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Indian engineers worst affected by degree accreditation decision

Many have lost their job titles, suffered pay cuts



DOHA: Kuwaiti supporters pose for the camera during the 24th Arabian Gulf Cup Group B football match between Kuwait and Oman at the Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium in the Qatari capital yesterday. Oman won the match 2-1. —AFP (See Page 28)

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The manpower authority last year mandated that all expat engineers should get a no-objection certificate from the Kuwait Society of Engineers (KSE) to have the title of "engineer" in their work permits. Indian engineers have been the most affected by this decision, as their degrees should be approved by India's National Board of Accreditation (NBA) in order to get an NOC from KSE. But most Indian engineers in Kuwait hold degrees that are approved by the All India Council for Technical Education and not NBA.

Attorney Fraih Al-Kouh argued Indian engineers are the most discriminated against, compared to other expat engineers. "I'm defending a few Indian engineers who unfairly lost their job titles after working as engineers for years. No verdict has been issued yet as the legal process is lengthy, but I'm sure the court will scrap this abusive decision," he told Kuwait Times.

According to Kouh, the sponsoring companies earlier only sought the approval of the employment contract from the ministry of social affairs and labor, then included the "engineer" title in the work permit. "Now the ministry decided to team up with NGOs and demanded approval from the KSE certifying the applicant is working in this field. KSE then demands the original degree and a work certificate to review if the applicant meets all conditions, and based on this they send or don't send the NOC to the ministry," he explained.

Engineers also face additional conditions. "Engineers have to pass a test if their work experience is less than five years - those with longer experience only have to appear for a personal interview at KSE to obtain the approval. But Indian engineers can't go through any of these procedures if they don't hold an NBA accreditation. This is discriminatory and should be corrected. The new rules of the ministry should only be applied on new engineers and not those who have worked here for many years," Kouh asserted. "If KSE is demanding NBA accreditation, then it should be demanded from all engineers and not only Indians," he added.

But an official from KSE, who preferred to remain anonymous, told Kuwait Times the condition for NBA accreditation was set by the Indian government and not the Kuwaiti ministry or KSE. "Today, only certificates from Indian universities that are members of NBA are accredited. Universities in other countries have other accrediting bodies such as ABET for the United States or other bodies in European and Arab countries. These bodies are equivalent to the Indian NBA," he explained.

Kouh however demanded an academic approach for the approval of engineers. "The approval should only be issued based on academic certifications from accredited universities and work experience. If the applicant submits a fake certificate, then he should be punished, as this is a crime. Some engineers may be graduates from a university that is not accredited, but they are good, so why not let them pass a test?"

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News in brief

Cop's body slam sparks outrage

WASHINGTON: A video of a Chicago policeman slamming a man into the pavement has added new tensions to the city's strained police-public relations, with the mayor on Friday calling it "very disturbing". Police said the incident took place Thursday in the Chatham neighborhood in Chicago's Southeast Side, when a man, who had allegedly been drinking in public, spat on a police officer as he was being detained. The video shows the policeman picking up the man as they both stood next to a police vehicle and hurling him to the street, the man's head apparently hitting the curb. The man lay motionless as a bystander filmed the incident. — AFP

Bishop on trial for raping nun

KOTTAYAM, India: A Roman Catholic bishop went on trial in southern India yesterday accused of repeatedly raping a nun. Franco Mulakkal arrived in court in Kottayam, Kerala state, with a group of supporters after attending morning prayers. The bishop is charged with raping the nun several times between 2014 and 2016, while head of the Missionaries of Jesus order. Mulakkal did not immediately make a plea in court but he has denied the accusations in the run-up to the trial. — AFP

Israeli troops kill Palestinian

GAZA CITY: Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian teenager near the border with the Gaza Strip on Friday, the health ministry in the Hamas-run enclave said. Fahd Al-Astal, 16, died after being shot in the stomach east of Khan Yunis in the south of the enclave, and four other Palestinians were wounded, the ministry said. Weekly border protests along the Israeli frontier were officially cancelled on Friday. But residents said a small number of mostly young Palestinians still approached the border fence. At least 348 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in Gaza since weekly protests began in March 2018. — AFP

Iran disputes protest death tolls

TEHRAN: Iran yesterday disputed death tolls issued abroad for bloodshed that erupted during protests in the country over fuel prices, after a rights group said over 160 demonstrators were killed. London-based human rights group Amnesty International said in a tweet on Friday that the crackdown claimed the lives of 161 demonstrators. But Iran's deputy interior minister, Jamal Orf, disputed such figures. — AFP

Johnson vows action after London attack

LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson vowed yesterday to review Britain's sentencing system after a convicted terrorist released early from prison was suspected of stabbing two people to death in an attack around London Bridge. Police shot and killed Usman Khan after his suspected assault that seriously injured three other people was broken up by bystanders - one armed with a 1.5-m narwhal tusk and another a fire extinguisher.

Video footage of the confrontation showed Khan, 28, being challenged by a

man, reportedly a Polish chef, wielding the tusk - believed to have been taken from a nearby historic hall - and sprayed with the extinguisher. He had been conditionally released from jail last December after serving less than half of a 16-year prison sentence for terrorism, and was wearing a suspected fake explosive device. Moments later armed police officers arrived on the scene and shot him dead. Investigators have said they are not actively seeking others in relation to the incident, which recalled a three-man terrorist assault two years ago on London Bridge that killed eight.

HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent yesterday a cable of condolences to Queen of Britain Elizabeth II and Prime Minister Johnson. In the cable, the Amir expressed to the Queen and the prime

Continued on Page 24



LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson (center), British Home Secretary Priti Patel and Commissioner of the City of London Police Ian Dyson arrive at the scene of a stabbing on London Bridge yesterday. — AFP

Fury in India over new rape, murder case

HYDERABAD: Hundreds of people yesterday laid siege to a police station where four men are being held over the latest gruesome rape-murder to shock India. Baton-wielding police pushed back crowds from the building in the southern city of Hyderabad where they said the 27-year-old veterinary doctor was gang-raped, killed and then her body burned. While the suspects were

quickly detained, the killing sparked new outrage in a country that has been in the international spotlight over its handling of sex assaults since the brutal gang-rape and murder of a student on a Delhi bus in 2012.

"How anyone could subject another human being to such terrible, unprovoked violence is beyond imagination," said former opposition Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi on Twitter. Police had to bring in reinforcements to bolster security around the Hyderabad police station. The suspects appeared before a magistrate for what was expected to be the start of "fast-track" proceedings later yesterday.

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SILIGURI, West Bengal: Youth of NGO 'Tarunya' form a human chain as they participate in a candlelight procession yesterday calling for justice following the recent rape and murder of a 27-year-old veterinarian. — AFP

Iraqis keep up demos as PM vows to quit

NASIRIYAH, Iraq: Iraqis kept up anti-government protests in Baghdad and the south yesterday, dissatisfied with the premier's vow to quit and insisting on the overhaul of a system they say is corrupt and under the sway of foreign powers. Protesters have hit the streets since early October in the largest grassroots movement Iraq has seen in decades, sparked by fury at poor public services, lack of jobs and widespread government graft.

Security forces and armed groups

responded with violence to the decentralized demonstrations, killing more than 420 people and wounding 15,000, according to an AFP tally compiled from medics and an Iraqi rights commission. The toll spiked dramatically this week, when a crackdown by security forces left dozens dead in Baghdad, the Shiite shrine city of Najaf and the southern hotspot of Nasiriyah - the birthplace of Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi.

Facing pressure from the street and the country's top Shiite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, Abdel Mahdi announced on Friday that he would submit his resignation to parliament, due to meet today. But demonstrations have not subsided, with crowds in the capital and across the Shiite-majority south sticking

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BAGHDAD: Iraqi anti-government protesters carry away an injured comrade amidst clashes with security forces on the capital's Rasheed Street near Al-Ahrar Bridge on Friday. — AFP

Local

Prince William arrives in Kuwait today as part of regional tour



In this file photo, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends a banquet held in his honor by UK's Queen Elizabeth II.

KUWAIT: The Grandson of UK's Queen Elizabeth II, Duke of Cambridge Prince William is set to visit Kuwait today as part of a regional tour, which will also include Oman. The visit to Kuwait comes to honor the 200 years of longstanding and historic relations between the two countries. In the last decades, Queen Elizabeth II and members of the British Royal Family visited Kuwait on several occasions.

On February 12, 1979, the Queen and her spouse Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, arrived to Kuwait on a three-day visit upon an official invitation by then Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The visit focused on ways to bolster ties. It also allowed the Queen to visit various landmarks in the country. The Queen's daughter Princess Anne visited Kuwait on three occasions on February 17, 1987, on September 5, 1991 and on November 15, 1995. Charles, Prince of Wales, visited Kuwait on March 12, 1989 accompanied by

late Princess Diana. The visit included official rounds of talks with late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

On November 9, 1993, Prince Charles visited Kuwait where Sheikh Jaber honored him with the Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer in recognition of his stance with Kuwaiti during the Iraqi invasion of 1990 and subsequent liberation in 1991. The Order was also in recognition of Prince Charles efforts in boosting ties between the friendly nations. On February 21, 1997, Prince Charles visited Kuwait for the third time, holding talks on bilateral relations and issues of common grounds. On January 17, 2006, Prince Charles arrived to Kuwait to pay his respects to late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Prince Charles - accompanied spouse by Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall - visited Kuwait where official rounds of talks were held with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. In

2011 and 2015, Prince Charles visited Kuwait, holding meetings with several senior officials. Similar to Prince Charles, Prince Andrew - Duke of York - visited Kuwait on several occasions. The first visit was on November 27, 1998, when the Duke of York spent three days in Kuwait, meeting with senior officials including the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad.

On November 7, 1999, Prince Andrew visited Kuwait, expressing his admiration to the strong level of bilateral relations. The Royal Family member opened a photographic gallery celebrating the centennial of the Kuwaiti-British friendship accord. Prince Andrew visited Kuwait in 2000, 2003, and 2007 in various capacities and attending numerous functions. On March 31, 2008, Prince Andrew visited Kuwait, holding talks with the leadership of the country and attending an exhibition. The last visit for Prince Andrew was on May 18, 2014. — KUNA



KUWAIT: In this file photo, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Prince Charles of Wales during a visit to Kuwait in 2011. — KUNA photos



In this file photo, the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah receives Queen Elizabeth II during her visit to Kuwait on February 12, 1979.



In this file photo, the Late Crown Prince Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah receives Prince Charles and Princess Diana during a visit to Kuwait.

Indian Embassy celebrates 'Constitution Day'

KUWAIT: The Embassy of India recently organized a function in its auditorium to celebrate the Constitution Day of India and mark the 70th Anniversary of adoption of India's Constitution. The Constitution of India formally came into effect on 26 January 1950, which is celebrated as Republic Day of India. The event was very well attended with the presence of a large number of distinguished guests comprising a Member of National Assembly of the friendly State of Kuwait, officials from the Government of Kuwait, representatives from Academia, leading Think Tanks, Diplomats, representatives of the Indian Community in Kuwait, and a significant number of Kuwaiti and Indian students. Dr Mohammad Al-Feeli, an eminent Kuwaiti constitutional expert and Professor of Public Law at Kuwait University, was the Keynote speaker at the event.

Addressing the gathering, K Jeeva Sagar, Ambassador of India to Kuwait, credited the constitution for the progress of the country governed by strong, independent democratic



KUWAIT: Ambassador of India to Kuwait K Jeeva Sagar (center left), Kuwaiti constitutional expert Dr Mohammad Al-Feeli (center right) and other dignitaries attend the ceremony. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

institutions; and for creation of an ecosystem which provides meaningful freedom for realization of true potential of an individual. Underlining that Kuwait itself is a rule-based and constitution-based nation, the ambassador thanked the leadership, the government and the people of Kuwait for their humanitarian and friendly approach towards expatriates in general and Indian community in particular.

In his keynote address, Dr Feeli highlighted the salient features of the Indian constitution, particularly the aspects of pluralism and secularism, fundamental rights, directive princi-

ples of state policy, and the principle of separation of powers. He spoke about the farsightedness shown by the drafting members of the constitution in providing an enduring framework of the Rule of Law to fulfill the aspirations of over a billion people.

Two short documentaries on India's Constitution; 'India -The Spirit of Freedom' and 'Mooknayak - Leader of the Silent' were screened on the occasion. On the sidelines, a collection of photographs on the theme 'Making of the Indian Constitution' were also displayed.

Exhibition documents late Amir's visit to Britain



KUWAIT: Essa Dashti gives an explanation during a tour at the exhibition. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: An exhibition about the centennial visit of late Amir Sheikh Ahmad Jaber Al-Sabah to Britain was held in Kuwait recently, documenting the first official visit by a Kuwaiti to the United Kingdom in 1919. The documents, which belonged to Essa Dashti, put into display at Al-Hamra Mall showing late Sheikh Ahmad congratulating King George V and the Britain Government

for the victory of the United Kingdom and its allies in World War I. The exhibition included photos of places Sheikh Ahmad visited in Britain, and the gifts exchanged between Sheikh Ahmad and King George V. The exhibition is part of celebrations that mark the 120th anniversary of the protectorate agreement between Kuwait and Britain, which was signed in 1899. —KUNA



Souq Murouj

Ooredoo supports entrepreneurs in Souq Murouj

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait, The first to launch innovated digital services in Kuwait is proudly partnering with Souq Murouj for the fourth consecutive year to bring to you Murouj Market, a monthly weekend market for local entrepreneurs and businesses. The market, which is held at Murouj Complex, includes an Ooredoo dedicated booth, local farm produce, artisanal food products and crafts, with a

'street food' section aimed at highlighting the culinary diversity of Kuwait's local food community. The market also offers a section dedicated for children's activities. It will be held once a month on weekends, until March 2019. The second market will take place today Friday November 29 from 3:30 pm to 11 pm. Commenting on this sponsorship, Ooredoo Kuwait Senior Director of Corporate

Communications Mijbil Al-Ayoub said: "We are happy to be supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs through this engaging project. This sponsorship comes in tandem with our social responsibility strategy, which in turn is based on our core values of caring, connecting and challenging. We look forward to meeting those young enthusiastic small business owners as well as our valued customers at the market."



Mijbil Al-Ayoub



A picture displayed at the exhibition and dated back to 1919 shows members of the Kuwaiti and Saudi delegations during their visit at Buckingham Palace.



A picture displayed at the exhibition shows the crew of the ship in a group photo with Sheikh Ahmad Jaber Al-Sabah and Prince Faisal Al-Saud.

Local

Late US President George Bush, a leader engraved in Kuwaitis' minds

WASHINGTON: Almost a year has passed since the world woke up to the sad news of the passing away of the 41st President of the US George H W Bush whose success in gathering international support for the 1991 Gulf War was seen as a military and diplomatic "triumph." At the time of his death on November 30, 2018, Bush was the longest-lived US president, whose public image was seen as a "pragmatic caretaker" president, where he won a single term presidential election that started from 1989 until 1993. In August 1990, Bush strongly condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and was able to immediately put together a 30-nation coalition that was backed by a UN mandate during which he warned, "This will not stand, this aggression against Kuwait." Bush addressed a joint session of the US Congress regarding the authorization of air and land attacks, laying out four immediate objectives, saying, "Iraq must withdraw from Kuwait completely, immediately, and without condition. Kuwait's legitimate government must be restored."

After that, in early 1991, by a vote of 250 to 183, the House passed a resolution authorizing Bush to use force against the Iraqi military, a vote that was considered "an important victory" for him. On January 17, 1991, the US and allied planes struck Iraqi targets and Desert Shield became Desert Storm. The ground war kicked-off in February 24 and Bush ordered a cease-fire 100 hours after the fighting began. In the wake of that 1991 victory, Bush's approval at home approached 89 percent, the highest rating ever recorded, where he also gained broad international support for the Gulf War and the war's result were seen as both a diplomatic and military triumph.

A figure that will forever be remembered for his crucial role in Kuwait's liberation, as well as his speech from the Oval Office on February 27, 1991 declaring "Kuwait is liberated. Iraq's army is defeat-

ed. Our military objectives are met. Kuwait is once more in the hands of Kuwaitis in control of their own destiny. We share in their joy, a joy tempered only by our compassion for their ordeal," is engraved in the hearts of all Kuwaitis of different generations. A speech that is remembered and will be remembered by many generations to come, addressing a joint session of Congress announcing the end of the Gulf War, Bush said, "Aggression is defeated. The war is over. This is a victory for every country in the coalition, for the United Nations. A victory for unprecedented international cooperation and diplomacy... It is a victory for the rule of law and for what is right." He noted, "All of us grieve for the victims of war, for the people of Kuwait and the suffering that scars the soul of that proud nation," and that "for the sake of our principles, for the sake of the Kuwaiti people, we stood our ground. Because the world would not look the other way."

On his first visit to Kuwait in April 1993, Bush, who was not president then, was presented with the Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer "in gratitude and appreciation" for his efforts liberating Kuwait. He also received then an honorary doctorate from Kuwait University. In a January 2011 interview marking the 20th anniversary of the Gulf War, Bush recalled the mission, saying, "I think it was a signature historical event," and "I think it will always be. "In a cable of condolences on the passing away of Bush last year, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah recalled the stance and support of Bush to Kuwait and his rejection of the Iraqi occupation in its early hours. His Highness Sheikh Sabah also remembered the decisive decision taken by the American administration under the leadership of Bush and his pivotal role on forming an international coalition mandated by the UN to liberate the State of Kuwait.

Furthermore, in a written message from His



WASHINGTON: In this file photo, Kuwait's Amir representative Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah attends former US President George H W Bush's funeral. — KUNA

Highness the Amir to the US 43rd President and son of late Bush, George W Bush, His Highness the Amir noted, "We have lost a dear friend... particularly dear for the Kuwaiti people who will never forget him as a supporter of justice." His Highness the Amir also recalled the late ex-president's brave stance in support of Kuwait, namely his emphatic rejection of the

flagrant Iraqi aggression and his leading role in forming the international coalition for the liberation of the State of Kuwait. On his death, Kuwaitis recollected his great contributions in liberating their homeland from the Iraqi invasion, a man whose positions will remain in the memory of all Kuwaitis and the entire world. — KUNA

Mubarak Port to play key role in int'l trade

LONDON: Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Communication Kholoud Al-Shehab said Friday Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port is one of the mega projects in the country's national development plan that will have a great impact on international trade routes. "The port, with 24 harbors, will serve as a major route for regional shipping and transit services," she said in a statement delivered on behalf of Kuwait to the 31st General Assembly of

the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The port is designed to link the sea to the mainland through a network of highways and railways, thus serving as a critical juncture in the international Silk Road between the East and the West, Shehab noted.

On Kuwait's role in the IMO, she said her country joined the organization as early as in 1960 only one year after the IMO held its maiden meeting. "Kuwait, having one of the biggest fleets in the world, takes part actively in the various programs of this UN specialized agency out of keenness on ensuring the safety of shipping and preventing marine pollution," she added. Earlier Friday, the IMO General Assembly elected Kuwait as one of the 20 category C members of the organization's council. —KUNA



LONDON: Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Communication Kholoud Al-Shehab. — KUNA

Kuwaiti inventors win first place at Invention fair

SEOUL: Kuwaiti inventors Sara Abu Arjeeb and Dr Meshari Al-Mutairi were awarded the Golden Award at Seoul International Invention Fair (SIIF) 2019 yesterday. Engineer Abu Arjeeb received the Golden Award for her invention "detector of bone fractures," while Engineer Mutairi received the same award for his invention "treatment of oil contaminated soil."

Kuwait's Ambassador to the Republic of Korea Bader Al-Awadhi expressed his pride in the fact that two Kuwaiti inventors were awarded the first places in the SIIF. Awadhi added that this win reflects

the care and attention paid by Kuwait to the youth category, especially the creators and inventors, adding that Abu Arjeeb and Mutairi were able to show the bright face of the Kuwaiti youth and raise the name of their country. Awadhi expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Patent Office of the General Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation Council for organizing this active participation of the inventors from the GCC countries at the Seoul International Fair.

Meanwhile, Mutairi said that this is the first time that two Kuwaiti inventors have been awarded the gold prize in such invention fairs, adding that this confirmed the talent and creative qualities enjoyed by Kuwaiti youth. In the meantime, Abu Arjeeb presented the gold prize to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and expressed her pride for raising the name of Kuwait in the fair and in the field of inventions. — KUNA



SEOUL: Kuwaiti inventors Sara Abu Arjeeb (right) and Dr Meshari Al-Mutairi (left) with Kuwait's Ambassador to the Republic of Korea Bader Al-Awadhi. — KUNA

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Local

Zain participates in 3rd Smart City Forum in Kuwait

Company showcased its role in empowering New Kuwait vision



Hamad Al-Marzouq and Ambassador Hong Youngki with Zain officials at the company's booth.

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, participated in the 3rd Smart City Forum in Kuwait entitled Beyond Technology: The Evolution of Smart Cities. The event, held at Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel, was organized by Korea Land and Housing Corporation in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Korea to the State of Kuwait with the attendance of many public and private sector officials.

The forum witnessed the presence of the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the State of Kuwait Hong Youngki, Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq, Deputy Director General for Planning and Design at the Public Authority for Housing Welfare Nasser Khraibut, as well as many representatives of the Korean Embassy in Kuwait and officials from the country's private and public sectors.

Zain took part in the event with its own dedicated booth, through which it showcased the latest "Zain Business" innovative services and solutions it offers to serve the smart cities sector in the country. The company affirmed its capabilities as an active partner in achieving the goals of the Kuwait National Development Plan (New Kuwait 2035) that stems from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's conceptualized vision of a new Kuwait by 2035.

Marzouq participated in a panel discussion entitled Driving Smart Cities in Kuwait that came as part of the forum. During the discussion, Marzouq said: "the telecom

industry is currently undergoing a huge revolution, and as Zain is a leader in telecom and digital services, 5G technology is allowing us to be more relevant and transformative in the market. 5G is not just about speed, it is an enabling technology for Internet of Things (IoT), and as smart cities essentially rely on IoT to function, 5G and smart cities are inextricably linked."

Marzouq continued: "we at Zain are proudly committed to be an active enabler for the New Kuwait vision 2035, and so we were keen on being an early adopter of 5G technology, not only in the region but worldwide. We were keen on being the first to create that layer by investing in 5G and deploying the technology commercially all over Kuwait at a very early stage."

Marzouq added: "we relied on our acquisitions strategy to fill in the knowledge gap that naturally forms as new technologies emerge. We achieved this by investing in our smart cities arm NXX, who is a regional leader in smart city solutions with tremendous international capabilities."

Marzouq further explained: "the fast-paced advancements in technology are creating huge opportunities to transform communities and nations, and that's why we at Zain are committed to investing in IoT areas to offer new technologies and innovative solutions to the government sector and business community in Kuwait."

Marzouq added: "our digital transformation journey began nearly three years ago, marked by our partnership with the Ministry of Electricity and Water through the



Hamad Al-Marzouq during the panel discussion.

Smart Meters project. In addition, we offer our Zain LIFE brand, which consists of a portfolio of flexible smart home digital services for consumers and businesses, further enriching Zain's leadership in offering the latest digital transformation applications."

Zain's strategy is centered around digital transformation leadership and empowering the community to enjoy a

smarter portable lifestyle, as well as using advanced technology to enable an easier and more flexible life. The company places itself as an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait. The company's continues efforts prove its full potential in triggering the digital community, and will enrich its collaborations in Telecom and IT areas with its strategic partners on multiple levels.

KIB sponsors KALD Distinguished Teacher award



Amal Al-Sayer

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) sponsored the KALD Distinguished Teacher Award for the academic year 2018-2019. Organized by the Kuwaiti Association for Learning Differences (KALD), the awards ceremony took place on November 27, 2019 at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre where the award winners were announced and recognized for their contribution in teaching students with learning difficulties.

With a growing number of nominees year after year, the award has garnered the confidence of private schools across Kuwait. Schools have now begun to adopt the Charlotte Danielson self-assessment model to evaluate the performance of teachers; the same evaluation model adopted by the award committee. On this occasion, external communication Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, Fahad Al-Sarhan, said: "Our sponsorship of this award comes as part of our ongoing commitment to developing various areas in the local community, including education. As such, we continue to dedicate financial and moral support to a number of educational institutions, which will in turn boost the country's level of education and enrich generations to come." Sarhan also added that KIB's sponsorship underscores its appreciation of efforts made by teachers who believe that their profession embodies a noble mission, carrying it out in a professional, sincere and loving manner. This is true espe-

cially for those who teach students with learning difficulties, as they employ different styles that develop students' abilities and nurture their understanding.

Meanwhile, Amal Al-Sayer, Chairperson of KALD said: "We would like to thank KIB for sponsoring this huge awards ceremony. With this support, we are able to continue rewarding remarkable

teachers. This award is the first-of-its-kind in the Arab world, aiming at honoring outstanding teachers who deserve recognition from all of us." Sayer also pointed out that the idea of this award stems from the important role teachers play in various aspects of a student's academic career, psychological well-being and social life. She also noted that by honoring teachers, schools are also recognized for providing the right learning conditions and opportunities, such as training and ongoing support; thereby allowing for teachers to demonstrate their skills and competencies.

At the end, Sarhan noted that KIB always seeks to participate in events that cater to diverse segments in the local community, in line with its slogan 'Bank for Life.' Accordingly, the bank supports teachers as they educate youth, contribute to their upbringing, and ultimately helping them better serve their community in the future. He also shed light on the importance of spreading awareness about the different needs of students with learning difficulties and providing them with the best educational services, as well as supporting parents, teachers and specialists in this area.



Amal Al-Sayer with Fahad Al-Sarhan

ABK sponsors PAAET career fair

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced its successful sponsorship of the Public Authority of Applied Education and Trainee (PAAET) career fair, which was held between the 25th and 27th of November 2019 at the PAAET campus. ABK's participation reinforces its com-

mitment to playing an active role in supporting Kuwait's youth during the early stages of their work life. Commenting on the bank's involvement, Ali Akbar, Assistant General Manager - Human Resources at ABK said, "ABK participates in these job fairs to support fresh graduates and to nurture their skills and abilities by increasing their knowledge on what the banking industry entails and the requirements needed to pursue a career in banking through the 'ABK Academy.' Kuwait has a pool of young talent, and we look forward to interacting with them."



KUWAIT: ABK's booth at the PAAET career fair.

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Weekend negotiations could lead to new Kuwaiti Cabinet this week

Several political blocs could possibly be included in new govt formation

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Official government sources said meetings and consultations held by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah during the weekend resulted in shortening the waiting period for declaring his Cabinet formation, which is expected to be announced during the week. Meanwhile, some members of parliament said the formation will be delayed, which made the parliament suspend its sessions and not call for the regular Tuesday session.

Sources said Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled met some members of the ruling family and that ministers of foreign affairs, defense and interior were agreed upon. They said Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah is close to being named foreign minister, and it is not true that the post was offered to Sheikh Mohammad Al-Sabah as rumored on social media.

The sources said it is possible political blocs may be included in the new government, adding Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled offered ministerial posts to various political factions that are influential, including the Islamic Constitutional Movement, the Salaf Gathering, National Democratic Alliance and National Islamic Alliance. They said the blocs will be present in the government, but were not given the choice to nominate any person - rather Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled selected them.

New drugs

Ministry of Health (MOH) Assistant Undersecretary for Drug and Food Control Dr Abdullah Al-Bader said there will be a new procedure to register new drugs, allowing patients the opportunity to receive them as soon as they are released in global markets. Certain standards and specifications aim to hasten the evaluation of technical papers of the new drugs to obtain marketing approval as quickly as possible.



Al-Seif Palace.

Bader said the new procedure gave the evaluation priority in three categories - innovative drugs made of new substances; unique medicine used for rare disease; and medicines that meet the shortage in medicinal needs. He said the new mechanism divides drugs categories into three levels, adding that the study period will not be more than 30 days for the first level of new medicines that are approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and European medical authorities. Bader said the study of the second level will be a maximum of 60 days for drugs that are approved by FDA and Europe, while the study period will not be more than 90 days if it is approved by any international

control authority.

Physiotherapy 'intruders'

Head of Kuwait Physiotherapy Society Hanaa Al-Khamees said there will be coordination with the social affairs ministry to find a mechanism to combat physiotherapy profession 'intruders,' which will include banning them from practicing and to take legal action against anyone who falsely claims to be a physiotherapy specialist to protect patients. Khamees said ministry undersecretary Abdelaziz Shuaib welcomed the mechanism and said it is important to stop "impostors" in this profession, adding special committees will be formed for this purpose.

The new government

local spotlight



By Muna Al-Fuzal

Muna@kuwaittimes.net

Kuwaitis are looking forward to the formation of the new government in light of the recent tensions that led to the end of the previous government. It is natural that people consider the new government as a new phase of hope, starting with the selection of a new prime minister, HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah. He is a Kuwaiti diplomat and politician who served in various ministerial posts from 2006 until his appointment as Prime Minister of Kuwait in 2019.

I think it is not surprising that people are hoping that the new ministers will present a government consensus to work as a team, set a new action plan, support the issues of citizens and address mistakes without hesitation. This is a heavy burden and will not be an easy job. But the fact is that the public needs solutions and is fed up from waiting. Therefore, anyone who sees that there is a delay in the formation of the government should see this as a good start because the new prime minister seems keen to carefully choose his team in order to form a government that is capable of productivity and to work for outstanding issues for the benefit of citizens, especially in the absence of acceptance of some of the names that had been given the opportunity repeatedly without achievement for the benefit of citizens. At the end, the voice of the street determines the form of democracy.

Whether or not the new government attends the parliamentary session scheduled for Dec 10, what concerns me today is to talk about the wishes of the people in general, especially citizens and expats who wish well, and I will confine it to some of the issues that I see as fateful.

First, the most important question is what form of government the community needs? Do we want a technocrat government that includes specialized ministers such as ministers of justice and health, or ministers who have taken their opportunity repeatedly as they have experience in government work or formation, which is based on the distribution of quotas to satisfy the wishes of some? I think as the new prime minister enters the political scene, it is important to change this stereotype because the formation approach must modify to keep pace with the changes in society. I hope to see a government that takes into account the different trends and orientations in the country. To succeed, this government has to come with a clear strategy and a program to resolve many issues, especially ones related to women, naturalization, health and education. Moreover, implementation of this program must be speedy, so that people witness the seriousness of the new government.

I believe that the requirements of the youth and the services provided to them is an urgent issue, because we are beginning to witness unemployment of young graduates, and should support fresh graduates to work in the private sector. According to the latest statistics of the Public Authority for Manpower at the end of Dec 2018, the number of nationals working in the private sector is 63,963. This means that the government sector is still bloated by Kuwaiti manpower and that the process of Kuwaitization in the private sector is still far from reaching its goal.

Another key issue here is that we have around three million expatriates in Kuwait. We have opened this country for them and some are facing problems because of the sponsorship system. Some companies delay their salaries, and there are many other issues that fall on the next minister of economic affairs' shoulders and the Kuwaiti government in general, because these matters are related to the country's reputation.

I have one last wish - that the ministers must act as ministers who have the power to make decisions and changes to implement the action plan, and not merely be senior officials, especially since the next stage needs everyone's efforts. I sincerely wish the new government all success.

Municipality continues Jleeb raids

By Meshaal Al-Nezi

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality's Farwaniya branch carried out a campaign at Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh recently, during which municipality inspectors closed down a number of stores for violating rules and regulations. Random markets and cafes were also raided at the instructions of the municipality's Deputy Director General for Farwaniya and Mubarak Al-Kabeer Affairs Ammar Al-Ammar, and field follow up led by Director of Farwaniya branch Mohammad Sarkhouh.

Director of cleanliness and road occupancy Saad Al-Khuraiej said the campaign resulted in finding a yard that is state property used by a cafe without a license, in addition to closing 28 other cafes. Four truckloads of fruits and vegetables were confiscated, in addition to a truckload of used clothes. A total of 224 plastic chairs, 230 steel chairs, 64 plastic tables, 8 steel tables, and 50 shishas were confiscated during the raids on the cafes. Meanwhile, five truckloads of used tires were also removed, he added.

In other news, Municipal Council member Maha Al-Baghli proposed improving the pedestrian bridge that links Jabriya and Salmiya on Fahahel road near Hadi Clinic, and expanding it to cover the service road next to it.

Women journalists symposium concludes

RIYADH: The third symposium of Arab women journalists of the Arab news agencies concluded recently with a number of recommendations on supporting their work. The recommendations stressed the necessity of opening further channels for serious coordination and cooperation between the Federation of Arab News Agencies (FANA) General Secretariat and the Arab League media department to offer training, scientific activities and symposiums for journalists working for Arab news agencies. The proposals also urged the participating female journalists to form a committee tasked with discussing their problems and submitting a

general concept for this issue in the next fourth seminar. The recommendations pointed to considering the process of compatibility between Arab female journalists' social conditions and their professional duties in order to ensure continuity to enhance their experience and practice. They called on FANA to holding an annual meeting of Arab female journalists at Arab news agencies and to offer training and special programs for them. The meeting focused on several topics regarding Arab female journalists like their role in forming societal awareness, the image of Arab women in social media and others. — KUNA

127,000 subscribe to 'Shamal Azzour'

KUWAIT: Some 127,000 Kuwaitis have subscribed to 50 percent of the capital of Shamal Azzour Al-Oula Company, making up a 127 percent coverage of floated shares, Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP) said yesterday. The period of subscription to the company's capital elapsed on Friday, KAPP said in a statement, adding that it had subscribed to the firm on behalf of citizens when it was created. This process reflects the Kuwaiti government's determination to provide attractive investment openings to citizens, and to

engage them in the ownership of partnership enterprises, it said. Once the ownership of shares is transferred to citizens, the company's board of directors should have its shares listed on Boursa Kuwait, thus becoming the first power and water company ever to be registered with the stock exchange, it added. Similar opportunities are to be offered to Kuwaiti citizens in next partnership projects, according to the statement. Shamal Azzour Al-Oula is the joint stock company founded for the development of Az-Zour North One Power and Water Plant. — KUNA



Man dead, two injured in ATV, SUV crash

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti citizen died and two others were injured in an accident that happened when an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) collided with a sports utility vehicle (SUV) on Zour road. Zour firemen rushed to the scene, freed a trapped person and handed him to paramedics. An investigation was opened to reveal the circumstances behind the accident.

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- Pre-Implantation Genetic Testing for embryos
- Freezing for embryos / testicular biopsy / freezing sperm
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- Treatment of Recurrent abortion
- Laparoscopic hysterectomy
- Vaginal hysterectomy
- Endometrial resection
- Laparoscopic myomectomy

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Specialist Obstetrics & Gynecology,
Infertility and IVF

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- In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)
- Intra-Cytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI)
- Pre-Implantation Genetic Testing (PGT)

Dr. Akeel Hadi Moosa
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MBChB, PHD
FRCPath (Haematology)

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- Bleeding / Clotting disorders
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- Bone marrow disorders
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- Diagnosis and treatment General Internal medicine cases
- Diagnosis and treatment of Gastroenterology cases

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Mexico City traffic chaos a matter of life or death

Lahore looks for answers amid 'air apocalypse'

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BERLIN: Demonstrators gather with placards during a protest called by the Fridays for Future movement for climate protection on Friday, as part of global action day for climate. — AFP

Thousands rally before UN climate summit

Some activists focus anger on 'Black Friday' sales bonanza

BERLIN: Tens of thousands of protesters, primarily in Europe and Asia, hit the streets on Friday to make a fresh call for action against global warming, hoping to raise pressure on world leaders days before a UN climate summit. Carrying signs that read "One planet, one fight" and "The sea is rising, so must we", thousands flocked to Berlin's Brandenburg Gate for the latest "Fridays for Future" protest inspired by 16-year-old activist Greta Thunberg.

In total, about 630,000 people demonstrated across more than 500 cities in Germany, the Fridays for Future movement said. In Hamburg alone, some 30,000 mainly young people gathered and another 17,000 congregated in Munich to voice alarm at rising temperatures, police said. Thunberg, meanwhile, was on a boat sailing across the Atlantic, but tweeted a photo of herself holding a sign that said "School strike for climate".

Rallies took place across Europe, although on a smaller scale than during September's wave of "climate strikes" when organizers said some four million people filled city streets around the world. Approximately 1,700 turned out in Madrid, the host city of next week's 12-day COP25 conference, which aims to encourage governments to increase their commitments to cut emissions and combat climate change.

In France, climate activists focused their anger on the "Black Friday" sales bonanza with protesters blocking a distribution center of online retail giant Amazon outside Paris and others near Lyon and Lille. Protesters in Paris also formed a human chain at La Defense shopping mall that prevented people from reaching stores, to highlight the climate costs of consumerism.

The Dutch branch of "Fridays for Future" said demos were taking place in around 15 cities, culminating in an evening march in Amsterdam where protesters would observe a moment's silence for victims of the climate crisis. Several hundred young people also took to the streets of Lisbon, where Thunberg is expected to arrive shortly before making her way to Madrid.

Turnout was low in the United States and Canada, with the protest taking place during the American Thanksgiving holiday weekend. A demonstration in Washington drew about 50 people, another in New York had 100. "It's important to keep showing up, keep being out there and talking to people about how this is not a problem that can go away, unless we address it head-on," said 24-year-old Frank Fritz in Washington.

New York police arrested 23 anti-consumerism protesters who staged a sit-in outside Macy's department store. In Montreal, environmental groups distributed

second-hand clothing. "We are trying to create an eco-responsible movement against mass consumption, so we are giving away clothes for free to encourage people to consume less," protester Germain Desloges told AFP.

Toxic smoke

The latest round of global climate demonstrations kicked off in bushfire-ravaged Australia, where hundreds rallied outside the Sydney offices of the Liberal party. The target of their ire was Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who said earlier this month the suggestion that "individual actions of Australia" had an impact on the fires "doesn't bear up to credible scientific evidence". "Our government's inaction on the climate crisis has supercharged bushfires," said school strike leader Shiann Broderick, as Sydney was once again enveloped in toxic smoke from the fires.

Australia, with a population of almost 25 million, has low carbon emissions compared with the planet's biggest polluters but is one of the world's leading coal exporters. Protests also took place in Tokyo, where hundreds marched through the teeming Shinjuku district. "I feel a sense of crisis because almost no one in Japan is interested," said 19-year-old student Mio Ishida. "I was really inspired by Greta's actions."

Missed targets

In Delhi, about 50 school and college students marched to the environment ministry in the world's most polluted capital, carrying placards and chanting slogans demanding that the government declare a climate emergency. "This is about doing something that you believe in," said 23-year-old Saumya Chowdhury. "We want the government to acknowledge this and have a conversation on this issue with people." India is one of the biggest sources of greenhouse gases and has 14 of the 15 most polluted cities in the world, according to a UN study.

Some 200 nations are meeting in the Spanish capital from Monday for talks on finalizing the "rulebook" for the 2015 Paris climate treaty, which becomes operational in 2021. Scientists have warned that efforts to cap warming to 1.5 Celsius are failing and that carbon emissions - which are on the rise - would need to fall 7.6 percent a year to meet the target.

The United Nations has reported that greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere, the main driver of climate change, hit a record high last year. The UN has also warned that global temperatures are on track to rise almost 4 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, which could make some places virtually uninhabitable. — AFP

Over 160 nations agree to speed landmine clearing

OSLO: The 164 signatory countries to the Mine Ban Treaty (MBT) agreed Friday to accelerate the work to achieve the goal of a "mine-free" world in 2025, Norway's foreign ministry said. "Countries have now agreed that it is necessary to speed up mine clearance over the next five years," Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ine Eriksen Soreide said in a statement following a meeting in Oslo.

According to Landmine Monitor, an annual report by the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, 6,897 people were killed or injured by mines and other explosive remnants of war in 2018 and the report noted that it was the fourth year in a row with "exceptionally high numbers of recorded casualties." Of those, 3,789 were victims of so called improvised mines, the highest recorded number to date.

Under the "Oslo Action Plan," adopted on Friday, states undertake to "identify mined areas and put in place national plans for mine clearance". They also commit to measuring their progress in the final stretch before 2025, the goal set by the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention or Ottawa Treaty in 1997, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

The meeting in Oslo this week was the last in a series of five-year meetings to implement the treaty drafted in 1997, which helped to put an end to virtually all mine use by governments, including those that did not sign it. Armed groups are however increasingly using improvised anti-personnel mines. According to Landmine Monitor, non-state groups used this type of weapon last year in at least six countries: Afghanistan, India, Burma, Nigeria, Pakistan and Yemen.

Since the treaty's adoption nearly 58 million mines have been removed by clearing minefields and destroying stockpiles, according to the Norwegian ministry. Efforts to rid the world of these weapons were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997, which was given to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and US citizen Jody Williams. — AFP

Trump visits troops in Afghanistan

BAGRAM: President Donald Trump said Thursday the United States had resumed talks with Taliban insurgents as he made a surprise trip to Afghanistan to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday with troops. On a brief visit to Bagram Airfield outside the capital Kabul, Trump served turkey dinner to soldiers, posed for photographs and delivered a speech after meeting Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. "The Taliban wants to make a deal and we're meeting with them and we're saying it has to be a ceasefire," he told reporters.

About 13,000 US troops remain in Afghanistan, 18 years after the United States invaded following the September 11, 2001 attacks. Trump said he planned to reduce the number to 8,600, and later added "we can go much further than that," without giving details. "There's nowhere I'd rather celebrate this Thanksgiving than right here with the toughest, strongest, best and bravest warriors on the face of the earth," the president, who was making his first trip to the war-torn country, told the troops. "I've just come from serving Thanksgiving dinner to some of you... and we had a good time."

Trump joked that he had just

started eating when he was called away, and didn't even get to taste his turkey. "I should've started with that, instead of the mashed potatoes," he said. "But I hope everyone enjoyed the fantastic meal, it certainly did look good and hopefully everyone can get some well-deserved rest this holiday."

America's longest war

The United States earlier this year reached a deal with Taliban insurgents to pull US troops from Afghanistan and wind down America's longest war in return for security guarantees. But Trump made a shock move in September, describing the year-long talks as "dead" and withdrawing an invitation to the insurgents to meet in the United States due to the killing of an American soldier. "We were getting close and we pulled back. We didn't want to do it because of what they did," Trump later said during a meeting with Ghani, referring to the death of the soldier. "Since then, we've hit them so hard, they've never been hit this hard."

The Taliban refuse to negotiate formally with the Afghan government, though diplomatic efforts have continued to foster dialogue and an eventual peace deal. Trump said Thursday the war in Afghanistan "will not be decided on the battlefield" and that "ultimately there will need to be a political solution" decided by people in the region. The US president has often vowed to pull out of the US's "endless wars," and he is



BAGRAM, Afghanistan: US President Donald Trump serves Thanksgiving dinner to US troops at Bagram Air Field during a surprise visit on Nov 28, 2019. — AFP

keen to withdraw many troops from Afghanistan ahead of the November 2020 election when he faces a tough battle to win a second term.

Afghanistan remains roiled by violence, and US presidents are still only able to make fleeting, unannounced visits to Bagram - the biggest American base in the country - due to the security threat. Ghani, who was only given a few hours' notice about the visit, thanked Trump for pushing for "the type of peace that will ensure the gains of the past year and ensure your security and our security." The Taliban last week handed over two hostages - an American and an Australian - after three years in captivity in exchange for three high-

ranking insurgent prisoners, a move seen as a boost to peace talks.

Friction with US military leaders

Back in Washington, Trump's relations with the US military leadership have recently soured over his repeated interference in high-profile discipline cases. Trump reversed the demotion of Navy SEAL Edward Gallagher who was accused of war crimes but only found guilty of a lesser offense. Gallagher's case had been championed by Fox News and Trump's conservative base. The case drew sharp criticism from the top brass concerned that the president was undermining military judicial process. — AFP

International

Bashir's NCP condemns Sudan 'illegal govt' move to scrap party

Hundreds march in Khartoum seeking justice for martyrs

KHARTOUM: Ousted president Omar Al-Bashir's party on Friday condemned Sudan's new "illegal government" for ordering its closure and the dismantling of his regime that ruled the country for 30 years. Sudan's new authorities approved a law on Thursday ordering the Islamist leader's National Congress Party be dissolved, its assets seized and the regime dismantled as demanded by the protest movement that led to Bashir's fall in April.

On Friday, the NCP accused the authorities of taking a "reckless decision" in trying to confiscate its assets to tackle Sudan's economic crisis, which it said the new government had failed to address. Confiscating its assets "is nothing more than a moral scandal, an act of intellectual bankruptcy and a total failure on the part of the illegal government," the NCP said on its Facebook page. "The party is not bothered by any law or decision issued against it as the NCP is a strong party and its ideas will prevail."

The authorities have also banned personalities from the former regime from taking part in political activities for 10 years. The new ruling sovereign council and cabinet led by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok passed the law on Thursday, ruling that the NCP be "dissolved" and its registration "cancelled from the list of political parties in Sudan".

'No rule of law'

Bashir seized power on June 30, 1989 in an Islamist-backed coup that toppled the elected government of prime minister Sadiq Al-Mahdi. Hamdok said the law to dissolve the party and dismantle the regime was "not revenge" against the former rulers. "It aims to preserve the dignity of Sudanese people which was crushed by dishonest people," he wrote on Twitter. "This law aims to recover the plundered wealth of the people."

The Sudanese Professionals Association, the group that initially led protests against Bashir, said in a statement that the decision would help "building a demo-

cratic civilian state". But the NCP said the protest movement was turning the country's transition period into one where "no rule of law or equality prevails". "The FFC (Forces of Freedom and Change) is trying to drag the country into war, chaos and instability ... the law will only add to more tensions, extremism and destruction of political life in our country."

Hardline Islamist cleric Mohamed Ali Jazuli warned that the law had potential to trigger future conflict in Sudan. "This law is part of a regional project aimed at excluding Islam from all aspects of the state ... this would drag the country into a civil war," Jazuli said in his sermon as he led the weekly Muslim prayers at a mosque in the capital.

On Thursday, the sovereign council and the cabinet also formally scrapped a controversial public order law that had severely curtailed women's rights under Bashir. Thousands of women were flogged, fined and even jailed under the law, which activists said primarily targeted women through harsh interpretations of Islamic sharia law. Activists say security forces have used the law to arrest women for attending private parties or wearing trousers. "This law is notorious for being used as a tool of exploitation, humiliation & violation of rights," Hamdok wrote on Twitter earlier on Friday.

Meanwhile, hundreds of protesters marched yesterday through downtown Khartoum to demand justice for those killed in demonstrations against Bashir. More than 250 people were killed and hundreds injured in the months-long protests that erupted in Dec 2018, according to umbrella protest movement Forces of Freedom and Change.

Crowds marched from a central Khartoum square to Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok's offices, demanding authorities deliver justice for those killed and also find out about protesters who went missing. "Blood for blood!" chanted protesters gathered in front of Hamdok's offices in the capital, an AFP correspondent reported.

Dozens of policemen stood guard as protesters,



KHARTOUM: A woman holds up a sign reading in Arabic "civilian now, the people demand retribution for the martyr" during a demonstration in the center of the capital near the prime minister's offices yesterday. —AFP

many whistling, clapping and ululating, belted out revolutionary slogans. "We want justice for martyrs. We are afraid that the criminals might not be judged," said protester Nizar bin Sufian. He said protesters welcomed Thursday's decision by the new authorities to dismantle Bashir's regime and former ruling party. "But we have not seen any moves by the government to find those missing or to begin trials of those responsible for the killing of protesters," bin Sufian told AFP.

Bashir and several senior members of his regime are in prison, while the veteran leader himself is on trial for alleged graft. Since August, Sudan has been ruled by a joint civilian-military sovereign council headed by General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan. A transitional cabinet led by Hamdok has been tasked with the day-to-day running of the country. The sovereign council is tasked with overseeing an overall transition to civilian rule as demanded by the protest movement. —AFP

US-Russia tensions 'complicate' UN peace bid for Libya

TUNIS: For the UN's Libya envoy, US-Russia tensions top a list of "complications" in efforts to heal international divisions on the North African state's conflict, he told AFP in an interview. Ghassan Salame said "the road is (still) full of obstacles and complications" towards convening inter-Libyan peace talks that could be held in Geneva "probably in the first half of January". "We've recently had many complications, primarily of course concerning this Russian-American tension on the possible presence (in Libya) of Russian security firms," said Salame.

Washington has repeatedly voiced concern over alleged Russian meddling in the conflict that is being exploited by several outside powers for a proxy war. Russia is suspected of providing military support to eastern Libya's strongman Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, whose forces on April 4 launched a now stalled assault on the Tripoli base of the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA).

In early November, Russia denied media reports of Russian mercenaries backing up Haftar's forces, who already have the support of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan and Egypt. The GNA, for its part, is propped up by Turkish military aid. Under an action plan adopted by the UN Security Council in July, Salame has been working to organize an international conference in Berlin aimed primarily at ending foreign interference in Libya, which is in theory under a UN arms embargo. "Arms are coming in from everywhere," the United Nations envoy told AFP at his office in Tunis.

Four preparatory meetings have been held in the German capital and a final session is scheduled to take place on Dec 10, he said. Apart from the Security Council's five permanent member states, Germany, Italy, Egypt, the UAE and Turkey have also taken part. "If all goes well, we'll be able to set a date... for the political meeting that should take place most probably in the first days of 2020," in which other countries could also join, said the UN envoy, to be followed by the inter-Libyan talks.

'Novelty' of US interest in Libya

On the Russian mercenaries, Salame said he was not in a position to confirm their presence in Libya that appeared to

have motivated "a growing American interest" in the North African country. Previously, "the Americans had practically limited their interest to two fundamental questions: The fight against terrorism and the normal flow of oil production," he said. Senior US officials met with Haftar earlier this month to discuss steps towards ending his offensive on Tripoli, and accused Russia of exploiting the conflict, the State Department said.

Despite apparent initial support for Haftar on the part of US President Donald Trump, Washington has called for a halt to the offensive in the wake of a visit to the US capital by a GNA delegation earlier this year. Salame termed the renewed US interest in Libya "a novelty" and said the United Nations, "like the Libyans, are waiting for clarity on what the Americans think they can do" in the country.

The UN envoy also said a military deal signed by Turkey and the GNA following a meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul had added to international tensions. Their agreements on security and military cooperation, as well as maritime jurisdictions, have raised hackles among Egypt, Greece and Cyprus, he pointed out.

On the humanitarian front, Salame said that the deadlocked fighting south of



Ghassan Salame

Tripoli between pro-GNA and Haftar's forces had caused "a lot of destruction" on top of a civilian casualty toll of at least 200 killed and 300 injured. Among the combatants, the United Nations estimates more than 2,000 dead or wounded, he said. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), which Salame heads, has registered more than 146,000 displaced by the fighting launched almost eight months ago. The envoy said the actual figure for the displaced was much higher, with more than 100,000 believed to have taken refuge across the border in Tunisia. —AFP

Congo buries 27 massacre victims as anger mounts

OICHA, DR Congo: The Democratic Republic of Congo town of Oicha on Friday buried 27 victims of the latest massacre in the country's volatile east, with hundreds paying homage while lashing out at security forces for failing to stop attacks. Mourners gathered in silence around the tiny morgue of Oicha, located near the Ugandan border and east of the DRC town of Beni, the scene of repeated deadly strikes. Workers wore face masks as they wrapped the decomposing corpses in shrouds. They were barefoot in line with local tradition out of respect for the deceased.

Wooden crosses marked the graves and many wept as the bodies were lowered. During the mass funerals, gunfire broke out from the nearby bush but it was unclear who was firing. "My neighbor, who was my son's mother-in-law, had her throat slit and was then cut up," said Kahindo Kamabu, a woman in her fifties. "I am very sad but I'm not crying any more as I want to tell these murderers that we are strong and dignified despite our pain."

Janvier Kasahirio, the head of a local youth association, said: "We found the remains of our brothers in pieces," adding that some of the victims had been burnt. He said they found the bodies in the bush. The victims were hacked to death with machetes on Wednesday, taking to 107 the number of people killed in and around Beni since Nov 5. The vast majority of the killings have been carried out by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a militia that has plagued the Democratic Republic of Congo's east since the 1990s. —AFP

Algerian protesters insist Dec election must not go ahead

ALGIERS: Algerians thronged their capital Friday to insist that a presidential election set for December 12 must not go ahead before a change of regime. Protesters fear the poll will cement in power politicians close to ex-president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who quit in April under popular pressure after two decades as head of state. The five candidates standing in

the December poll all either supported the former leader or took part in his government. "There will be no vote!" demonstrators chanted on Friday. "We swear we will not stop!"

They denounced an official crackdown on the so-called "Hirak" movement that has shaken the country with months of unprecedented protests. Security forces, both uniformed and plain-clothed, flooded Algiers for the 41st consecutive Friday of demonstrations, deploying water cannon and anti-barricade vehicles. "This is intimidation! Why so many police vehicles? We're protesting peacefully and are against violence," said Tassadit Ourabeh, 64. At least 25 people were arrested before Friday's march, AFP journalists said. Police also used tear gas against young protesters outside a police station, witnesses said.

On Thursday, a European Parliament resolution said

es and multiple pieces of physical evidence implicate Schembri in the assassination of our wife and mother." They accused Muscat of playing "judge, jury, and executioner in an assassination investigation that so far implicates three of his closest colleagues."

The Times of Malta said Muscat told associates on Friday that he plans to resign imminently, though AFP was not able to immediately confirm the report. Muscat, who has vowed to resign if links were found between himself and the murder, said Friday he would remain in power, telling reporters he wanted "this case to be closed under my watch".

'Disgraceful'

Muscat said Friday he had recused himself from the decision on whether to grant immunity to Fenech. The prime minister later said he had reported Fenech to the police for attempted blackmail, saying the mogul had threatened to implicate him in the affair if he was not given a pardon. Protesters in Valletta on Friday night chanted "Mafia" and "murderers". "The killing of Daphne Caruana Galizia was a terrorist mafia act carried out by our state," said activist Manuel Delia.

He added that Schembri could have been kept in custody over corruption, money laundering and obstruction of justice. Protester Marylou Gafa called Muscat's refusal to give Fenech immunity "disgraceful". "He could have never decided in favor of a pardon that would have sent his closest collaborator to jail," she told AFP. —AFP

Pressure rises on Malta PM to resign over slain reporter

VALETTA: Malta's Prime Minister Joseph Muscat came under increasing pressure to resign on Friday as protesters cried foul over the latest twist in the case of slain investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia. The escalating murder investigation has rocked the tiny Mediterranean island and reached the highest rungs of the country's politics, with two ministers and Muscat's chief of staff Keith Schembri stepping down from their posts this week.

Thousands of demonstrators took to the streets of the capital Valletta after Muscat refused to give immunity to the main suspect in the 2017 murder, tycoon Yorgen Fenech, to disclose what he knows about the case. Fenech has identified Schembri as the mastermind behind Caruana Galizia's 2017 car bomb killing, according to sources. Schembri was arrested on Tuesday, but his release on Thursday sparked accusations of a cover-up.

Caruana Galizia's family accused the prime minister of protecting his long-time chief of staff, demanding he hand power over to a deputy who didn't have a conflict of interest. "We share Malta's shock and anger at the release of Keith Schembri," the family said in a statement. "At least two witness-

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International

NATO birthday overshadowed by top-level feuds between leaders

Macron, Erdogan go head-to-head in 'brain death' row

BRUSSELS: NATO marks its 70th birthday at a summit this week but the celebration could well turn into an arena of political combat between the alliance's feuding leaders. Heads of state and government will descend on London Tuesday bracing for a scrap over spending and how to deal with Russia, in a huge test of unity within NATO - billed by its own officials as the "most successful alliance in history". US President Donald Trump has repeatedly accused European countries of failing to pay their way and will be looking for evidence they are stepping up defense spending.

France's Emmanuel Macron has despaired of the club's strategic direction, saying it is suffering "brain death" - riling other leaders and drawing a rare public rebuke from German Chancellor Angela Merkel. And, on Friday, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, furious at Western criticism of his operation in northern Syria against the Kurds, hit back with a personal attack on Macron. "First of all, have your own brain death checked. These statements are suitable only to people like you who are in a state of brain death," Erdogan declared Friday. "You know how to show off but you cannot even properly pay for NATO. You are a novice," Erdogan said. In a televised speech, Erdogan said he would "say this at NATO".

French officials summoned the Turkish envoy in Paris to complain while a US administration official said that many members would tackle Turkey over its purchase of a Russian S-400 air defense system. Turkey's 64-year-old president accused 41-year-old Macron of being "very

inexperienced". "He doesn't know what fighting against terror is. That is why yellow vests invaded France," he added, in a swipe over the protests that badly rattled Macron's government last year. Erdogan said Ankara had a right to intervene in Syria given the two countries' shared border. "What is your business in Syria?" he said, addressing Macron. "Jump up and down as much as you like ... you will respect Turkey's right to fighting against terrorism sooner or later. There is no other way."

This combustible line-up is dropping into a Britain gripped by a frenetic national election campaign, with Prime Minister Boris Johnson's friendship with Trump under attack from opposition parties. Personal duels aside, the NATO summit agenda is pretty thin. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is hoping simply to get the leaders to sign off on decisions already taken. Last year's NATO summit in Brussels went off the rails when Trump launched a tirade at Merkel during a televised breakfast meeting. The week before this summit has seen a stage-managed series of spending announcements, all designed to send what one diplomat called a "political signal" to appease Trump.

'Trump is right'

Stoltenberg was at pains to point out on Friday that non-US defense spending has grown for four straight years and is on course to hit \$130 billion next year. A Trump administration official expected 18 of the 29 members to meet the alliance's two percent target by 2024. Stoltenberg said Trump was right about Europe and

Canada needing to spend more, but not "to please President Trump". "They should invest in defense because we are facing new challenges, our security environment has become more dangerous," he told reporters.

Stoltenberg is attempting to mollify Trump ahead of the summit by talking up a billion-dollar contract with US planemaker Boeing to upgrade the organization's reconnaissance planes. NATO members have also agreed to lower the cap on US contributions to the alliance's relatively small \$2.5 billion operating budget, meaning Germany and other European countries - but not France - will pay more. But such measures are a drop in the ocean compared to the tens of billions of dollars Europeans would have to spend to meet their promise to spend two percent of their national GDPs on defense. In 2014, the allies promised to meet this goal within a decade. But this week Merkel admitted that economic powerhouse Germany would not hit this sum before "the early 2030s". Stoltenberg insists Trump's tone towards NATO has been more positive of late, and a senior US administration official said Friday Trump's spending campaign had been "spectacularly successful."

'Still working out what he wants'

But Macron's broadside to an Economist interview earlier this month took many by surprise. The French leader stood by his remarks after talks with Stoltenberg, saying NATO was failing to address relations with Russia and what do to about Turkey. Macron's forthright comments have

drawn sharp public criticism, both from Germany and from eastern European NATO countries that feel threatened by Russia. An official from Macron's office told reporters that NATO lacks political direction and relies too much on the US. "We can't sweep debates under the carpet because we're afraid the Americans will disengage further" he added. A Trump administration official on Friday dismissed the "brain death" comments, saying "President Macron is still kind of working out what he wants out of the group".

The official, speaking to reporters on condition of anonymity, said Trump will tell the NATO summit that China and Russia remain major challenges. "China above all," the official added. Tomas Valasek, a former Slovak ambassador to NATO, said even if there was merit in opening debate, Macron had overstepped the mark. "NATO leaders have a responsibility that think tankers don't," said Valasek, now a senior fellow at the Carnegie Europe thinktank. "If you run one of the nuclear powers and in some ways the most powerful military in Europe you don't want to feed the perception of NATO disunity and I'm afraid that's what he's done." At the London summit, leaders will consider separate French and German proposals for expert committees to mull how NATO can improve its strategic thinking. Stoltenberg last week welcomed the German plan to create a group of experts - chaired by Stoltenberg himself - but was cool on the French plan. No formal statement by all 29 leaders will be issued. Instead there will be a "short declaration on the 'success story of NATO'", a diplomat said. — AFP

Trump flies into UK election campaign

LONDON: US President Donald Trump flies into Britain next week, just days before its general election - and if earlier visits are any guide, fireworks are expected. Trump is in town for a summit marking 70 years of the NATO military alliance, but his presence risks disrupting the campaign for the December 12 vote as it enters the final straight. The US leader has been outspoken in his support for Britain's exit from the European Union, which Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson has promised to deliver at all costs.

But has been equally forthright about how it should be done - and his views are not always the same as London's. Trump has also criticized opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, but this risks backfiring in a country where Trump himself is deeply unpopular. The NATO summit on Tuesday and Wednesday includes a reception for leaders and their partners hosted by Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace. Johnson, who is co-hosting the event, currently has no one-to-one meeting scheduled with Trump - and indicated he would not appreciate any interventions. "When you have close friends and allies like the US and the UK, the best thing is for neither side to get involved in each other's election campaign," he told LBC radio on Friday.

Labour attack lines

After three missed deadlines, Britain is due to leave the



Jeremy Corbyn Donald Trump Boris Johnson

EU on Jan 31, but the country remains divided and increasingly polarized about its future. Trump condemned former prime minister Theresa May's "foolish" attempts to get a Brexit deal and suggested Britain leave without one - an outcome businesses warn could be disastrous. He has hailed Johnson, who took over in July threatening to walk away from talks with Brussels, as "exactly what the UK has been looking for".

But when Johnson struck his own exit deal, Trump questioned if it would allow a new trade agreement with the US - something the prime minister has held up as one of the biggest prizes of Brexit. The president also warned in a recent interview that left-wing Labour leader Corbyn would take Britain to "such bad places". But Labour has relished the attacks from a man facing a threat of impeachment back home, who is greeted by protests

every time he visits Britain. It is expected to use Trump's trip to repeat its claim that Johnson's Brexit deal would open up Britain's state-run National Health Service to US firms. The prime minister has denied this, and this week said if Washington tried to include the NHS in trade talks, "we'd walk away".

Trump meanwhile is also close to Nigel Farage, a key figure in the 2016 EU referendum whose upstart Brexit Party threatens to take Tory votes with a promise of a hard break with Brussels. During a phone-in on Farage's radio show last month, Trump suggested he and Johnson form an electoral pact - something the Tories have strongly rejected.

Special relationship strained

UK-US relations recently have been strained, notably by different approaches to Iran's nuclear programme, climate change and China. There have also been tensions over the death in August of British teenager Harry Dunn in a car crash with a vehicle driven by the wife of a US diplomat. Anne Sacoolas claimed diplomatic immunity and subsequently returned home, but Dunn's family want her to come back to Britain to face justice.

Trump was also outraged by the leak of diplomatic cables written by British ambassador Kim Darroch earlier this year which described the Republican White House as inept. Trump condemned the diplomat as a "pompous fool". When then premier May defended him, he condemned her "foolish" approach to Brexit. Darroch has yet to be replaced, and the US president has previously mooted Farage for the job. — AFP

Nigerian justice struggles with sex abuse cases

LAGOS: A dozen officers are squeezed into the dimly lit Lagos State Police Gender Unit between worn desks and witnesses writing statements, as the force struggles to cope with an increasing number of reports of sex abuse in Nigeria. Recent figures are scarce but according to the United Nations, one in four women in the country experiences sexual abuse before they turn 18. Lagos is the only one of the 36 states in Africa's most populous nation with a force dedicated to tackling gender-based violence.

Conditions in the unit - one of 12 serving the chaotic megacity of 20 million - are basic. It has no interrogation room, no dedicated vehicle and no computers. Wedged in a corner behind mounds of loose files, officers point to a small plastic chair where alleged victims - most frequently children, with many aged around just 10 - are brought to give statements. "You can see, we're just managing," Detective Inspector Alaba Munisola, the head of the unit, told AFP. "The number of reported cases has been rising and rising."

Greater numbers of women are speaking out against prevalent sexual violence in the country, with both NGOs and police saying the number of reported cases has increased rapidly in recent years. But this has exposed victims to the failings of an underfunded, poorly trained criminal justice system - often exacerbating their trauma. NGOs and campaign groups say those who report crimes suffer prejudice, extortion and a lack of social support at each stage between reporting crimes and court trials. Investigations into sexual assault rarely result in convictions. The launch of a new nationwide sex offenders register has been described as an important step in helping to crack down on the worst abusers. But activists insist it is just the beginning of the fight to reform the system. "How the police record cases, information sharing, it's ridiculous. It's all in paper," said Ayodeji Osowobi, director of the non-profit organization Stand to End Rape. "The register will help agencies identify repeat offenders, police will have more information when they deal with suspects."

'Buy justice'

Stand to End Rape, which has dealt with hundreds of cases this year, represents those who come forward and provides psychological support. "For victims, when it comes to interfacing with the police, it's one of the most dreaded experiences ever," Osowobi said. "What they do to survivors is not ask them questions but interrogate them." Osowobi said victims are often questioned in public or open spaces, or even in front of suspects they've accused.

Deepening their ordeal, officers regularly extort victims for money and delay the case if they are not paid. "In most cases the police ask for a 'mobilisation fee', saying, 'we need fuel, we need something to ginger us,'" Osowobi said. Inspector Olakunle Orebe has worked in the Lagos Gender Unit since it was founded in 2015. "Oftentimes there is not provision for basic needs, such as transportation, printing case files, visiting the scene to investigate," he admitted, criticizing police budgets.

He said suspects and victims have been transported by some police forces in the same vehicles and sometimes even in public transport. "How will you now carry the survivor and the accused or the perpetrator inside one car?" he complains. "But it happens in places." "In this unit, we have so many challenges. We don't want a situation where victims have to buy justice, so oftentimes, these costs come from our pocket."

The judicial process for sexual assault cases takes two years on average and many victims who pursue prosecutions give up due to delays, Osowobi said. "Archaic" data collection by police, with cases recorded on paper, often result in key details being misplaced, Osowobi said. Uchenna Nwokedi, a consultant at the British Council in Nigeria, said cases also collapse due to a statute of limitations of just six years, as well as poor evidence collection. For instance, many state doctors are not trained to collect evidence after an assault or to present it in a way that persuades judges.

One positive development has been an increase in Sexual Assault Response Centres - run by the government and supported by foreign donors - which act as a first point of call for victims. — AFP

Albania quake toll hits 50 as search for survivors ends

TIRANA: The death toll from a powerful Albanian earthquake rose to 50 as the search for survivors was called off, Prime Minister Edi Rama said yesterday. The 6.4 magnitude quake that hit the Balkan country before dawn on Tuesday was the most deadly and destructive in decades, and left about 5,000 people homeless. "The number of the earthquake victims reached 50 and rescue operations have ended," Rama told a cabinet meeting while struggling to hold back tears.

Entire families were crushed in their homes while they were sleeping, forcing relatives and neighbors to watch in agony as rescue teams pulled bodies from the ruins this week. About 900 people were injured, of whom 41 are still hospitalized, according to the defense ministry. The damage was the worst near the Adriatic coast in the port city of Durres and the town of Thumane, where scores of people were trapped beneath the wreckage of apartment buildings and hotels.

The funeral of eight members of the Lala family, including four children, killed in Durres was to be held later yesterday. Only one member of the family, Rame Lala, 19, survived when his four-storey home collapsed. He sus-

tained serious injuries and was evacuated to Italy with two other victims for specialized care.

Nearly 2,500 people from the worst-hit areas have been moved into hotels or other buildings. Another 3,480 people in the capital Tirana, where there were no casualties, fled to shelters, with some now housed in reception centres and others staying in the homes of relatives, Rama said. The prime minister yesterday expressed "deep gratitude" to rescue teams from Albania and around Europe who had pulled some 50 people from the ruins.

Rama met a French team in Durres on Friday, commenting that "two weeks ago, football world champions were in Albania", in reference to a Euro 2020 qualifying match against France. Now it was "world champions in rescuing the lives of others" who had showed up, he said on Twitter. Rama also attended the burials of nine people from two families who had died in Thumane. Towns in one of Europe's poorest countries, which has a population of 2.8 million people, developed chaotically after the fall of communism in the 1990s. Experts say a lot of construction took place without respect for building codes and with cheaper materials. — AFP



JANSCHWALDE, Germany: Climate activists hold a placard reading "Love for Lausitz, not for the coal" during a demonstration in front of the Jaenschwalde power plant yesterday. — AFP

Campaigners occupy German coalmines in climate protest

SPREMBERG, Germany: Thousands of activists sought yesterday to occupy several open-cast coal mines in eastern Germany, to put pressure on the government to phase out the fossil fuel - a divisive issue in the country's rust belt. With painted faces and dressed in white, hundreds of campaigners sought to force their way into a mine by Welzow-Sued - in the Lausitz basin. Further north-east, another few hundred also arrived at Jaenschwalde Ost mine in the morning, seeking to run into the mine while another 450 blocked a railway connected to the site.

Meanwhile, MIBRAG which operates another mine - the Vereinigtes Schleenhain site - south of Leipzig also said about 1,200 protesters blocked a coal-excavator, forcing the group to halt operations. "We have nothing against peaceful protests and the exercise of democratic rights, but we reject all forms of breach of laws and violence," MIBRAG chairman Armin Eichholz said in a statement. In these mining regions, thousands of jobs depend on coal. But some residents are also threatened with the loss of their homes over a planned expansion of mining.

Separately, dozens of pro-coal militants also gathered close to the Welzow mine. "Ende Gelaende wants to destroy our infrastructures, it's not the right way to do it... we need coal in the region," Thomas Hauke, 62, told AFP, referring to the anti-coal group which is organizing the protest.

Lost year

All three mines hit yesterday produce lignite, a low-grade type of brown coal that is also considered the most harmful to human health and the environment. Calling Saturday's coordinated protest action a success, a spokeswoman Ende Gelaende (Game Over) said around 3,000 turned up for the blockades. "Despite all the nice speeches and promises, 2019 was another lost year for the climate," said Nike Malhaus.

The occupation is being supported by other environmental groups, including the German branch of Fridays for Future which is also holding a protest at a power station in the region. It will be the second time this year that Ende Gelaende has occupied a coal mine. In June, several hundred climate activists carrying sleeping bags blocked the vast Garzweiler lignite mine near Cologne for several days.

Campaigners say the government's plans to phase out coal by 2038 announced this year do not go far enough. They want that date brought forward for Germany to meet its international commitments to slash carbon pollution. "The plan is totally empty. It's a scandal, a crime against future generations," Malhaus said this week. The mining industry in the Lausitz basin, which stretches all the way into Poland, is vital to the local economy. Czech-controlled LEAG, which owns the Jaenschwalde and Welzow-Sued mines, is one of the region's largest employers with 8,000 workers. — AFP



DURRES, Albania: Relatives and family attend the funeral yesterday of eight Lala family members who died during an earthquake. — AFP

International

Months after abrupt halt, Trump gives blessing for Taliban deal

Taliban say 'way too early' to speak of resuming talks with US

WASHINGTON: Nearly three months after he abruptly ended talks with the Taliban, President Donald Trump has given his blessing to fresh diplomacy, but major obstacles stand in the way of a deal to end the Afghanistan war. Chief among the questions is how to address the soaring violence in Afghanistan - which the Taliban sees as leverage but which Trump has hinted that the insurgents were willing to halt.

Trump flew to Afghanistan on Thursday for a surprise trip to see US troops on the Thanksgiving holiday and dropped the news that talks with the Taliban were back on - a process the president declared dead in September. "The Taliban wants to make a deal and we're meeting with them," Trump said. US officials offered little evidence that full-fledged negotiations had resumed.

But observers said that Trump was at least signaling support for further negotiations after the success last week of a captive swap with the Taliban, who freed two Western professors held hostage for three years. "US diplomats have been quietly exploring how to get the talks restarted," said Laurel Miller, who served as the US special representative on Afghanistan and Pakistan under both Trump and his predecessor Barack Obama.

"Until now it was unclear if those quiet efforts were enough to reverse his public claim that the talks were dead. Now he's publicly validated them," said Miller, now the Asia director at the International Crisis Group. She nonetheless questioned if fresh talks would be seamless after Trump in September said he had invited and then dismissed a Taliban delegation after the death of one US soldier. "I think that would give any party that you're negotiating with some pause about how reliable you're going to be in meaning what you say and sticking to it," she said.

Hope for ceasefire?

Trump, who faces re-election in less than a year, has been eager to end America's longest war and wind down what he sees as a waste of blood and treasure. A November study by Brown University found that the United States has spent \$6.4 trillion on wars globally since

the September 11, 2001 attacks which prompted the Afghanistan intervention. In one of Trump's most startling remarks, he said on Thursday that the Taliban had come around and "want to do a ceasefire" and that "it will probably work out that way."

The Taliban on Friday sounded a note of caution. "It is way too early to talk about the resumption of talks for now," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told AFP in a WhatsApp message, adding that the Islamist group would give an official reaction later.

President Ashraf Ghani - who, taking a page from other world leaders, profusely praised Trump during their joint appearance - has long demanded a ceasefire as a precondition for Taliban talks with his internationally recognized government that would come after a US deal with the insurgents. But the Taliban have consistently refused and kept up a campaign of bloody attacks, meaning a ceasefire would mark a major concession. A senior US official said that in renewed Taliban talks, "the focus will be on reducing violence" and that negotiations could be expanded to seek a larger agreement.

Risks of expanding agenda

Veteran US negotiator Zalmay Khalilzad reached a draft agreement with the Taliban in September after a year of talks. Under the agreement, the United States would withdraw troops in return for Taliban pledges not to let Afghanistan be used to stage attacks by Al-Qaeda or other extremists. The deal is not believed to have required a ceasefire - much to the disappointment of Ghani's government.

Scott Worden, director of the Afghanistan and Central Asia programs at the US Institute of Peace, said that a Taliban deal could take much longer if new elements were added. "After the talks were called off by President Trump in September, the Taliban expressed, I think, a surprising willingness to sign a deal whenever the US was ready, which shows that they were happy with it," Worden said.

Trump said in Afghanistan that he was ready to reduce



BAGRAM, Afghanistan: Afghan President Ashraf Ghani addresses US troops during a surprise Thanksgiving Day visit of US President Donald Trump at Bagram Air Field on Thursday. — AFP

US troop numbers "much further" than the draft deal's decrease to 8,600 - the level before Trump took office and ordered reinforcements. Trump has been eager for a signature foreign policy victory ahead of the November 2020 US elections, with few signs of breakthroughs in his diplomacy with North Korea or from his pressure campaign

against Iran. Worden, however, said the political calendar could also play out the opposite way, with advisers warning Trump of a repeat of Iraq where the Islamic State group surged after Obama pulled troops. "Those are both powerful political arguments and I think that they will have to play out over the next many months," he said. — AFP

Final remains of UK truck victims arrive in Vietnam

HANOI: The final remains of the 39 people found dead in a truck in Britain last month arrived in Vietnam yesterday, the foreign ministry said, returning them to bereft families after weeks of waiting. The victims were among the 31 men and eight women discovered in a refrigerated lorry in Essex, east of London, on October 23 - all Vietnamese nationals who were illegal migrant workers. The first 16 bodies were returned on Wednesday, with tearful relatives mobbing ambulances when they arrived in their home-

towns. Yesterday, "the bodies and ashes of 23 remaining victims... arrived in Noi Bai Airport in Hanoi," announced the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Sixteen bodies and the ashes of seven victims were flown from London, state-run Vietnam News Agency reported, and they were immediately "delivered to their homeland by car". The victims hailed mostly from the central provinces, some of the country's poorest, while some were from the north.

Families were given two options for repatriation: \$1,800 to bring back ashes, or \$2,900 for the cost of a coffin carrying the body. Many chose to receive the bodies because they wanted to carry out traditional burial rites, and had to take out loans from the government to facilitate the return. The father of Le Van Ha - who left behind a wife and two children for Europe in the hopes of a higher income to support them - told AFP yesterday that everything was prepared for his son's return. "I decided to receive his

body back instead of ashes so that we could see him for the last time," Le Minh Tuan said. "Everyone is sad but finally my son will be back home."

Several of the victims' relatives told AFP they borrowed tens of thousands of dollars to pay for their relatives' trips to Europe. The central provinces have well-entrenched networks of brokers who facilitate the risky trips with the promise of well-paid jobs, though migrants typically end up working in nail bars or cannabis farms. The brokers promised the 39 victims the truck route was safe and billed it as the "VIP route", their families told AFP.

The Northern Irish driver of the truck, 25-year-old Maurice Robinson, pleaded guilty on Monday to conspiring to assist illegal immigration. Several other people have been arrested in the UK over the incident, while Vietnam has held at least 10 people - though none have been formally charged. — AFP

Lahore looks for answers amid 'air apocalypse'

LAHORE: When black smoke from burning rice stubble in nearby India swept into Lahore - one of Pakistan's largest and wealthiest cities - earlier this month, outraged residents declared an "air apocalypse" and the provincial government shut down schools. But even the city's own thick autumn smog - driven in large part by emissions from polluting vehicles - is becoming a significant threat to health and basic rights, residents and human rights groups warn.

"Air pollution ... claims tens of thousands of lives, devastates the health of millions, and denies other rights, like the right to education, when children cannot go to school," said Omar Waraich, South Asia campaigns director for Amnesty International. "This is a human rights crisis," he said. This autumn, Lahore's worsening air quality has led it to overtaking New Delhi on some days as the most polluted city in the world, according to the community-led Pakistan Air Quality Initiative.

"Both Lahore and Delhi now have a similar number of days of very unhealthy or hazardous air pollution" said Abid Omar, a founder of the non-profit initiative. Since October, the city of more than 10 million has been engulfed most days by a smoky, chemical haze that is relieved only briefly when it rains. Warmer air layers above the cooler air at ground level act like a lid that keeps the pollutants close to the ground, according to Pakistan's Meteorological Department.

Across the city, many residents now wear disposable anti-pollution masks - but they are a poor fit for the faces of vulnerable young children, residents say. Air quality is so bad that it exceeds even the worst ratings of the World Health Organization, said Attiya Noon, an air quality activist in Lahore and the mother of three young children. Pollution "is now beyond the index" - which means serious consequences for the city's health, said Noon, a member of the Punjab government's newly set up Smog Committee.

The committee was hurriedly established earlier this month when air quality levels became so hazardous in Punjab's capital that schools had to be shut down three times, and social media channels erupted with outrage. The smog group now aims to find both immediate and

longer-term ways to reduce pollution. Mahbina Waheed, a Lahore entrepreneur and another member of the committee, said the creation of the group was one sign the provincial government was taking the problem seriously. "With the last government we felt we were helpless and were spiraling into this abyss with all the focus on building new roads. Now with this new government we can raise our voices and they are heard," she said.

More monitoring

One of the quick fixes the activists are proposing is to require students to ride buses to school, rather than arriving in many more individual cars. Countries such as China and Iran have used school closures as a way of curbing smog emergencies, Noon noted. Malik Amin Aslam, an advisor to the country's prime minister on climate change, attended early meetings of the Smog Committee and said Lahore needed "more high-quality air monitoring stations and actionable data."

New Delhi, he said, has 37 official air monitoring stations, while Lahore has just four. The World Bank plans to provide 30 new monitors in Pakistan, including 10 in Lahore, with the aim of having them in place within six months, he said. The biggest driver of the city's pollution, Aslam said, is vehicles, which contribute 43 percent of the smog. Burning of crop stubble, steel manufacturing furnaces and brick kilns are other major sources, he said.

Omar, of the Pakistan Air Quality Initiative, said mandating the use of cleaner fuels should be a top priority. "While closing schools or low weekend traffic have a marginal impact, our transportation and industrial sectors never sleep," he said. Aslam said he would take up fuel standards with the country's oil ministry and urge them to import higher quality diesel. He said he also planned to introduce vehicle inspection systems in Punjab province in coming months to keep a check on polluting vehicles.

As well, Pakistan's cabinet recently passed a new electric transport policy, which aims to shift 30 percent of vehicles on the country's roads to electric power by 2030. Aslam said the World Bank also plans to provide \$55 million to help Punjab steel and brick plants shift to cleaner technologies, and to help farmers find alternatives to burning crop residues by next year. Effectively cutting emissions, however, will also require better city planning, said Mome Saleem, executive director of the new Islamabad-based Institute of Urbanism. — Reuters

N Korea blasts Abe, warns of 'real ballistic missile'

SEOUL: North Korea yesterday warned Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that he could soon see a "real ballistic missile" while excoriating him as the "most stupid man ever known in history". The colorful condemnation comes two days after the isolated state tested what it called a "super-large multiple launch rocket system", with South Korea reporting that two projectiles came down in the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea.

In the wake of the launch, which was supervised by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, Abe termed the fired weapons "ballistic missiles" that violated UN resolutions. "It can be said that Abe is the only idiot in the world and the most stupid man ever known in history as he fails to distinguish a missile from multiple launch rocket system while seeing the photo-accompanied report," a foreign ministry official said in a statement carried by state news agency KCNA. "Abe may see what a real ballistic missile is in the not distant future and under his nose... Abe is none other than a perfect imbecile," it added.

It was best for the North to avoid dealing with Abe, the official went on, adding

that doing so with a "political dwarf" would bring "disgrace". The criticism yesterday of the Japanese leader is the second of its kind by Pyongyang this month. The North had slammed him as an "idiot and villain" and warned he will never set foot in Pyongyang after he condemned the North's weapons test days earlier.

Pyongyang is under multiple sets of international sanctions over its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile programs, which it says it needs to defend against a possible US invasion. Nuclear negotiations between the US and the North have been at a standstill since the Hanoi summit between President Donald Trump and leader Kim Jong Un broke up in February, and Pyongyang has since demanded Washington change its approach by the end of the year.

North Korea has issued a series of increasingly assertive comments in recent weeks as time runs down on its end-of-year deadline. Trump hinted at the prospect of a fourth meeting with Kim in a tweet earlier this month, only to be rebuffed by the North, which said it had no interest in summits "that bring nothing to us". — AFP

Mexico City traffic chaos a matter of life or death

MEXICO CITY: It's a peculiar scene: in the middle of a busy Mexico City intersection, police officers earnestly blow their whistles, instructing oncoming traffic to stop - as indifferent drivers speed past them by the dozens. Undeterred, the cars waiting on the cross street enter the intersection, too. They zigzag to avoid the others, sending pedestrians running for their lives as they try to cross Chapultepec Avenue, one of Mexico City's vital but horribly clogged arteries. "You have to be on the look-out. Here, cars run red lights, they ignore pedestrian crossings," says one, Regina Serratos. "Nobody stops for anybody," adds her friend Ruben Esposito. "It's horrible."

The police standing guard wave their arms and blow their whistles constantly, but issue exactly zero traffic violations. To the outside observer, this chaotic scene, set to a soundtrack of blaring horns and screeching tires, looks like something out of Dante. For residents of the Mexican capital, it is just another morning commute. "The police blow their whistles, but no one cares. Public authorities are perceived as corrupt bribe-grubbers here. No one trusts them or respects them," a high-ranking official at city hall told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Not to mention the fact that drivers usually have no idea why they're being whistled at," he said.

There is a reason for that. Like several states across the country, Mexico City - whose greater urban area is home to more than 20 million people - does not require an exam to obtain a driver's license. An ID, proof of residence and a fee of 754 pesos (about \$40) are all it takes. There is also the fact that the city government has defined the traffic police's priority as keeping traffic moving. Pedestrians and cyclists - whose protection is,



MEXICO CITY: Aerial view of peak hour in Mexico City on Nov 20, 2019. — AFP

notably, not the priority - have good reason to be afraid. "Bikes and electric scooters are like motorcycles: A plague. Sometimes I try to watch out for them, and sometimes I don't," said taxi driver Jose-Carlos Mendoza, 59, from behind the wheel of his Chevy as he weaved through the traffic in a brutal staccato of stops and starts. The city's road accident statistics make for sobering reading. There were 365,167 of them last year, according to the national statistics institute. They killed 4,227 people - an average of nearly 12 per day - and injured 89,191. When cars are not running red lights at deadly speed, they are often idling in the sprawling city's snarled traffic. Mexico City has some of the nastiest traffic jams on Earth - the worst in the world, according to a study by TV network Imagen, or fourth-worst, according to traffic data firm Inrix. — AFP

News in brief

Bouterse sentenced to 20 years

PARAMARIBO, Suriname: A military court in Suriname sentenced President Desi Bouterse to 20 years in prison Friday over the executions of political opponents when he was the South American country's dictator in the 1980s. Bouterse, 74, is on a state visit to China and will appeal the judgement when he returns next week, his lawyer Irvin Kanhai said. A two-time coup leader, two-term president and convicted drugs-trafficker, Bouterse has dominated Suriname's politics since taking power in a 1980 military coup. Friday's judgement, delivered by a three-member court martial led by Judge Cynthia Valstein-Montor, relates to the executions of 15 regime opponents in Dec 1982. — AFP

Mexico suspends judges

MEXICO CITY: Mexico suspended two judges Friday after a man they freed - a former chief executive of Amazon's Mexican unit accused of attacking his wife with a baseball bat - emerged as the chief suspect in her subsequent murder. Outrage has erupted in Mexico over the killing of Abril Perez, who was shot dead by two gunmen Monday in Mexico City, the same day activists took to the streets of the capital for a massive protest over rampant violence against women. Perez was walking down a busy avenue with her two children when the gunmen drove up on a motorcycle and killed her in broad daylight. According to her family, her estranged husband, the former head of Amazon Mexico, is suspected of hiring hitmen to carry out the killing. — AFP

Fujimori leaves prison in Peru

LIMA: Peru opposition leader Keiko Fujimori was released from prison Friday after spending 13 months in pre-trial detention in a corruption case linked to Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht. Her release comes days after the country's Constitutional Court ordered her freed in a ruling related only to her detention and which otherwise has no bearing on the corruption case against her. "For me, it was the most painful event of my life," Fujimori said as she left prison and hugged her husband in front of a large group of supporters and journalists. The court, she said "has corrected damage that has been inflicted on us. I will continue to face the investigation, as I have always done." — AFP

Analysis

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The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

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DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
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Washington Watch

Trump dismantling international order

By Dr James J Zogby

The Trump Administration's declaration that Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian lands are not illegal was, in fact, a consequential act - though not for the reasons cited by Israelis or Palestinians. It was also "the nail in the coffin" - though not the "coffin of the peace process" - as some Palestinians have claimed.

The decision was not so consequential with regards to settlements because for the last three and one-half decades, successive American administrations' policies toward Israeli settlements have moved from passive acquiescence to outright acceptance. It was Ronald Reagan who first said that he didn't believe settlements were illegal. And it was George W Bush who tried to make the distinction between "existing realities" and new settlements. The former, he claimed, had already been built and could remain, while the latter were to be discouraged.

The Israelis took advantage of this loophole and continued to build, knowing that US presidents might complain but wouldn't do anything to stop them. The net result has been that the settlement population in the occupied territories has grown from 50,000 during the Carter administration to 620,000 Israeli settlers even before Trump took office.

Against this background, it's fair to say that the Trump announcement on Israeli settlements didn't reflect any dramatic shift in US policy. It's also fatuous to suggest that will it have any effect on the "peace process." It doesn't end it, kill it, set it back, or slow it down - precisely because there is no peace process, nor has there been one for several years. In reality, pretending that there is such a process has been an illusion projected by the US to control Palestinian behavior and to keep Europeans and Arabs at bay so as to maintain exclusive US control over the "process" and to protect the Israelis from any international sanctions or pressure.

The real significance of the Trump Administration's announcement is something quite different - it demonstrates a flagrant disregard for international law and conventions, the role of the international community, and universal human rights.

We've already seen this attitude on display with Trump's withdrawal from several international agreements negotiated by previous administrations (regarding trade, climate, and arms control), the threats the administration has made to punish other nations who voted against the US at the UN, and the contempt it's demonstrated toward the International Criminal Court and several UN agencies.

On Israel-Palestine issues, the current administration has repeatedly demonstrated this disdain for international law and consensus (e.g., attempting to legitimize the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights or defunding and refusing to acknowledge the rights and even existence of Palestinian refugees). But, and here's the nub of the matter, the legitimacy and applicability of international law and conventions are not up to one bad actor or one rogue nation.

It is here that the behavior of the US has been especially consequential and problematic. The US can't make illegal settlements legal, grant occupied territories to the occupier, or deny refugee status to refugees and their descendants on its own - these are matters of international law, the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and scores of UN resolutions passed by the overwhelming majority of the nations of the world. The status of these Palestinian rights remains unchanged, despite US actions.

But what has been affected by decades of US disrespect for law and rights and international institutions has been the ability of these rules to be applied and these structures to effectively play their roles in governing the relations among nations and their behaviors toward one another. And this is what is most consequential about Trump's declaration.

It is true that the architecture of diplomacy, the rule of law, and respect for universal rights have long been either ignored or honored only selectively. It's also true that these structures and rules only work when powerful nations adhere to and uphold them. So, when in the past the US has flaunted international law or cherry-picked human rights violators they would condemn, it only served to undercut the rule of law and weaken the architecture of international relations and diplomacy. What Trump has done is take this dismantling of diplomacy and law one step farther, literally casting aside international law and human rights conventions. This is the real danger posed by his behavior.

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

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A representative of Code for Africa, John Eromosele, stands on a boat while teaching a volunteer, Hannah Shemed, how to use the designated computer application to fast-track digital mapping and referencing in the Makoko waterfront settlement in Lagos on Oct 23, 2019. — AFP

Drone project aims to put Lagos slum on map

John Eromosele records the coordinates of a bustling canal on his smartphone from aboard a dug-out canoe navigating the floating slum of Makoko in Nigerian megacity Lagos. The waterway is "like a boulevard, there's always traffic here," the computer coding specialist laughed as other boats jostled for space between rows of wooden houses on stilts. Officially Makoko does not exist. Its estimated 300,000 inhabitants - no one knows for sure how many - and their ramshackle homes do not appear on any city development plans or maps.

A South Africa-based NGO, Code for Africa, wants to change that. It wants to help bring badly needed services to Makoko by literally putting the slum on the map. "Most of the streets here don't have names, and our houses don't have numbers. Sometimes, you can find up to 50 people using the same number," said Chief Albert Jeje, one of Makoko's five traditional rulers. "Who cares about poor people like us? ... Government officials never come to visit us."

Makoko is dubbed "the Venice of Africa" by some, but its similarity with the romantic Italian city is minimal. Waste floats on the surface of Makoko's black waters, and visitors choke on the fumes of diesel-fuelled generators and wood-smoked fish. With no administration, the huge labyrinth of waterways has no mains electricity or piped drinking water, no public schools, no hospital, no police station.

'A new tool'

The mapping project was launched in September with funding from the US-based Pulitzer Center and a non-profit organization called Humanitarian OpenStreetMap, which uses free, open-source software. The scheme enlists young slum-dwellers to pilot drones and then use the information they collect to map what is a black hole at the heart of Nigeria's economic hub. "This is a new tool that can allow international organizations or local authorities to intervene to improve access to basic services - health and water, for example," said Jacopo Ottaviani, one of the project leaders.

Like Lagos, with its 20 million inhabitants, the fishing village that sprang up on the site at the end of the 19th century has relentlessly grown, edging into the sea. In the first stage of the project, drones will take some 1,000 aerial images of the area, to be stitched together by coding specialists like Eromosele to form one larger picture. Code for Africa selected six young women from the slum to fly the drones and index the data to make an initial version of the map. Other community members will also be able to add content over time.

Clutching her smartphone, one of the volunteers noted the location of a cassava-processing plant on stilts using Code for Africa's specially developed mapping app. A little farther on, Abigail, 24, marked down a butcher specializing in dog meat, and just beyond that a traditional medicine

clinic and pawnbroker. "We have fun doing it, and we learn a lot of things," she told AFP. Code for Africa, which advocates for open use of technology and data journalism, purposely selected women for the project to offer them a CV-boosting experience.

Some locals suspicious

Not all of Makoko's inhabitants seem comfortable with the project. "People are sometimes suspicious. They wonder if what we are doing is not going to turn against them," Abigail said. "So we try to reassure them." The concerns are understandable. In 2012 the Lagos state authorities sent in police to evict people on the grounds that Makoko was an environmental hazard. "People woke up one morning with posters ordering them to leave," Chief Jeje said.

At least one person was killed as local residents resisted the operation, during which homes were levelled. Eventually the violence forced the authorities to back down. But Makoko still lives in fear: in recent years, other Lagos slums have been razed and replaced by housing projects. With the city's population booming, every square metre is fiercely disputed as developers vie for space. More often than not it is the poorest who find themselves squeezed out, pushed to the outskirts of the sprawling metropolis. Chief Jeje hopes that the map of Makoko will help its inhabitants to claim their rights over their homes. "We are fishermen," he said. "If you drive us from here, we die." — AFP

Scientists scour past for future climate clues

As the pace of global warming outstrips our ability to adapt to it, scientists are delving deep into the distant past, hoping that eons-old Antarctic ice, sediments and trees chart a path to navigate our climate future. "What interests us is to understand how the climate works," says Didier Roche of France's National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). At the Laboratory for Climate and Environment Sciences (LSECE), just outside Paris, the aim is to establish a comprehensive record of climate change dating back hundreds of thousands of years, to chart the repeated warming and cooling cycles the Earth has gone through and to try to understand what drives them.

Get that far and it becomes possible to determine what part humans play in the current global warming phase through the massive greenhouse gas emissions, principally CO2 and methane, that have come with industrialization and population growth. A key research tool are the cores of ice, some dating back 800,000 years,

which contain tiny bubbles of trapped air and are drilled out at depths of up to 3.2 kilometres by the European Project for Ice Coring in Antarctica (EPICA).

While the air bubbles reveal CO2 and other greenhouse gas levels, similar cores of sediment or tree ring records help build up the picture of Earth's climate. From the gas bubbles "we can reconstitute the composition of the atmosphere," said Anais Orsi, researcher at France's Atomic Energy Commission (CEA). Particles of dust meanwhile "can tell us if there were lots of forest fires in Patagonia or if Australia was going through a very dry spell," she said.

As for trees, with their very clear record of growth rings, "they can tell us about temperature, sunlight, humidity levels," said Valerie Daux, professor at the University Versailles-Saint Quentin, just outside Paris. Levels of the carbon 14 isotope, which allow for a close dating of material, provide another line of investigation to establish "at what speed an ecosystem can adapt to climate change," said the CEA's Christine Hatté.

Climate models essential

All the data is collected and processed to be put into climate models and then extrapolated into what appears set to be a much warmer future. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) warned this week the world was headed for disaster without an all-but-impos-

sible 7.6 percent cut in annual fossil fuel emissions through to 2030 so as to limit global temperature rises to 1.5C. Continue as we are, and even taking into account current Paris climate agreement pledges, the world is on track for an increase of 3.2C and possibly more.

The World Meteorological Organization said Monday that atmospheric greenhouse gas levels hit an all-time record in 2018. The Paris deal committed nations to limit temperature rises above pre-industrial levels to "well below" 2C, and to a safer 1.5-C if at all possible. But a trio of studies released this year showed that Earth had never warmed as uniformly or as quickly as it had in the last century.

Against this backdrop, the search for more detailed and more accurate climate change models becomes essential. Roche noted that a global temperature increase of 6.0-8.0C would produce a "climate comparable to that of the dinosaurs," although he cautioned that a different land mass configuration at that time would have to be taken into account. What is more certain is that only 21,000 years ago, the Earth was 3.0-4.0C colder than today. "At that time, New York was covered in ice one kilometre thick, with Norway under three kilometres and sea levels 120 metres lower than now," he said. "We have disturbed our climate very sharply over a very short timeframe. The more we do that, the more it will change." — AFP

The Falklands ewe turn: From sheep farming to tourism

Late in life, Tony Heathman has sought out pastures new: The 70-year-old former sheep shearer now spends his days driving tourists around the Falklands Islands. If that sounds like an odd career switch, his story is typical on the remote British archipelago, where tourism is an increasingly popular side hustle for workers in the grueling livestock industry. Heathman works for his 38-year-old daughter Nyree's Estancia Tours in the South Atlantic territory, having long ago handed over his farm to his other daughter.

"A lot of people will save up their leave and take days off to just drive down here for a day when the big ships come in," Heathman told AFP on a gusty trip to Volunteer Point, a peninsula famous for the islands' signature species, the king penguin. Driving tourists around one of the Falklands' main attractions is Heathman's main job these days. "It's very lucrative. Some people just rely on it for extra cash," he says. "It's a day out to meet people and exchange views on various subjects, talk about life on the Falklands and worldwide - I enjoy it." Sheep farming nevertheless remains a traditional way of life for some islanders - enduring despite a rapidly modernizing society and an exodus of workers to the archipelago's one town, Stanley.

Grueling work

There are 92 farms and some 500,000 sheep on the Falklands. Goose Green farm on East Falkland island

employs five sheep shearers and as many "rouseys" - the women who shake out the freshly shorn wool. It is grueling work. "There's a learner on the end, he'll shear 160. The two boys in the middle, they'll shear 400 today; it depends on your ability," Goose Green farm manager Keith Alazia, 47, told AFP. His five employees will work for around eight and a half days straight, shearing 13,500 sheep between them - around 1,500 a day. Then they'll move on to another farm. They can earn almost one pound sterling per sheep. "People have sheared 25,000 in the Falklands in a five month season, so that's the best part of £25,000 in that time," said Alazia. But on a remote island chain with harsh weather where locals say you can experience all four seasons within an hour, such strenuous work is not for everyone. Neither is sheep farming. "You have the real Falkland Islanders who still live on farms and are 90 years old and go out every day and gather sheep," said Joanne Baigorri, a credit officer at the islands' only bank. "But you have some of us who like to be in town with our comfort and heating and internet and things like that."

Life on the Falklands can be slow, to the extent that the recent opening of a movie theater in the capital Stanley caused a stir. There are no nightclubs and the internet is expensive and can be frustratingly slow. Restaurants open for business at around 6:00 pm and often stop taking orders by 8:30 pm.

Safe place

But that small town vibe has its plus side too: This is a place where people don't lock their homes or cars. "I love living here. I have three children, this is such a safe place to raise your children," said Baigorri, 27, as she shopped in Stanley's supermarket. It's also a surprisingly cosmopolitan place. Falkland Islanders proudly boast about 60 nationalities among a population of just 3,400. Ten percent are



In this photo taken on Oct 10, 2019, an employee shears a sheep at a ranch in Goose Green, Falkland Islands (Malvinas). — AFP

Chileans while there are also burgeoning communities of Filipinos, Saint Helenians and even Zimbabwean deminers.

"I fell in love with the Falklands and fell in love with a local person," said Gabi McRae, a 31-year-old Chilean who works in quality control at the Falkland Islands Meat Company. Life can sometimes be difficult, though, as the weather can cause havoc with air and boat travel. Many internal flights are called off due to gusting winds and occasionally the ship carrying food stocks runs into difficulties, from the weather or Argentina, which continues to claim sovereignty despite Britain asserting its authority since 1833. "Sometimes you can find it hard to find things you actually need," said McRae. "For example, I might want to bake a cake and you've got no sugar and there's absolutely no sugar on the entire island." — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2019

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TOKYO: An employee stands by tables at the Ryugin restaurant in Tokyo. Two Japanese restaurants have shot to the top of the La Liste ranking of best places to eat in the world, with a third getting the second highest mark from the authoritative 'guide of guides'. — AFP

Japanese restaurants rocket to the top

Famously innovative Ryugin restaurant jumps 30 places

PARIS: Two Japanese restaurants have shot to the top of the La Liste ranking of best places to eat in the world, with a third one getting the second highest mark from the authoritative "guide of guides". Yosuke Suga's tiny Tokyo restaurant Sugalabo, which has only 20 tables, does not have a Michelin star but shares the top spot on the French-based list alongside the reigning leaders, Guy Savoy in Paris and New York's Le Bernardin.

The famously innovative Ryugin restaurant in the Japanese capital run by chef Seiji Yamamoto jumped 30 places to also reach the shared number one spot. Kyoto's Kitcho Arashiyama was one of seven restaurants including Alain Ducasse's Monaco base that split second place. The French celebrity chef's Paris table at the Plaza Athenee hotel was ranked fourth by the classification, which aggregates reviews from guides, newspapers and websites including TripAdvisor.

Meteoric rise

But it is the rapid rise of Suga, 43, once a personal assistant to the legendary late French superchef Joel Robuchon, that will

make most headlines. Last year Sugalabo did not even make La Liste's top 1,000. His "secret" introduction-only dining room is hidden away behind a coffee house in the Azabudai neighborhood, and closes for a few days every month so Suga can go off around Japan looking for new ideas and ingredients. Although he comes from a family of chefs schooled in the French tradition, the produce Suga uses is almost entirely Japanese.

The chef however said he breaks his homegrown "rule" to add caviar, truffles and foie gras to his dishes. The playful Yamamoto, who invented edible inks to decorate his plates, got the maximum three Michelin stars four years ago. He once served up what he called a "Chateau Ryugin 1970 soup" of potatoes, seashells and beetroot served in a bottle of wine corked with salsify. Although he also trained in France, he insisted that "before I send a plate to a client I always ask myself, 'Is this Japanese food?' If the answer is no, I won't serve it."

Japan, China lead pack

Japan and China have more of the planet's best restaurants than anywhere else

according to the ranking, which was set up four years ago as a "more scientific and reliable" rival to the British-based 50 Best list. Japan leads the country table with 130 restaurants in the top 1,000 but Chinese cuisine is closing the gap with 126, up three on last year if you include restaurants in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan.

France—the historic home of haute cuisine—comes in third with 116 and the United States just behind with 113. The Mirazur restaurant at Menton on the French Riviera which topped the 50 Best list is joint fourth on the ranking. It's Argentinean chef Mauro Colagreco became the first foreign chef in France ever to win three Michelin stars earlier this year. He was tied on the same score as Massimo Bottura of Italy's Osteria Francescana who he toppled from the top of the 50 Best and the acclaimed Catalan restaurant El Celler de Can Roca in Girona. British celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay came joint fifth for his London base.

Most popular food

La Liste's co-founder Jorg Zipprick said China's rise is partly because of the large number of restaurants there and the boom in



NEW YORK: Eric Ripert, chef and co-owner of Le Bernardin in New York City works in the kitchen of his restaurant in New York. — AFP

local gastronomic guides. But Italian food is still the most popular on the planet after Japanese cooking, he said, judging from what was being cooked in the 20,000 establishments on La Liste's database. Zipprick said that environmental consciousness such as "local producers, sustainable fish, organic

ingredients, plus the need to avoid food waste" were playing an increasingly important role in how people rate restaurants. The highest ranking Australian restaurant was Melbourne's Attica (joint eighth) while Toronto's Alo was the pick of the bunch in Canada in seventh place. — AFP

Aramco IPO oversubscribed so far, but not by big margin

RIYADH: Saudi Aramco's initial public offering (IPO) was on course to be oversubscribed but not by a huge margin, according to figures released so far by the lead manager before a Dec 4 close for institutional investors to submit offers. Bids received by Friday from institutional and retail investors totaled \$44.3 billion, lead manager Samba Capital said, about 1.7 times the value Saudi Arabia aims to raise from selling a 1.5% stake in the state-owned oil giant.

Although the IPO has received more than enough bids, the level of interest is relatively muted compared to other emerging market IPOs and subdued even when compared to the listing of a top Saudi bank in 2014 that was oversubscribed many times over. If

Riyadh hits its target of raising 96 billion riyals (\$25.6 billion) or more it would still be a world record IPO, valuing the company at about \$1.7 trillion.

But this is lower than the \$2 trillion valuation originally touted by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has put the sale at the heart of his program to raise cash for ambitious plans to diversify the kingdom's oil-reliant economy. Riyadh scaled back its original IPO plans, scrapping an international roadshow to focus instead on pushing the offering among wealthy Gulf Arab allies. It has stayed quiet on when or where it might list the stock abroad, which had been central to the plans that were first announced in 2016. Bankers said roadshows in New York and London were cancelled after international investors balked at the proposed valuation.

Attracting allies

In the first update on institutional interest, Samba said the value of bids had reached 118.86 billion riyals (\$31.7 billion), with the bulk coming from Saudi companies and funds, while foreign investors accounted for just 10.5% of offers. Sources told Reuters this week the sovereign wealth funds of Abu

Dhabi and Kuwait, both OPEC oil producers like Saudi Arabia and close political allies, planned to invest.

The retail tranche, which closed to subscribers on Thursday, attracted bids worth 47.4 billion riyals (\$12.64 billion), around 1.5 times the amount of shares offered to them. The level of interest is relatively modest when compared to the listing of Saudi Arabia's National Commercial Bank in 2014 when the retail portion was 23 times oversubscribed. Alibaba's listing in Hong Kong this month had bids for 40 times as many shares to those on offer.

Saudi banks have been offering citizens easy loans to bid for shares in Aramco, the crown jewel of the Saudi economy and the world's most profitable company. Some financial institutions offered loans four times their usual limits and others set no ceiling on the amount clients deemed creditworthy could borrow, two financial sources told Reuters. The government had been encouraging rich Saudis to invest, promoting such investment as a patriotic duty, particularly after Aramco's oil facilities were attacked in September. Riyadh and Washington blamed Iran, although Tehran denied the charge. — Reuters

Cryptocurrency promoter charged over North Korea

WASHINGTON: A prominent American cryptocurrency promoter and former hacker was charged with sanctions violations Friday after he allegedly advised North Korea on using virtual money to avoid international controls. Virgil Griffith, 36, who lives in Singapore and works for the blockchain and cryptocurrency developer Ethereum, was arrested at Los Angeles International Airport on Thursday, the Justice Department said. He attended a conference on blockchain and virtual currencies in Pyongyang in April, where he spoke about how to use both technologies "to evade sanctions," the department said.

Doing so violated US Treasury bans on "exporting any goods, services, or technology" to North Korea, put in place in response to the country's nuclear weapons program. "Despite that the US Department of State had denied Griffith permission to travel to the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), Griffith presented at the DPRK Cryptocurrency Conference, knowing that doing so violated sanctions against the DPRK," the Justice Department said in a statement.

The department said North Korean officials at the conference appeared to show particular interest in Griffith's presentation. After the conference, it said, Griffith "began formulating plans to facilitate the exchange of cryptocurrency between the DPRK and South Korea, despite knowing that assisting with such an exchange would violate sanctions." The Justice Department said he also announced plans to renounce his US citizenship, aiming to "purchase" citizenship in another country. — AFP

Business

Lebanon crisis wreaks havoc on Syria's war-torn economy

Lebanon bank curbs choking off dollar flow to Syria

AMMAN: A financial crisis in Lebanon has hit the economy of neighboring Syria hard, choking off a vital source of dollars and dragging the Syrian pound to record lows. Shut out of the global financial system by Western sanctions, Syria's economy has depended on banking ties to Lebanon to keep business and commerce running during the country's more than eight-year-old war.

But as Lebanese banks impose tight controls on hard currency withdrawals and transfers abroad, wealthy Syrians have found their funds inaccessible. The flow of dollars to Syria from Lebanon has all but stopped, according to three businessmen and five bankers in Damascus and abroad. "These deposits are now trapped. You can imagine the aftershocks from this which is beginning to surface in the Syrian economy," said a senior Lebanese banker who handles accounts of wealthy Syrians, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

Lebanon's long-brewing economic crisis is the worst since its 1975-90 civil war. The banks are seeking to prevent capital flight as dollars have become scarce and the value of the Lebanese pound has slumped on a black market. The Syrian pound has nosedived by 30% in the weeks since Lebanon's economic crisis escalated on Oct. 17 after a wave of anti-government protests swept the country to Syria's west.

The Syrian pound hit an all-time low of around 765 to the dollar this week, compared to 47 before the uprising against President Bashar Al-Assad began in 2011 and escalated into full-blown war with rebels and militants. Wealthy Syrians are believed to have deposits of billions of dollars in Lebanese banks, businessmen and bankers said. Interest paid on Syrians' deposits in Lebanon and remitted home has been an important source of dollars for the economy.

Unable to transfer dollars directly to Syria, Syrians outside the Middle East have used Lebanon's financial

system as a conduit to send funds to their relatives estimated at hundreds of millions per year. This flow has also been hit. Syrian laborers in Lebanon are also feeling the effects of a sharp contraction in an economy that is shedding jobs fast. "The Syrians may be even more affected by the restrictions than others," said Kamal Hamdan, who heads the Beirut-based Consultation and Research Institute think tank.

Dollars in short supply

Many middle-class Syrians lived off interest from their savings in Lebanon. "Syrians who relied on interest on their deposits spent some of these inside Syria. There are thousands who have now stopped bringing in their dollars from Lebanon, reducing the supply of dollars," Damascus-based Syrian businessman Khalil Touma said.

The Syrian pound was under pressure even before the Lebanese crisis set in, reflecting Syria's deep economic problems compounded during a war that shattered swathes of the country. With critical Russian and Iranian support, Assad has recovered control of the bulk of Syria. But much of the country is in ruins and Western states will not support reconstruction without a negotiated political transition.

In an effort to support the Syrian pound, the authorities enlisted the support of wealthy pro-Assad businessmen in October, asking them to deposit funds with the central bank, said two businessmen. But this was too little to have an impact. Restrictions were also tightened on Syrian pound withdrawals in a bid to curb dollarisation. Syria's central bank instructed banks to cap withdrawals at 5 million Syrian pounds per day which was later relaxed to 10 million pounds after objections, two Damascus-based bankers and one businessman said.

"These restrictions, especially after the panic over the pound, made people no longer put money in banks.



BEIRUT: Photo shows a view outside a branch of 'Bankmed' bank in the Lebanese capital Beirut. —AFP

Most people kept it in cash for fear they cannot withdraw it when they want. This further pushed the dollar higher," Touma said. But these efforts have been in vain. The two Damascus-based bankers said the central bank had abandoned moves to defend the pound through direct intervention, preferring to preserve remaining foreign currency reserves. "We fear that this time the fall is irreversible," another prominent businessman told Reuters.

"Traders are no longer putting their pounds in banks. They are turning them into dollars and this has created even more demand for the dollar," Karim Halawani, a trader, said by phone from Damascus. Many Syrians now hoard the foreign currency they have. "People got scared even more, saying if these powerful businessmen were not able to do anything then the situation is deteriorating," the food importer said. —Reuters

China factory activity expands in November

BEIJING: China's November factory activity rebounded for the first time in seven months, data showed yesterday, despite the looming threat of fresh US tariffs within weeks if Beijing and Washington fail to sign a partial trade deal. The closely watched Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), a key gauge of activity in the country's factories, rose to 50.2 in November, up from 49.3 last month, the National Bureau of Statistics said.

The reading is slightly above the 50-point mark that separates growth and contraction every month. A sub-index of new export orders climbed to a 7-month high at 48.8, but was still in contraction as demand wanes for China's exports abroad. Ting Lu, chief China economist

at investment bank Nomura, says "the blip" of a rise in the official manufacturing PMI doesn't signify a recovery in the economy.

"The jump of manufacturing PMI from 49.2 in Feb to 50.5 in March this year made the whole market very excited about a strong recovery, but it turned out to be an illusion," said Lu. "This time is no different." The reading comes as Beijing and Washington edge towards a partial deal to a trade war that has dragged on for nearly 20 months. Top US and Chinese negotiators held phone talks on Tuesday and agreed to keep in touch over "remaining issues" for a "phase one" trade deal between the two countries, Chinese state media said.

The two sides have slapped tariffs on nearly half a trillion dollars worth of goods in two way trade, and US President Donald Trump is threatening fresh tariffs in mid-December if there was no mini-deal. Beijing has also implemented a number of measures to stimulate the economy, which expanded at its slowest pace in nearly



WUHAN: A worker checks cigarettes at a factory in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province. —AFP

three decades in the third quarter. People's Bank of China trimmed the interest rate it charges on funding to commercial lenders last week, to boost lending to credit-starved parts of the economy. —AFP

Italy softens budget plastic tax, cuts tax on green tampons

ROME: Italy's government has decided to back-track on a contested tax on plastic in its 2020 budget in the face of protests from producers in a region where the ruling parties face a key local election in January. However, seeking to maintain a focus on the environment, it announced a steep cut in sales tax on biodegradable tampons. Both changes will be introduced in amendments to the budget which must be approved in parliament by the end of the year.

The levy on production of single-use plastic was presented as an environmentally-friendly measure and originally aimed to raise 1.1 billion euros (\$1.21 billion) next year. The plan got a hostile reception in the northern Emilia Romagna region which holds an election on Jan 26, where the incumbent governor from the ruling Democratic Party (PD) faces a tough challenge from the right-wing League.

A defeat in the traditionally left-leaning Emilia Romagna would risk destabilizing Italy's ruling coalition of the PD and the anti-establishment 5-Star Movement, already split on issues such as euro zone reform, immigration and the justice system. Plastic packaging is a major source of income and employment in Emilia Romagna, one of Italy's most industrialized regions.

The government will drastically scale down the plastic tax, with a new revenue target of just 330 million euros, PD senator Dario Stefano said on Friday. "The levy will not be applied to syringes, medical devices and packaging of medicinal products, it's really a good result," Stefano told Reuters. The government says it can make up for the shortfall because an early-retirement scheme introduced this year is proving less costly than anticipated. —Reuters

India growth falls to worst level in years

MUMBAI: India's economy grew at its slowest pace in more than six years in the July-September period, down to 4.5 percent from 7.0 percent a year ago, according to government figures released Friday that piled more pressure on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The expansion in Asia's third-largest economy fell from 5.0 percent in April-June and marked the sixth consecutive quarterly contraction.

The GDP growth, now well below the level needed for India to provide the millions of jobs required each year for new entrants to the labor market, poses a major headache for Modi. His government is struggling to kickstart what was once the world's fastest growing major economy as consumer demand shrinks and

unemployment surges to a four-decade high.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has announced several reforms, easing restrictions on foreign investment in key sectors, slashing corporate taxes, and launching a privatization drive aimed at reviving moribund state firms. The central bank, the Reserve Bank of India, has cut interest rates five consecutive times this year in a bid to boost lending. But none of the measures have raised consumer confidence. Demand for everything from cars to cookies has plummeted.

The slump has already seen India lose its position as the fastest-growing major economy to China this year. China said last month that its economy grew 6.0 percent in July-September, down from 6.2 percent in the second quarter. Economists expect India's central bank to announce yet another rate cut on Thursday to combat a liquidity crunch caused by the collapse of India's shadow banking sector. Rates are currently at a nine-year low.

Patchy record

Economist and author Vivek Kaul told AFP that the reforms were a case of too little, too late. "The Modi government waited for growth to collapse" before taking any action, Kaul said. "The steps are essentially very marginal and not going to help the economy in the long run," he said, adding that more far-reaching reforms were needed but were unlikely to happen. Modi's right-wing government won a landslide re-election victory in May but its economic record has been patchy.

Experts say the economy has never recovered from a 2016 shock cancellation of bank notes that forced many small-scale businesses to shut down or the roll-out of a nationwide goods and services tax in 2017. The opposition Congress Party slammed what it called "failed Modi-nomics" in its comment on the new data. Mumbai-based economist Ashutosh Datar told AFP the latest figures were "a reaffirmation of how serious and damaging the slowdown is". —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.	
EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	304.600
Euro	338.870
Sterling Pound	397.350
Canadian dollar	231.460
Turkish lira	54.200
Swiss Franc	308.460
US Dollar Buying	297.150
ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.782
Indian Rupees	4.250
Pakistani Rupees	1.969
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.678
Nepali Rupees	2.659
Singapore Dollar	224.800
Hongkong Dollar	38.909
Bangladesh Taka	3.553
Philippine Peso	5.999
Thai Baht	10.098
Malaysian ringgit	77.903
GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	81.281
Qatari Riyal	83.716
Omani Riyal	791.683
Bahraini Dinar	809.350
UAE Dirham	82.986
ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	21.350

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd	
Rate for Transfer	
US Dollar	304.240
Canadian Dollar	229.325
Sterling Pound	394.835
Euro	337.170
Swiss Frank	306.530
Bahraini Dinar	809.085
UAE Dirhams	83.235
Qatari Riyals	84.475
Saudi Riyals	82.025
Jordanian Dinar	430.395
Egyptian Pound	18.916
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.685
Indian Rupees	4.260
Pakistani Rupees	1.959
Bangladesh Taka	3.537
Philippines Peso	5.984
Cyprus pound	18.100
Japanese Yen	3.780
Syrian Pound	1.590
Nepalese Rupees	2.663
Malaysian Ringgit	73.865

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL		
CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
British Pound	0.387354	0.401254
Czech Korune	0.005130	0.014430
Danish Krone	0.040864	0.045864
Euro	0.328658	0.342358
Georgian Lari	0.121560	0.121560
Hungarian 0.001148	0.001338	
Norwegian Krone	0.029170	0.034370
Romanian Leu	0.065285	0.082135
Russian ruble	0.004775	0.004775
Slovakia	0.009109	0.019109
Swedish Krona	0.027867	0.032867
Swiss Franc	0.298662	0.309662
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.198196	0.210196
New Zealand Dollar	0.189864	0.199364
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.224272	0.233272
US Dollars	0.300500	0.305800
US Dollars Mint	0.301000	0.305800
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003002	0.003803

Chinese Yuan	0.041883	0.045383
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036962	0.039712
Indian Rupee	0.003624	0.004396
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002698	0.002878
Korean Won	0.000248	0.000263
Malaysian Ringgit	0.069229	0.075229
Nepalese Rupee	0.002627	0.002967
Pakistan Rupee	0.001295	0.002066
Philippine Peso	0.005962	0.006262
Singapore Dollar	0.217637	0.227637
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001320	0.001900
Taiwan	0.010030	0.010210
Thai Baht	0.009743	0.010293
Vietnamese Dong	0.000013	0.000013
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.801807	0.809865
Egyptian Pound	0.018953	0.021694
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000211	0.000271
Jordanian Dinar	0.423633	0.432633
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000153	0.000253
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021213	0.045213
Omani Riyal	0.786039	0.793938
Qatar Riyal	0.083010	0.083844
Saudi Riyal	0.080140	0.081440
Syrian Pound	0.001291	0.001511
Tunisian Dinar	0.102671	0.110671
Turkish Lira	0.046316	0.056161
UAE Dirhams	0.082298	0.083126
Yemeni Riyal	0.000990	0.001070

Business

'Black Friday' becoming a shadow of its former self

Crowds of the past have thinned out with the rise of e-commerce

NEW YORK: The US holiday shopping season officially opened with a deluge of "Black Friday" promotions but the frenzied crowds of the past have thinned out with the rise of e-commerce. Companies in the retail, entertainment and tourism industries once again tried to entice shoppers after Thanksgiving with a bevy of offers on a day synonymous with American consumer culture and notorious "doorbuster" sales that start at the crack of dawn. But US consumers aren't buying Black Friday the way they once did.

Only 36 percent of US consumers plan to shop this year on Black Friday, down one percent from last year and a decline of 23 percent from 2015, according to a PricewaterhouseCoopers survey. "Just a few years ago, Black Friday had the aura of a FOMO (fear of missing out) event," PWC said. "Now it seems more symbolic than significant in the pantheon of retail holidays." Black Friday will be followed in three days by "Cyber Monday," a second highpoint of spending early in the season. Friday's sales have prompted copycat versions throughout Europe, an effort that has generated no small amount of friction.

This year's events prompted protest in parts of France, Germany and the Netherlands that included environmentalist rallies outside Amazon distribution centers and human chains blocking malls. There has been little sign of that sort of subversiveness in the United States. Rather, the bigger emerging challenge for Black Friday has been shifting consumer patterns. The PWC survey said that for the first time in 2019 more consumers (54 percent) said they'll do more of their shopping online than in stores.

Demos and deals as Black Friday sweeps Europe

PARIS: Climate activists staged protests across Europe on Friday to denounce the environmental toll of mass consumption, while shoppers hit the streets and the internet as retailers of all stripes touted pre-holiday bargains. The American "Black Friday" tradition of a post-Thanksgiving day of deals has taken hold in Europe as a long weekend of sales, alarming critics who say it encourages unbridled and wasteful spending.

This year, activists have targeted the climate costs of frenzied shopping, in particular from delivering the millions of items ordered from Amazon and other online retailers. French NGOs had pledged a "Black Day for Amazon," with protesters blocking a distribution centre outside Paris on Thursday, and others near Lyon and Lille on Friday.

The Extinction Rebellion campaign group posted on Twitter images of protesters being forcibly removed by police from the Lyon site. "Amazon today emits as much greenhouse gases as a country," Jean-Francois Julliard, head of Greenpeace France, said at a sit-in at Amazon's headquarters just north of Paris on Friday. Activists formed human chains to prevent shoppers from entering stores at La Defense business district west of Paris as well as in the central city of Saint-Etienne and the town of Roanne.

In Strasbourg, activists plastered storefronts with anti-consumerist messages such as "Black Friday: A bad deal for the environment" and poured glue into door locks, delaying the opening of dozens of stores. Sylvain Truc, a member of Youth for Climate protesting in Marseille, southern France, called Black Friday "the symbol of what we're

Academics urge Lagarde to take climate action at ECB

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: The European Central Bank should take "concrete action" to help tackle the climate crisis, more than 160 academics and civil society groups said in a letter to new ECB chief Christine Lagarde. "The most powerful financial institution in Europe cannot just sit passively as we witness a growing environmental crisis," the letter said, urging Lagarde to ditch fossil fuel-linked investments.

"Without any further delay, the ECB should commit to gradually eliminating carbon-intensive assets from its portfolios, starting with immediate divestment from coal-related assets." Among the 164 signatories were campaign groups Greenpeace and 350.org, the charity Caritas France, former Dutch environment minister Jacqueline Cramer and Britain's ex-Financial Services Authority chairman Adair Turner.

Lagarde took the reins at the ECB at the start of November pledging a stronger focus on climate change risks and environmental protection. But she immediately ran into opposition from Germany's powerful Bundesbank central bank chief Jens Weidmann who said he

Higher sales expected

Economists and retail industry insiders are broadly confident about the outlook for the 2019 season, owing to a strong labor market. Consumer spending accounts for about 70 percent of US economic growth and has stayed strong throughout 2019 even as manufacturing has stagnated and business investment has been lackluster.

"Consumers are in good financial shape and willing to spend a little more on gifts for the special people in their lives this holiday season," said Matthew Shay, Chief Executive of the National Retail Federation. The NRF has projected that US consumers will spend an average of \$1,048 this year, up about four percent they said they would spend last year.

But increasingly more of those sales are migrating online. This trend includes Amazon of course, but also traditional brick-and-mortar chains like Walmart and Macy's that have evolved into "multichannel" retailers, as well as companies and organizations hawking everything from pet food to hotel stays to political merchandise. President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" merchandise was being once again discounted on the US president's political website at 35 percent off.

Democratic presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts was offering 25 percent off merchandise orders of \$75 or more. Due to the lateness of Thanksgiving, this year's holiday shopping season is about six days shorter than last year, prompting more retailers to push up promotions even earlier in the season than usual, according to analysts. Online consumer



LOS ANGELES: Shoppers carry televisions purchased from a store during Black Friday sales in Los Angeles. — AFP

spending on Thanksgiving day came in this year at \$4.2 billion, up 14.5 percent from a year ago and the first time above \$4 billion, according to Adobe Analytics.

Jason Woosley, a vice president with Adobe, said preliminary data showed Black Friday was also on track to top its performance from last year by almost 19 percent,

with promotions for sporting goods and appliances especially popular. The data suggested the Thanksgiving day shopping spree hasn't "stolen any traffic from Black Friday," he said, adding that about 20 percent of the overall online sales for the season are expected between Thanksgiving and Cyber Monday. — AFP



AJACCIO: People walk past a 'Black Friday' logo on a banner in Ajaccio, on the French Mediterranean island of Corsica. — AFP

trying to fight." But many retailers across France nonetheless reported brisk Black Friday business. A salesman at the Holland Bikes store in the Villiers neighborhood said an early rush of clients snapped up several bikes at 20 percent off.

German strike

In Germany, around 2,200 Amazon workers walked off the job to escalate their long-running fight for better pay and working conditions. The strike called by the powerful Verdi union is set to last until Tuesday morning and will also cover "Cyber Monday", another extravaganza of online discounts in what is a crucial sales period for Amazon.

"Their work cannot be had at rock-bottom prices," Verdi said in a statement, demanding a collective labor agreement to ensure "a living wage and good, healthy jobs". And in Austria, 15 activists from the anti-capitalist group Attac managed to halt vehicles from leaving Amazon's distribution centre in the state of Lower Austria, accusing it of threatening local trade and jobs. In the Netherlands, Students for Climate called for a human chain in Maastricht.

'Buy Nowt'

Others urged people to halt purchases altogether to protest the US-inspired event, such as the "Buy Nowt Friday" in Bradford, northern England, organized by artists and anti-poverty advocates. But many British retailers hoped deep discounts would bolster sales that have suffered from the uncertainties linked to Brexit. In Madrid, where stores across the city are offering Black Friday deals, Greenpeace held a rally just days ahead of the opening of the COP25 conference on fighting climate change. Activists unfurled a banner on the facade of a building on the Gran Via, a major shopping artery in the Spanish capital, which read "Consumerism = Climate Crisis."

Faced with the backlash, Amazon France's managing director Frederic Duval defended the company's record on the environment. "Ecology is quite important to us, it's at the heart of our strategy," he told RTL radio, noting that Amazon has ordered 100,000 electric delivery vehicles. He also said that Amazon France would step up efforts to ensure that unsold goods were given to charity, following reports that many unsold items are destroyed by the company. — AFP

South African Airways shunned by insurers

JOHANNESBURG: Two big travel insurance companies in South Africa have stopped covering tickets issued by South African Airways (SAA) against insolvency as doubts grow about whether the struggling state-owned airline can survive. While the move is unlikely to push SAA into liquidation by itself, it will hurt ticket sales and exacerbate a cash crunch that left the airline unable to pay salaries on time this month, analysts said. SAA has not made a profit since 2011 and has been struggling with an unprofitable network, inefficient planes and a bloated workforce, despite bailouts of more than 20 billion rand (\$1.4 billion) over the past three years.

Its financial position worsened dramatically after Nov. 15, when two of its largest unions began an eight-day strike over pay that forced SAA to cancel hundreds of flights. Banks want additional guarantees from the state before they lend SAA more money but Finance Minister Tito Mboweni has refused, leaving the airline's finances on a knife edge. Public Enterprises Minister Pravin Gordhan still wants to save SAA, which says it needs to more than 2 billion rand (\$136 million) quickly to stay afloat.

More pain for German car industry

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: Luxury automaker Daimler said Friday it would scrap at least 10,000 jobs worldwide, the latest in a wave of layoffs to hit the stuttering German car industry as it battles with a costly switch to electric. The Mercedes-Benz maker said it wanted to save 1.4 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) in staff costs by the end of 2022 as it joins rivals in investing huge sums in the greener, smarter cars of the future. "The total number worldwide will be in the five-digits," Daimler personnel chief Wilfried Porth said in a conference call about the job cull.

He declined to give a more detailed breakdown. The group said in an earlier statement that "thousands" of jobs would be axed by the end of 2022, after clinching a deal with labor representatives. The cull includes slashing management jobs "by 10 percent," Daimler said, reportedly amounting to some 1,100 positions around the world. "The automotive industry is in the middle of the biggest transformation in its history," Daimler said.

"The development towards CO2-neutral mobility requires large investments," it added. Along with other manufacturers, Daimler is scrambling to get ready for tough new EU emission rules taking effect next year, forcing it to accelerate the costly shift to zero-emissions electric cars and plug-in hybrids. The group, which employs 304,000 people globally,

President Cyril Ramaphosa has stayed out of the tussle so far but the longer Mboweni refuses to sign off on guarantees, the more likely it is that SAA will shut down - an outcome an SAA board member said last week was a possibility. Santam's Travel Insurance Consultants (TIC) said this week it had stopped its travel supplier insolvency benefit for SAA flights then Australian agency Flight Centre Travel Group said it would stop selling SAA tickets.

The company that administers Holland Travel Insurance told Reuters on Friday it had also excluded SAA from its travel supplier insolvency coverage, citing the airline's finances. Bryte Insurance's head of travel Anrieth Symon said on Friday it had reversed its position on SAA and would cover its flights against insolvency. SAA spokesman Tlali Tlali declined to comment when called by Reuters on Friday and did not respond to emailed questions. Neither Mboweni's spokeswoman nor Gordhan's spokesman answered their phones when called by Reuters.

'All options'

SAA said in a memo to staff on Friday seen by Reuters that its board and executives were in intense discussions with the government and that the airline's leaders were exploring "all options regarding SAA's future". Guy Leitch, an aviation analyst who edits the SA Flyer magazine, said the decisions by the insurers and Flight Centre to drop the airline were hugely significant. "No one managing SAA, from Minister Gordhan downwards, anticipated the flight of confidence that the strike would have," Leitch said. — Reuters

said the job cuts would be achieved through natural turnover, early retirement schemes and severance packages.

Fewer parts needed

Daimler's announcement comes as the mighty German car industry is buffeted by trade tensions, weaker Chinese demand and a darkening economic outlook. Other major car companies have in recent months already unveiled plans to cut some 30,000 jobs in the sector over the next years. Germany's Audi said it wants to axe 9,500 jobs, followed by more than 5,000 at Volkswagen, some 5,500 at car parts supplier Continental, while Bosch aims to cut more than 2,000 roles. US car giant Ford plans to scrap some 5,000 jobs in Germany alone.

Electric engines require fewer parts and are less complicated to assemble than internal combustion engines, needing fewer hands. But auto bosses have said thousands of new, hi-tech jobs will also be created in the electric era to make cars more autonomous and connected. German automotive expert Ferdinand Dudenhoeffer has said he believes the German car sector - which currently employs 800,000 people - will shed 250,000 jobs over the next decade. A total of 125,000 new ones will be created, he predicted.

Daimler returned to profit in the third quarter and said it was expecting 2019 revenues to be "slightly above" last year's, while operating profit would be "significantly below" the 11.1 billion euros in 2018. Adding to Daimler's woes this year were expensive recalls linked to faulty Takata airbags and to diesel cars allegedly fitted with software to dupe emissions tests. — AFP



FRANKFURT AM MAIN: Christine Lagarde, President of the European Central Bank (ECB), addresses journalists during a press conference in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. — AFP

was critical about "calls for a green monetary policy". Preferentially targeting "green" bonds for asset purchases by the ECB would violate the ECB's principle of "market neutrality", he argued.

But writers of the letter urged Lagarde, the bank's first female president, to push back against "resistance from those who think central banks should leave climate policies to others". They said it was "shocking" that the ECB was still buying assets from companies in carbon-intensive and fossil fuel-related industries as part of its huge bond-purchasing program to boost economic growth. The Frankfurt insti-

tution should show "ingenuity" and redesign the scheme to support investments that contribute to the green transition, the letter said.

The public appeal comes ahead of a UN summit on the climate crisis in Madrid next week, amid growing alarm about global warming. In a symbolic move on Thursday, the European Parliament declared "a climate and environment emergency". The European Investment Bank, the lending arm of the European Union, announced earlier this month it would end all fossil fuel financing from 2022 and prioritize lending to clean energy projects. — AFP

Business

OPEC oil output slips before Aramco IPO, policy meeting

Nigeria still exceeds quota by largest margin

LONDON: OPEC oil output has fallen in November as Angolan production has slipped due to maintenance and Saudi Arabia has kept a lid on supply to support the market before the initial public offering (IPO) of state-owned Saudi Aramco, a Reuters survey found. On average, the 14-member Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries has pumped 29.57 million barrels per day (bpd) this month, according to the survey.

That is down 110,000 bpd from October's revised figure. The survey suggests Saudi Arabia, after resuming normal supply after attacks on facilities in September, is still pumping far less than an OPEC-led supply deal allows. OPEC meets to review the pact on Dec. 5, the same day Aramco is due to announce the final offer price.

OPEC, Russia and other allies, known as OPEC+, agreed to reduce supply by 1.2 million bpd from Jan 1. OPEC's share of the cut is about 800,000 bpd, to be delivered by 11 members, with exemptions for Iran, Libya and Venezuela. The producers are expected to

extend their supply pact at meetings on Dec 5-6. OPEC delegates have said the producers could discuss deeper supply cuts amid forecasts of excess supply in 2020. "The minimum is to extend," said an OPEC delegate.

Oil has slipped to \$63 a barrel after spiking to \$72 following the Sept. 14 attacks on Saudi oil plants. The current price is below the levels many OPEC countries need to balance their budgets and below the levels officials say they favor. The 11 OPEC members bound by the agreement, which for now runs until March 2020, have easily exceeded the pledged cuts. Compliance has risen to 152% in November, the survey found, from 135% in October, although Iraq and Nigeria remain laggards among larger producers.



Saudi oil output edges lower after Oct recovery

Angolan drop
OPEC's largest production drop of 140,000 bpd was in Angola, which exported less crude in November due to maintenance affecting the Girassol crude stream, traders said. The African producer was already pumping far below its OPEC quota

due to a natural decline in production and a lack of new fields coming online, rather than due to voluntary restraint.

Saudi Arabia has pumped 9.85 million bpd, down 50,000 bpd from October, the survey found. Riyadh's output had jumped by 850,000 bpd in October after the September attacks, but remained below Saudi Arabia's OPEC quota. In November, the country has been pumping more than 400,000 bpd less than the agreement allows, the survey found. OPEC's second-

largest producer Iraq has pumped slightly less, but continues to overshoot its target.

Nigeria, which has consistently pumped more than its OPEC target, continued to do so in November, the survey found, although output has edged lower this month. Among countries pumping more, the largest increase was in Kuwait, which increased output by 70,000 bpd to 2.72 million bpd, reaching its exact quota level. Ecuador also pumped more after a decline in October, when protests against government austerity measures led to several fields being shut down.

Venezuela, which is contending with US sanctions imposed on state oil firm PDVSA and a long-term decline in output, managed a small boost to supply with exports increasing in November. Production from the two other exempt producers, Libya and Iran, was little changed. The Reuters survey aims to track supply to the market and is based on shipping data provided by external sources, Refinitiv Eikon flows data and information provided by sources at oil companies, OPEC and consultants.—Reuters

NBK Capital acted as Global Coordinator, Joint Lead Manager



Faisal Al-Hamad

Rani Selwanis

KUWAIT: Watani Investment Co KSCC (NBK Capital) acted as Global Coordinator and Joint Lead Manager for the National Bank of Kuwait SAKP's (NBK or the Bank) \$750 million Regulation S/144A Perpetual Non-Call 6-year Tier 1 Capital Securities (the Capital Securities) issuance. The Capital Securities offer semi-annual coupon payments set at 4.50% per annum and have a first reset date on 27 November 2025, before which the securities can be called at any point 3 months prior or on any interest payment date thereafter.

The issuance represents the first of its kind to be offered in both Regulation S and 144A formats from the GCC, which allowed for the marketing of the issuance globally including on-shore in the United States. A diversity of global investors participated in the issuance, with the order book peaking at US\$ 2.3 billion (3.1x oversubscription) from more than 160 investors and a final book of \$1.9 billion (2.5x oversubscription).

The robust demand for the issuance allowed NBK to price the lowest coupon ever for a GCC Tier 1 capital security at 4.50% (6 Year US Treasury rate + 283.2bps). The transaction achieved a globally diverse order book lead by US investors at 33%, followed by UK investors at 27%, Asian-Pacific investors accounted for 20%, while European and MENA investors each made up 10% of the final order book.

Fund managers dominated the placement making up 76% of the final order book, followed by Insurance companies and Banks/Private Banks at 12% and 10% respectively. Faisal Al Hamad, NBK Capital's Chief Executive Officer stated: "We are honored to once again guide NBK towards achieving yet another landmark transaction that has shattered the bounds of the GCC's evolving debt capital markets. NBK's ability to shore up capital from around the world is a testament to the Bank's global reach and leading regional position"

Rani Selwanis, NBK Capital's Managing Director and Head of Investment Banking added: "NBK has continuously looked to challenge the market and with this transaction the Bank has elevated yet again to a global level and surpassed expectations, by achieving the most diverse global order book ever for an Emerging Market Tier 1 issuance and setting a record-breaking pricing level out of the GCC." The issuance constitutes direct, unsecured, unconditional, and subordinated payment obligations of the Issuer and NBK. The issuance obtained a "Baa3" rating by Moody's, one of three other issuances to obtain an investment grade rating from the GCC.

The proceeds from the issue of Capital Securities will be used by NBK to further enhance its Basel III Compliant Tier 1 Capital while also supporting its general corporate purposes. NBK is one of the leading banks in Kuwait and the largest by total assets, customer deposits and customer loans and advances. The Bank continues to maintain a rating of Aa3 by Moody's, A+ by S&P and AA- by Fitch (all stable). NBK Capital, Citi, JP Morgan and Standard Chartered acted as Global Coordinators and Joint Lead Managers, while HSBC and UBS acted as Joint Lead Managers on the transaction.

Huawei launches a new noise cancelling earphones

KUWAIT: Huawei recently launched the HUAWEI FreeBuds 3, the brand's flagship Bluetooth earphones. Boasting the title of the world's first Open-fit active noise cancelling Bluetooth earphones, the HUAWEI FreeBuds 3 was launched in line with Huawei's commitment towards providing a more connected and seamless world. Packing in premium features, solid build quality and capable of delivering stunning sound, these earphones are designed for a variety of users ranging from the gamers to music or movie lovers and even the everyday user. Here are four reasons why we love them.

Intelligent noise cancellation

The HUAWEI FreeBuds 3 is capable of cancelling out any and all ambient noise in the background with its active noise cancelling technology. With the help of innovative features and advanced technologies, the HUAWEI FreeBuds 3 can easily cancel out external noise for a more immersive audio experience. This also extends to phone calls, where the earphones are able to identify vibrations

in the users head from the background noise, improving phone quality. The patented aerodynamic design also ensures that strong wind noises are cancelled out, further enhancing the noise cancellation. This technology comes in great use when in crowded areas like malls, metros, cafés and many more. By allowing the user to zone out from the surrounding noise, they are able to enjoy their music and phone calls in noisy environments. Additionally, the earphones are also perfect while running or during a windy day, something most other earphones struggle with.

Open-fit design

The HUAWEI FreeBuds 3 boasts a stylish open-fit design that not only looks trendy while in-ear but also serves functional purposes. Being the world's first earphone to have an open-fit design with active noise cancellation, the HUAWEI FreeBuds 3 hold an advantage by being comfortable to wear for long and extended periods of use, without having to face the risk of falling out. The earphones are also the result of Huawei's engineering prowess, as the innovative custom parts balance treble, bass and middle for a more refined audio experience.

Powered by the Kirin A1 chip

The Kirin A1, Huawei's first dedicated chip for wearables and hearables, adds the extra power to the



HUAWEI FreeBuds 3. Not only does it enhance the audio quality by reducing lag and latency during videos or gaming, it also ensures quick and seamless connections. The chipset also ensures that the earphones are optimized for power consumption, thus saving battery for longer use.

All-day Battery

Speaking of power consumption and battery, the HUAWEI FreeBuds 3 comes with a 2W HUAWEI Super Charge feature along with support for both wired USB Type-C and wireless charging. In just 30 minutes of wired charging, users can enjoy up to 14 hours of playback or 6 hours if they opt for wireless charging. On a full charge, the HUAWEI FreeBuds 3 by itself are able to provide four hours of playback, and a

total of 20 hours* when used alongside the charging case. Additionally, users can also charge the HUAWEI FreeBuds 3 with Wireless Reverse Charging feature found on Huawei smartphones.

Data about battery life and charging time are based on the test results of HUAWEI lab. By default (Active Noise Reduction is not enabled), 50% volume, AAC mode, actual battery life is affected by volume, source, environmental interference, product features and usage habits. These are the top four features that we loved on the HUAWEI FreeBuds 3. Designed for all users, this Bluetooth is the perfect companion for both entertainment as well as a daily driver, especially due to its comfortable open-fit design and active noise cancellation features.

NBK sponsors the Kuwait Institute of Banking Studies' seminar

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is the main sponsor for the upcoming seminar "Digital Leader" by the international speaker, Erik Qualman. The seminar focuses on Digital Leadership and how to focus in a Digitally Unfocused World. The seminar, will be held in JW Marriott Kuwait on December 3rd, 2019 and is organized by Kuwait

Ahli United Bank announces winner of Al Hassad Draw

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank announced on the 27th of November 2019 the KD 100,000 winner of its Monthly draw of Al Hassad Islamic account as Azhar Mohammad Talaat. The draw was live on FM 88.8 Kuwait Pulse. Al Hassad Islamic account which has over 850 prizes, over a 12 month period and is the very first draw account in Islamic banking in Kuwait that has reshaped the lives of thousands lucky winners. Al Hassad has have over 850 prizes, over a 12 month period.

On the occasion Ahli United Bank congratulate its winning customer, and commented that there are many chances to win waiting for our customers. Draws are held every Wednesday at AUB Kuwait or AUB Bahrain depending on the draw plan. On public holidays, the draw is postponed to the next business day. Al-Hassad Islamic Account presents 4 quarterly mega prizes of KD 250,000 that will help the lucky winners achieve their dreams and aspirations.

In addition, Al-Hassad Islamic Account presents a monthly draw to win a prize of KD 100,000. One powerful new aspect of the Al-Hassad Islamic Account is the prize draws on the holy occasion of both Eid Al Fitr and Eid Al Adha, when the winning

Institute of Banking Studies (KIBS).

The seminar will cover a number of themes; including the impact of the social media on attaining client loyalty, the institutional adaptation to the new digital era, and the institutions' transition to the new digital world. Qualman will provide the audience with information about the meaning of retooling businesses for a new digital era; management by objectives; client loyalty; in addition to prioritizing objectives and making the full use of a digital landscape.

Qualman's approach of educating, entertaining, and empowering audiences helps drive immediate and long term changes to the way businesses are approached in a digital age. Qualman will also give a breakdown of the five simple keys to success and influence in addition to other tools on how to manage daily tasks errors and provide a distinguished client experience.

customers will receive the eid prizes of KD 100,000 each. May the Eid always bring prosperity and blessings to the Islamic nation. Al-Hassad Islamic Account presents also 21 weekly prizes comprised of a grand prize of KD 10,000, 20 prizes of KD 1,000 each.

In addition to the highly attractive package of the prizes, there will be the annual expected profits on, which makes the Al Hassad account a useful tool for family and other savings, both for the short term and for the longer term - a fact which well appreciated by a large multitude of new and old customers. It is worth mentioning that there is possibility to open the account online for non-customers and there is possibility to transfer the salary to Al Hassad account. In addition Al Hassad customers can issue an ATM immediately and have the freedom to deposit and withdraw any time.

To be eligible to participate in the draw, the customer should have a minimum balance of KD 100, whereby the customer has two chances to participate, with a maximum of 30,000 chances per draw, in addition to annual profits for all participants. Every KD 50 invested for at least 15 days entitles the customer to one chance in the each draw. The longer the customer keeps his balance the bigger the changes of participation in the draw.

For more information on Ahli United Bank's products and services, customers are invited to visit any of the Bank's branches or dial the customer service "Hayakom", or log on the Bank's website www.ahliunited.com.kw

Investors expect international stocks to outperform US

NEW YORK: Even though the US stock market continues a record-breaking rally that has sent the benchmark S&P 500 index up nearly 25% for the year, investors appear to be looking elsewhere for better values in the year ahead. World stock funds brought in \$8.2 billion in investor inflows over the last two weeks, breaking a losing streak that dated back to early September, according to Investment Company Institute data. US equity funds, meanwhile, lost more than \$10 billion in outflows over the last two weeks, extending a retreat that has spanned seven of the last eight weeks.

The move into overseas stocks comes as economic fundamentals appear to be improving in parts of Europe and Asia while US growth looks to be slowing, drawing money away from a market that had been an outperformer. Even with the MSCI All World Country Index, which tracks global equities, nearing record highs set in January, 2018, fund managers and analysts say global stock markets still offer a better chance to outperform US stocks in the year ahead. The cite significantly lower valuations after failing to keep pace with the US equity market for much of the last decade.

"We're starting to see a period where valuation is going to be the driver for future returns," said David Marcus, chief investment officer at Evermore Global Advisors. He has been shifting more of his portfolio into European stocks such as Belgium-based medical lab equipment maker Fagron NV and French media giant Bolloré SA.—Reuters



Erik Qualman

What's On

ACK launches IEEE student branch



The Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) held a ceremony to officially announce the establishment of a student branch of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) at the College. The ceremony was attended by representatives from IEEE Kuwait Chapter, members of ACK IEEE student branch and ACK faculty members.

Among the attendees representing the IEEE Kuwait Chapter were Dr. Mansour Jaragh - Chairman, Eng. Fadhel Abulhasan - Secretary & Treasurer, Dr. Feda Al-Shahwan - Membership Development Officer and Dr Ali Al-Fayli - IEEE

Young Professionals Chairman.

Established in 1963, IEEE is the world's largest technical professional organization for the advancement of technology. IEEE is serving the world through 420,000 members and more than 3000 student branches distributed over 100 countries.

The ceremony began with an opening speech by ACK student Othman Al Matrouk, Chairman of the ACK IEEE Student Branch. Afterwards, ACK student Alaa Bouomar, Vice Chairman, gave a speech introducing IEEE, its goals and offerings. Lastly, the visiting members of the IEEE Kuwait

Chapter gave their speeches by thanking the College and congratulating the students for forming a student branch. The speeches also highlighted the benefits of IEEE and what opportunities it provides for students.

The ACK IEEE Student Branch has various offerings that help students and its members by offering opportunities for youth development, empowering students to build critical skills, offering social activities to enhance students' networking, teaching college and career skills to enrich CV's and holding tailored events that target students' needs.

Mohamad Zaki, Electrical Engineering Senior Instructor at ACK and IEEE Student Branch Counselor, praised the commitment and hard work of the student members who put together the ceremony and is looking forward to their future plans with the Branch. Zaki also added that the Student Branch will be a valuable resource for all ACK students, as its membership is open to all majors, not only engineering.

ACK would like to thank IEEE for providing our students with such a valuable opportunity to help them with their future careers.

Ooredoo Kuwait sponsors third PAAET career fair



Ooredoo Kuwait, the first to launch innovated digital services in Kuwait sponsored the third annual career fair of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training as a Platinum sponsor held last week under the patronage and attendance of PAAET Director, Dr. Ali Al-Mudhaf. Ooredoo Kuwait, represented by Eisa Al-Beshaier, Senior Director of Human Resources and Administration Services was honored by Dr. Al-Mudhaf for the company's sponsorship of the career fair.

Ooredoo's ongoing support to the various career fair held in public and private universities, colleges, and learning institutions nationwide is part of the company's keenness in offering students job opportunities to students, especially in the telecommunications sector which is considered one of the most vital and dynamic fields operating in Kuwait's private sector.

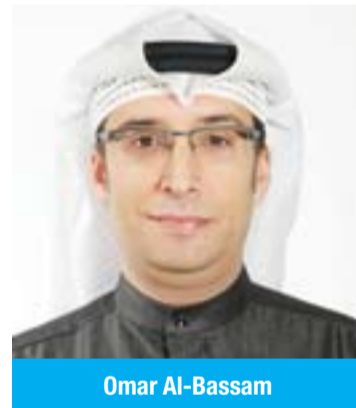
Eisa Al-Beshaier, Senior Director of Human Resources and Administration Services at Ooredoo Kuwait reiterated the company's belief in the major role that the youth play in the future

of our country. He said, "Our support for youth is deep-rooted within our strategy across the organization in Ooredoo. Our aim is to help them discover their potential, open new horizons for the ambitious youth by providing them with opportunities to apply their educational knowledge to the professional world." Al-Beshaier added, "We are continuously seeking opportunities to recruit talent and welcome them into the Ooredoo family".

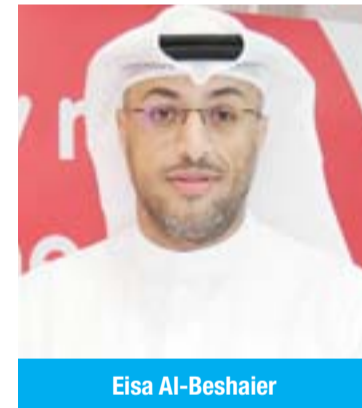
Omar Al-Bassam, Chief Human Resources and Administration Services Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait reiterated the company's belief in the major role that the youth play in the future of our country. "We are glad to participate in the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training Career Fair, which attracts a number of Kuwait's most talented students who received extensive academic education in a variety of fields."

ing queries about job opportunities, job descriptions, and career paths, in addition to introducing them to the different training and internship opportunities Ooredoo provides annually in collaboration with different entities.

For more information, please contact 121, our team will answer all inquiries around the clock 7 days a week. Or visit our website www.ooredoo.com.kw or the nearest shop to you, or simply use our App 'MyOoredoo' for updates and more.



Omar Al-Bassam



Eisa Al-Beshaier



Future Eye Theatre's megadrama Shur Shomrat

Future Eye Theatre Kuwait, well known drama theatre house in Kuwait is launching their mega drama - SHUR SHOMRAT on 24th January 2020 at Hawally Boy's Scout auditorium.

The drama encapsulates the biography of late M.S Baburaj, the legendary Malayalam musician. To render this saga with all its spirit, breeze, emotions and colours, we are proud to have Dr Samkutty Pattomkary's unchallengeable expertise with his script and direction.

Dr Samkutty Pattomkary, the erudite scholar, took his Master's degree in Theatrical Arts from Thriassur School of Drama followed by Ph.D. from JNU, and Future Eye Theatre is blessed with his consent to stage his phenomenal work in Kuwait for the first time.

Future Eye Theatre, who is well-known for the versatility in the subjects they present in their various plays, considers this as a feather in the cap. The Theatre has established a remarkable image in the hearts of art lovers of Kuwait with their unique presentation of various subjects on the stage supported by a prodigious crew. As a recognition to these efforts the Theatre has bagged award from Kerala Sangeetha Nalaka Academy twice, and it is worth to note that Future Eye Theatre is the only organization invited by the Government of Kerala to present a drama in the home country.

Undoubtedly, this mega drama is going to be a major breakthrough for all the enthusiastic theatrical artists. The co-ordinators assure that this musical saga will caress the spectators with cool breeze as the music of Baburaj, leaving an ever memorable experience.

VIVA strategic sponsor of the fourth annual KALD Distinguished Teacher's award 2018-19 ceremony

VIVA, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers and enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, and a subsidiary of STC Group, has sponsored the fourth Kuwait Association for Learning Differences (KALD)'s Distinguished Teachers Award Ceremony, with the first and only award in the Arab World to be granted to the teachers of students with learning difficulties in Kuwait. The event was held at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre in presence of Eng. Maziad AlHarbi VIVA CEO and Ms. Amaal Al-Sayer KALD Chairperson.

Both AlHarbi and Al-Sayer honored the Award Judging Committee and the three winners of KALD Distinguished Teacher's Award announced during the event.

Ms. Danah Faisal AlJasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at VIVA commented: "Our strategic sponsorship extending until 2020 inclusive of this significant event is part of the Corporate Social Responsibility agenda at VIVA that

strives to support different initiatives in the fields of health, education, sports, environment and entrepreneurship. We believe that this important award honors the teachers in recognition of their achievements throughout their educational journey, and is a motivational token to continue encouraging them to excel in their fields in support of their students." She added: "The teacher has an essential role in building, educating and

equipping generations whom in return will contribute to the prosperity of the nation."

The participating teachers were judged by a committee of members who have a lengthy track record in the field of education. The evaluation was based on international standards used in the educational sector and in accordance with the teaching methodology of "Charlotte Danielson", which is an effective and successful model for evaluating the performance of the teachers.

A documentary film about KALD Distinguished Teacher Award was presented during the ceremony, followed by an entertainment acts performed by the student Faisal Al-Nashmi. The event was attended by several VIP and social figures.



Health & Science

Mumbai slum-dwellers by the sea live at mercy of climate change

MUMBAI: Already at risk from rains, flooding and open sewers, slum-dwellers who live by the ocean in the Indian financial capital Mumbai are vulnerable to rising seas caused by global warming and say the government should help them move to safer locations. Thousands of people, mostly migrants from other parts of the country, live in temporary shelters, built on rocks at the edge of the sea and are likely to be the first hit from coastal flooding caused by climate change.

"Even hearing about (the rising sea levels) we feel afraid. What do we do? We have been living here for so many years. It would be good if the government could do something to help us," said Kamakshi Tangesh Devender, who lives in a slum in Worli neighborhood. Climate change poses a greater threat to poor communities in developing nations like India, Indonesia and the Philippines, with people living on the margins less able to protect themselves from the impact.

A research paper last month by Climate Central, a US-based non-profit climate science and news organization, found that climate change will put an estimated 300 million people global-

ly at risk of coastal flooding by 2050. The UN-backed Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said in a report in September that sea levels could rise by one meter (3.3 feet) by 2100 - 10 times the rate in the 20th century - if carbon emissions that are responsible for climate change keep climbing.

"Mumbai is going to be under water, we need to plan for that eventually and what is required is to plan a new city to replace Mumbai as and when it gets submerged. And ideally, to my mind, it should be somewhere inland - at a pretty substantial elevation," Debi Goenka, an environmental activist, told Reuters. As well as changing sea levels, scientists say climate change is causing an increase in extreme weather events around the world such as drought and floods. Mumbai has been hit this year by incessant rains and flooding, causing loss of life and property and halting essential services like local transport. The city received 66 percent more rainfall than average during the June to September monsoon season, breaking a record set in 1954. Governments are meeting at a UN summit on climate change in Madrid on Dec 2-13. — Reuters

New Zealand increases Samoa measles aid as epidemic worsens

WELLINGTON: New Zealand announced extra aid for Samoa Friday as the Pacific nation's measles epidemic raced past 3,000 cases and experts warned the number could double before the crisis was over. Samoa's government said the death toll from the outbreak had reached 42, up three in 24 hours, while the overall number of cases rose by 213 to 3,149 over the same period.

"The Samoan health system is under serious strain, with growing numbers of people, many of whom are very young, needing complex care as a result of the measles outbreak," New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters said. He said Wellington was sending 100,000 doses of measles vaccine to Samoa, enough to immunize half the 200,000 population. UNICEF has already dispatched 110,000 doses.

Peters said more medical specialists were on their way from Wellington to help with Samoa's compulsory vaccination program, as well as a much-needed oxygen-producing machine. "New Zealand is also looking to provide psychological support for health workers in Samoa, who have been confronted with some distressing cases in very demanding conditions," he added.

Australia has also sent medics to the island nation, and a 13-strong team of doctors and nurses from Britain is due to arrive today. Infants aged four or under account for 38 of the deaths since the outbreak began in mid-October and the government said another 20 children were critically ill in hospital.

University of Auckland vaccinologist Helen Petousis-Harris said the climbing infection rates showed the outbreak was yet to peak and there could be 4,500 to 6,500 before they started trending downwards. "Unfortunately, it looks that the cases (will) double by the time it's over, with a certain degree of confidence," she told TVNZ. Due to low immunization rates the outbreak has hit harder in Samoa than Pacific neighbors Tonga and Fiji, where there have been fewer measles cases and no deaths. The World Health Organization has blamed anti-vaccine campaigners for worsening the epidemic and Petousis-Harris condemned the spread of misinformation around the outbreak. "In a sense, it's a pro-death movement. In the case of Samoa, I think it is particularly distressing because we have such a terrible crisis happening," she said. — AFP

'Vampires' to boost vaccination rates?

MOSCOW: Struggling with growing skepticism of vaccinations, health authorities in Moscow have turned to a surprising ally for help: blood-thirsty vampires. A video posted by the Moscow health department this week features a black-clad, long-haired vampire and his fang-baring young daughter. During a visit to the doctor, they ask if it is safe for the girl to drink blood from the unvaccinated. After suggesting that it

would be better not to drink blood at all, the doctor warns unvaccinated blood could be "very dangerous," then lays out the benefits of vaccinations. "So is this why some parents are rejecting vaccinations?" the vampire father asks. "To stop us from biting their children?"

The video ends with a message urging parents to have their children vaccinated. It was released as city authorities look for ways to boost vaccination rates. On Thursday, local deputies including the head of the city's public health committee recommended making vaccinations mandatory. The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF warned in July that vaccination rates around the world have "dangerously" stalled — in many cases due to increasing suspicion of vaccines. — AFP

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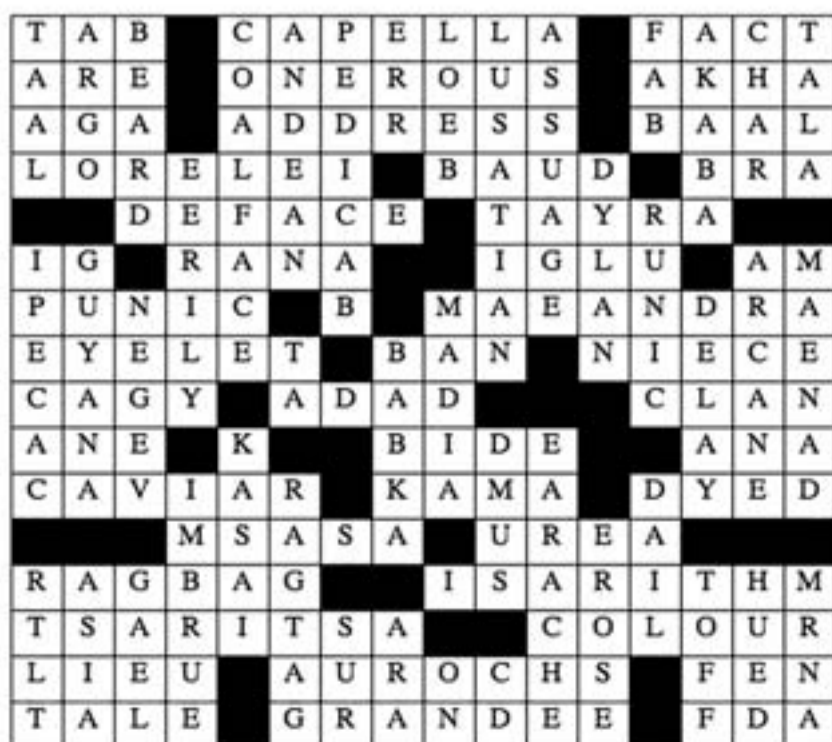
ACROSS

1. Cooking utensil consisting of a wide metal vessel.
4. Health care for the aged.
12. An alliance made up of states that had been Soviet Socialist Republics in the Soviet Union prior to its dissolution in Dec 1991.
15. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
16. A card game played in casinos in which two or more punters gamble against the banker.
17. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
18. High quality grape brandy distilled in the Cognac district of France.
20. A promontory in northern Morocco opposite the Rock of Gibraltar.
21. Used in combination to denote the middle.
22. Distant in either space or time.
23. A slender double-reed instrument.
25. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
28. A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
30. Scale-like structure between the base of the wing and the halter of a two-winged fly.
33. Become louder.
35. A Spanish unit of length (about a yard) having different values in different localities.
38. Void of thought or knowledge.
41. A sweetened beverage of diluted fruit juice.
42. A communist state in the Caribbean on the island of Cuba.
44. The square of a body of any size of type.
45. That is to say.
46. A training program to prepare college students to be commissioned officers.
48. A mountain peak in the Andes in Bolivia (21,391 feet high).
53. American novelist (1909-1955).
54. A cushion on a throne for a prince in India.
56. Any of several plants of the genus Calochortus having tulip-shaped flowers with 3 sepals and 3 petals.
58. Any of the minor woodland deities who were companions of Dionysus (similar to the satyrs).
60. The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Dali region of Yunnan.
61. Short and thick.
62. Submerged aquatic plant having narrow leaves and small flowers.
68. Bottle that has a narrow neck.
71. Slender bristlelike appendage found on the bracts of grasses.
72. On or to the other side of a page.
75. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
76. Wild and domestic cattle.
77. The qualities of a hero or heroine.
78. A member of a Mayan people of southwestern Guatemala.
79. In or of the month preceding the present one.
80. Someone who listens attentively.
81. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

1. Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America.
2. Beside one another in a row or rank.
3. Kamarupan languages spoken in northeastern India and western Burma.
4. A master's degree in business.
5. (used of count nouns) Every one considered individually.
6. The district occupied entirely by the city of Washington.
7. The United Nations agency concerned with civil aviation.
8. An esoteric or occult matter that is traditionally secret.
9. (music) A short recitative that is melodic but is not an aria.
10. A rapid series of short loud sounds (as might be heard with a stethoscope in some types of respiratory disorders).
11. The 7th letter of the Greek alphabet.
12. The shape of a bell.
13. (anatomy) Of or relating to the ilium.
14. The 18th letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
19. City in Sudan.
24. An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
26. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
27. A logarithmic unit of sound intensity.
29. (Old Testament) In Judeo-Christian mythology.
31. A lake in northwestern Russia north of St. Petersburg.
32. Either of a pair of thick-walled tubes that carry urine from the kidney to the urinary bladder.
34. The part of the eye that contains the iris and ciliary body and choroid.
36. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
37. Polish filmmaker (born in 1929).
39. The most northwestern Hawaiian island (beyond Kauai).
40. The time of life between the ages of 12 and 20.
43. South African term for 'boss'.
47. Tropical American trees with palmately compound leaves and showy bell-shaped flowers.
49. A public promotion of some product or service.
50. Spend time badly or unwisely.
51. Of or relating to or involving an area.
52. A syntactic string that forms a part of some larger syntactic unit.
55. A person who tries to bluff other people.
57. A city in Veneto.
59. A measure of a person's intelligence as indicated by an intelligence test.
63. Absent without permission.
64. In or of the present month.
65. Endless loop of flexible material between two rotating shafts or pulleys.
66. A member of an Iroquoian people formerly living on the south shore of Lake Erie in northern Ohio and northwestern Pennsylvania and western New York.
67. A feeling of strong eagerness (usually in favor of a person or cause).
69. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
70. God of love and erotic desire.
73. A tax levied on the difference between a commodity's price before taxes and its cost of production.
74. (informal) Of the highest quality.

Friday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Today may find you more impulsive than you usually are. You seem to be direct and outspoken when dealing with others today. You desire a fresh start. Your mind is on new beginnings and developing new habit patterns. Out with the old and in with the new. The consequences of the choices and decisions you make today will be long lasting. Take your time and put much thought into the changes you are making. Remember, acting on impulse is not always the best way to handle decisions and problems. Change can be good as long as you take the time to think things through and realize every action has a consequence.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today may find solutions to old problems seem to fall in your lap. Ideas and dreams may easily turn into realities. You have a strong sense of independence today. You are a one of a kind. Others may see you as quite eccentric. You are special and full of life. Communication with others comes natural. Clear thoughts of the past may be flowing today and you are able to really get in touch with your inner self. You know what you want and you are determined to achieve your goals.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You may be entering a phase of directness and impulsiveness. You could find yourself experiencing powerful and forceful feelings. Your emotions are at an all time high. You seem to be craving a new start, some sort of new beginning is what you feel you need. New habits will start to be developed. These are habits that will have lasting effects on your life. Make sure these are positive things for you because they will have a long-term effect on your life. You may find that your mind is in overdrive. Slow down and think things through before making any big decisions. Do not act in haste.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Will find you entering a phase of directness. You may be very impulsive. You may want to bite your tongue to prevent putting your foot in your mouth. Others could find this quite offensive. Try and remember to take a moment to think before you speak. You should have no problem getting your point across to others, whether it be positive or negative. Try and remember to keep things positive today and put on a happy face to avoid conflict. This is a great day for new beginnings. Out with the old and in with the new.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You are not lacking charm today. It seems as if everyone is drawn to you. Today is the date to make the date or apply for the job you have been thinking about. Others will be drawn to you today. You crave a fresh start. Out with the old and in with the new. Reach out to mend fences and ask for new beginnings. This is a time in your life where new habit patterns will be developed. Make sure they are good ones. Actions have consequences and these new habits will have lasting effects on your life. Make yourself known, Leo. This is a time for you to shine.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Today finds you direct and impulsive. What a combination! Powerful emotions are the driving force behind your mood. You may want to count to ten before you speak today. You are driven to make a fresh start. New beginnings are what you desire. This is a great time to make decisions and changes you will stick to. Make sure they are good ones. New habits will set the tone for quite some time in your life. A good day to keep to yourself to avoid conflict with others. That mouth could get you in trouble.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Today is a day of high energy and quick thinking. Your mind is sharp but your tongue is sharper. Be sure and wash your feet this morning as you may find yourself with one in your mouth. Stop and take a breath before responding to any negativity you encounter. Ask yourself if you had rather be right or if you had rather be happy. You may find biting your tongue is worth keeping the peace. Don't get carried away under pressure and make any hasty decisions. Take some time to think things through today before making any major decisions.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Powerful and forceful feelings seem to be your driving force today. A mixture of being outspoken and impulsive could be a dangerous recipe. You may want to practice biting your tongue. You could end up with your foot in your mouth if you aren't careful. A fresh start is what you crave. This is a great time to start new habit patterns. Make sure these are good ones, because your actions have consequences and these will be long lasting.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Your artistic temperament is in conflict with your practical self today. What you are doing may be fun and aesthetically satisfying, but is it producing the income you need? Look for a project that is creative and financially profitable. You have many talents. You don't have to settle for either/or. You can have it all.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You may find yourself having emotional differences with someone. This could cause you to become frustrated. There may be someone or something that just doesn't feel right to you and you are unable to put your finger on it. Trust your gut on this one. You are usually a great judge of character and able to know who and who not to keep in your circle. This is one of those people that you do not need to allow to become a part of your life. You can save yourself some heartache by walking away.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Communicating with others comes naturally to you today. You seem to have a gift when it comes to getting your point across with ease. It seems as if clear thoughts about the past flow freely through your mind today. You seem to have great understanding of the feelings of those around you. This is a great time to have a really special moment with someone you love. You may find that bonds are strengthened, and you will feel closer than usual to this person. A great foundation for the future may be built this evening with the one you love.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

This is a great day for your career wise. You may be just the one for the job that is coming available. It is an awesome day of harmony with not only your friends but with your co-workers. Your ideas and input are greatly appreciated today. Stick to your routine and stay true to yourself and you will experience a great sense of admiration from others. Even though today may find you in a very impulsive mood, resist temptation and think long and hard about decisions you make today. You may be facing some life changing decisions. This is not only a great day to organize your thoughts but also work on organizing your affairs and surroundings.

Wordsearch Puzzle

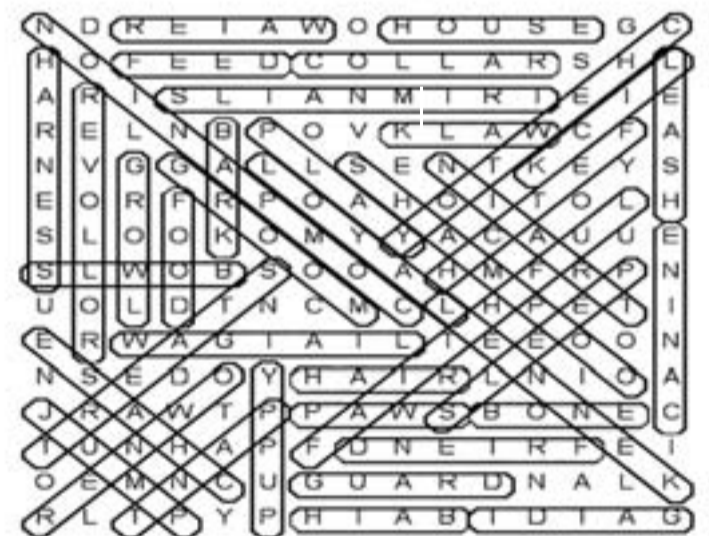
Phonetic Alphabet

Find and circle the Phonetic Alphabet words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell an additional word from the Phonetic Alphabet.



- | | | | |
|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| ALPHA | HOTEL | OSCAR | UNIFORM |
| BRAVO | INDIA | PAPA | VICTOR |
| CHARLIE | JULIET | QUEBEC | WHISKEY |
| DELTA | KILO | ROMEO | X-RAY |
| ECHO | LIMA | SIERRA | YANKEE |
| FOXTROT | MIKE | TANGO | ZULU |
| GOLF | | | |

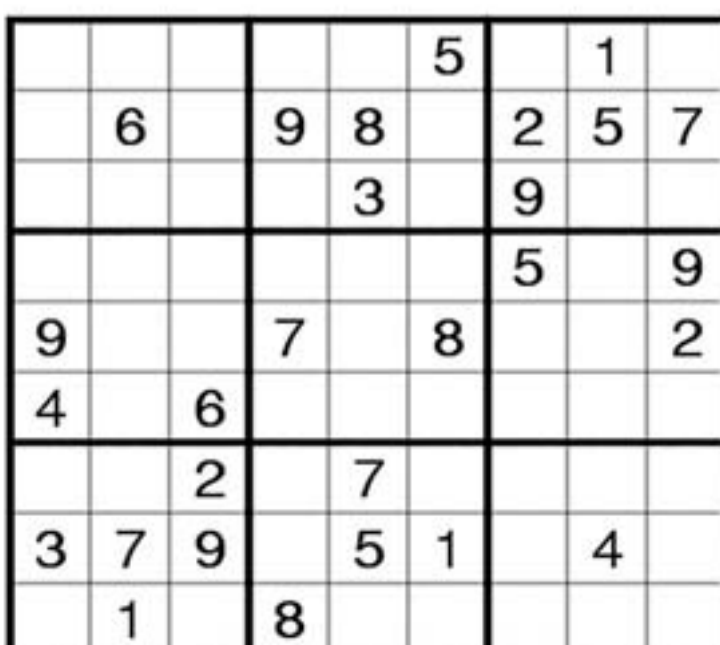
Pet Dog



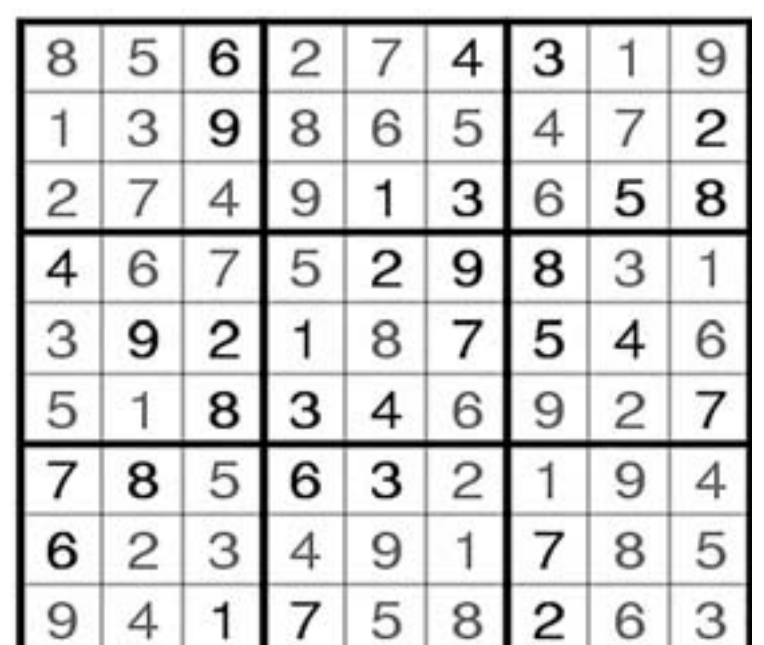
- | | | | |
|-----------|---------|--------|------------|
| BARK | FEED | ID TAG | PUPPY |
| BATH | FETCH | JUMP | ROLL OVER |
| BONE | FOOD | KENNEL | SHAMPOO |
| BOWLS | FRIEND | LEASH | SLEEP |
| CANINE | GROOM | LICK | TRAIN |
| CHASE | GROWL | LOYAL | TREATS |
| CHEW TOY | GUARD | OWNER | TRIM NAILS |
| COLLAR | HAIR | PANT | WAG TAIL |
| COMPANION | HARNESS | PAWS | WALK |
| FAITHFUL | HOUSE | PLAY | WATER |

The hidden message is: DOGS LOVE YOU UNCONDITIONALLY

Daily Sudoku



Friday's Solution



Lifestyle

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2019



Tourists eat dishes of mixed insects at the Bugs Cafe restaurant in Siem Reap province. Ant spring rolls, silkworm taro croquettes and a 'bug mac' - Cambodia's first insect tapas restaurant is mixing cocktail culture with creepy crawler fare. — AFP Photos

THIS STORY HAS LEGS – CAMBODIA'S 'BUG CAFE' SERVES UP INSECT TAPAS



A cook prepares mixed insect dish at the Bugs Cafe restaurant in Siem Reap province.

Ant spring rolls, silkworm taro croquettes and a "bug mac" - Cambodia's first insect tapas restaurant is mixing cocktail culture with creepy crawler fare. At the busy "Bugs Cafe" in the tourist town of Siem Reap, chef Seiha Soeun stands over a sizzling wok in the kitchen tossing in crickets, grasshoppers, tarantulas and scorpions.

Sold at street vendors or in Instagram-friendly tourist spots, insects aren't new to Cambodian palates. But they are usually served one way: fried, with dipping sauce, and maybe a cold beer. "We have a different kind of menu," Seiha said, adding that he practiced making the "bug mac" - a patty of pureed ant, bee, silkworm and cricket topped with a slice of cheese and pickle - many times to get it just right.

On a recent evening at the restaurant, French co-founder Davy Blouzard greeted curious diners and explained the menu. "We want to show that it's possible to make quality food with insects," he said. There is sweet potato cream with bee larvae, silkworm and mango flambe, and even a cricket cheese-

cake dessert. Insects are eaten by two billion people worldwide, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization. Besides being a cheap source of protein, insect cuisine is also a possible answer to rising concern over the environmental impact of livestock farming.

As dinner orders picked up, tourists from as far afield as Britain, Poland and Malaysia all happily - if a little squeamishly - crunched away. Servers worked the room wearing shirts emblazoned with the words "I HATE INSECTS", with the "H" crossed out. British backpacker Joshua Bean, 23, said he knew he had to visit the cafe after seeing an ad for the unusual eatery at his hostel. He didn't flinch at the "juicy" silkworms and an assortment of other insects piled up on his plate. "It's not the kind of thing you get back home," he said. — AFP



A cook fries mixed insects at the Bugs Cafe restaurant in Siem Reap province.



French co-founder Davy Blouzard speaks during an interview with Agence France-Presse at the Bugs Cafe restaurant in Siem Reap province.



A tourist (left) holds a skewered cricket and spiders at the Bugs Cafe restaurant in Siem Reap province.



Chef Seiha Soeun (left) prepares a mixed insect dish at the Bugs Cafe restaurant in Siem Reap province. — AFP photos



Hailey Bieber denies 'funny' speculation

The 22-year-old model - who recently celebrated a year of marriage to Justin Bieber - took to Instagram to insist she is not expecting a baby, after fans saw with her hand over her stomach and wrongly guessed she might be pregnant. Hailey wrote: "The internet is funny!! No, I'm not pregnant I just really love food." Meanwhile, Justin, 25, recently celebrated Hailey's 22nd birthday with a sweet social media post and insisted that babies are in

their future. He wrote: "Happy birthday babes! You make me want to be better everyday! The way you live your life is so attractive.. ps you turn me on in every way. next season BABIES (sic)." Justin previously opened up about how childhood fame had left him feeling suicidal and using "pretty heavy drugs" but said marriage to Hailey has changed his life for the better.



Steve Kazee is the 'happiest' with Dewan

The 44-year-old actor couldn't help but boast about his harmonious relationship with the 'Step Up' actress on Instagram when the brunette beauty uploaded a series of photographs of them on Thanksgiving on Instagram. She captioned the sweet shots: "The journey to get a good group picture though. Grateful for so much today Happy thanksgiving everyone!!! (sic)." To which Steve replied: "The happiest." Jenna and the Tony winner have been dating since she split from her ex-husband Channing Tatum, with

whom she has six-year-old daughter Everly, and announced in September that they are expecting their first child together. Earlier this month, Jenna, 38, revealed she feels "very empowered" by motherhood. She said: "I believe that I can do and accomplish anything at any point with any amount of sleep with any amount of stressors in life. [When you have a child], you know that you love something and you can commit and dedicate yourself to something so much, that you can do anything. [It] made me feel very empowered."



Katie Price wants former husbands to pay back £2 million

The 41-year-old star was made bankrupt during a hearing at the Insolvency and Companies Court in London after failing to pay back an agreed £12,000 a month to her creditors and now she is reportedly turning to her exes, Peter Andre and Kieran Hayler, to pay her back money that she lavished on them during their marriages. A source told The Sun Online: "Katie is broke - but her exes aren't." She's told both of them that she expects some cash from them as she bankrolled them for years when they were married. "She was always the money-earner, while they enjoyed her millions." Now the shoe's on the other foot, she doesn't see why they wouldn't help her out. "It's pay-back time. She says she spent a fortune falling in love with the wrong men - now it's time to get what she's owed."



Kerry Katona wants to go back to school

The 39-year-old star has been open in her life about her struggles with bipolar disorder and drug abuse and admits she is interested in re-entering education to study the subjects in a bid to change careers. Speaking in New! magazine, she said: "What I wouldn't give to be back in the classroom! "If I had my time over I'd study psychology, the brain and mental health, especially with everything I've been through." Kerry even thought about enrolling on an adult learning course this September but had to put her plans on hold as she is starring in pantomime 'Sleeping Beauty' over December and January at the Kenneth More Theatre in Ilford, England. But the former Atomic Kitten star - who will play wicked witch Carabosse - intends to revisit the idea of going back into education in 2020 because she just loves learning. She added: "I've thought about doing an adult learning course, but with panto season coming up I probably won't have time to do anything in the next few months. It's on my mind, though. What can I say? I just love learning."

Khloe Kardashian

trying to stay off her phone

The 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians' star has decided to put down her electronic devices in order to live in the "moment" with her 20-month-old daughter True, whom she has with her ex-partner Tristan Thompson, and has encouraged her fans to do the same as time goes by "faster and faster" these days. Taking to her Twitter account, the 35-year-old reality TV star said: "Hi loves!! I hope you all are enjoying every moment with your loved ones!! Slow down and take in every moment! I've been staying off my phone and living in every minute with my baby. Time seems to be going by faster and faster. Happy holidays (sic)" Although her decision to put her phone down means she probably won't be documenting her life on Instagram as much as before, but the blonde beauty recently teased that she and True could be set to get their own reality TV show.



Jonathan Scott is 'beyond thankful' for his girlfriend



The 41-year-old reality television personality has only been dating the 'New Girl' star since September but couldn't help but gush over her on Thanksgiving on Thursday as he put together a slide show of his loved ones. He captioned the montage: "I am beyond thankful to be surrounded by such incredibly fun loving people & puppies. You bring joy to my life. I love you. #HappyThanksgiving #ThankYouToOurFansToo (sic)." Last month, Zoë joined Jonathan at his twin brother Drew and his wife Annalee's Halloween fancy dress wedding. The 39-year-old star - who dressed as Catwoman for the nuptials - shared a photo of their outfits the following day and wrote: "It's the first time I've ever been cat-woman escorted to a fancy dress party wedding by Batman. Only for the nuptials of @mrjdscott and @annaleebelle could I be so inspired! Congrats to these gorgeous and gracious love birds. I was overjoyed to celebrate such a happy union! [heart emojis] (sic)"

Caitlyn Jenner built a six-foot wall around her house



The 70-year-old former Olympian - who was known as Bruce Jenner before she had gender reassignment surgery back in 2015 - had the blocked structure erected so that no one would out her before she was ready to make the announcement. Speaking on Britain's 'I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!' on Friday night, she added: "This was before I came out, because I couldn't go out the front door to my pool because I thought someone would get a picture." However, Caitlyn - who has daughters Kendall, 24, and Kylie, 22, with her ex-wife Kris Jenner as well as Brody, Brandon, Cassandra and Burt from two previous relationships - ripped down the wall as soon as she had shared her new identity and image on the front page of Vanity Fair magazine. She explained: "The day Vanity Fair came out, the wall came down." Caitlyn recently admitted it was harder to transition than to train to win gold in the decathlon at the 1976 Olympics because she didn't feel "accepted".

Ed Sheeran

still doesn't have a mobile phone

The 28-year-old singer decided to ditch his electronic devices and social networking sites back in 2015 when he took a year-long break from the spotlight to "travel the world" but, despite returning to Instagram 12 months later, the 'Shape of You' hitmaker can still only be contacted via email as he doesn't have a phone. Roman Kemp - who is friends with Ed - said during Friday's (29.11.19) episode of Britain's 'I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!': "Ed doesn't have a phone, you email him." Back in 2017, Ed revealed his decision to get rid of his phone has helped lower his stress. He said at the time: "I bought an iPad, and then I just work off of email, and it's so much less stress. I don't wake up in the morning and have to answer 50 messages of people asking for stuff. It's just like, I wake up and have a cup of tea." The flame-haired hunk may be one of the world's best-selling musicians, but he recently cut his friendship group to just four people as he deals with his own social anxiety.



Chris Brown's baby son is called Aeko

The 30-year-old rapper - who already has five-year-old daughter Royalty with his former partner Nia Guzman - announced on Instagram that him and his ex-girlfriend Ammika Harris have chosen the unusual moniker for him. Alongside a picture of him looking at his phone, Chris wrote: "RORO & AEKO (ECHO) (sic)." Up until now, the former couple haven't publicly spoken about their tot's birth, but they did both take to social media to post cryptic messages, which fans of the 'No Guidance' hitmaker thought was about their new arrival. Ammika posted on her Instagram story: "I was in love, when I first saw you." And Chris shared an image of himself with the caption "11-20-2019", which fans thought was his son's birth date, as well as a second image of himself wearing a hoodie emblazoned with the word "born". The news came after it was reported in August that the pair were due to welcome a baby boy, following their split earlier this year.

IT IS COMING HOME: KARAOKE CHAMPIONSHIPS ROCKS JAPAN

In a figure-hugging sparkly dress, Val Monique tears around the stage, whipping up the crowd as she channels her inner Tina Turner and belts out "Proud Mary." Monique is Panama's representative in the Karaoke World Championships, one of 40 amateur warblers selected from 30,000 entrants for the competition, which is being held this year for the first time in its spiritual home of Japan.

proudly waving a Ukrainian flag, Karasevych introduced his compatriots, including a woman dressed like "Hatsune Miku", a vocaloid character with long blue ponytails and a miniskirt. "Karaoke makes us happy. He is an economist, I am an accountant, and she is a teacher, and we today stand on the stage like professionals, like stars," he said.

Among the karaoke classics featured on Thursday were Spandau Ballet's "Gold" sung by the Finnish entrant and "You'll Never Walk Alone", interpreted by the contestant from the Philippines. The crown went to Jenny Ball from Britain, who sang Queen's "The Show Must Go On" in the semi-finals and Jennifer Hudson's "And I Am Telling You" in the final. "Thank you so much. Arigato!" she exclaimed after her victorious performance on stage. "I don't know what to say!" Her prize: a portable microphone and a medal. The show closed with a chorus of the 1985 sing-along hit "We Are The World" - an annual rendition.

'Great legs'

The annual Karaoke World Championships were first held in Finland in 2003, the brainchild of a Finnish company. The final contestants were selected from some 30,000 applicants across the globe, according to Daiichikoshu, a Japanese karaoke company backing the event. The selection process differs from country to country, but in Japan the company asked wannabe competitors to upload their singing performances at karaoke parlors, said Daiichikoshu official Kikumi Onchi.

Around 2,200 people applied just for Japan, considered the home of karaoke - a word that means "empty orchestra" in Japanese - and where the concept was born around 50 years ago. "We listened to each one of the songs, selected several singers for regional competitions, and picked the final four singers for the world championships," Onchi told AFP. One of



Ekaterina Mandrichenko of Russia sings during the Karaoke World Championships in Tokyo.



Val Monique of Panama (left) and Shai Othman of Singapore prepare backstage before performing during the Karaoke World Championships in Tokyo. — AFP photos

Accountants, teachers and economists from as far afield as the Faroe Islands, Guatemala and Brazil battled it out for the prestigious title of the world's best karaoke singer in the competition run since 2003. And like everyone around the world who has ever grabbed the mic, for a brief time under the spotlight, the contestants found their 15 minutes of fame.

"Karaoke can make everyone feel for one moment like a professional. Only karaoke can give you those few minutes of glory on the stage," said Vladyslav Karasevych, a contestant from Ukraine. Resplendent in a black and white "Harlequin" outfit and white hat, and

the lucky Japanese contestants, Yuji Ogata, voiced delight at performing "at home" after he belted out "ai no sanku", the Japanese version of the Edith Piaf classic "L'hymne a l'amour" ("hymn to love").

"I myself thought the world championships was a far-fetched dream, but here it is happening in Tokyo, Japan," Ogata said.

Vladimir Brilov, a contestant from Russia, said he was making the most of his time in Japan, experiencing the unique Japanese karaoke culture. "I was all alone because I wanted to feel comfortable," Brilov said. "I was a superhero for myself and that made me so pleased." After the show, Panama's karaoke queen Monique

paid tribute to her inspiration Tina Turner, an "amazing, powerful woman."

"She is, I don't know even how many years old, and she is still dancing, still singing. I wanted to have that same energy she has on stage and show off great legs like she shows off, even if she's 70-80 years old," she said of Turner, who turned 80 on Tuesday. "I'm so excited. Being on stage was such a rush but adrenaline just hits you as soon as you are there on the stage. It was amazing," she said. "I just wanted to have fun and I think it was worth it." — AFP

Love in the time of Ebola: 'Hell's Gate' opens in Liberia

A new Liberian film named "Hell's Gate" premieres Friday in the capital Monrovia. About two lovers whose wedding plans are upended when the deadly Ebola virus strikes. An outbreak of the disease raged in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea in 2014-16, killing more than 11,300 people across the three countries. "There is a need to have a document on what devastated our country during the Ebola outbreak," the film's executive producer Cosme Pulano said. Already decimated by back-to-back civil wars from 1989 to 2003, Liberia was the country the worst hit by the West African Ebola crisis. More than 4,800 people died.

Pulano said he hoped "Hell's Gate" would serve an educational purpose since the disease "could return anytime." West Africa is currently free of Ebola but the Democratic Republic of Congo has an ongoing outbreak. The much-feared virus has killed 2,199 there since August 2018. Not everyone in Monrovia is keen on revisiting the painful episode. "I am not going there," said Adams Zeogar, an Ebola survivor, referring to the film. Although he agreed that discussing Ebola was important, he said he wanted to avoid reminders of "this horrible past".

Other people touched by the crisis were more positive. "For me it's a great experience," said Dahsaw Owusu, who plays the main character's best friend in the film. The actor lost a brother and an aunt to Ebola. The executive producer, who is also an employee at Liberia's presidential affairs ministry, barely escaped Ebola himself. At one point during the outbreak he suffered strong headaches, he told AFP, and family members avoided him suspecting he had fallen sick.

Pulano ignored advice to visit an Ebola clinic after his sister argued that he would already have died if he were infected. "Entering an Ebola Treatment Unit was like entering hell," he said, explaining the title of the film. "Hell's Gate" - which cost some \$40,000 (36,300 euros) to produce - is entirely Liberian made. All of the 169 cast and crew members are Liberian, and Pulano wrote the script after interviewing local doctors and Ebola victims. "There is a need for us to tell our own story," he said. Fifteen percent of the profits will go toward Ebola orphans, according to Pulano. — AFP



Montaha Al-Ajeel participates in international show

Fashion Designer Montaha Al-Ajeel participated in an international show held in Bangkok, Thailand, as part of the 9th celebration of Silky Fashions that is held for one week with the support of the Queen Mother. The celebration, organized by Thailand Tourism Authority, was attended by Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha, several ministers, senior officials, diplomats and members of the royal family. 43 designers from 71 countries participated as they competed over designs using Thai royal silk.



No industry for women: Bollywood #MeToo 'accused' back at work

A year after Bollywood followed Hollywood by naming male predators accused of sexual harassment, many women say they have suffered while alleged perpetrators are back in the limelight. In the US, #MeToo triggered the downfall of powerbrokers including Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey, and Brett Ratner. Victims were hailed as trailblazers for speaking out, and millions of dollars were raised to support their cases.

In Bollywood, women have faced a backlash, campaigners say. When singer Sonu Mohapatra accused composer Anu Malik of sexual misconduct she was told to vacate her judge's seat on TV talent show, "Sa Re Ga Ma Pa". "I was marked as a troublemaker and asked to leave. Overnight," Mohapatra said last month. Program producers Zee TV denied her claims, telling AFP her departure had "no connection" with #MeToo. The maelstrom forced Malik, who also had a molestation case filed against him in the 1990s, to stand down last year as a judge on the Sony TV show "Indian Idol".

He was later reinstated. But after campaigners fought back, Malik, who has dismissed the allegations as "false and unverified", announced his departure for a second time last week. It was a rare victory for #MeToo in Bollywood, where many high-flyers accused of harassment and even rape have revived their careers after lying low for a few months. Director Vikas Bahl, whose name was initially removed from the credits of the hit movie "Super 30" following a sexual misconduct complaint, was reinstated after being cleared by an internal committee, which reportedly did not involve the victim.

Filmmaker Subhash Kapoor, on trial for molestation, was initially dropped from a movie produced by Aamir Khan, one of Bollywood's most-feted actors. But the superstar backtracked, saying only a court could establish whether or not he is guilty - a process likely to take years in India's overburdened legal system. Veteran actor Alok Nath, under investigation for rape, has sued the complainant for defamation. His film "Main Bhi" ("Me Too"), in which he plays a judge overseeing sexual harassment cases, is awaiting release.

'Rehab without remorse'

"I imagine the advice many of the men got was 'just go underground for a year and people will forget'," said singer Shweta Pandit, who was 15 when composer Malik, then 40, allegedly asked her to kiss him in exchange for work. A classically-trained vocalist, Pandit told AFP the 2001 incident made her "shut down" and become a recluse. "I stopped trusting people," she said, tearing up. "Singing was the only way I could

express myself." She never discussed the incident until the #MeToo campaign jolted her into speaking out last year. Since then, she has faced online trolling and a backlash. "Some men are like, 'if we hire her, then she might say something, better be careful.' For some people, the moment a woman speaks, she is trouble," she said.

"Many well-wishers had warned me against saying anything but I have to stand my ground." Anusha Khan, a consultant who conducts workshops against sexual harassment in the entertainment industry, told AFP: "Bollywood is still grappling with the fact that this problem exists." "The protection system for predators is very strong." As a result, many accused men have resurrected their careers with relative ease, she said. "It's rehab without remorse."



Bollywood actress Tanushree Dutta attends the 'MTV IWM Buzz Digital Awards' ceremony in Mumbai. A year after Bollywood followed Hollywood by naming male predators accused of sexual harassment, many women say they have suffered while alleged perpetrators are back in the limelight. — AFP

'Not backing down'

Even the case credited with kickstarting India's #MeToo movement has hit roadblocks. Actress Tanushree Dutta first accused Bollywood star Nana Patekar of touching her inappropriately while filming a song in 2008, when she was 24 and he was 57. At least two people - a journalist and an assistant director - have publicly corroborated her version of events. The incident effectively ended her career, the former Miss India told AFP.

Police refused even to register her harassment complaint. "I lost friends, I lost work, I went through periods of depression. "When your work is taken away from you, you feel like you have no reason to wake up sometimes," she said. Dutta repeated the claims in an interview a decade later, triggering an outpouring by women across India.

Police agreed to accept her 2008 complaint but closed the case in June, citing insufficient evidence. Dutta accused them of deliberately botching the investigation. Patekar, who has repeatedly denied the allegations, did not answer AFP interview requests. For Dutta, who plans to appeal the police decision, #MeToo is only a beginning. "I never set out to be a revolutionary," she said. "But they already destroyed my career so what have I got to lose? I am not backing down." — AFP

ANTARCTICA TOURISM: THE QUEST FOR EARTH'S VULNERABLE EXTREMES



Tourists visit the Pehoe Lake at the Torres del Paine National Park Magallanes region, Chile. — AFP Photos

The swimsuit-clad tourists leap into the icy water, gasping at the shock, and startling a gaggle of penguins. They are spectators at the end of the world, luxury visitors experiencing a vulnerable ecosystem close-up. And their very presence might accelerate its demise. Antarctica, a vast territory belonging to no one nation, is a continent of extremes: the coldest place on Earth, the windiest, the driest, the most desolate and the most inhospitable.

Now, it's also a choice destination for tourists. All around Half Moon Island, off the Antarctic Peninsula, blocks of ice of all sizes float by on a calm sea, their varying forms resembling weightless origami shapes. On this strip of land, that juts out of the Antarctic Polar and towards South America, visitors can see wildlife normally only viewed in zoos or nature documentaries along with spectacular icy landscapes. The ethereal shades of white that play across the pillowy peaks change with the light, acquiring pastel hues at dawn and dusk.

"Purity, grandeur, a scale that's out of this world," says Helene Brunet, an awestruck 63-year-old French pensioner, enjoying the scene. "It's unbelievable, totally unbelievable. It's amazing just to be here, like a small speck of dust." AFP joined the 430 passengers on board the Roald Amundsen, the world's first hybrid electric cruise ship, on its maiden voyage in the Southern Ocean. "It's not your typical beach, but it's awesome to do it," says a numb Even Carlsen, 58, from Norway, emerging from his polar plunge in the three-degree C water.

When tourists go ashore, bundled up in neon-colored windbreakers and slathered in SPF50 sunscreen, they have to follow strict rules: clean your personal effects so you don't introduce invasive species, keep a respectful distance from wildlife to avoid distressing them, don't stray from the marked paths and don't pick up anything. "We mucked up the rest of the world. We don't want to muck up Antarctica too," says an English tourist, as she vacuums cat hair off her clothes before going ashore.

'Heart of the Earth'

The Antarctic peninsula is one of the regions on Earth that is warming the fastest, by almost three degrees Celsius in the past 50 years, according to the World Meteorological Organization — three times faster than the global average. In March 2015, an Argentinian research station registered a balmy 17.5 degrees Celsius, a record. "Every year you can observe and record the melting of glaciers, the disappearance of sea ice... (and) in areas without ice, the recolonisation of plants and other organisms that were not present in Antarctica before," said Marcelo Leppe, director of the Chilean Antarctic Institute.

Antarctica is "like the heart of the Earth," he added, saying that it expands and contracts

like a heart beating, while the mighty current which revolves around the continent is like a circulatory system as it absorbs warm currents from other oceans and redistributes cold water. The Antarctic Treaty, signed 60 years ago by 12 countries - it now has 54 signatories - declared the area a continent dedicated to peace and science, but tourism has gradually increased, with a sharp rise in the past few years.

Tourism is the only commercial activity allowed, apart from fishing - the subject of

sales director travelling with his wife Martina, says. They said they had paid a supplement to climate compensate for their flight from Germany. But some question whether tourists should be going to the region at all.

"The continent probably would be better off being left to penguins and researchers, but the reality is, that is probably never going to happen," said Michael Hall, professor and expert on polar regions at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. "Vicarious appreciation never seems to be enough for

There are some trips I just won't take, because they leave a big footprint and they're not worth it. "Crisscrossing the planet to go to a beach for example," she says.

Don't mention climate change

Like other expedition cruises where accessible science is part of their trademark, the Roald Amundsen, owned by the Hurtigruten company, has no dance floor or casino. Instead, there are microscopes, science events and lectures about whales and explorers like Charles Darwin. But they steer clear of climate change, which is only mentioned indirectly. That's a deliberate decision as the subject has proven "quite controversial", said Verena Meraldi, Hurtigruten's science coordinator. "We held several lectures dedicated specifically to climate change but it leads to conflicts. There are people who accept it as a fact, others who don't," she said.

Onboard, "passengers" are referred to as "guests" and "explorers" rather than "cruisers". "Explorers" are typically older, well-heeled, often highly traveled pensioners who are handed walking sticks as they step ashore. "My 107th country," says a Dane, stepping ashore onto Antarctica. The Roald Amundsen "guests" choose between three restaurants, from street food to fine dining - a far cry from the conditions endured by the Norwegian adventurer for whom the ship is named, who had to eat his sled dogs to survive his quest to reach the South Pole in 1911.

They have paid at least 7,000 euros (\$7,700) each for an 18-day cruise in a standard cabin, and up to 25,000 euros (\$27,500) for a suite with a balcony and private jacuzzi. Other cruises are banking on ultra-luxury, with James Bond-like ships equipped with helicopters and submarines, suites of more than 200 square meters and butler services. With a seaplane to boot, the mega-yacht SeaDream Innovation will offer 88-day cruises "from Pole to Pole" starting in 2021. The two most expensive suites, with a price tag of 135,000 euros per person, are already booked.

Worlds collide

Outside, in the deafening silence, wildlife abounds. All around are penguins, as awkward

gradually declining over the years, but it's not known if that is man's fault or they have just moved away, according to Karin Strand, Hurtigruten's vice president for expeditions. Invisible to the naked eye, traces of humankind are however to be found in the pristine landscape. Not a single piece of rubbish is in sight but microplastics are everywhere, swept in on ocean currents. "We've detected them in the eggs of penguins for example," Leppe told AFP.

Venice under water

The Antarctic, which holds the world's largest reserve of freshwater, is a ticking time bomb, warn experts and studies. They say that the future of millions of people and species in coastal areas around the world depends on what is happening here. As a result of global warming, the melting ice sheet - especially in the western part of the continent - will increasingly contribute to rising sea levels, radically re-drawing the map of the world, says climate scientist Anders Levermann, of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. This meltwater will contribute 50 centimeters to the global sea level rise by 2100, and much more after that, he said. "For every degree of warming, we get 2.5 meters of sea level rise. Not in this century, but in the long run," he said.

Even if the international community meets its obligations under the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to under two degrees Celsius, sea levels will still rise by at least five metres. "Which means that Venice is under water, Hamburg is under water, New York, Shanghai, Calcutta," he said. It's impossible to predict when, but the scenario appears unavoidable, says Levermann. In the same way that a cruise ship powering ahead at full speed can't immediately stop, sea levels will continue to rise even if all greenhouse gas emissions were to cease immediately, a study has said.

Changing the world?

The tourism industry says it hopes to make "ambassadors" out of Antarctica visitors. "It's good for the animal life and for the protection of Antarctica that people see how beautiful this area is, because you cherish what you



Norwegian Daniel Skjeldam, chief executive officer of the Hurtigruten hybrid expedition cruise ship, MS Roald Amundsen, poses for a photo after an interview with AFP at Orne Harbor in South Shetland Islands, Antarctica.

international disputes over marine sanctuaries - and is concentrated mainly around the peninsula, which has a milder climate than the rest of the continent and is easier to access. Cruise ships have roamed the region for around 50 years, but their numbers only started to increase from 1990, as Soviet ice-breakers found new purposes in the post-Cold War era. Some 78,500 people are expected to visit the region between November and March, according to the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO).

That's a 40-percent increase from last year, due in part to short visits by a few new cruise ships carrying more than 500 passengers, too many to disembark under IAATO regulations. "Some might say 'Well, 80,000 people, that doesn't even fill a national stadium...' (and that it) is nothing like Galapagos which welcomes 275,000 a year," says IAATO spokeswoman Amanda Lynnes. "But Antarctica is a special place and you need to manage it accordingly."

'Leave Antarctica to penguins'

It is Antarctica's very vulnerability that is attracting more and more visitors. "We want to see this fantastic nature in Antarctica before it's gone," Guido Hofken, a 52-year-old IT

humans. So with that being the case, it needs to be made as low risk to the Antarctic environment and as low carbon as possible," said Hall. "However, when the average tourist trip to Antarctica is over five tons of CO2 emissions per passenger (including flights), that is a serious ask."

Soot or black carbon in the exhaust gases of the scientific and cruise ships going to the region is also of concern, said Soenke Diesener, transport policy officer at German conservation NGO Nabu. "These particles will deposit on snow and ice surfaces and accelerate the melting of the ice because the ice gets darker and will absorb the heat from the sun and will melt much faster," he told AFP. "So the people who go there to observe or preserve the landscape are bringing danger to the area, and leave it less pristine than it was," he added.

Responsible tourism

Antarctic tour operators insist they are promoting responsible tourism. The trend is for more intimate, so-called expedition cruises, in contrast to popular giant cruise liners elsewhere which are criticized for being invasive and polluting. With greener ships - heavy fuel, the most commonly used for marine vessels, has been banned in Antarctica since 2011 - cruise companies have sought to make environmental awareness a selling point, occasionally earning them accusations of greenwashing.

Global warming, pollution and microplastics are the result of human activities on other, faraway continents, say tour operators. Here, their motto is "Take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints, keep nothing but memories". But before they've even set foot on the cruise ships departing from South America - the most common itinerary - visitors to Antarctica will already have flown across the world, causing emissions that harm the very nature they have come so far to admire.

Most visitors hail from the Northern Hemisphere, and almost half are from the United States and China, IAATO says. "I'm a tourist who feels a little guilty about taking a flight to come here," admits Francoise Lapeyre, a 58-year-old globetrotter from France. "But then again, there are priorities.



Video journalist Viken Kantarci works before boarding the Hurtigruten hybrid expedition cruise ship, MS Roald Amundsen, in Valparaiso.

on land as they are agile in water. Massive and majestic whales slip through the waves, and sea lions and seals laze in the sun. On Half Moon Island, chinstrap penguins — so called because of a black stripe on their chin - strut about in this spring breeding season, raising their beaks and screeching from their rocky nests. "This is to tell other males 'This is my space' and also, maybe, 'This is my female,'" ornithologist Rebecca Hodgkiss, a member of the Hurtigruten's scientific team, explains, as a group of tourists stroll around ashore.

The colony of 2,500 penguins has been

know and understand," said Hurtigruten chief executive Daniel Skjeldam. Texan tourist Mark Halvorson, 72, says he is convinced. "Having seen it, I am that much more committed to having a very high priority in my politics, in my own inner core convictions to being as environmentally friendly in my life as I can," he said. So, do Guido and Martina Hofken see themselves as future "ambassadors of Antarctica"? "Just a little bit, probably. But I don't think I will change the world," Guido Hofken concedes. "The best thing would be for nobody to travel to Antarctica." — AFP



French tourists Jackey Tomas and Francoise Lapeyre pose for a photo after an interview with AFP at sea.

Iraqis shatter taboos in rage at Iran, but bloodshed may follow

BAGHDAD: By torching Tehran's consulates and slapping their muddy shoes against photographs of top Iranian officials, Iraqi protesters have shattered a taboo on public criticism of their influential eastern neighbor. But even as it faces red-hot rage in the streets, Tehran has consolidated its influence within Iraq's political class and among armed actors, analysts tell AFP. In the latest expression of fury, protesters crowded around the Iranian consulate - already emptied of diplomats - in Iraq's shrine city of Najaf late Wednesday.

Shouting "Iran out, Iran out", they set fire to tyres and other items before storming the consulate itself. "Iran's interference in Iraqi affairs has angered many Iraqis," a young protester in Najaf told AFP. "The consular fire is a clear message to Iran to reconsider its role in Iraq," he warned. It was the second Iranian consulate attacked by protesters since the grassroots movement erupted on Oct 1 in anger at a government deemed corrupt and inefficient.

With unprecedented bluntness, demonstrators in Baghdad and across the restive south have charged Iran with overreaching. They say Iran interferes too much in Iraqi politics, holds undue sway among its armed actors and has even hamstrung Iraqi industries by flooding markets with its own goods. Protesters have slapped their shoes against pictures of Qasem Soleimani to insult the commander of the Revolutionary Guard Corps' foreign operations arm and Tehran's pointman in Iraq. Soleimani, sources told AFP, has played a key role in convincing Iraqi factions to keep backing embattled Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi, further fuelling protester outrage.

"Anti-Iran sentiment isn't new, but how openly it's being expressed is unprecedented," said Fanar Haddad,

an expert at Singapore University's Middle East Institute. "The epicenter of public anger is at the Iraqi political system, but (anger at) Iran is a by-product of that. You cannot disentangle them." For decades, Iran has carefully crafted ties to a vast range of Iraqi political and military actors, from Shiite opponents of ex-dictator Saddam Hussein to Kurdish factions in the north and even Sunni tribes in the west.

Tehran also backs many of the factions in Iraq's Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary force, formed in 2014 to fight the Islamic State group. On top of that, it sells crucial electricity and natural gas to supplement Iraq's grudging power sector and is the second-largest source of imported goods, from food to cars. So when demonstrators hit the streets in outrage at a lack of jobs, unreliable electricity and corruption among the ruling class, Iran was on the brain. "Iran intervenes in the formation of the government and in the economy, and the parties it supports are the ones dominating political life," said demonstrator Hussein.

Young protesters like him had hoped the defeat of IS in 2017 could usher in a phase of relative stability, financial recovery and even some new political parties, said Maria Fantappie, the International Crisis Group's Iraq analyst. But their hopes were "crushed", Fantappie said, when they saw the political class, Hashed factions and Iran maintain the same ruling system criticised as corrupt. "There was a simmering anti-Iran feeling and the uprising lifted the cover on the pot that was already boiling," she told AFP, saying the sentiment was "now on the surface".

The protests have uncovered the enormous rift between the public and the political elite, as well as between rival Iranian and Iraqi religious authorities,

security and restore order". Over two days, 42 people were shot dead in Nasiriyah, 22 in Najaf and three in Baghdad. The rising death toll sparked a dramatic intervention from Sistani, the 89-year-old spiritual leader of many of Iraq's Shiites. In his Friday sermon, Sistani urged parliament to stop supporting the government, and hours later, Abdel Mahdi announced he would submit his resignation.

Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council yesterday said it had formed a committee to probe the unrest, pledging to "punish those who attacked protesters". Accountability for those killed has become a key demand of protesters in Iraq, where tribal traditions - including revenge for murder - remain widespread. "Every victim has a mother, a father, a tribe who won't stay quiet," said a Baghdad protester. "Otherwise there could be civil war."

Even cities that have been relatively peaceful, including Hilla, held mourning marches for those killed in recent days. Within minutes of Abdel Mahdi's Friday announcement, leading factions called for a no-confidence vote - including key government backer the Saeroon parliamentary bloc, led by firebrand cleric Moqtada Sadr. Abdel Mahdi's other main backer, the Fatah bloc, called for "necessary changes in the interests of Iraq" in a departure from its usual statements supporting him.

Since promising to submit his resignation, Abdel Mahdi has continued to hold meetings, including with cabinet and the United Nation's top representative yesterday. Iraq's constitution does not include a provision for the resignation of a premier, so submitting a letter to parliament would trigger a motion of no-confidence. If parliament meets today and passes such a motion, the cabinet would stay on in a caretaker role until the president names a new premier. Chief justice Faeq Zeidan is one of several names being circulated as a possible replacement. — AFP

nected to Khan. Police believe he began the attack at Fishmonger's Hall, a historic building said to contain many ancient artifacts on the north side of the bridge. Khan was attending an event organized by the University of Cambridge's criminology institute on prisoner rehabilitation, and reportedly arrived with two knives and the fake suicide vest.

The Metropolitan Police appealed for witnesses to come forward. As the attack moved to London Bridge, a throng of people could be seen in videos grappling with Khan on a pedestrian walkway. They reportedly included a convicted killer on day-release from prison and other ex-offenders also attending the criminology event. Tour guide Stevie Hurst told BBC radio that "everyone was just on top of him trying to bundle him to the ground". "I saw that the knife was still in his hand so I just put a foot in to try and kick him in the head," he said.

One man in a suit and tie - identified by media as a police officer - was later seen carrying a large knife away. "As we saw the worst of human kind, we saw the very best of human spirit and London," Met Commissioner Cressida Dick said yesterday as she visited London Bridge. On Nov 4, Britain downgraded its terrorism threat level from "severe", the second-highest of five levels, to "substantial" - the lowest rating in more than five years.

Attention has swiftly turned to how Khan could have been released from prison after serving less than seven years of his sentence. Inmates are usually released half-way through the type of determinate sentence he was given, and time spent in custody before trial may have been taken into account. The Parole Board said it had no involvement in his release and that it appeared to have happened automatically as required by law. During the attack, Khan wore an electronic tag used to monitor criminal offenders, The Times newspaper reported.

Johnson, who took over as prime minister in July, said the cases of other convicted terrorists released early were under urgent review. "A great deal of work is being done right now to make sure that the public is protected," he added. Queen Elizabeth II said she and husband Prince Philip had been saddened to hear of the attack and expressed her "enduring thanks" to the "brave individuals who put their own lives at risk to selflessly help and protect others". The 2017 London Bridge attack involved Islamist extremists wearing fake suicide devices ploughing a van into pedestrians, before attacking people with knives in nearby Borough Market and being shot dead by police. — Agencies



RBALA: Iraqi demonstrators clash with security forces in this holy shrine city on Friday. — AFP

Fantappie said. Iraq's highest Shiite religious authority Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani has backed the protesters and urged outside powers not to intervene. Many have interpreted his words as a veiled warning to Tehran, including Sistani's Iranian counterpart - and rival - Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

But swelling public criticism of Iran could also trigger more bloodshed, observers fear. "The burning of the consulate is obviously a blow to Iran, but it can also be used as a pretense for strengthening the security response," Haddad said. Indeed, a day after the fire, two protesters were shot dead in Najaf. — AFP

Iraqis keep up demos as PM...

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to their weeks-long demands for complete regime change. "We'll keep up this movement," said one protester in the southern city of Diwaniyah, where thousands turned out early yesterday. "Abdel Mahdi's resignation is only the first step, and now all corrupt figures must be removed and judged."

Teenaged protesters threw rocks at security forces in Baghdad, who were positioned behind concrete barriers to protect government buildings. The forces fired rubber bullets and tear gas canisters at the demonstrators, wounding 10, a medical source told AFP. "We won't leave our barricades until the regime falls, until we get jobs, water, electricity," one protester said.

More than two dozen protesters were wounded in Nasiriyah when security forces fired live ammunition at anti-government rallies, medics said. The units dispersed a sit-in on one bridge in the city but protesters held two more, according to AFP's correspondent. Iraq's second holy city Karbala was rocked by overnight clashes between young protesters and security forces exchanging fire bombs. Najaf was relatively calm yesterday, according to AFP's correspondent, but protests there usually swell later in the day.

This week's surge in violence started when protesters stormed and burned the Iranian consulate in Najaf late Wednesday, accusing Iraq's neighbor of propping up the Baghdad government. Tehran demanded Iraq take decisive action against the protesters and hours later Abdel Mahdi ordered military chiefs to "impose

Johnson vows action after...

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minister his deepest sorrow on the incident. Sheikh Sabah strongly condemned the attack against innocent civilians, displaying support to all British efforts to protect citizens as well as maintaining stability and security in the UK.

HH the Amir also expressed solidarity with the British leadership and people against such heinous acts and wished for the swift recovery of those wounded in the incident. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to Queen Elizabeth and Johnson.

Kuwait's foreign ministry also strongly denounced on Friday the deadly stabbing attack. As part of Kuwait's principled stand against all forms of violence and terrorism, an official of the ministry stated support to whatever measures the UK might take to protect its security. The source expressed sincere condolences to the families of the victims and wished the wounded quick recovery.

The latest attack came less than two weeks before Britain's general election, and politicians temporarily suspended campaigning. "It does not make sense for us as a society to be putting people who have been convicted of terrorist offences... out on early release," Johnson said as he visited the scene. "We argue that people should serve the tariff, serve the term, of which they are sentenced," the prime minister added, noting the Conservatives' manifesto calls for a tougher sentencing regime.

Khan, a British national from Stoke in central England, was handed an indeterminate sentence for public protection in 2012, with at least eight years in prison. He was part of an eight-man network inspired by Al-Qaeda who had plotted to bomb targets including the London Stock Exchange, and planned to take part in "terrorist training" in Pakistan. But his sentence was quashed by the Court of Appeal in April 2013 and he received a new 21-year term, comprising a custodial sentence of 16 years and five years on conditional release.

Police yesterday were reportedly searching a property in Stafford, in central England, thought to be con-

Smog in Iran shuts schools, universities

TEHRAN: Air pollution forced the closure of schools and universities in parts of Iran yesterday, including Tehran, which was cloaked by a cloud of toxic smog, state media reported. The young and elderly and people with respiratory illnesses were warned to stay indoors and sporting activities were suspended for the start of the working week in the Islamic republic. The decision to shut schools and universities in the capital was announced late Friday by deputy governor Mohammad Taghizadeh, after a meeting of an emergency committee for air pollution.

"Due to increased air pollution, kindergartens, preschools and schools, universities and higher education institutes of Tehran province will be closed," he said, quoted by state news agency IRNA. Schools in the capital would also be closed for a second day today, Taghizadeh said later. "Having examined the index of pollutants in Tehran... it was decided for all schools to be closed tomorrow in Tehran province, except for the counties of Firuzkuh, Damavand and Pardis," he was quoted as

saying.

An odd-even traffic scheme was imposed yesterday to restrict the number of private vehicles on roads in the capital and trucks were banned outright in Tehran province, IRNA reported. The scheme would be lifted today, but heavy vehicles would still be barred from the city, said Taghizadeh. But activities would be halted today for all sand mines and industries in Tehran that contribute to air pollution, he added, without specifying which ones.

Schools were also closed yesterday in the northern province of Alborz and in the central province of Esfahan, IRNA reported, citing officials. Other areas where schools were shut included the northeastern city of Mashhad, Orumiyyeh city in northwestern Iran and Qom city, south of Tehran. In Tehran, average concentrations of hazardous airborne particles reached 146 micrograms per cubic meter yesterday morning, according to air.tehran.ir, a government-linked website. By mid-afternoon, the index had dropped to 107 after winds blew away some of the pollution hanging over the capital. The World Health Organization's advised maximum level is 50.

The pall of pollution has shrouded the sprawling city of eight million for days and is only expected to clear tomorrow when rain is forecast. Air pollution was the cause of nearly 30,000 deaths per year in Iranian cities, state media reported earlier this year, citing a health ministry official. — AFP

Indian engineers worst affected...

Continued from Page 1

Unfortunately, there are no clear criteria. I think the government needs those engineers," he said.

Kouh also demanded that the affected engineers should be compensated. "Those who lost their title of 'engineer' or those whose salaries were cut due to changing the profession should be compensated, as this

has further effects, such as their indemnities. I expect the verdict in the case filed in this matter will be announced by the middle of next year. They should be compensated for the period when they were not 'engineers'," he concluded, adding he has more details that can't be revealed at the moment.

Meanwhile, KSE signed an agreement of cooperation with the Institution of Engineers (India) on Thursday to improve and strengthen relations in various fields. The signing was held on the occasion of the 57th anniversary of the establishment of KSE and the 100th anniversary of the founding of IEL. Various workshops and conferences will also be held.

Fury in India over new rape

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They were remanded in judicial custody for 14 days, police said.

The victim's mother demanded that the culprits be burnt alive, the Times of India newspaper quoted her as saying. The incident is reminiscent of the fatal gang rape of a young woman, labelled Nirbhaya (Fearless) by Indian media, on board a bus in 2012. The crime sparked widespread protests and drew international attention to violence against women in India. The current case has also provoked outrage on social media with #HangRapists trending on Twitter in India. "It has been 7 yrs to the gut-wrenching #Nirbhaya case & our moral fabric continues to be in pieces," Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar tweeted. "We need stricter laws. This needs to STOP!"

Yesterday, police were criticized as protests spread to other cities. A woman who tried to stage a one-person demonstration outside the Indian parliament in New Delhi said she was beaten by police after refusing to go home. Anu Dubey had sat outside the assembly carrying a sign questioning why she could not "feel safe" in her own country. "The only purpose of this protest is to ensure that I am not burned to death tomorrow," she told reporters later, fighting back tears.

"That woman died, other girls have also died. Every 20 minutes, there is a rape in India. I don't want to die. And I can't be a spectator to any more rape cases. I'm tired of seeing such cases over and over again," she said. According to government figures, more than 32,000 rape cases were reported in 2017, however, experts say that the crime is vastly unreported. Other cases reported yesterday included a 16-year-old girl who died in a Delhi hospital 10 days after being allegedly raped by a neighbor and then set ablaze.

Police said the 27-year-old Hyderabad vet, who

cannot be named, was abducted on Wednesday night after she left her scooter near an expressway toll booth. The four men are alleged to have deflated a tyre whilst she was away and offered to help when she returned to collect it. The victim called her younger sister to say she was stranded and that a group of men had offered to fix her scooter. The woman said she was "afraid", according her sister's testimony to police. The sister called back later but the victim's phone was switched off.

Police said the ashes of the woman's body were found on Thursday morning. The body had been wrapped in a blanket and doused with kerosene. The killing has set off a firestorm of social media comment, many calling for a tough reaction. "The culprits must be given severest punishment," commented Rajasthan state's chief minister Ashok Gehlot, one of tens of thousands to post Twitter comments.

Women's groups turned against a minister in Telegana state, which includes Hyderabad, who said the dead woman could have been saved if she had called police first instead of her sister. "Is there no shame," hit back Swati Maliwal, head of the Delhi Women's Commission. "Now the blame is being put on the dead victim."

India's National Commission for Women condemned the incident, with its head Rekha Sharma saying it "won't leave any stone unturned till these perpetrators get the punishment they deserve". The commission advises the government on policy regarding women's rights and aims to provide a voice for issues ranging from sexual exploitation to employment, but has no judicial powers.

Yesterday, around 30 protesters including college students rallied outside a police station in central Delhi, carrying placards demanding justice and an end to crime against women. "If your blood doesn't boil even now, it's not blood but water," they chanted. One of the protesters, student Kanchan Pal, 19, said she wanted to raise her voice in support of rape victims. "Women are being raped everywhere, whether it is Delhi or Hyderabad or any other state," said Pal. "We don't feel safe." — Agencies

Sports

Bruins nip Rangers in OT for sixth straight win

Blue Jackets stay hot, stop Penguins

BOSTON: David Krejci scored 1:40 into overtime as the Boston Bruins rallied from two goals down to beat the visiting New York Rangers 3-2 on Friday. David Pastrnak tied the score in the third period, and Sean Kuraly also scored as the Bruins ran their winning streak to six games. Jaroslav Halak stopped 26 shots. Pavel Buchnevich and Filip Chytil scored for the Rangers, who had their three-game winning streak end. Henrik Lundqvist made 24 saves. Krejci went top shelf for the game-winner in overtime after Pastrnak crashed the net to draw in the defense. Halak also earned an assist on the goal.

CAPITALS 4, LIGHTNING 3 (OT)

Dmitry Orlov scored the game-winner in overtime to cap a two-point game as host Washington erased a third-period deficit to beat Tampa Bay. Orlov became the hero 3:03 into overtime when he ripped a high short-side shot home for his second goal of the season. Capitals goaltender Braden Holtby made 27 saves for the win, while T.J. Oshie collected three assists. The Capitals got to OT by erasing a 3-1 deficit in the third. First, Jakub Vrana made it one-goal game when he slipped a sharp-angled shot into the net at 3:45 of the period. Then, Alex Ovechkin's power-play goal, a patented one-timer from the top of the left circle, tied the game at 11:36.

JETS 3, DUCKS 0

Nikolaj Ehlers scored his team-leading 12th goal, Kyle Connor recorded his 10th, and Connor Hellebuyck needed to make just 24 saves for his second shutout as surging Winnipeg prevailed at Anaheim to win its third straight game. Neal Pionk also scored, and Blake Wheeler and Patrik Laine each added two assists as the Jets improved to 10-2-1 in November. They're also 7-1-0 on the road this month. Hellebuyck was pulled after allowing five goals on 19 shots during Winnipeg's 7-4 loss at Anaheim on Oct. 29. However, he came up big often on Friday, even while not seeing many shots en route to his 16th career shutout.

SHARKS 4, KINGS 1

Noah Gregor scored his first career goal, and Logan Couture added another score in the second period as host San Jose put away from Los Angeles for the second time in four days. Patrick Marleau and Marc-Edouard Vlasic each scored in the first period as the Sharks won for the fourth time in their past five games. Martin Jones made 33 saves for San Jose. Kyle Clifford scored his third of the season with less than two minutes remaining to avoid the shutout as the Kings lost for the third time in their past four games. Los Angeles lost its eighth consecutive road game, scoring 10 goals in those games.

WILD 7, SENATORS 2

Minnesota scored six unanswered goals as they put away visiting Ottawa for the eighth consecutive time. Jared Spurgeon contributed a goal and two assists, and Ryan

Donato and Zach Parise also scored second-period goals. Luke Kunin, Ryan Hartman and Jason Zucker added tallies in the final period, and Jonas Brodin had two assists. Eric Staal had a goal and an assist and played in his 1,200th NHL game, fifth among active players.

SABRES 6, MAPLE LEAFS 4

Jack Eichel collected two goals and an assist as host Buffalo scored four times in the second period en route to a win over Toronto. Casey Mittelstadt scored to snap a 16-game goal drought, and rookie Victor Olofsson, Jimmy Vesey and Jeff Skinner also tallied for Buffalo, which received 25 saves from Linus Ullmark. The Sabres, who snapped a five-game winless skid against the Maple Leafs, will vie for a sweep of the home-and-home series when the Atlantic Division rivals reconvene in Toronto on Saturday. The Maple Leafs got two goals from John Tavares and one apiece from Dmytro Timashov and Kasperii Kapanen.

AVALANCHE 5, BLACKHAWKS 2

Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and three assists, J.T. Compher scored a goal and added two assists, and Colorado won at Chicago in the front end of a back-to-back set. Cale Makar, Valeri Nichushkin and Ryan Graves also had goals and Pavel Francouz stopped 34 shots for the Avalanche, who have won two in a row. Patrick Kane and Zack Smith scored, and Corey Crawford had 18 saves for the Blackhawks. The Avalanche played without forward Andre Burakovsky, who sustained an upper-body injury in Wednesday's win over Edmonton. He did not make the trip with the team and is considered day-to-day. The teams meet again Saturday night in Denver.

FLYERS 6, RED WINGS 1

Sean Couturier and Scott Laughton each had a goal and an assist as host Philadelphia had little trouble with Detroit, the team with the fewest points in the NHL. Shayne Gostisbehere, Kevin Hayes, Oskar Lindblom and James van Riemsdyk scored one goal apiece for the Flyers, who won their third in a row. Jake Voracek recorded three assists while Matt Niskanen added two assists for the Flyers, who improved to 8-1-4 at home. They also have recorded at least one point in five consecutive games. Robby Fabbri scored the lone goal for the reeling Red Wings, who fell to 0-6-2 in their past eight games. Detroit goaltender Cal Pickard, who played for the Flyers last season, stopped 29 shots.

GOLDEN KNIGHTS 2, COYOTES 1 (SO)

Alex Tuch scored a goal in regulation and the game-winner in the third round of the shootout to carry host Vegas past Arizona in Las Vegas. Tuch deked Arizona's Darcy Kuemper with a backhand fake and then fired a forehand shot over the goaltender's left pad to give Vegas its second straight victory. Jonathan Marchessault had scored in the first round of the



BOSTON: Chris Wagner #14 of the Boston Bruins takes a shot against Henrik Lundqvist #30 of the New York Rangers during the third period at TD Garden in Boston, Massachusetts. —AFP

shootout for the Golden Knights before Christian Dvorak tied it starting the third round — the first goal allowed in 19 career shootout attempts by Vegas goaltender Malcolm Subban. Subban, making his third consecutive start as Marc-Andre Fleury left the team to deal with the illness and subsequent death of his father, finished with 35 saves to win back-to-back games for the first time since March. He improved to 2-4-2 this season.

BLUE JACKETS 5, PENGUINS 2

Gustav Nyquist had a hat trick and Nick Foligno scored twice to pace host Columbus past Pittsburgh, which had a three-game winning streak snapped. The Blue Jackets, who are 5-2-1 in their past eight games, scored twice on the power play and built a 4-1 lead through two periods. They were 1-6-3 in their previous 10 games against Pittsburgh. Joonas Korpisalo stopped 29 of 31 Penguins shots and Nyquist registered his second career hat trick. Jake Guentzel and Kris Letang scored and Evgeni Malkin had two assists for Pittsburgh, which had its three-game winning streak and six-game point streak snapped. Tristan Jarry made 25 saves.

BLUES 3, STARS 1

Ryan O'Reilly's late goal in virtually the blink of an eye

after his team relinquished a lead gave St. Louis the lead for good in defeating host Dallas. Just 18 seconds after Roope Hintz tied the game 1-1 with 3:11 remaining for the Stars, O'Reilly netted his sixth goal of the season. Ivan Barbashev's empty-net goal with 2.1 seconds left on the clock finished the scoring. Colton Parayko also scored for St. Louis, which got 31 saves from goaltender Jake Allen. The Central Division-leading Blues have won two straight games, picked up a point in their last nine road games (7-0-2), and are 11-2-3 in their last 16 games overall. Goalie Ben Bishop made 37 saves for the Stars, who have lost two straight.

PREDATORS 3, HURRICANES 0

Nashville goalie Pekka Rinne stopped 31 shots for a shutout of host Carolina in Raleigh, N.C., as Rocco Grimaldi, Calle Jankrok and Austin Watson scored for the Predators, who caught the Hurricanes off guard early and used that leverage for a solid performance. The Predators have a four-game points streak, as they rebounded from an overtime loss Wednesday to the Vegas Golden Knights. Rinne, who hadn't played in Nashville's previous three games, notched his third shutout of the season. He has a team-high nine victories. Carolina was blanked for the first time this season, and lost its second straight. —Reuters

KSRS organizes 'Kuwait to Jerusalem' marathon



KUWAIT: Kuwait Social Reform Society (KSRS), in cooperation with the Youth for Jerusalem Society, Jerusalem Forum in addition to official and social establishments organized the first six kilometers Marathon on Jaber Bridge under the slogan

from "Kuwait to Jerusalem", on the occasion of the world solidarity day with the Palestinian people, and loyalty to Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque, to confirm solidarity with Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa mosque.

The marathon started at 9 am in an



enthusiastic atmosphere. KSRS Secretary General Yaqoub Al-Ansari said many of the various age groups participated with a total of 1,500 participants, and this reflected the status of Palestine in all. He said Kuwait's official and popular

support of the Palestinian cause in all arenas, and thanked all those who worked for the success of the marathon including the interior and health ministries in addition to Kuwait Municipality and Roads Authority.

NBK 2019 Walkathon Centre starts receiving applicants

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) opened a specialized center in the Green Island to assist the registered participants in its annual walkathon and distribute the assigned T-shirts and numbers. The center will be opened daily until December 5th, 2019 from 1:00 pm to 09:00 pm. This year, NBK's Walkathon is marked by a variety of fun, entertaining and health

awareness-raising activities. Titled "One step can change your life"; the Walkathon will take place on December 7, 2019. NBK will be giving away two new Renault cars from Al Babbain Group during the Walkathon along with many other valuable prizes.

Participants of the age 12 and above who registered online can now visit NBK walkathon center daily until December 5, 2019 to receive their assigned T-shirt and number. Ten winners will be selected from each of the 10 categories of participants. The walk for both the female and male participants will start from the Green Island on the Gulf Road to the Shuwaikh Beach Park, parallel to the Gulf Road, next to KPC building for a distance of 11 Km.

NBK strongly supports sporting events and encourages various sporting activities as means to promote a healthier and more active lifestyle for members of the community. Throughout the years, NBK also organizes



several social awareness programs including Educational, Environmental, Health and many other active initiatives.

Philippine President to attend opening Sea Games ceremony

CLARK: President Rodrigo Duterte will attend the opening ceremony of the Southeast Asian Games, the presidential palace said, a day after the Philippine leader apologized for the chaotic build-up. The organization of the 30th edition of the SEA Games has been mocked and marred by complaints about transport, accommodation and food as thousands of athletes have flooded into the Philippines for the biggest-ever edition of the multi-sport event.

And the threat of an approaching typhoon — forecasted to

hit the north of the country early next week — looms large. Duterte had pledged a probe into the troubled run-up to the Games' opening ceremony at the Philippine Arena, around 25 kilometres (15 miles) north of the capital Manila, after a rush of logistical problems and last-minute construction.

"I'm really apologising for the country... they (other nations) should know while they are still here that the government is not happy," Duterte said in an interview that aired Friday. "You cannot just cast away all those — the discomfort, the sufferings of the athletes, sleeping on the floors, getting hungry," he added. "To the countries that sent them here, it's a big deal."

He also instructed organisers to release complimentary tickets to many of the 56 sports at the SEA Games to locals. The Philippines was bracing for a typhoon which national forecasters warned was maintaining its strength.

PAGASA said Typhoon Kammuri — which is packing gusts of 185 kilometres (115 miles) per hour and maximum sustained

winds of 150 kph (93 mph) — is presently heading right for Games venues in the north of the country and is expected to make landfall on Tuesday.

MANILA PROTESTS

In Manila, about 2,000 protesters — some dressed as athletes — marched near the Philippine presidential palace yesterday to demand that Duterte and Games organising committee chairman Alan Peter Cayetano be held to account over alleged corruption in funding.

Some held a large banner that read "Support Our Athletes. No to SEA Games Corruption", "We are Proud of Our Athletes" and "We Are Ashamed Of Our Government".

"There are widespread reports of anomalies. These should be investigated," hotel worker Gerry Bodol told AFP as he held up a hand-printed red poster that read: "Make Duterte and Cayetano Pay for #SEAGamefail".

The organising committee, which has the support of

I'm the more skilled boxer: Andy Ruiz

NEW YORK: World heavyweight champion Andy Ruiz Jr said he was the more skilled fighter and Briton Anthony Joshua will have to rethink his strategy in their Dec. 7 title rematch. Mexican-American Ruiz produced one of boxing's biggest upsets when he dethroned the previously undefeated world champion Joshua with a seventh-round stoppage at New York's Madison Square Garden in June. Their second WBA, IBF and WBO title showdown — dubbed the 'Clash on the Dunes' — takes place in Saudi Arabia after former Olympic champion Joshua triggered a rematch clause and Ruiz said the fans can expect "fireworks" when they slug it out again.

"He's going to try to make adjustments. I don't know if he wants to exchange punches, but I'd love for him to do that because I'm the more skilled boxer," Ruiz said in an interview published on Saturday by The Telegraph <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/boxing/2019/11/30/exclu-sive-andy-ruiz-jr-interview-still-chubby-little-fat-kid>.

"He'll try to box me round and use his jab. But for how long? How long can he keep me away from hunting him down? That's what we've been working on most of all right now, heading into the fight.

"Fight fans are... going to see a lot of fireworks. If he knocks me down, I'm going to get up and knock him down. I know he'll try to do the same if I knock him down. The main thing is to stay focused and disciplined." Joshua was dropped to the canvas four times in the June bout and Ruiz, who has never been knocked out in his professional career, said that he would look to control the fight and use his speed against his taller opponent. "I want to impose myself in this fight, but I don't want to overlook him," Ruiz added. "He's still a dangerous fighter. I respect him and all the fighters who risk their lives inside the ring. "He's going to have some tricks up his sleeve and it's my job to not let that affect me. The main thing is pressure, throw combinations and use my speed. I can't let him grow balls in there." —Reuters

Duterte, has denied the allegations. With only sailing, windsurfing and netball on the sporting schedule on Saturday, all eyes will be on the opening ceremony, which starts at 7 pm (1100 GMT). Many of the details remain a secret, although the show's director, Filipino writer Floy Quintos, shared a photo on Facebook of hundreds of performers in colourful costumes on stage.

"Yes, the show is a spectacle," wrote the award-winning playwright, adding the image showed a people "united". "And the power of spectacle is one that has been used, worldwide by the powerful to further agendas. But it is in the hands of the spectacle's creators to patch together some meaning, some cohesion, some message that goes beyond the political."

This year's Games in Clark, Manila and Subic, which run through to December 11, are particularly complex with a record 56 sports across dozens of venues that are in some cases hours apart apart by car, even before Manila's notorious gridlock traffic is factored in. —AFP

Sports

Warner hits 335, Smith shatters record as Pakistan suffer in second Test

Pakistan in deep trouble at 96 for six

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at the end of day two of the pink-ball second cricket Test between Australia and Pakistan at Adelaide Oval yesterday:

Pakistan 1st innings

S. Masood c Paine b Hazlewood	19
Imam-ul-Haq c Warner b Starc	2
A. Ali c Smith b Cummins	9
A. Shafiq c Paine b Starc	9
B. Azam not out	43
I. Ahmed c Paine b Starc	10
M. Rizwan c Paine b Starc	0
Y. Shah not out	4
Extras	0
Total (six wickets: 35 overs)	96
Fall of wickets: 1-3 (Imam-ul-Haq), 2-22 (Azhar), 3-38 (Masood), 4-69 (Shafiq), 5-89 (Ahmed), 6-89 (Rizwan)	
Still to bat: Shaheen Afridi, Muhammad Musa, Mohammad Abbas	
Bowling: Starc 13-5-22-4, Hazlewood 8-2-29-1, Cummins 14-1-45-1	

Australia 1st innings (overnight 302-1)

J. Burns c Rizwan b Afridi	4
D. Warner not out	335
M. Labuschagne b Afridi	162
S. Smith c Rizwan b Afridi	36
M. Wade not out	38
Extras (lb6, nb7, w1)	14
Total (3 wickets dec: 127 overs)	589
Fall of wickets: 1-8 (Burns), 2-369 (Labuschagne), 3-490 (Smith)	
Did not bat: Travis Head, Tim Paine, Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon, Josh Hazlewood	
Bowling: Abbas 29-7-100-0, Afridi 30-5-88-3, Musa 20-1-114-0, Yasir 32-1-197-0, Ahmed 15-0-75-0, Azhar 1-0-9-0.	

ADELAIDE: An irrepressible David Warner smashed an unbeaten 335 yesterday while Steve Smith became the fastest man to 7,000 Test runs as Australia took control of the day-night second Test against Pakistan.

Skipper Tim Paine waved his players back into the pavilion at 589 for three ahead of the second day's dinner break with Warner on the 10th highest Test score ever, also a personal best. The decision to declare deprived him of a crack at Brian Lara's all-time high 400 not out, but it proved to be the right one with the Australian bowlers quickly tearing through Pakistan's hapless top order under the Adelaide Oval lights.

They finished in deep trouble at 96 for six with Mitchell Starc grabbing four of them. Babar Azam was not out 43 and Yasir Shah was on four. "It's just sunk in to me that it is very rare that you get these opportunities... I'll cherish this moment for the rest of my life, definitely," said Warner on making such a big score.

"More importantly, the partnerships we put on. It just showed how much pride we have as a batting unit running between the wickets. "If I'm doing my job well and putting the team in the best position, we're going to win a lot of games," he added.

The visitors, who have lost 13 consecutive Tests in Australia, enjoyed little success in a long day in the field as they look to avoid a 2-0 series defeat. But they did remove Marnus Labuschagne for 162 in the opening session and also bagged Smith, caught behind by Mohammad Rizwan off Shaheen Afridi for 36.

In making his runs, Smith shattered a record that had stood since 1946. He took a single off Muhammad Musa to reach 7,000 runs in his 126th innings, taking possession of a mark held for 73 years by English great Wally Hammond who reached the milestone in his 131st innings. Smith also moved past legendary countryman Donald Bradman's 6,996 Test runs to become Australia's 11th highest scorer.

The home team resumed the day at 302 for one with Warner on 166 and Labuschagne 126, with the pair putting on another 67 runs before Pakistan finally got a breakthrough. Skipper Azhar Ali took the new ball and Afridi clean-bowled Labuschagne as he attempted a drive, just as he and Warner appeared set for another long day at the crease.

The 25-year-old, who has come of age during the series, trudged off to a standing ovation after a classy



ADELAIDE: Australian batsman David Warner (C) is congratulated by teammates Nathan Lyon (L) and Pat Cummins (R) after scoring 335 not out against Pakistan on the second day of the second cricket Test match in Adelaide yesterday. — AFP

162, his second century in a row. Their marathon 361-run partnership was a record second-wicket stand for Australia against Pakistan and the highest ever in a pink-ball Test.

Minutes later, Warner completed only the second Test double century of his career. Playing in his 81st Test, he reached 200 with a single from Afridi, having clattered 23 fours along the way.

Pakistan thought they finally had him out on 226 when he was caught in the gully off debutant Musa, only for their heads to drop when it was called a no-ball. Warner made them pay, passing his previous highest Test score of 253, set in Perth in 2015, before reaching a triple century off 389 balls to join an elite club.

He raced to 335, one more than former captain Mark

Taylor's epic 334 against Pakistan in 1998 and Donald Bradman's 334 against England in 1930, before Paine decided to unleash his bowlers, conscious that rain is forecast for the next two days.

Exhausted, Warner was given a hero's send off by the crowd with his knock the second best ever by an Australian after Matthew Hayden's 380 against Zimbabwe in 2003. Matthew Wade remained unbeaten on 38.

Facing a tough last session under lights, Pakistan's batsmen quickly caved in. Starc removed Imam-ul-Haq, who got a thick edge to Warner on two, before Pat Cummins had Azhar caught for nine. Josh Hazlewood accounted for Shan Masood before Starc nabbed Asad Shafiq, Ifukhar Ahmed and Rizwan cheaply. — AFP

NZ take control of second England Test with early wickets

WELLINGTON: Tim Southee and Matt Henry removed both England openers as New Zealand reduced the tourists to 39-2 and took control of the second Test by the close of play on the second day at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday. New Zealand had been dismissed for 375 about an hour after tea and hold a 336-run lead heading into the third day of a match that England need to win to level the two-test series.

Rory Burns was on 24 at the close of play, having survived two dropped catches, with captain Joe Root on six and looking uncomfortable at the crease as he battles with a precipitous drop in form over the last year. Opening batsman Dom Sibley was trapped in front by Southee for four to leave the tourists 11-1 before Joe Denly (four) was snapped up by wicketkeeper BJ Watling with a superb low catch off Henry to reduce them further to 24-2.

England could have been even further

in the mire at stumps with Burns dropped on 10 by Ross Taylor at first slip off Henry and again, from a more difficult chance, on 19 by Jeet Raval at midwicket off Southee.

England's pace attack had earlier dragged their side back into the game with a fiery spell of short-pitched bowling at New Zealand's tail after Stuart Broad had broken a 124-run stand between debutant Daryl Mitchell (73) and Watling (55). "When I was sitting on zero I wasn't that calm," Mitchell said. "So it was nice to get a run and get started and the more time you spend out there the easier it does get. "But England bowled very well. They were very patient at times and built pressure and asked good questions.

"We just had to grind it out for a period there and I was lucky enough to get a few runs." New Zealand had been well set at 315-5 heading into tea before Broad removed first test man-of-the-match Watling with the penultimate ball before

SCOREBOARD	
Scoreboard at stumps on day two of the second Test between New Zealand and England in Hamilton yesterday:	
New Zealand 1st innings (overnight 173-3)	8-357 (Southee), 9-375 (Santner), 10-375 (Wagner)
J. Raval c Root b Broad	5
T. Latham b Broad	105
K. Williamson c Root b Woakes	4
R. Taylor c Root b Woakes	53
H. Nicholls c Broad b Curran	16
B. Watling c Burns b Broad	55
D. Mitchell c Archer b Broad	73
M. Santner c Woakes b Archer	23
T. Southee c Pope b Woakes	18
M. Henry not out	5
N. Wagner c Sibley b Curran	0
Extras: (lb1, lb3)	18
Total: (all out: 129.1 overs)	375
Fall of wickets: 1-16 (Raval), 2-39 (Williamson), 3-155 (Taylor), 4-182 (Latham), 5-191 (Nicholls), 6-315 (Watling), 7-330 (Mitchell),	
Series: New Zealand lead 1-0.	
England 1st innings	
R. Burns not out	24
D. Sibley lbw Southee	4
J. Denly c Watling b Henry	4
J. Root not out	6
Extras: (lb1)	1
Total: (two wickets: 18 overs)	39
Fall of wickets: 1-11 (Sibley), 2-24 (Denly)	
Bowling: Southee, 8-1-24-1, Henry 7-3-10-1, Wagner 2-0-3-0, Mitchell 1-0-1-0	
Series: New Zealand lead 1-0.	

the break.

Broad then had Mitchell caught at deep fine leg by Jofra Archer about 20 minutes after play resumed in the final session. With the hosts' bowlers prepared to take on the short-pitched deliveries,

England quickly wrapped up the innings as mistimed shots from New Zealand's batsmen ended up in the hands of the boundary fielders. The last five wickets fell for just 60 runs and Broad finished the innings with 4-73. — AFP

Heads of Gulf Basketball Federation meet

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Basketball Federation Rasheed Al-Enezi chaired the coordinatory meeting of heads of Gulf Federations on the sidelines of Kuwait's hosting of the Gulf national teams.

The chairman agreed to renew the Gulf Championships contract to put new rules that allow host federations more freedom in raising the TV broadcast rates, besides having the constructor sponsor of the championship share in the financial returns.

The meeting agreed to demand the Asian Federation to support the host federation financially when hosting Asian championships.

Al-Enezi said the meeting is very important because Kuwait federation want to make some comments about Gulf events.

Meanwhile, Secretary General of the Asian Federation Hakoob said the Asian Federation approved the new date of the Gulf championship which will be towards the end of May.

He said the Gulf clubs championship will be of the home-away system starting with the championship after next under the patronage of the Asian Federation, adding that the Asian federation will give \$90 thousand to anyone hosting its championships, while each person in the teams will be \$75 per day.



KUWAIT: Group photo of the heads of Gulf Basketball Federation.

Tennis Australia to honour Margaret Court

MELBOURNE: Margaret Court's calendar-year Grand Slam jubilee will be commemorated at next year's Australian Open, Tennis Australia announced yesterday while hitting out at her "demeaning" personal views on homosexuality and gay marriage.

The first Slam of 2020 will mark the 50th anniversary of Court winning all four majors in the same year — the holy grail of tennis. Earlier this month, Court — now a church pastor — complained that she had yet to receive a formal invitation to the tournament in January to mark her achievement.

It followed controversy over her views on homosexu-

ality and gay marriage, which has seen high-profile players like Billie Jean King and Martina Navratilova call for the Margaret Court Arena to be stripped of her name.

Tennis Australia yesterday said the historic occasion would be marked with a programme of events throughout the tournament, with Court invited to attend. But it made clear that her personal views were not supported by the governing body. "Tennis Australia respects Margaret's unmatched tennis career and welcomes her to the Australian Open, particularly in this milestone anniversary year," it said in a statement. "As often stat-

ed, Tennis Australia does not agree with Margaret's personal views, which have demeaned and hurt many in our community over a number of years.

"They do not align with our values of equality, diversity and inclusion." Court used to attend the Australian Open regularly but hasn't shown up since 2017, when the controversy over her views first flared.

Despite the scathing comments from Tennis Australia, she said would be back for 2020. "I'm looking forward to celebrating the 50th anniversary of winning the Grand Slam with my family and friends at the Australian Open," she said. — AFP

India rout Pakistan 4-0 to seal Davis Cup qualifiers spot

NUR-SULTAN: Veteran Leander Paes improved his Davis Cup record to 44 doubles wins yesterday as India thrashed Pakistan 4-0 in the Asia/Oceania tie played at a neutral venue due to political tensions between the arch-rivals.

The 46-year-old Paes combined with Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan to serve out Pakistan's teenage pair of Muhammad Shoaib and Huzaifa Abdul Rehman 6-1, 6-3 in the Kazakhstan capital of Nur-Sultan.

Paes, who overtook Italy's Nicola Pietrangeli as Davis Cup's most successful doubles player with his 43rd win last year, won the doubles match to seal India's berth in the qualifiers.

Sumit Nagal then turned out for the reverse single to outplay Yousaf Khalil 6-1, 6-0 in 32 minutes and the fifth match was not played. India will now travel to Croatia — two-time Davis Cup champions — next year for the world group qualifiers to be played on March 6-7.

The 12 winners of the qualifiers will join the six teams — Spain, Canada, Great Britain, Russia, France and Serbia — that have already booked their place in the Davis Cup finals. The International Tennis Federation moved the Asia/Oceania Group 1 tie away from Islamabad because of India's security fears even though Pakistan opposed the decision.

Pakistan's top players Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi and Aqeel Khan pulled out of the tie in protest. The match was also pushed back from September because of security fears, as the two countries were wrangling over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

The nuclear-armed neighbours split angrily in 1947 after independence from Britain and have fought three wars since. Sport has also suffered badly. India cut bilateral cricket ties with Pakistan after attacks in Mumbai in 2008 that authorities blamed on Pakistani militants.

India last played a Davis Cup tie in Pakistan in 1964, when they beat the hosts 4-0. Pakistan lost 3-2 when they played in Mumbai in 2006. — AFP

Sports

Bucharest set for Euro 2020 draw as tournament enters new territory

BUCHAREST: Bucharest hosts the draw for Euro 2020 with the fates of World Cup holders France and reigning European champions Portugal providing the greatest interest just over six months before the start of what is a controversial tournament.

The coaches of all qualified nations will be in attendance for the draw ceremony beginning at 1700 GMT (7pm local time) at the Romexpo exhibition centre in Romania's capital, which will host four matches at the finals.

For the first, and surely only, time, this European Championship — the second to feature 24 teams — is being held in 12 cities in 12 different European nations from June 12 to July 12, with the semi-finals and final taking place at Wembley in London.

It was an idea championed by ex-UEFA president Michel Platini, before his four-year ban from the game, as a way of marking the 60th anniversary of the first European Championship in 1960.

However, the concept has come in for criticism, and part of that is down to the fact that much of the suspense has already been taken from the draw. The need to ensure qualified host nations get to play at least two home matches means some teams already know which group they will be in.

For instance, four of the six top seeds are hosting games, with Ukraine and Belgium the only exceptions. However, the decision to keep Ukraine and Russia apart for diplomatic and security reasons has had an impact on the Belgians.

They therefore already know they will be in Group B along with two hosts, Denmark and Russia. The only suspense is whether Wales or Finland from Pot Four

complete their group. Belgium's Manchester City star Kevin De Bruyne made headlines recently when he called that "a scandal". Similarly, the Netherlands — who will play group games in Amsterdam — know they will be in Group C with Ukraine.

"It was clear from the beginning and sometimes in life you have to weigh pros and cons, the advantages and disadvantages," said UEFA deputy general secretary, Giorgio Marchetti, at a press conference on Saturday, defending the tournament format.

"UEFA thought the prevailing reason to do it was to try to have a special celebration of what is essentially a greater European, and now a global, event.

"We had to accept these limitations, and by the way no hosts were guaranteed to have a place at the Euros." The Netherlands could also end up playing Romania in Bucharest, should the Romanians come through the play-offs next March, a process which still involves 16 teams including Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland.

Indeed, the draw will take place without all 24 finalists being known, the last four spots going to the play-off winners. Matches will be played from Dublin and Bilbao to Saint Petersburg and Baku. Italy will host the opening game in Rome, and they are one of the top seeds, as are England, Germany and Spain.

France lurk in Pot Two alongside a revived Netherlands, while 2016 winners Portugal sit in the third pot. It is therefore possible that France will find themselves in the same group as Italy, Portugal and Wales. England, meanwhile, could also find themselves in the same group as France and Portugal.

However, Gareth Southgate's side will be confident



BUCHAREST: The stage is pictured prior to the UEFA Euro 2020 football competition final draw in Bucharest yesterday. — AFP

of making the knockout phase given they will play at Wembley. Then again, if they were to qualify in second or third place in their group, it is possible they could end up having to go to Saint Petersburg or to Baku, by the Caspian Sea, for a quarter-final.

The concept has left European football's governing body open to criticism about the tournament's impact on climate change. UEFA have estimated 405,000

tonnes of carbon emissions will be produced by travelling fans and staff and in response have promised to invest in "emission reduction projects".

President Aleksander Ceferin has defended the format, pointing out that there has been no need to build new venues or transport links, but he admitted "it also has a cost, with increased travel for fans to watch their teams play". — AFP

Young United talent gives Solksjaer food for thought

MANCHESTER: Ole Gunnar Solksjaer will continue the difficult balancing act of integrating Manchester United's exciting young talent into a first team still struggling to find consistency when they take on Aston Villa today.

United faced a marathon trek to play Astana in Kazakhstan on Thursday although, having already qualified from their Europa League group, the United manager was able to rest his entire first team squad.

Striker Jesse Lingard was the only regular first team player to make the trip as Solksjaer kept one eye on the Villa game and an increasingly frustrating domestic campaign. United are presently nine points off the fourth and final Champions League place occupied by Chelsea, where Frank Lampard has illustrated youth can flourish.

Solksjaer fielded a team on Thursday with an average age fractionally over 22 and the majority acquitted

themselves well despite a 2-1 defeat. Right-back Ethan Laird, midfielder Dylan Levitt and centre-back Di'Shon Bernard, who was unfortunate to score an own goal, all made debuts and were singled out for praise by the manager. Solksjaer spoke of possibly allowing a number of the youngsters to leave in the January transfer window to gain valuable first team experience on loan elsewhere. "I think some of these might benefit from going out on loan," he said.

"Of course, they need men's football and it was a first taste of it for some of them. "Some of them are also knocking on the door for us. Some of these have done themselves a good favour."

But, while the Norwegian's selection continued his admirable reliance on the club's youth production line, it did raise the broader issue of how easy it will be to ease such precocious talent into United's current first team. Striker Mason Greenwood and midfielders Tahith Chong, James Garner and Angel Gomes have all made substitute appearances in the Premier League this season while injuries have seen left-back Brandon Williams start two, and have a further couple of outings off the bench. Greenwood, 18, has been a particular success coming on as a substitute in 10 Premier League games this season and scoring five goals across all competitions.

His latest, and the first in the league, came in the thrilling 3-3 draw at Sheffield United last Sunday when

Solksjaer's team came from two goals down to lead at one stage, having scored three times in seven minutes.

Williams, 19, also scored during that spell while the third goalscorer — 22-year-old Marcus Rashford — meant the three United scorers had an average age of under 20. But that game also illustrated the concerns Solksjaer must overcome in introducing such youngsters into his side.

United were overwhelmed for 70 minutes by their opponents, and eventually failed to hold onto a 3-2 lead, thanks to some deeply average displays from more senior players — notably England defender Phil Jones who was substituted at half-time by Solksjaer.

Harry Maguire, an £80 million (\$103 million) summer signing from Leicester, has also been criticised for some indifferent form and a failure to lead by example. Injuries in midfield, notably to the French World Cup winner Paul Pogba and, more recently, young Scotsman Scott McTominay, have added to the impression an unhealthy emphasis and level of expectation is being placed on some of the United youngsters with a possibly long-term damaging impact on their development.

Solksjaer will be hoping the return of Pogba — possibly against former manager Jose Mourinho's Tottenham next Wednesday — will bring some much-needed experience and stability to the heart of his team, and help the young talent around him. — AFP

Sacked Emery says 'honour' to have coached Arsenal

LONDON: Unai Emery said it had been an "honour" to coach Arsenal despite being sacked as manager of the Premier League club on Friday after just 18 months in charge. The 48-year-old Spaniard was fired following the 2-1 home defeat to Eintracht Frankfurt in Thursday's Europa League match, which extended their winless run to seven games.

Assistant Freddie Ljungberg has taken over as interim manager with ex-Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri and Wolves boss Nuno Espirito Santo among the early favourites to be named the next full-time boss.

Despite his sacking, Emery insisted it had been an "honour" to manage the London giants. "It has been a year and a half full of emotions, of great moments and some other more bitter ones," he said. "But not a single day has gone by without me stopping to think about how lucky I have been to work for this club with these players and their professional and personal qualities."

Former Arsenal player Ljungberg said he would work hard to improve the atmosphere at Arsenal.

"However long I oversee @Arsenal I will give everything I have to put smiles on faces again," he tweeted. "We have a busy few weeks ahead and the team needs your support. Let's get to work!"

Arsenal are on their worst run without a victory since 1992, when they went eight games without a win under George Graham. They are already eight points off the top four after failing to win a Premier League match since October 6.

Emery was appointed as successor to Arsene Wenger in May 2018 after a trophy-laden career at Sevilla and Paris Saint-Germain with a brief to make Arsenal a Premier League force again.

The club, who have not won the Premier League since 2004, had stagnated in the final years of Wenger's 22-year reign despite a series of cup triumphs.

But Arsenal could only finish fifth last season, missing out on the riches of the Champions League for a third straight year.

Emery spent more than £130 million (\$168 million) in the close-season, bringing in a clutch of players including winger Nicolas Pepe, centre-back David Luiz and left-back Kieran Tierney. But despite the reinforcements they have collected just 18 points from 13 games so far this season.

Emery has had many off-field issues to contend with, losing Aaron Ramsey on a free transfer to Juventus at the end of last season. He then saw former captain Laurent Koscielny refuse to travel on a pre-season tour to the United States as he pushed through a move away from north London. — AFP



VITORIA: Real Madrid's Brazilian defender Marcelo (R) vies with Alaves' Spanish defender Martin Aguirregabiria during the Spanish league football match between Deportivo Alaves and Real Madrid CF at the Mendizorroza stadium in Vitoria yesterday. — AFP

Madrid go top after gutsy win at Alaves

MADRID: Sergio Ramos scored a goal and conceded a penalty as Real Madrid battled past Alaves yesterday to go top of La Liga before today's game between Barcelona and Atletico Madrid. Barca and Atletico face off at the Wanda Metropolitan and Madrid did all they could to take advantage, with Dani Carvajal the unlikely matchwinner in a gritty 2-1 victory over Alaves.

"We know that these grounds that teams give everything against Madrid," said Marcelo. "It's in these matches that leagues are won." "We fought until the end," added Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane. Ramos had headed them in front shortly after half-time only to concede a needless penalty for throwing his arm across Joselu, which Lucas Perez converted before Carvajal poked in.

Madrid pull three points clear of Barcelona and six ahead of Atletico, who have played a game more than the top two. Sevilla, in third, host Leganes on Sunday. Alaves stay 13th.

A 1-0 defeat at Mendizorroza 13 months ago came three weeks before Julen Lopetegui was sacked as coach but this time Madrid showed the kind of steel that was so painfully lacking last season.

On a wet and windy afternoon in the Basque country, Zidane's side never showed the verve and creativity that was so impressive in the draw against Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday. But this was a gutsy performance that means they have now won six and drawn two of their last eight matches in all competitions, with the Clasico against Barcelona next month fast approaching.

"A few weeks ago people were saying a lot about this team," said Zidane. "But we have to stay the same, stay calm and keep working because this is just the start." Gareth Bale made his first Madrid start since October 5 after recovering from a calf injury and his first too since his controversial celebration with Wales earlier this month, which sparked anger among his club's supporters.

Bale hit the post in the first half but faded and was replaced by Rodrygo after Alaves' equaliser. With Eden Hazard out injured, Isco also kept his place while Alphonse Areola was given a rare outing in goal ahead of the rested Thibaut Courtois.

Madrid were lucky not to concede another penalty early on as Aleix Vidal slalomed inside Ramos and then Eder Militao, whose dangling leg caught Vidal's foot. Referee Guillermo Cuadra felt the fall was exaggerated.

At the other end, Bale hit the post with a header and Karim Benzema latched onto a quick throw but instead of shooting, hooked the ball back for Isco whose effort was saved. Alaves grew in confidence as the rain grew heavier yet Madrid regrouped at half-time and took the lead soon after as Ramos was given a free header to glance in Toni Kroos' crossed free-kick.

But after scoring his sixth goal of the season, Ramos gifted Alaves an equaliser in the 66th minute by out-muscling Joselu in the penalty area, only to throw an arm across the forward's chest. Perez made no mistake.

Bale went off for Rodrygo and Alaves might have been able to build on their momentum if they had consolidated. Instead, parity lasted three minutes as Isco met Luka Modric's cross at the back post and while Pacheco did brilliantly to save, Carvajal reacted faster than Victor Laguardia to the rebound.

Perez almost drove in a late equaliser but Marcelo made a diving block and Ximo Navarro's header had to be clawed away by Areola as Madrid held on. — AFP

Guardiola wants to stay at Man City beyond 2021

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola is interested in staying as Manchester City manager beyond the length of his current contract with the Premier League champions, which is due to expire next summer.

The 48-year-old is already on course to make City the longest employer of his managerial career, having spent four years at Barcelona and three in charge of Bayern Munich. But Guardiola has for the first time indicated that he would be prepared to discuss the prospect of staying beyond the summer of 2021 and into a sixth season in charge at the Etihad.

"I'm open (to staying) yes, I'm so comfortable working with this club," said Guardiola. "It depends on results. When you are five years it depends on the results. We will see what happens this season and next season."

This season has not gone according to plan for the City manager as he attempted to match the unprecedented efforts of last year when he swept all three domestic titles with the club.

Injuries have played a big role in City, who travel to Newcastle this weekend, falling nine points behind league leaders Liverpool although the manager has long insisted that he will fulfil his current contract.

The fact his wife Cristina Serra has returned to live in Barcelona has cast doubts over Guardiola's long-term plans in some quarters but the City manager insisted he feels like Manchester has become a second home.

"A little bit yeah," he said. "But I also knew how tough this league is and I'm comfortable with the players, they're incredible people and it is a joy to train with them. "We know how well they react when they don't win, they win and they don't play good, want to improve and when you see it it's a dream come true as a manager and that's what we have to continue."

"Any club, any situation, any country is different, I'm older, already I have been in three incredible leagues, it's different. "In that period (with Barcelona) I was younger and now I'm more experienced. Maybe with the experience I have now I would stay in Barcelona or Bayern Munich."

"Still, I have 18 months, that's a lot of time in football, that's why the club and myself agree it is not time to talk just play tomorrow do our best, make a good season and after that we see how everything goes. "That is the best way I trust a lot the club and they trust me and that is the most important thing. The results and our passion and what we see and decide."

While Guardiola has yet to actively open contract talks, his words will be encouraging to a City hierarchy who saw their club boosted this week by a £388 million investment from US private equity firm Silver Lake Management, a move that valued the Premier League champions' parent company at nearly £4 billion. Before opening serious talks with City management, however, Guardiola also needs to satisfy himself that the club's staff and players remain on the same page. — AFP



Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Norwich City v Arsenal	17:00
beIN Sports HD 2	
Wolverhampton Wanderers v Sheffield United	17:00
beIN Sports HD 7	
Leicester City v Everton	19:30
beIN Sports HD 7	
Manchester United v Aston Villa	19:30
beIN Sports HD 2	

25 Bruins nip Rangers in OT for sixth straight win



26 Warner hits 335, Smith shatters record as Pakistan suffer

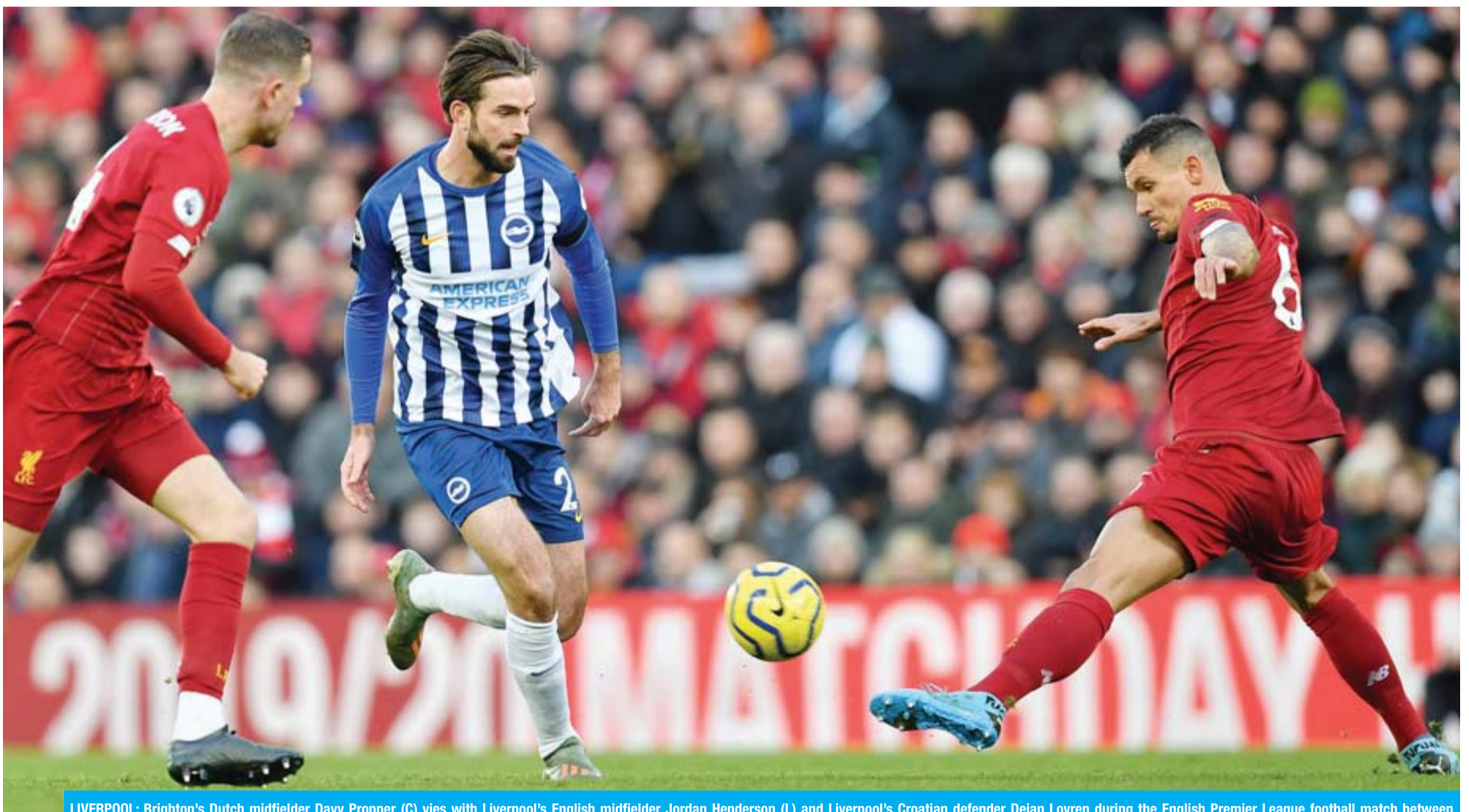


27 Madrid go top after gutsy win at Alaves



Liverpool stretch lead with nervy win

Manchester City and Chelsea stumble



LIVERPOOL: Brighton's Dutch midfielder Davy Propper (C) vies with Liverpool's English midfielder Jordan Henderson (L) and Liverpool's Croatian defender Dejan Lovren during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Brighton and Hove Albion at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: Liverpool extended their lead at the top of the Premier League to 11 points with a nervy 2-1 win over Brighton as Manchester City slipped up once more in a draw at Newcastle yesterday. Chelsea missed the chance to go level on points with second-placed City as Frank Lampard's men suffered a shock 1-0 home defeat by West Ham, while Tottenham's winning run under Jose Mourinho continued as Dele Alli scored twice in a 3-2 win over Bournemouth.

Virgil van Dijk is hoping to beat Lionel Messi to the Ballon d'Or on Monday and showed he can score goals as well as stop them with two towering headers from Trent Alexander-Arnold set-piece deliveries to put Liverpool 2-0 up inside 25 minutes.

However, goalkeeper Alisson Becker was sent off

14 minutes from time for handling outside his area and Brighton reduced the deficit from the resulting free-kick through captain Lewis Dunk. But the 10 men held out for another vital three points to edge closer to a first league title in 30 years.

While Liverpool have made a habit of winning games when not at their best, not for the first time this season, City let points slip away to further dent their title chances after a 2-2 draw.

Twice Pep Guardiola's men led at St James' Park through Raheem Sterling and a brilliant Kevin De Bruyne strike eight minutes from time. But Newcastle responded quickly on both occasions as Jetro Willems cancelled out Sterling's strike before Jonjo Shelvey swept home a well-worked free-kick two minutes from time.

"We do the same work we have done over the last few seasons. We tried to score more goals but it did not happen," said Guardiola, whose side failed to capitalise on nearly 80 percent of possession.

City's slip-up gave Chelsea the chance to go level on points with the champions and Leicester, who host Everton today. However, the Blues failed to replicate their fine form over the past two months as West Ham won for the first time in nine games to ease the pressure on Manuel Pellegrini.

Aaron Cresswell scored the only goal three minutes into the second half with a tidy finish as he cut inside onto his weaker right foot. But it was the Hammers who were the more likely to add to the scoring as the second period wore on with Kepa Arrizabalaga keeping them at bay with a string of

saves, while Michail Antonio had a goal ruled out after a VAR review for handball.

Tottenham are up to fifth and within six points of Chelsea in the battle for a top-four finish as the in-form Alli preserved Jose Mourinho's perfect start. The scoreline should have been far more convincing for Mourinho's men, who led 3-0 with 17 minutes left as Alli's fine form continued with a goal either side of half-time before Moussa Sissoko scored for the first time in over two years. But Tottenham have conceded twice in all three of Mourinho's matches in charge and were left hanging on as Harry Wilson scored a double for the visitors. Crystal Palace secured their first win in six games to move into the top half as Wilfried Zaha and Jeffrey Schlupp were on target in a 2-0 win at Burnley. — AFP

Oman beat Kuwait 2-1 in Qatar's Gulf Cup

DOHA: Kuwait football national team was defeated yesterday by previous tournament's champions Oman in Group B matches within the 24th Gulf Cup held in Doha, Qatar.

In the first 20 minutes of the first half, the Qatari referee, Khamis Al-Merri used the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) and awarded a penalty to the Omani team after a strong tackle by the Kuwaiti defender. Before the end of the first half, at the 32-minute another penalty was given to the Omani side, ending the first half 2-0 to the Omani side.

Omani player Abdulaziz Al-Maqbali scored twice from the penalty area. The Kuwaiti side was able to control the ball and attack more in the second half, and scored their only goal by Yusif Nasser in the 79th minute. In the second match of Group B, the Saudis will try to overcome their loss from Kuwait during their match against Bahrain, the latter is also eager to win the match's three points. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain played 17 matches against each other at the Gulf Cup. The Saudis won on nine occasions, the Bahrainis won in four, while both teams ended four matches in a draw. — KUNA



DOHA: Kuwait's goalkeeper Hameed Al-Qallaf (left) and defender Meshari Al-Enezi (right) vie for the ball with Oman's forward Abdulaziz Al-Mugbali during the 24th Arabian Gulf Cup Group B football match between Kuwait and Oman at the Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium in the Qatari capital yesterday. — AFP

Kuwait in Gulf Basketball final

KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday qualified to the Gulf Basketball Championship final after defeating the UAE 74-65 in the semi-final.

Kuwait will face in the final today the winner between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain who will play later today. President of the Kuwaiti Basketball Federation Rasheed Al-Enezi told reporters after the game that the team's qualification to the final is an important achievement for Kuwaiti basketball.

Al-Enezi stressed that the Kuwaiti team's ambition is to win the championship and gift it to the Kuwaiti fans who supported them from the start. For his part, Kuwait's Hussein Al-Khabbaz expressed his happiness and fellow players to reach the final game, adding that the team will do everything in its power to achieve the title. — KUNA