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US, UK issue travel warnings for NE India as protests rage

Protests turn violent in West Bengal state



NEW DELHI: A protester displays a placard during a demonstration against the Indian government's Citizenship Amendment Bill in New Delhi yesterday. — AFP

GUWAHATI: Protests against a divisive new citizenship law raged yesterday as Washington and London issued travel warnings for northeast India following days of violent clashes that have killed two people so far. Many in the far-flung, resource-rich northeast fear the new legislation will grant citizenship to large numbers of immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh, who they accuse of stealing jobs and diluting the region's cultural identity.

Several thousand protesters rallied in the capital New Delhi yesterday evening, urging Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to revoke the law, some holding signs reading: "Stop Dividing India". "People are not gathered here as Hindus, or Muslims, people are gathered here as citizens of India. We reject this bill that has been brought by the Modi government and we want that equal treatment as is enshrined in our constitution," said protestor Amit Baruah, 55, a journalist.

Protests turned violent in West Bengal state, a hotbed of political unrest, with at least 20 buses and parts of two railway stations set on fire as demonstrators blocked roads and set fire to tyres. No injuries were reported. Tensions also simmered in Guwahati in Assam state, the epicenter of the unrest, where medical staff said two people were shot dead and 26 hospitalized late Thursday after security forces fired live rounds.

Friday's funeral procession of 18-year-old Sam Stafford, who was killed in the firing, was attended by hundreds of angry and distraught mourners who shouted, "long live Assam". "We were watching news all day

on TV about the protests when my nephew left home in the evening. We asked him not to go but he went with his friends," the student's aunt Julie Stafford said.

Anticipating further unrest, authorities extended an internet ban across Assam till Monday. Most shops were shut and anxious residents stocked up supplies yesterday when the curfew was relaxed during the day. The Citizenship Amendment Act allows for the fast-tracking of applications from religious minorities including Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, but not Muslims. Samujjal Bhattacharya from the All Assam Students Union, which has been at the forefront of the protests, told AFP the group would continue its fight against the new law "in the streets and in the court".

Modi and Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe postponed a summit that was reportedly due to be held in Guwahati from today, and the United States and Britain warned their nationals to "exercise caution" if travelling to the wider northeast region. Islamic groups, the opposition and rights organizations say the law is a part of Modi's Hindu nationalist agenda to marginalize India's 200 million Muslims.

He denies this and says that Muslims from the three countries are not covered by the legislation because they have no need of India's protection. Modi's right-hand man Amit Shah yesterday sought to reassure the northeastern states, saying the government would protect their "culture, social identity, language and political rights".

Continued on Page 24

Protests erupt; Algeria ex-PM wins election

ALGIERS: A former ally of Algeria's deposed leader Abdelaziz Bouteflika was elected president of the protest-racked country in a widely boycotted vote, sparking another outpouring of anger on the streets Friday. Huge crowds massed once again in Algiers vowing to keep up their campaign for the total dismantling of the political establishment, following ex-prime minister Abdelmadjid Tebboune's victory in Thursday's poll.

Continued on Page 24



Algerian President-elect Abdelmadjid Tebboune

Sudan's Bashir sentenced to 2 years in jail

KHARTOUM: A Sudanese court yesterday convicted former president Omar Al-Bashir on corruption charges and sentenced him to two years of detention in a reform facility, the first ruling against the ex-leader ousted by mass unrest. The presiding judge said Bashir, 75, who was deposed by the military in April following months of street protests against his three-decade rule, was being sent to the reform facility, rather than a prison, on account of his age.

He also ordered the confiscation of millions of euros and Sudanese pounds found in Bashir's residence when he was toppled. The charges, which included possession of illicit foreign currency, carried a maximum prison sentence of 10 years. Bashir's prosecution is a test of how fast and how far military and civilian authorities now sharing power in Sudan will act to overturn his legacy.

Bashir is also wanted by the International Criminal Court, which issued arrest warrants against him in 2009 and 2010 on charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sudan's restive Darfur region. Dressed in traditional white robes and a turban, Bashir watched silently from inside a metal defendant's cage while the judge, Al-Sadiq Abdelrahman, read out the verdict.

"The convict, Omar Al-Bashir, is consigned to a social reform facility for a period of two years...The



Sudan's ex-president Omar Al-Bashir

sums of foreign and national currency that were seized are confiscated," Abdelrahman said. The Sudanese Professionals Association, which spearheaded protests earlier this year, welcomed the verdict as a "political and moral condemnation" of Bashir and his regime, while noting that it was only one of several cases against the former president and his allies.

From early morning, troops and military vehicles were deployed in the centre of the capital Khartoum, blocking access to the presidential palace and the Defense Ministry, and there was a heavy security presence at the court. About 3,000 supporters of the ex-president's Islamist movement rallied in the centre of the city. "Today we went out to demonstrate to defend Islamic religion and against secularism," said 34-year-old protester Ahmed Yassin.

Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Tahir, Bashir's lead defense lawyer, said he would appeal. "The judge made the ruling based on political motives, but despite that we still have confidence in the Sudanese judiciary," Tahir told reporters. Several other judicial cases have been

Continued on Page 24

Qatar sees 'progress' in resolving Gulf dispute

DOHA: There has been small progress in resolving a bitter dispute between Qatar and some of its neighbors, the Gulf state's foreign minister said yesterday, just days after its premier visited Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut diplomatic and trade links with Qatar in June 2017, accusing it of backing terrorism.

Doha denies the charge and accuses its neighbors of seeking to curtail its sovereignty. Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser Al Thani attended an annual

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit held in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, its highest representation at the meeting since 2017.

Asked whether there was progress at the meeting of regional leaders, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said at the Doha Forum in Qatar that there has been "small progress, just a little progress".

The premier's visit followed an intensification of efforts to resolve the row including unannounced Qatar-Saudi talks in October. There was no public mention of the 2-1/2 year dispute at the summit. The row has shattered the GCC alliance, a bloc of Sunni-ruled Arab monarchies in the Gulf that have close ties with the United States, including hosting American military bases. Qatari Finance Minister Ali Sherif Al-Emadi said the world's biggest liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporter remains "a big believer of the GCC". — Reuters



BEIJING: The Kuwaiti media delegation visits the Xinhua agency.

Kuwait delegation seeks to bolster China relations

BEIJING: A Kuwaiti delegation - led by editor-in-chief of Al-Anbaa newspaper Yousef Al-Marzouq - visited China as part of both countries' efforts to bolster relations on all possible domains. Speaking to the press, Marzouq said that the visit, which included the cities of Beijing, Shanghai and Xi'an, was made possible due to an invitation from the Chinese government. China is keen on developing relations with Kuwait on all possible domains, stated Marzouq, adding that the visit focused on developing relations in particular the political, economic, and social ties.

Meetings with Chinese foreign ministry, media, and economic officials were held during the visit, the Kuwaiti media figure affirmed. He also noted that the Kuwaiti media delegation also met with Ambassador of Kuwait to China Samih Hayat and member of the embassy's staff with the encounter discussing the huge development in Kuwaiti-Chinese relations since His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's 2018 visit to China. — KUNA

Local

ACK hosts 11th Engineering Students Project Exhibition

Mechanical, electrical, civil and petroleum engineers showcase projects



KUWAIT: Participants in a group photo. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



The exhibition's inauguration.



Students during the exhibition.

News in brief

Amir congratulates Bahrain King

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah congratulated Bahrain's King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa yesterday, some two decades after his accession to the throne. In a cable he sent to the Bahraini monarch, His Highness the Amir said the Gulf island nation has seen meteoric development under King Hamad's watch, wishing Kuwait's Gulf neighbor continued success and prosperity. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the Bahraini king. — KUNA

Amir congratulates UK PM

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Friday sent a cable of congratulations to UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson on the Conservative Party's win at the parliamentary elections. His Highness the Amir praised the bilateral and historic ties between Kuwait and the UK, stressing the constant aspiration to strengthen these common relations. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to Prime Minister Johnson. — KUNA

Kuwait congratulates Algeria

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a congratulatory cable on Friday to Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, over his victory in the presidential election of Algeria, commending the close ties between both sides. Both His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah expressed similar sentiments in separate cables. — KUNA

Amir condoles with Merkel

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable of condolence to German Chancellor Angela Merkel over the victims of an explosion at a residential building in the town of Blankenburg, in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt, which killed one person and injured several others. In the cable, His Highness the Amir wished mercy for the deceased and a swift recovery for the injured. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah voiced similar sentiments in a couple of separate cables to the German Chancellor. — KUNA

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) hosted its 11th Engineering Students' Graduation Project Exhibition on Thursday at Boulevard Hall in Salmiya, where students from four engineering programs - mechanical, electrical, civil and petroleum showcased their projects.

On the sidelines of the event, Prof Isam Zabalawi, President of ACK expressed his pride in students' participation at the exhibition. He said "the projects presented by students today are based on a theoretical base. Different techniques have been used and tried inside the laboratories. These projects are constantly and continuously developed and supervised by faculty members."

He added that "some projects have been tried on reality to prove their effectiveness. We are working on documenting these projects and to see what project must be marketed and used in Kuwait. The projects will be documented and their results will be published at international conferences."

Speaking at the event, Dr Mohammed Abdul-Niby,

Dean of the School of Engineering said that the exhibition has 28 outstanding projects conducted by 108 students for the semester of fall 2019. "These projects show the students' capabilities and skills. These projects will contribute effectively to building and developing the new Kuwait. Our students have worked hard to meet the specified projects' requirements with the help and support of their supervisors. We believe that these projects are seeds that will illuminate the future of Kuwait and that our students will be skilled and active engineers in the society," he noted.

He affirmed that the technology and engineering are shaping the world and that is why ACK motivates its students to gain exposure to real-life engineering practice that will prepare them well for their future workplace careers and also contribute towards their lifelong learning process.

Meanwhile, the Australian Ambassador to Kuwait Jonathan Gilbert said that the embassy is proud of the students' remarkable projects in terms of technical aspects. "The ability of the students of Australian College of Kuwait is remarkable," he said.

At the end of the evening, the winners were

announced. The first civil engineering winning project that got two awards (Best Civil Project and the Best Project by Australian embassy) is "Optimization of reinforced concrete design using FRP Laminates" project by Abdulrhman Soufi, Abir Mohamed, EilafAshkanani, and Zaid Al-Douri.

The second winner in the Mechanical engineering project is "Radiofrequency (RF) controlled robotic vehicle with metal detection" project by Emad Nuaman, Faisal Dughaiman and Ala Omar. The other winner in the Petroleum engineering project is "Oil spill remediation using magnetic separation via nanoparticles" by Abdullah Hamadah, Abdullah Al-Mearaj, Ya'qoub Al-Ebrahim, Abdulaziz Al-Shatti and Hanan Abdullah.

This exhibition was sponsored by the Kuwait Society of Engineers, Australian Embassy, Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences and Gulf Consult. The exhibition was developed as a platform to provide students with the opportunity to present their innovative concepts, reflecting their knowledge, competency and special technical skills acquired during their studies at the School of Engineering.

Ooredoo Kuwait wins 2 awards at Arab Media Forum



KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait officials honored during the event.

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait, the first to launch innovated digital services in Kuwait is proud to announce that it has won two awards at the seventh Creative Competition 2019 held by the Arab Media Forum in the categories of Best Public Relations Personality of the Year for Ooredoo Kuwait's Senior Director of Corporate Communications, Mijbil Al-Ayoub and Advertising Creativity Award for Best National Day TVC.

The competition was conducted by the General Secretary of the Arab Media Forum Madi Al Khamees and was held last Thursday at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC) in Kuwait City. More than 200 TVCs participated in the competition from Kuwait, the GCC, and the Arab World. The event was attended by a number of distinguished media personalities and celebrities from Kuwait and the region. The awards shed light on Ooredoo's great efforts to engage with the local community in creative and innovative ways and in areas and matters of their interest. Commenting on this, Ooredoo Kuwait's Corporate

Communications Senior Director, Ayoub said: "We are proud of winning such distinguished awards, and we dedicate this to our beloved customers for believing in us. We at Ooredoo are always striving to connect better with our customers, which reflects from our deep rooted values of caring, connecting and challenging. We're honored to see our efforts awarded tonight, and we promise to deliver and engage even more with our customers."

Ayoub further added, "The field of Public Relations has changed over the years and the Kuwaiti market is highly educated and knowledgeable. We are continuously working hard to raise the creativity benchmark to deliver the best to the market and to further increase our brand equity in the market."

The Arab Media Forum awards ceremony is considered as one of the renowned events that take place in the region, which brings together representatives from the different industries in one place to celebrate their tremendous revolutionary efforts in innovation and creativity.

UN official briefed on Kuwait education support programs

KUWAIT: President of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly Tijjani Mohammad-Bande yesterday commended the role of Bareeq and Boomerang programs in spreading positivity among students, admiring the role of civil society institutions in supporting government efforts and financing sustainable development goals. Mohammad-Bande said in a press statement, on the sidelines of the visit to the headquarters of Al-Nuwair Positive Initiative (Bareeq), headed by Sheikh Intisar Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, that Kuwait supports the UN in many projects. He thanked Sheikh Intisar Al-Sabah for giving him the opportunity to visit this non-governmental and non-profit organization that is doing a great job in the field of education and is important in trying to help those who have difficulty in learning.

Mohammad-Bande affirmed the depth of the historical relationship that binds Kuwait to the UN, appreciating Kuwaiti support for the activities and programs of the UN and its organizations. He said that Kuwait was not only a leader of humanitarian issues in the world but was also ready to continue positive engagement with the UN system, especially in regional issues, noting Kuwait's contribution through its membership in the Security Council that will finish by the end of this month.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Intisar stressed that civil society institutions are working alongside the Kuwaiti government to highlight the cultural image of Kuwait. Sheikh Intisar gave a presen-

tation on Bareeq program, which achieved outstanding success in schools, adding that this was due to the cooperation of the program with a team that includes a group of educators headed by the Program's Director Ruqaya Hussain. She pointed out that it aims to spread and promote positive thinking and integrated psychological well-being for students, eliminating negativity through a set of interactive activities that are short, simple and easy to implement, based mainly on scientific research results. The fruits of the program seemed clear in the great success that it has achieved in over 39 schools of the Ministry of Education to date, including nearly 500 teachers and more than 11,000 students, she noted.

Through the follow-up of the program, they detected a change among students, decreased tension and the ability to speak in front of the public. What distinguishes Bareeq program is the distance from the traditional methods of lectures and seminars, which always afflicts the bored recipient, explaining that students enjoy the program activities, she said. After their participation in the program, parents, teachers and school administrations testified these impressive results, which made the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning include the program.

Since its inception in 2013, it reinforced positivity in Kuwaiti society, which sought more of it through various activities and events, she emphasized. — KUNA

Local

NATO chief to lead delegation to Kuwait to celebrate ICI anniversary

Stoltenberg praises Kuwait's efforts for regional stability

BRUSSELS: A North Atlantic Council (NAC) delegation on the level of permanent representatives to NATO and led by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is set to visit Kuwait today and tomorrow. The NATO chief and NATO Ambassadors will attend a ceremony under the patronage of His Highness Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the NATO Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), where Stoltenberg will deliver remarks, noted a NATO press release Friday. Stoltenberg together with NATO Ambassadors will be attending a North Atlantic Council (NAC) meeting with the ICI Countries. The Gulf Cooperation Council Secretariat, Oman and Saudi Arabia will also participate, it noted. The ceremony and the NAC meeting will take place at the NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait City. ICI was launched in Istanbul in 2004 to promote long-term security cooperation between NATO and Arab Gulf countries. Currently Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and UAE are members of the ICI. Stoltenberg inaugurated the NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait in 2017.

Regional peace

Stoltenberg had lauded Kuwait's efforts to promote regional peace and security and stressed that the security of the members of the ICI is of great importance for the Alliance. In an exclusive interview ahead of his visit to Kuwait, he noted that Kuwait was chosen as the venue for the major event because it hosts the NATO-ICI Regional Centre. He said this center "has played a very important role in furthering our cooperation with the Gulf Countries-Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates-through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative."

"I was proud to open the NATO-ICI Regional Centre in 2017; and I welcome the opportunity to go back to Kuwait very soon, together with all NATO Ambassadors represented at the North Atlantic Council, at such a historical juncture in the evolution of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative," said the NATO chief. "I welcome Kuwait's long-standing efforts to contribute to regional stability, including through the NATO Istanbul Cooperation Initiative," he underlined.

"The security of our ICI partners is of strategic importance to NATO. Through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, we have a unique platform where we discuss security issues of common concern," said Stoltenberg. "Over the years, we have increased the quantity and the quality of our cooperation; and our NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait has helped NATO's outreach to the Gulf Cooperation Council, Saudi Arabia and Oman. It is the sovereign prerogative of these countries, ultimately, to decide how they want to move this process forward," he added.

"We can be proud of the past 15 years of partnership under the framework of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. We have conducted a wide range of practical activities, from military training and education, to crisis management, and dealing with natural and man-made disasters," he said. All the four Gulf partners in the ICI have Individual Partnership Cooperation Program with NATO, he noted. Under these agreements, a wide range of activities has taken place, including on energy and maritime security, cyber defense, and civil emergency planning, he stated. He said that ICI countries have taken part in many of NATO operations and missions, including in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Libya.

"Our upcoming visit will be an opportunity to take

stock of the achievements made and to discuss our common way forward with our partners to make our partnership even more efficient," indicated Stoltenberg. The NATO-ICI Centre in Kuwait has welcomed more than 1,000 officers and experts from NATO and the Gulf there, for joint training, cooperation and capacity building, he noted. "We are also working together to develop national expertise and resilience on crisis management, cyber security, energy security, maritime security, and defense against Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear threats," he said.

"Our NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait offers us the possibility to step up our cooperation in a number of areas, including interoperability, which enhances our ability to work together to manage future crises through joint training," said Stoltenberg, a former Prime Minister of Norway. "We also continue - through our NATO Mission in Iraq - to strengthen the Iraqi military in their fight against international terrorism, to ensure that Daesh (so-called Islamic State) can never return," he stated. "Furthermore, we believe that as a regional organization, the Gulf Cooperation Council is playing a key role in dealing with the crises affecting the security of its members. A leading principle of our cooperation is non-discrimination of any of our partners. We all have an interest in a unified Gulf Cooperation Council," added the NATO Secretary General. He said NATO is following developments in the region very closely.

"With instability in the Middle East and North Africa, NATO's partnerships are more valuable than ever. At our leaders' meeting in London on December third and fourth, we reaffirmed that NATO is a defensive Alliance and poses no threat to any country. We



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg

work to increase security for all," he stressed. "As a multilateral organization, we have strengthened partnerships in our neighborhood and beyond, and we have deepened political dialogue, support, and engagement with partner countries and international organizations. Over the years, we have increased our consultations on security issues of common concern; and on the practical side, our partners have engaged in more focused cooperation activities," he concluded. ICI was launched in Istanbul in 2004 to promote long-term security cooperation between NATO and Arab Gulf countries. Currently Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and UAE are members of the ICI. — KUNA



Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi

Kuwait calls on North Korea to resume talks

NEW YORK: Kuwait has called on North Korea to return to the negotiating table and resume direct talks over its nuclear program. Kuwait believes that dialogue is the best way to resolve this issue, Kuwait's Permanent Representative at the UN Security Council Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi said during a UNSC session on the tension in the Korean Peninsula.

He, moreover, stressed that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea must comply fully with its international obligations, dispose of its nuclear weapons and illicit programs and return to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear State. The Kuwaiti diplomat voiced support to the direct dialogue initiative undertaken by the United States and others in the region, saying that it has paid off.

Kuwait endorsed the resulting agreements which have contributed to defusing tensions, he noted. Al-Otaibi hailed the UNSC's leading role in issuing resolutions condemning the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's illicit programs. The council must remain united, firm and keen on the full implementation of all such resolutions while taking into account the need to facilitate the delivery of aid to people in need in North Korea.

He regretted that the atmosphere of optimism has begun to vanish after North Korea's resumption of ballistic missile tests. "The path of talks to reach the desired goal of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is still long and arduous." But we believe that the full and sincere commitment of all concerned parties and the full implementation of all relevant UN Security Council resolutions will lead to a lasting and comprehensive peace agreement in a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula," he concluded.

Preventive diplomacy

Meanwhile, a Kuwaiti diplomat said that his country worked during its non-permanent membership in the



Member of the Kuwaiti mission to the UN Fahad Hajji

UNSC on propagating preventive diplomacy and this was visibly on display at the council's June session on prevention of conflict and mediation. This statement was delivered by member of the Kuwaiti mission to the UN headquarters in New York Fahad Hajji during a UN General Assembly session on the culture of peace late Thursday.

Hajji said that the notion of spreading peace was under threat from entities promoting extremist ideologies and hate speech. The lack of understanding and forgiveness had paved the way for violent extremism to the point that some individuals are proud of their crimes on current modes of communication, indicated the Kuwaiti diplomat. He pointed to the New Zealand Christchurch terror incident as an example of how a hateful person was able to broadcast his heinous act and white supremacist propaganda on social media.

He went on to say that such behavior should be countered by spreading the culture of peace and understanding, affirming that such measure was part of global goal 16 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG) connected with peace, justice, and strong institutions.

The UN charter called for resolving conflicts in a peaceful manner. Hajj affirmed, pointing out that Kuwait's foreign policy was based on spreading peace as an essential tool. He reaffirmed that Kuwait was willing to participate in all regional and international efforts aimed at spreading the culture of peace and preventing hate from taking hold of the world. — KUNA

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Sunrise view at Al-Khuwaisat. — Photo by Hochimin Haridas (KUNA)

‘Humanitarian Center’ ratchets up aid delivery across the globe

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KUWAIT: Given its UN-bestowed moniker of ‘Humanitarian Center,’ Kuwait has long been accustomed to doling out aid for the less fortunate around the world, thanks to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah’s penchant for altruism. Kuwait’s humanitarian endeavors run the gamut from food and healthcare aid to educational assistance, where a Kuwait-based charity has just concluded a three-month vocational sewing program for some 150 impoverished women across several Yemeni provinces, allowing them the opportunity to ply their trade.

Tawfik Mohammad, a Yemeni official, thanked Kuwait for the copious amounts of aid the country has given Yemen, particularly amid this critical juncture the war-torn nation is going through. Such initiatives as the one taken by Kuwait Humanitarian Relief Society in the southwestern Yemeni city of Taiz, allow these families to make ends meet, he explained, while simultaneously narrowing down the unemployment rate in a county suffering from acute poverty, added the official.

Fouad Al-Fakiya, another Yemeni official, heaped equal praise on Kuwait for these generous endeavors, saying such projects help alleviate the misery many Yemenis are mired in, going on to wish the country continued prosperity and development. Elsewhere in Yemen, the same Kuwait-based charity doled out water tanks to displaced people in Yemen’s Maarib governorate, where some 2,200 families were the beneficiaries of the aid. In a statement, the Kuwaiti charity described the initiative as an “answer to the pleas of humanity,” saying such projects aim to lift thousands of Yemenis out of sheer penury.

Meanwhile, Kuwait’s “outstanding role” in the humanitarian field was acknowledged by UN General Assembly President Tijjani Muhammad-Bande on Thursday, who made the remarks amid a visit to the country. Kuwait has



Kuwait-based charity doled out water tanks to displaced people in Yemen.

shown “constant willingness” to cooperate to solve issues related to the region and the Islamic world, he emphasized, saying Kuwait’s contributions are mainly towards matters such as human rights, security and development.

Similarly, Kuwait’s devotion to humanitarian causes was praised on Wednesday by Nawaf Al-Sherian, a member of the permanent national committee on international humanitarian law. The commission was established last year and set an action strategy for 2020, he said, revealing that Kuwait seeks to sign several agreements and deals with similar committees in other countries.

Furthermore, The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) on Tuesday praised Kuwait’s profound contributions towards global humanitarian endeavors. Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) is always at the “forefront” of world charities providing urgent aid for some of the world’s most impoverished nations, said (IFRC) president Francesco Rocca, as he met with KRCS chief Dr Hilal Al-Sayer. — KUNA



Kuwait-based charity concluded vocational sewing program in Yemen.



KUWAIT: Firemen freed a girl whose foot got stuck in the toilet of her parents’ home in Saad Al-Abdullah yesterday. Special tools were used to cut concrete and plastic in order to avoid causing any harm to the girl. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun

Zain signs strategic partnership agreement with Al-Qabas

To offer the most advanced cloud solutions and data center services

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced signing a strategic partnership agreement with Dar Al-Qabas Press Printing, Publishing, and Distribution Company to offer the most advanced cloud solutions and data center services. The agreement aims at driving Al-Qabas newspaper's digital transformation efforts.

Zain hosted the agreement signing ceremony at the Zain Innovation Center (ZINC) in the company's main headquarters in Shuwaikh. The ceremony witnessed the attendance of Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq, Al-Qabas Managing Director Naser Al-Momen, as well as top executives from both companies.

As part of the agreement, Zain will be offering a number of innovative cloud solutions to revamp Al-Qabas' integrated digital infrastructure. The solutions include Zain Business Data Center (ZBDC) services, such as data storage and industry-leading security and connectivity when hosting digital assets in the MENA region. The agreement also includes network cabling and management services, connectivity, CCTV, service management, and much more.

During the signing ceremony, Zain Kuwait's Chief Enterprise Business Officer Hamad Al-Marzouq said: "this is a first step for collaboration between Zain and Al-Qabas, and we always encourage and support digital transformation projects in Kuwait. We are partners with Al-Qabas in their transformation journey, and we completely support their efforts. Providing cloud solutions is only the first step, as we will move on to 5G, artificial intelligence (AI), and blockchain applications in the future".

Marzouq added: "the reason for this collaboration between Zain and Al-Qabas is to support their transformation journey from paper to digital, a journey that they are considered leaders in across the Middle East region. We are extremely proud of these efforts, especially that Al-Qabas is a leading media organization locally and regionally in this area".

Commenting on information security and cybersecurity, Marzouq said: "this has become a key priority for the



KUWAIT: Zain and Al-Qabas officials in a group photo after signing the agreement.

entire world today, and we at Zain offer the most advanced cybersecurity solutions as per the highest international standards. Kuwait has put forward a plan for cybersecurity, and we are steadily following suit. We are proud to partner with Al-Qabas to use our extensive experience in this area to protect their data."

Regarding the expected outcomes of this partnership, Marzouq said: "we have a plethora of similar successful partnerships with government entities and private sector companies. This partnership will surely be fruitful in producing new levels throughout the next five years, and we look forward to seeing an all-new Al-Qabas, hand in hand with Zain." Al-Qabas Managing Director Naser Al-Momen said: "this agreement

embodies Al-Qabas' keenness on further driving our digital transformation journey. Our partnership with Zain - a leader in Internet and telecommunications services - is longstanding and strategic. The agreement also reflects

Al-Qabas management's keenness on keeping up with the worldwide tech evolution. This is especially true with the launch of 'Al-Qabas Premium' app and our Al-Qabas Online website, in addition to our social media accounts."

Momen continued: "Al-Qabas aspires to offer a faster and more professional experience when it comes to loading huge amounts of our information and video clips, especially with 'Al-Qabas Premium' and Al-Qabas Online." Momen added: "we aim to further develop our internal networks and systems, and what pushed us to take on this project more than anything else is the huge amount of data of 'Al-Qabas Premium', such as articles, photos, PDFs, and videos. We were keen on increasing our cloud storage, as well as have the best tools for system maintenance, speed, and storage efficiency. This agreement will surely support us in being the best in the future".

Momen explained: "focusing on digital media is of great importance to the board of directors and the executive management. The e-paper's efficiency in the website and app so far is what made us even more keen on developing the tech aspect of our services".

Momen concluded: "today's signing with Zain will surely accelerate and improve the 'Al-Qabas Premium'

experience, making it easier and better for our subscribers, while also supporting its spread regionally and internationally as per our set plan. 'Al-Qabas Premium' is more than just online archives, as it will expand to have more rich content in the future, and its recent expansion across the Arab world is a great example on its success".

Zain recently received the M&O (Management and Operation) Data Center Certification by Uptime Institute - the IT industry's most trusted and adopted global standard for the proper design, build and operation of data centers, making it the first telecom operator in Kuwait and the third in the region to receive this prestigious certification. Zain's certification by one of the world's leading advisory organizations comes to demonstrate the company's leadership and commitment in adopting the highest international standards for its data center, which ultimately reflects on the quality and efficiency of its services targeted at the Enterprise Segment within the Kuwaiti market.



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In Greek migrant camp, women endure hardship

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WASHINGTON: Ranking Member, Republican Representative Doug Collins, arrives for the start of the House Judiciary Committee's vote on House Resolution 755, Articles of Impeachment Against President Donald Trump, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on Friday. — AFP

Trump to face impeachment vote

Panel's impeachment vote 'an embarrassment to our country,' says Trump

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump stood on the verge of impeachment Friday after a House panel approved charges he abused his power and obstructed Congress, setting up a historic vote in the chamber next week.

In a grave moment for a deeply divided nation, members of the Judiciary Committee voted along party lines to approve two articles of impeachment against the president for committing acts that met the constitutional threshold of "high crimes and misdemeanors."

The panel recommended by 23 votes to 17 that the Democratic-led House ratify both articles, ahead of a vote by the entire chamber that is expected to make Trump only the third US president in history to be impeached, after Andrew Johnson in 1868 and Bill Clinton in 1998.

"Today is a solemn and sad day," committee chairman Jerry Nadler said after the vote, which was called with surprising speed the day after a rancorous 14-hour debate. "Yet we must meet the challenge posed by a president who puts himself before the country, whose actions pose a direct threat to the integrity of our elections, and to the separation of powers that safeguard our liberty."

One article charges the president with abuse of power for conditioning \$391 million in critical military

aid and a White House meeting on Ukraine launching investigations into Democrats ahead of the 2020 presidential election. The other charges him with obstructing Congress for refusing to cooperate with the inquiry, a development Democrats say is unprecedented in American history.

Nadler said the House will act "expeditiously" to vote on the charges. The chamber's Rules Committee will convene Tuesday morning to lay out guidelines for the impeachment debate and eventual vote. Impeachment would trigger a January trial in the Senate, where the solid Republican majority is expected to protect the president by voting against conviction and removal.

An ever-defiant Trump, who insists there is a witch hunt against him, called the panel's impeachment vote "an embarrassment to our country." He also insisted the divisive process will be "very good for me politically" as Americans face a presidential election next November. But while the White House said Trump looks forward to a fair trial and due process in the Senate, the president lashed out at Democratic "fools" and branded House Speaker Nancy Pelosi a "liar."

'Travesty for America'

The panel's fractious debate session Thursday

came to a surprising late-night end when Nadler abruptly postponed the votes. Startled Republicans accused Nadler of running a "kangaroo court," but Democrats said they did not want to be accused of taking such momentous action against the president in the dead of night.

Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, who held up a pocket copy of the US Constitution as she voted, said she was not acting against Trump as a person. "It is a vote for the Constitution and for 'We the People,'" she said, quoting the charter's preamble.

But Republicans have circled the wagons around the president, insisting he has done no wrong and accusing Democrats of dangerous overreach. Republican Debbie Lesko emerged from the ornate hearing room where she cast her vote calling the process a "travesty for America."

"I have never, in my entire life, seen such an unfair, rigged railroad job against the president of the United States," Fellow Republican Matt Gaetz warned that Democrats were eager to oust Trump "with no direct evidence" of criminal behavior. "For Democrats, impeachment is their drug, it is their obsession," he said.

Both sides were already girding for Trump's trial in the Senate, where conviction and removal would require two-thirds of votes. "There is zero chance that

the president will be removed from office," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, whose Republicans hold 53 of the 100 seats. McConnell also told Fox News he will be in lockstep with Trump, "coordinating with the White House counsel" regardless of his expected role as impartial juror in the trial.

Senate trial

Trump has signaled to aides that he wants a full-throated defense in the Senate, with witnesses testifying in person. Republican leaders, mindful of political fallout, indicated they would rather not see the process turn into a drawn-out spectacle.

"I'll do long or short," Trump said Friday when asked whether he wants an extended trial. But he added that he "wouldn't mind a long process" because he wants to hear testimony from the whistleblower who triggered the process earlier this year. Pelosi launched the impeachment inquiry in September after an unidentified whistleblower warned in a complaint that Trump, on a telephone call with his Ukrainian counterpart, used the power of his office to "solicit interference" from the foreign leader in the 2020 election. In the July 25 call Trump asked President Volodymyr Zelensky to launch an investigation into former US vice president Joe Biden, Trump's potential election rival. — AFP

Hezbollah chief warns Lebanon government could take time

BEIRUT: The head of Shiite movement Hezbollah in protest-wracked Lebanon Friday warned that the formation of a new cabinet desperately needed to redress a tumbling economy could take time. Lebanon has been swept by unprecedented nationwide protests since October 17, demanding the complete overhaul of a political class deemed inept and corrupt. The government stepped down on October 29, but bitterly divided political parties have failed to agree on a new premier ever since.

Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah spoke ahead of parliamentary consultations to nominate a new prime minister tomorrow. "The consultations are supposed to take place on Monday and we hope that whoever receives most votes will be designated to form a government," he said in a televised address. "But the formation will be no easy feat," he warned.

In a multi-confessional country often in political deadlock, the name of the new prime minister is frequently picked before symbolic parliamentary consultations. "Until now the parliamentary blocs have not agreed on a name" for the new premier, Nasrallah said. He said it was likely each bloc would "name who it wanted without any prior agreements."

The protesters have demanded a government made up solely of experts not affiliated

to the country's traditional political parties, but analysts have warned this could be a tall order. Nasrallah said he would support a "government of national partnership", and one with "the widest possible representation" that did not exclude any of the major parties.

He said it could be headed by outgoing premier Saad Hariri or someone the outgoing premier designated. The names of various potential candidates have been circulated in recent weeks, but the Sunni Muslim establishment on Sunday threw their support behind Hariri returning.

More US sanctions

The international community has urged for swift cabinet formation to implement key economic reforms and unlock international aid. The World Bank estimates a third of Lebanese live in poverty and this could rise to half. It has projected a recession of at least 0.2 percent for 2019.

A sworn enemy of neighboring Israel, Hezbollah is the only faction not to have disarmed after Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war. The United States considers Hezbollah a "terrorist" organization, but the movement is also a key political player with ministers in the outgoing government and seats in parliament. The United States has targeted the Shiite party with tough sanctions, ramped up under the administration of President Donald Trump.

Nasrallah lambasted comments by US officials, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who Wednesday said the Lebanese were aware of the "risk" of Hezbollah being in their country. Nasrallah suggested the United States might be "blackmailing" the Lebanese, and only offering to help in a time of economic crisis if they first dealt with that "danger." He alleged the United States had been unable to neutralize the movement



BEIRUT: An image grab taken from Hezbollah's al-Manar TV on Friday shows Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah, delivering a televised address from an undisclosed location in Lebanon. — AFP

despite actions including "sanctions."

On Friday, the US Treasury Department imposed new sanctions against two alleged Hezbollah money launderers and financiers, including a diamond trader who collected art. It accused Lebanon-based Nazem Said Ahmad, whose art collection includes works by Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol, and his companies of helping to launder large sums of money for the group.

"Ahmad, who has a vast art collection, is one of Hezbollah's top donors, generating funds through his longstanding ties to the 'blood diamond' trade," it said. A second man based in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Saleh Assi, was sanctioned for laundering money through Ahmad's diamond business and supporting another alleged financier already under sanctions. — AFP

Top Iraq cleric denounces protesters' killing, abduction

KARBALA, Iraq: Iraq's top Shiite cleric on Friday denounced the murder and abduction of anti-government protesters, calling for weapons to be placed under the control of the state. Around 460 people have been killed and 25,000 wounded, most of them protesters, since anti-government rallies erupted on October 1 in Baghdad and the Shiite-majority south.

Since then demonstrators in the capital and southern cities have disappeared almost daily, in most cases taken from near their homes as they returned from protests. "We strongly denounce the killings, abductions and attacks of all kinds that have been taking place," Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani said in a sermon delivered by his representative in the shrine city of Karbala during the weekly Friday prayer.

London-based rights group Amnesty International on Friday urged Baghdad to clamp down on what it called a "campaign of terror targeting protesters." Protesters accuse pro-Iran armed factions of playing a role in the killings and abductions.

Sistani specifically mentioned an attack late last Friday, when unidentified gunmen stormed and torched a multi-storey building in Baghdad where pro-

testers had camped out for weeks. At least 20 protesters and four police officers were killed and about 80 demonstrators abducted, medical sources and witnesses said.

The revered Shiite cleric also denounced Thursday's lynching by demonstrators of a teenager accused of attacking protesters in Baghdad, calling it "an atrocious crime." Such actions "reaffirm once again the importance of what the marjiaiyah (Shiite religious leadership) has repeatedly called for and that is that all weapons must be placed under the control of the state", he said.

Sistani urged authorities to prosecute those responsible for the violence and called on protesters to keep their demonstrations peaceful. Amnesty in its statements also called on Iraq's authorities "to step up to their responsibilities." Iraq must "take immediate and effective action to put an end to a growing lethal campaign of harassment, intimidation, abductions and deliberate killings of activists and protesters," it said.

"The authorities' utter lack of action over the past weeks has paved the way for this horrifying new stage in what is clearly a full-on attempt to crush the protests in Iraq through instilling fear among the population," said Amnesty's Middle East Research director Lynn Maalouf.

She said government inaction indicated acquiescence and in some cases complicity in the "enforced disappearances, torture and unlawful killings of people who are on the streets to claim their human rights." The mostly young protesters are angry at a government they see as corrupt, inefficient and under the sway of neighboring Iran. — AFP

International

In face of US opposition, UN renews agency helping Palestinian refugees

UN responsible to combat attacks on Palestinian refugees: PLO

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations General Assembly on Friday overwhelmingly renewed the mandate for a UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees for another three years amid misconduct allegations and a cash shortfall triggered by a halt in US funding.

The mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) was extended until June 30, 2023, with 169 votes in favor and nine abstentions, while the United States and Israel voted against.

UNRWA, which was established in 1949, provides education, health and relief services as well as housing and microfinance assistance to more than 5 million registered refugees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

The agency has faced budgetary difficulties since last year, when the United States - its biggest donor - halted its aid of \$360 million per year. The United States and Israel have both accused UNRWA of mismanagement and anti-Israeli incitement.

Hamas, which runs the Gaza Strip, hailed the UN vote as a defeat for the United States and a failure of its attempts to pressure UN member-states against UNRWA. "We welcome the decision to renew the international mandate to UNRWA and we see it as another failure to hostile US policies to the

Palestinian rights," Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri told Reuters.

The US mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the vote. Last month UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krahenbuhl resigned amid an investigation into misconduct allegations. Krahenbuhl has denied wrongdoing and said his agency was the victim of a political campaign designed to undermine it.

Switzerland, the Netherlands and Belgium suspended payments to UNRWA over the inquiry, deepening the budget crisis set off last year by the United States. UNRWA hopes the management shake-up will help pacify donors, said a source with knowledge of the organization's thinking.

The United States has advocated shifting the agency's relief services to refugee host countries. But UNRWA counters it provides a humanitarian lifeline and that it safeguards and advances Palestinians' rights under international law.

Hanan Ashrawi, a senior Palestine Liberation Organization official, praised the UN vote on Friday and said it was the United Nations' responsibility to combat what she called US and Israeli attacks on Palestinian refugees. "All attempts at trying to limit UNRWA's mandate or defend it or attack it have failed, and we hope that the international community will continue to come to the rescue," she said. —AFP



GAZA CITY: A Palestinian pupil looks at toys displayed by a street vendor in Al-Shati refugee camp in Gaza City yesterday. —AFP

'We are nothing' without UNRWA's help, says Palestinian refugee

BETHLEHEM/GAZA: George Salameh's family has lived in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem for 70 years. Still, he prefers his family be called "al-Yafawi", meaning "of Jaffa", an ode to the Mediterranean coastal town his family left in 1948 and still considers home. Salameh, like many Palestinians whose families were made refugees following the mid-20th century war that surrounded Israel's creation, views his presence in the Israeli-occupied West Bank city as temporary.

Other Palestinian refugees are scattered from the Gaza Strip to Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. Many still hold iron keys which they say belong to homes they fled or were forced to flee amid what Palestinians call the "Nakba", or catastrophe, in 1948.

Salameh, 59, now runs a falafel, ful and hummus restaurant, just off Bethlehem's Manger Square. The motto "since 1948" is emblazoned on the restaurant's menus and its waiters' shirt sleeves. He says his membership card from UNRWA - the UN's agency for Palestinian refugees - guarantees his right under international law to return to his family's home in Jaffa, which now sits in central Israel, some 78 km (nearly 50 miles) away.

The UN General Assembly voted on Friday to renew UNRWA's mandate to provide education, health and relief services to more than five million Palestinian refugees across the region. UNRWA argues its services are needed "in absence of a solution to the Palestine refugee problem."

But Israel refuses the right of return Salameh and other refugees claim, fearing the country would lose its Jewish majority. Salameh admits his hopes for going back remain dim. "We don't believe there will be a right of return. It's like an anaesthetic, it takes the pain away, but it is not a cure," Salameh said.

In the Gaza Strip, Zakeya Moussa says her family once owned 16 acres (6.5 hectares) of land just north of the coastal enclave's fortified border with Israel. Moussa, 63, has spent her entire life living in Palestinian refugee camps in the Strip, which Israel has kept under blockade since 2007 citing security concerns from its Islamist rulers Hamas.

Near Moussa's home in Gaza's Beach refugee camp on the shores of the Mediterranean, Palestinians were unloading sacks of flour they receive from UNRWA, which provides aid to over half of the enclave's two million residents. "UNRWA gives us flour, plant oil, beans and milk, we get treated for free, we get medication... We are nothing without UNRWA," Moussa said.

She says her family's land had a house surrounded by tracts of fruit and vegetable fields, all now north of the Strip's Erez border crossing with Israel. Under different circumstances, it would be just a short walk away, she said. "If I started walking now, I would be there in the afternoon." —Reuters

Turkish official says EU should boost funding of Syrian refugees

ISTANBUL: The European Union should spend more than the 6 billion euros (\$6.6 billion) already allotted to fund Syrian refugees in Turkey, and speed up the flow of that money, the Turkish foreign ministry's EU point person said yesterday.

EU funds support the roughly 3.5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, after Syria's more than eight year war killed hundreds of thousands and pushed millions from their homes. In turn, Turkey has agreed to halt further immigration to Europe. "The flow of funds should be sped up and the amount of

funding should be increased," said Faruk Kaymakci, a deputy Turkish minister of foreign affairs. "As long as the crisis is there we have to work together. The 6 billion euros will not solve the problem when it is finally all spent," Kaymakci told reporters in Istanbul.

The EU, which set up the funding in 2015, says more than 5.6 billion euros have been allocated, more than 3.5 billion contracted and more than 2.4 billion disbursed. Kaymakci said hosting the refugees costs Turkey some \$40 billion in total.

Europe's relations with Turkey are strained on several fronts including disagreement over a Turkish military incursion in October against a Kurdish militia in northeast Syria. Turkey in late October threatened to "open the gates" to allow refugees into Europe unless Europeans back its plan to resettle them in northeast Syria. —Reuters

In Greek migrant camp, women endure hardship

CHIOS: Mired in the mud, living under a plastic tarpaulin next to overflowing bins, 18-year-old Afghan Merziyeh Eskandari knows she faces another hard day in the migrant camp on the Greek island of Chios. The daily routine starts with standing in line for stinking toilets, getting two bottles of water and a portion of rice, and later sleeping in the cold without electricity.

The Vial camp on Chios has places for 1,000 people but nearly 5,000 are crammed in. Some of them, like Merziyeh, are camping in a nearby olive grove. To keep warm or cook food, the migrants cut branches from the olive trees and make a fire in a metal bucket.

The smell of smoke, dirty water and refuse permeates the camp. The UN's refugee agency and NGOs say a lack of hygiene is not the only problem in the camp. It can be a dangerous place — especially for women. "Insecurity, especially at night, is often mentioned by the women," UNHCR says.

The makeshift camp is home to men of various nationalities who have migrated alone. Human Rights Watch recently sounded the alarm, calling on the Greek government to "act immediately to ensure safe and humane conditions for women and girls" in the migrant camps.

The rights group urged the authorities to "identify the vulnerable people, including pregnant women and young mothers, victims of sexual violence and other violent acts", as well as the disabled, and offer them appropriate lodging.

Fears for safety

"The simple act of going to the toilets seems too risky for women and girls," says Human Rights Watch's Hillary Margolis in a report on conditions for women in the Moira camp on Lesbos island. Zubaida, an Afghan woman living at Moria, told the rights group how she stopped drinking tea at six o'clock each evening so she would not have to go to



CHIOS: A Syrian woman sits in her tent with her children in the Vial refugee camp, on the Greek island of Chios, on December 10, 2019. —AFP


the toilet during the night. She fears being raped.

Amino Abduhahi Ahmat, a Somali at the Chios camp, told AFP that "at night we have to go to the toilets three or four women together because we're afraid of the drunken men".


Doctors Without Borders (MSF) runs a support program for migrants who are victims of sexual violence, many of whom are women. Irini Papanastassiou, a Greek representative for MSF, said some women have been victims of rape but it was not clear when or where the attacks had happened.

Given the overcrowding and dire conditions at the camp, the Greek government has promised to transfer some 20,000 people to the mainland by the end of the year. But the influx of new arrivals "has been greater than the number transferred, and the conditions in the camp remain extremely difficult", Lida Lakka with UNHCR at Chios told AFP. Still, Merziyeh says, despite the hardship in the camp, "of course it's better here than in Afghanistan".

To escape the war-torn country, she left behind a husband as she took to the road with her parents and two younger sisters. It took them nearly a year, including a month in a Turkish prison and six or seven attempts to cross from Turkey's coast to Chios island. "I didn't have a good life in Afghanistan and I don't miss it," she said. "I want a job and education. I want to be a doctor." —AFP



مملكة البحرين
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Kingdom of Bahrain
Electricity & Water Authority
Planning & Studies Directorate

Water Transmission Project Associated with Al Dur IWPP Phase II Invitation for Prequalification for Construction of Pipelines and Water Stations

The Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain through the Electricity and Water Authority (EWA) is implementing a Major Independent Water and Power Production Plant at Al Dur on the South East Coast of the Kingdom of Bahrain namely "Al Dur Phase II IWPP Plant". The Plant is scheduled to produce 50 Million Imperial Gallons per day (MIGD) of potable water by June 2022. EWA intends to implement works between 2020 and 2023 namely, "Water Transmission Project associated with Al Dur IWPP Phase II", for transmitting this quantity to various Water Distribution Stations.

The Water Transmission Project broadly includes the following:

- The Construction of 110 Km of Water Transmission Pipelines ranging in diameters from 600 mm to 1200 mm.
- New storage and pumping facilities at the existing Al Dur Forwarding Station.
- 8 no. new Water Distribution Stations.
- Replacement of facilities and / or reinforcement works at 19 no. existing stations and replacement of electromechanical equipment at a number of existing stations.

The above station works will result in a total additional storage capacity of about 150 Million Gallons and an additional installed pumping capacity of about 120 MIGD. About 30 km of priority pipelines and some capacity enhancement works at the existing Al Dur Forwarding Station are already under execution. The remaining works are intended to be grouped into 11 no. contract packages for inviting bids. The packages shall be grouped for Pipelines (4 no. EPC packages including supply of DI pipes, fittings and valves), and Water Stations including automated pump stations, Ground Storage Tanks, and Elevated Storage Reservoirs (7 no. EPC packages). The contract packages will be tendered in stages commencing from the 2nd quarter of 2020 and the overall project is anticipated to be completed by May 2023.

The Electricity and Water Authority intends to prequalify contractors who can demonstrate experience in successful execution of works of a similar nature and have a sound financial background, prior to inviting them to tender for construction of the works. Applicants may apply to prequalify for one or multiple packages.

The Prequalification Document in English will be available for downloading from the Bahrain Tender Board Website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.bh/xcap/supplier/suplogin.aspx>

In order to purchase the document, interested applicants shall first register themselves in the e-Tendering system through the above link and fulfil the formalities mentioned in the Tender Board Website including the payment of the prescribed fees. Interested applicants must also confirm their willingness to submit an application, along with confirmation of the completion of Tender Board e-registration process at the address stated below within 10 days from the date of publication of this advertisement:

Dr. Kadhmed Hasan Madan
Director, Planning and Studies Directorate, Electricity and Water Authority, PO Box 2, Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain.
Fax: (+973) 17541189 • Tel: (+973) 17996808

The confirmation shall be copied to Mott MacDonald at the following address:

The Project Manager — Al Dur Phase II WTP
Mott MacDonald Ltd, PO Box 10471, 3rd Floor Office, Almoayed House - Building 2332, Road 2830 - Block 428, Al Seef District, Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain. • Fax: (+973) 17910087 • Tel: (+973) 17576400

Prequalification Documents can only be submitted by those firms who have confirmed their interest to participate in the prequalification process.

Applications for prequalification shall be submitted for each type of package in separate sealed envelopes to the Bahrain Tender Board Office as stipulated in the prequalification document. The date of the submission shall be as notified on the Tender Board Website.

An information meeting with the prospective applicants will be held approximately 14 days after the date of uploading the Prequalification Document to the Tender Board Website. The time and location of the meeting shall be advised. The purpose of the meeting is to explain the strategy of the project and to allow interaction between the interested applicants and the Electricity and Water Authority and Mott MacDonald.

In the event of any difficulty experienced with the e-registration process, the Applicant may contact the Authority or Mott MacDonald at the above addresses.

International

Victorious Johnson urges UK to move past Brexit divide

'Labour collapse' after losing 59 seats to end up with 203

LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson called on Britons to put years of bitter divisions over the country's EU membership behind them as he vowed to use his resounding election victory to finally deliver Brexit next month.

Johnson's ruling Conservatives won their best result for three decades on Thursday night after promising to get Britain out of the European Union on January 31, a new deadline set by Brussels. The snap general election turned into a re-run of the original 2016 EU membership referendum, whose outcome paralysed Britain's leaders and created divisions across society.

But in a victory speech in Downing Street on Friday, the former London mayor struck a magnanimous tone, vowing to listen to those who opposed Brexit and lead an inclusive government. "I urge everyone to find closure and to let the healing begin," he said hours after visiting Queen Elizabeth II to be reappointed prime minister.

Johnson staked his political career on the election, which created the possibility of the pro-EU opposition coming to power and calling a new Brexit referendum that could undo the results of the first. The gambit paid off spectacularly, with his Tories securing 365 seats in the 650-seat House of Commons — their biggest majority since the 1980s heyday of Margaret Thatcher.

It also devastated the main opposition Labour party, which suffered its worst result since 1935. Labour's socialist leader Jeremy Corbyn said he would step down after a period of "reflection" within the century-old party. The anti-Brexit Liberal Democrats also had a dismal night, falling to just 11 seats and losing their leader, Jo Swinson.

Honor the mandate

London stocks and the British pound jumped on hopes of an end to years of uncertainty, which has hurt investment and economic growth. Johnson said his party had an "overwhelming mandate from this election to get Brexit done". He promised to then focus on other public priorities, notably by increasing investment in healthcare, schools and infrastructure. "The work is now stepped up to make 2020 a year of prosperity and growth and hope," he concluded, to cheers from aides and activists outside Number 10.

Anti-Brexit campaign groups expressed dismay at the result, which spells the end of attempts to keep Britain in the European Union, although many voters welcomed a

decisive result. "At least it's clear," said lawyer Gordon Hockey in London. "It's not necessarily what I wanted but at least we know where we stand and Brexit will happen in some form or other."

Trump cheers 'great WIN'

Parliament will reconvene on Tuesday and Johnson is expected to publish legislation before Christmas needed to ratify the Brexit deal he agreed with Brussels in October. This should be passed by January but Britain and the EU still need to thrash out a new trade and security agreement — a process that officials have warned could take years.

At an EU summit in Brussels on Friday, the bloc's leaders expressed relief at the clear result and said they would work for a swift trade deal. But they warned that any new arrangement must uphold European values and norms.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Britain would be an economic "competitor at our door" after Brexit. The result of Britain's third election in almost five years signals a personal victory for Johnson, who remains a polarizing figure.

US President Donald Trump tweeted his congratulations on a "great WIN!" and said London and Washington would be able to strike a "massive new trade deal." He also told reporters on Friday that Johnson's victory bodes well for his own fortunes in next year's US election. "I want to congratulate Boris Johnson on a terrific victory. I think that might be a harbinger of what's to come in our country. It was last time," Trump said.

Johnson has promised new free-trade deals with the EU and the United States, and after Thursday's victory, now has the political capital at home to press ahead. The US State Department said Friday it was "committed" to reaching a comprehensive trade deal with its historically "once it formally withdraws from the European Union."

Labour collapse

Labour's support collapsed on Thursday, with the Tories taking many former strongholds in northern England and Wales that voted to leave the EU. The party lost 59 seats to end up with 203, after what Corbyn admitted had been a "very disappointing night."

Corbyn had promised a second referendum on Brexit in a bid to appeal to half of British voters who still want to stay in the EU. But he had focused Labour's campaign on a

House of Commons into a majority and move his government's agenda forward. Notably, that includes Britain - the world's fifth largest economy - exiting the European Union by the end of January, which would mark the country's most significant trade and foreign policy move since World War Two.

The five-week campaign also saw Johnson facing questions about his personal trustworthiness after his repeated failed promises during the year to deliver Brexit by the end of October "do or die." He faced allegations of failing to disclose close personal ties with a U.S. businesswoman who had received thousands of pounds in public business funding while he had been mayor. Jennifer Arcuri publicly said during the campaign she had had "a very special relationship" with Johnson, who has denied any impropriety. A government audit report ruled that a ministerial department's decision to award a 100,000 pound (\$128,000) grant to a company run by Arcuri was appropriate.

The plan early in the campaign was to target around 40 traditionally Labour supporting seats in northern and central England, a party source close to the campaign said. Johnson launched the Conservative campaign battle bus in Middleton in northwest England, in a district with a slim Labour majority but which saw 62% of voters back Brexit in 2016.

"The strategy is to woo Brexit Party supporters of all colors and to specifically court Labour leave voters especially in the North and Midlands," said the source,

speaking on Oct. 29, the day the House of Commons approved an early election. "The themes are people versus parliament, let's get Brexit done and move on, and a very merry Brexit to everyone."

Exit polls Thursday evening suggesting a major victory for Johnson caught some in the Conservative camp off guard. "I was stunned," said one member of Johnson's campaign team, who described the sense of relief that the campaign strategy to keep on message had worked.

As the results of the election rolled in early Friday, it became clear that the Conservatives had succeeded in scooping up seats in districts that had voted Labour for generations, including places like Bishop Auckland and Sedgefield, the seat held by former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair. However, Johnson's party had lost seats in some more pro-EU constituencies, such as Putney in London.

"This election means that getting Brexit done is now the irrefutable, irresistible, unarguable decision of the British people," said an ebullient Johnson on Friday morning. He also addressed those who had voted Conservative for the first time by saying "you may only have lent us your vote" and "you may intend to return to Labour next time round." He added: "I and we will never take your support for granted."

Core message

His often-ruffled appearance, including a distinctive mop of blonde hair, marks a contrast to the discipline and ruthlessness he displayed to get to this point. Johnson - full name is Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson - took office in July after winning

Constitutional change?

Northern Ireland voted by 56 percent to remain in the European Union in 2016. Since then, it has become central to a Brexit deal with Brussels. Unease spread about the prospect of a no-deal Brexit and the re-emergence of a hard border with EU neighbor Ireland to the south.

Border checks are associated with three decades of sectarian violence over British rule of Northern Ireland that left some 3,500 people dead. The potential removal of an open border — a plank of the 1998 agreement that ended "The Troubles" — has been seen as an unwelcome return to the past.

It also reopened the issue of Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom with England, Scotland and Wales, and the potential of a united Ireland. For the first time, the election returned more Irish republican than British unionist lawmakers to the UK House of Commons.

The largest republican party Sinn Fein even took the seat of North Belfast from unionist hands for the first time since it was drawn up in 1885. Sinn Fein leader Mary Lou McDonald called it a "historic moment". "The discussion around constitutional change is now underway," she told Irish broadcaster RTE Friday.

"It's safe to say that Irish unity will be firmly on the agenda in a way that it has never been before," Queen's University Belfast politics lecturer Jamie Pow told AFP. But he said the combined republican vote share from Thursday "still amounts to a minority." Those describing themselves as neither republican nor unionist will be key in any vote. They would likely be swayed by changes in economic or political circumstance, including those Brexit is forecast to bring.

Scotland eyes exit

After winning 48 of 59 seats in Scotland, SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon stepped up the pressure for a new referendum on independence. "The stunning election win from last night for the SNP renews, reinforces and strengthens the mandate we have from previous elections to offer the people of Scotland a choice over their future," she said.

The first Scotland independence referendum failed in 2014, when 55 percent voted in favor of preserving its membership in the United Kingdom. But Scotland opposed Britain's withdrawal from the European Union in the 2016. Sturgeon said Thursday's outcome gave Johnson a mandate to take England out of the European Union, but not Scotland. —AFP



SEDFIELD: Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson has a selfie photograph taken with a supporter during a visit to see newly elected Conservative party MP for Sedgefield, Paul Howell at Sedgefield Cricket Club in County Durham, north east England yesterday, following his Conservative party's general election victory. —AFP

News in brief

Boy, 13, arrested in student's death

NEW YORK: New York City police arrested a 13-year-old boy in connection with the murder of a college student in a Manhattan park, local media reported on Friday, rattling a city in which crime rates have plunged in recent years. Tessa Majors, 18, was stabbed multiple times with a knife on Wednesday evening during a robbery while walking through Harlem's Morningside Park near her school, Barnard College, according to the New York Police Department. Police believe there were up to three attackers. Majors was able to stagger out of the park to seek help at a nearby school security booth, and was declared dead at a hospital. She was completing her first semester at the women-only college after leaving her home in Charlottesville, Virginia, to move to the city. Morningside Park has long had a reputation for being unsafe and the site of numerous crimes, including murders. —Reuters

Arizona girl body found

PHOENIX: Arizona searchers on Friday recovered what was believed to be the body of a missing six-year-old girl at a lake northeast of Phoenix, the third child to have died when her family's vehicle attempted to cross a rain-swollen creek, authorities said. Sheriff's deputies said they believe they have found Willa Rawlings several miles from where the family's military-style truck was recovered roughly two weeks ago, a statement from the Gila County Sheriff's Office said. The family was notified. Law enforcement officials and volunteers had been combing the area by foot since Nov 29, when the truck entered the creek near a crossing that had been deemed impassable and was blocked off by authorities. Some two inches of rain had fallen in the area during a powerful winter storm. —Reuters

Greta: 'I need a break'

TURIN: Tireless teenage activist Greta Thunberg has been crisscrossing the globe by car, train and boat - but not plane - to demand action on climate change. But now even she needs a rest. Fresh from being named Time magazine's Person of the Year, the 16-year-old Swede joined thousands of students in the north Italian city of Turin on Friday for a protest to pressure the government to take more action to curb carbon emissions. Thunberg, who refuses to fly, travelled to Turin by train and car from Madrid after attending a UN climate summit in the Spanish capital. She arrived in Europe only a few days earlier aboard a catamaran after spending months campaigning in the United States. Now she needs a little downtime. "I will be home for Christmas and then I will take a holiday break because you need to take rest," she told reporters in Turin. "Otherwise you cannot do this all the time." —Reuters

How Johnson's election gamble paid off

LONDON: It was a straight forward message: "Get Brexit done." The mantra of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his Conservative Party during the national election campaign was aimed at harnessing voter frustration at a parliamentary logjam over Britain's exit from the European Union. It worked.

Beyond the traditional strategy of swaying voters in swing districts held by the main opposition Labour Party, Johnson wanted to strike directly at Labour's heartlands in the hopes of winning support from people who had never voted Conservative but for whom Brexit had come to trump even traditional party allegiances.

The Conservatives secured a commanding victory, winning 365 of the 650 seats in the House of Commons - the party's largest majority since under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. The result handed Johnson his first national election victory but also delivered a dramatic blow to his main competitor, opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn, whose Labour Party suffered a crushing defeat with just over 200 seats.

For 55-year old Johnson, who only entered Downing Street this summer after his Conservative predecessor resigned, calling an election had been a high-stakes gamble. But he also considered it a necessity to convert his party's minority in the

Election raises hopes, fears in Northern Ireland

BELFAST: Prime Minister Boris Johnson's crushing election victory gives Britain a chance to move past years of gridlock over Brexit — especially in Northern Ireland, where social and political divides run deep. "We're leaving limbo," said Orlaith McKeever, preparing food for the lunchtime rush at St. George's Market in Belfast, a redbrick rabbits' warren of stalls and kiosks.

Brexit-voting music trader Lawrence John, 69, also reflected relief that the stalled process of extricating Britain from the European Union after nearly five decades was finally moving ahead. "Like many, many people I'm sick of all this Brexit stuff. Three-and-a-half years ago there was a referendum to decide whether we were going to leave," he told AFP.

"We're just finally getting news that it can actually happen after all this time," he said after Johnson's Conservatives won their biggest majority since the heyday of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. Thursday's snap general became a re-run of the 2016 EU membership referendum in which Johnson championed the Brexit cause. The prime minister ran this campaign on the promise to "get Brexit done" — a simple but effective message with profound implications for Britain's most politically volatile region.

International

Divers search for remaining bodies from New Zealand volcanic eruption

Death toll rises to 17; minute's silence to be observed tomorrow

WELLINGTON: Divers searched seas around New Zealand's volatile White Island yesterday for two people still missing five days after the volcano erupted, as the death toll rose to 17. Police deputy commissioner John Tims said the divers faced "unique and challenging conditions" as they searched waters "with between zero and two meters visibility".

They were focusing on an area where a body was seen floating in the water earlier in the week. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, meanwhile, has called for a minute's silence to be observed at 2.11pm (0111 GMT) on Monday in honor of the victims of the eruption.

"Together we can express our sorrow for those who have died and been hurt, and our support for their grieving families and friends," Ardern said, with the minute's silence to start exactly one week after the eruption began.

Of the 47 people on the island at the time of the eruption, the number killed rose to 17 with another fatality confirmed yesterday, police said, without releasing details of name, age or nationality. Another 27 remain in hospitals in New Zealand and Australia with 20 listed as being in a "critical" condition.

Scientists monitoring the island said the likelihood of another eruption over the weekend was decreasing but the risk remained. "Their new calculation was that there is a 35-50 per cent chance of an eruption occurring," Natalia Deligne, a volcanic hazard and risk modeller, said.

The remains of six people were retrieved Friday in a daring operation by elite soldiers with two mili-

tary helicopters under threat of another blast. The recovery had been on hold for days as poisonous gases continued billowing from the volcanic vent and the island remained blanketed in a thick layer of acidic ash.

The coroner in New Zealand is working through a "robust" process to identify the bodies, authorities said. Most of the people on the island were tourists from Australia, the United States, Britain, China, Germany, Malaysia and New Zealand who were on a day trip to see the natural wonder.

The survivors' injuries are so severe New Zealand doctors initially estimated they would need to import 1.2 million square centimeters (185,000 square inches) of skin for grafts. New Zealand police on Saturday officially identified the first victim as 21-year-old Australian woman Krystal Browitt.

Browitt was on a family holiday to celebrate her birthday in New Zealand when she joined her older sister Stephanie and father Paul on a visit to the island. Her mother Marie stayed behind on the boat, and has since been by the bedside of her daughter and husband who were both originally in a coma in a hospital burns unit following the eruption, according to a GoFundMe page set up for the family.

"It has been quite difficult," a friend of the Browitt daughters, Tahlia West said. West remembered Krystal as "just a beautiful girl, very caring, very gentle." All 13 Australians hospitalized have been repatriated. The current condition of Stephanie and Paul is unknown. —AFP



WHAKATANE: This handout photo taken and released on December 13, 2019 by the New Zealand Defense Force shows elite soldiers taking part in a mission to retrieve bodies from White Island after the December 9 volcanic eruption, off the coast from Whakatane on the North Island. —AFP

Supporters throng streets as Myanmar leader Suu Kyi returns

NAYPYITAW: Thousands of supporters of Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi thronged the streets of the capital Naypyitaw yesterday to celebrate her arrival back from The Hague, where she defended the country against genocide charges.

The Nobel laureate waved as her black car drove slowly past crowds who waved flags, held up pictures of her face and shouted jubilant greetings.

"Mother Suu went to the court on behalf of the country," local farmer Khin Maung Shwe told Reuters. "Actually the accusation was against the army. But she took the first step of responsibility as a leader of the nation."

Gambia has accused Myanmar of violating the 1948 Genocide Convention over a military campaign

that drove more than 730,000 Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar. It has asked the International Court of Justice to order "provisional measures" to prevent more harm.

Suu Kyi led a team to the Netherlands for three days of hearings, during which she denied genocide and argued the U.N. court should not have jurisdiction.

"Myanmar requests the court to remove the case from its list," Suu Kyi said on the final day of hearings on Thursday. "In the alternative (the court should) reject the request for provisional measures submitted by the Gambia." The Nobel Peace Prize laureate's surprise decision to attend the hearings in person has dealt a further blow to her tarnished international reputation.

Suu Kyi was long feted in the West as a champion of human rights and democracy, and was a high-profile political prisoner during 15 years of house arrest for her opposition to Myanmar's then ruling military junta.

But her stance on the Rohingya issue has seen her stripped of many awards, calls for the Nobel committee to revoke her peace prize and strong criticism



NAYPYITAW: Myanmar's State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi waves to supporters upon arriving back in Naypyitaw yesterday. —AFP

from former celebrity supporters and other organizations.

At home however, Suu Kyi, the daughter of Myanmar's founding father Aung San, is still revered by

many. The proceedings in the Hague have galvanized supporters, who have staged rallies across the country chanting "Stand with Suu Kyi" and waving flags. —Reuters

Thousands rally behind Thai anti-establishment frontman

BANGKOK: Thousands rallied in Bangkok behind the popular leader of an upstart anti-establishment party yesterday, in the first major protest since March elections returned a junta-aligned government to power.

Protesters held signs calling for democracy and flashed a three-finger salute, a rallying symbol used by the Future Forward Party that got more than six million votes in the election, thanks to mostly young Thais weary of the military's role in politics.

The party's popular billionaire leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit called for those who could "no longer tolerate the current social conditions" to come out in a flash mob demonstration. "We want to show the power of the people who will not surrender," he shouted in a megaphone to gathered supporters.

"Today we stand together and we want to tell them that we are not afraid," he yelled to people chanting "long live democracy." Police told AFP yesterday that roughly 150 "unarmed" officers would be deployed to Bangkok's tourist-friendly downtown shopping district for the rally.

"I don't think we have a real democracy," said 27-year-old Nithiwadee, who held a sign calling for the constitution to be amended. "This party has the bravery to say what others do not," she added. Under junta rule which followed a coup in 2014 there have been no massive rallies, and March's elections — governed under a military-scripted constitution — reinstated former junta chief Prayut Chan-O-Cha as prime minister.

Future Forward's popularity has rattled the military and its allies, and its executives have been battered by legal woes since the election. The latest threatens the party with dissolution over alleged illegal loans from Thanathorn — a case submitted Friday to a court that stripped his MP status last month.

The 41-year-old leader has repeatedly said the cases against him and FFP are politically motivated. Thailand's political scene has been dominated by violence



BANGKOK: Thai politician and leader of the opposition Future Forward Party Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit arrives at a rally in Bangkok yesterday. —AFP

since 2006, with street protests devolving into blood-soaked disorder.

In 2010, the military — led by then-army chief Prayut — opened fire on protesters gathered in downtown Bangkok, killing more than 90.

Thailand's courts have played a central role in taking out political threats to the establishment and no civilian government has completed its term since 2006. The country has seen more than a dozen coups since 1932. —AFP

Three dead in Nepal bomb blast

KATHMANDU: Three people, including a police official, were killed when a bomb exploded in southern Nepal yesterday. The device detonated outside a local residence after the owner called the police to report a suspicious object on his premises in Dhanusha district.

"The blast occurred just as our team reached there to investigate. The owner, his son and a member of our force were killed," senior police official Pradhuma Karki said. Karki said that two more members of the family and another police officer were also injured and are undergoing treatment.

"We are investigating the case, no one has claimed its responsibility yet," he said. Nepal has enjoyed relative peace since the end of a decade-long civil war which concluded with a peace deal struck in 2006. In May, four people were killed and seven injured in three blasts in the capital Kathmandu, as members of an outlawed Maoist faction made a botched attempt to plant bombs around the city. —AFP



JANAKPUR DHAM: Local people look at the site of a bomb blast in Mahendra Nagar, Janakpur, some 300 km southeast of Kathmandu yesterday. —AFP

Drought displaces thousands of Ethiopians

LONDON: Hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians are living in camps up to four years after being displaced by drought, researchers said on Friday, warning climate change could exacerbate the problem. Ethiopia is home to millions of pastoralists who are particularly vulnerable to climate change as they depend on their livestock to survive.

A new study by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), which compiles global data, found pastoralists in the Somali region of southeast Ethiopia lost up to 80 percent of their cattle in a 2015-2017 drought. It said 425,000 were still displaced, many living in camps. "The most important problem that they (pastoralists) are facing is that the droughts in the last years are more intense and more frequent," the report's author Pablo Ferrandez told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. The researchers interviewed 219 people in July 2019 for the study. —Reuters

North Korea conducts 'crucial test' at Sohae launch site: KCNA

SEOUL: North Korea has conducted another "crucial test" at its Sohae satellite launch site, state media reported yesterday, as nuclear negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington remain stalled with a deadline approaching. The announcement comes a day before US Special Envoy on North Korea Stephen Biegun is set to arrive in Seoul for a three-day visit, and after the United States tested a medium-range ballistic missile over the Pacific Ocean on Thursday.

"Another crucial test was successfully conducted at the Sohae Satellite Launching Ground from 22:41 to 22:48 on December 13," a spokesman for the North's National Academy of Defense Science said in a statement carried by the official KCNA news agency. The "research successes" will be "applied to further bolstering up the reliable strategic nuclear deterrent" of North Korea, the spokesman added. The statement did not provide further details on the test. Sohae, on North Korea's northwest coast, is ostensibly a facility designed for putting satellites into orbit. But Pyongyang has carried out several rocket launches there that were condemned by the US and others as disguised long-range ballistic missile tests. The North is banned from firing ballistic missiles under UN Security Council resolutions, and rocket engines can be easily repurposed for use in missiles. Frustrated by the lack of sanctions relief after three summits with President Donald Trump, North Korea has vowed an ominous "Christmas gift" if the US does not come up with concessions by the end of the year.

Some analysts have suggested the North may be referring to an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Earlier this month the North announced it conducted what it called a "very important test" at the same site in Sohae. "It's very likely that the North is going to fire something on Christmas day, and they may call it a rocket system when it actually is an ICBM," Ahn Chan-il, a North Korean defector and researcher in Seoul, told AFP. "The tests at Sohae can be seen as a form of preparation for the launch — whatever it will be — on December 25."

End-of-year deadline

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un had agreed to shutter the Sohae site during a summit last year with South Korean President Moon Jae-in in Pyongyang as part of trust-building measures. Kim has also held three meetings with US President Donald Trump since June 2018.

But his nuclear negotiations with Washington have been deadlocked since a summit in Hanoi broke up in February, and Pyongyang has issued a series of increasingly assertive comments in recent weeks as its time limit approaches.

The North this week criticised Washington as "foolish" for convening a UN Security Council meeting over growing concern about short-range rockets fired from the isolated state. By arranging the meeting, Washington "decisively helped us make a definite decision on what way to choose," North Korea's foreign ministry spokesman said.

Last week, the North's vice foreign minister warned of returning to a war of words with the US, threatening to resume referring to Trump as a "dotard" — Pyongyang's nickname for the US leader at the height of tensions in 2017.

The comments came a day after it warned that if the US used military force against the North it would take "prompt corresponding actions at any level." Back in 2017 North Korea announced it successfully tested an ICBM capable of reaching Alaska. At the recent NATO summit, Trump boasted about Washington's "most powerful military", adding: "Hopefully, we don't have to use it, but if we do, we'll use it. If we have to, we'll do it." —AFP

Analysis

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5 years of thirst: South Africa's Eastern Cape battles brutal drought

South African farmer Steve Bothma heaved a sigh of relief when the weatherman finally predicted rain. His excitement was short-lived. Just a few days later, the forecast changed. It was back to cloudless sunshine. In South Africa's Eastern Cape province, no one can remember the last proper downpour. Some say it was five years ago, others six.

"This is a disaster," said Bothma, 51, who in his three decades working the land has never seen such dry weather. "Older people who are 70 or 80 years old would tell you exactly the same thing," he added. Southern Africa is grappling with one of the worst droughts in decades—the outcome of years of absent or erratic rainfall, and temperatures that have reached record highs. Millions are facing hunger due to poor harvests and dwindling livestock. "It is usually beautifully green at this time of the year," said Bothma, as a hot gust of wind swept through his sheep pen.

"But now even the pine trees are dying." South Africa is one of the world's driest countries at the best of times. Rapid urbanisation and growing water consumption have placed a strain on water reserves and caused the coastal city of Cape Town to almost run dry in 2018. But the ongoing drought has compounded the situation. Dam levels dropped dangerously low in October, prompting President Cyril Ramaphosa to call for "drastic measures". South Africa is in "a dire situation", said Ramaphosa in October, highlighting that five out of nine provinces were badly hit.

To the slaughterhouse

Bothma has had to cull around 60 percent of his merino sheep, including lambs. Because of the drought, he could only afford to keep 2,000 as "breeding stock". "Usually I keep them until they are five or six years old," Bothma explained, as his staff selected animals for the next trip to the slaughterhouse.

The price he gets for his merino wool has plunged by around 40 percent over the past year due to the drought and a foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in the north of the country. "The wool is full of dust and not very strong," said Bothma. Years of dry weather have left scars in the landscape. Arid fields flanked the windy gravel road leading to the nearest town of Adelaide, tucked at the bottom of a mountain range. Cows chewed pieces of wood and sheep ambled in search of food. In town, livestock roamed the streets and nibbled at scorched grass on the golf course. The nearest dam dried up at the start of the year.

'Can't wash'

Some of Adelaide's 15,000 inhabitants had been without running water for seven months. A South African aid group, Gift of the Givers, has been helping by delivering water to the area since April. On a recent water mission, hundreds of people in the township of Bezuidenhoutville rushed up with an array of empty bottles, buckets, iceboxes and even paint cans. "We are keeping it for food and drink," said Rodney Douglas, 59, pushing a wheelbarrow piled high with plastic jerrycans.

Assanda Sais, 38, complained that she could only spare enough water to bathe once a week and that her house was "smelling". "We keep dirty water to flush," she explained. Bezuidenhoutville's local middle school has had to shorten its week by half a day due to the lack of water. Many children were missing class altogether. "Kids have to help parents to carry water," said teacher Zeenat Gangat, sweltering as the sun beat down on the container walls of a classroom. "They can't wash," she added. "They complain about stomach issues."

Poor infrastructure

Local authorities have tried to ease the situation by connecting sections of the town to a reservoir fed by Fish River, around 50 kilometers (30 miles) away. The water is allocated on a rotational basis, but even then the pipeline to the river is way too narrow. Adelaide deputy mayor Bornboy Ndyebi said the town's pipelines were in poor shape, and Thandekile Mnyimba, who heads the regional district of Amathole, told AFP that water trucks supplied by the government had broken down.

South Africa's main opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA), has accused the ruling party of acting too late. "It is only when the dam reached a very low level - around four percent - that they woke up," said DA councillor Ernie Lombard. Ramaphosa has sought to pin the blame on years of poor governance under former president Jacob Zuma, whom he succeeded in 2018. "Corruption in the water sector has in no small part contributed to the situation we currently face," he declared. — AFP

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Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson delivers a speech outside 10 Downing Street in central London, following his Conservative party's general election victory. — AFP

How the world is reacting to Johnson's win

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's resounding election victory was largely welcomed by governments around the world on Friday, with hopes it will put an end to years of Brexit deadlock. But EU leaders warned of the challenges ahead in securing a trade deal with the bloc after it leaves on January 31, and said they did not want an "unfair" competitor on their doorstep. Here are some of the initial reactions:

'Massive' trade deal with US

"Congratulations to Boris Johnson on his great WIN!" US President Donald Trump tweeted. "Britain and the United States will now be free to strike a massive new Trade Deal after BREXIT. This deal has the potential to be far bigger and more lucrative than any deal that could be made with the E.U. Celebrate Boris!"

'Competitor at our door'

"My hope is that the United Kingdom remains an ally, a friend and an extremely close partner. The condition is to define the rules of a fair relationship," French President Emmanuel Macron said after an EU summit, amid fears London will seek to lower taxes and regulations after Brexit. "We do not want Britain to be an unfair competitor."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel issued a similar warning. "There will be a competitor at our door..."

that may also encourage us to be quicker in our decisions," she said at the same summit. Earlier Merkel had issued congratulations to Johnson and said: "I look forward to our further cooperation towards the friendship and close partnership of our countries." The EU's Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton said the two sides now had to rebuild "balanced" relations. Britain, he said, was a very important trade partner for the EU, "but we are by far the biggest trading partner for Britain".

'Constructive dialogue'

"I am sure that the development of constructive dialogue and cooperation in various spheres would be fully in the interests of our countries' peoples and the entire European continent." Russian President Vladimir Putin said. His spokesman had said earlier that the Kremlin was not sure the Conservative victory would bring "good relations" with Russia, which have been strained in recent years. "I don't know to what extent such expectations are appropriate in the case of the Conservatives," Dmitry Peskov told journalists.

'Milestone in fight against hatred'

"This is not just a political victory, it is first and foremost a victory of values," Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said. "The spectre of anti-Semitism loomed

large over this campaign, and the British public overwhelmingly voted against it in what is, in our opinion, a testament to British history and values." He was referring to allegations dogging opposition Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn that he turned a blind eye to growing anti-Semitism in his party. "It serves as an important milestone in the fight against hatred."

'Looking forward to stability'

"Congratulations @BorisJohnson on a resounding victory and being returned as UK PM," tweeted Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison. "Looking forward to the stability this brings and a new deal for Oz with the UK. Say g'day to the quiet Britons for us."

'Closest possible cooperation'

"The political situation in Great Britain has become clearer. Unfortunately, from a Polish point of view, Brexit will take place soon, but there is something good in what has happened," said Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. "We can expect a stable political situation in Great Britain and an early start to negotiations that will clarify a mechanism for the closest possible cooperation between Great Britain and the European Union and between Great Britain and Poland, cooperation in the fields of trade... defense and of course politics. — AFP

Washington Watch

Overlooked congressional rebuke of Trump position on Israeli settlements

Dr James J Zogby
President Arab American Institute

President Arab American Institute the most stunning rebuke to the Trump Administration's unilateral effort to legitimize Israeli settlements didn't come from Arab and European leaders. Over the years, their statements of condemnation have become so predictable that both Israel and the US routinely shrug them off. Instead, the most significant response came in the form of a letter sent by Members of Congress to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

Drafted by freshman Congressman Andy Levin of Michigan, the letter was co-signed by 106 other Representatives. While it's true that the Levin letter isn't a law and, therefore, will have no real impact on policy, there are several reasons why it is worthy of note. Most important is fact that the letter strongly endorses the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands.

The third and final paragraph of the letter to Secretary Pompeo reads: "This State Department decision blatantly disregards Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which affirms that any occupying power shall not 'deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies'...If the US unilaterally abandons international and human rights law, we can expect a more chaotic and brutal twenty-first century for America and our allies..."

This is the first time that a substantial number of Members of Congress have embraced the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. In fact, in 1999 and 2009 Congress passed resolutions denouncing international efforts to hold Israel accountable for its violations of the Conventions. The principle reason for this Congressional refusal to embrace the Conventions has been in deference to Israel's insistence that its seizure of Palestinian lands in 1967 was not an occupation. Instead they refer to the territories as "disputed areas."

That being the case, Israel has long refused to accept that the Conventions apply to Palestinian lands, since if they were to apply, then Israel would be guilty of: "annexing" occupied lands, demolishing Palestinian properties and homes, building settlements for their own citizens on this land, stealing resources from this land, the expulsion of and denial of repatriation of Palestinians who inhabited this land, and whole range of human rights abuses committed against the captive Palestinian population including torture, collective punishment, and illegal detention.

Israel has also used pressure from their Washington lobbyists to insure that not only would Congress refrain from taking any measure against Israel, they would also avoid using the term "occupied" in reference to Palestinian lands. [In 2016, I served as one of Bernie Sanders' representatives on the Democratic Party's platform drafting committee. Our efforts to insert the words "occupation" and "settlements" were met with stiff resistance. We ultimately failed in our efforts.]

In recent years we have witnessed some evolution in the policy debate over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Three of the leading Democratic candidates for the presidency have criticized Israeli settlements, denounced Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's declared intention to annex parts of the West Bank. These Democrats also link future US aid to Israel to Israeli policies toward the Palestinians. And last week, the House of Representatives passed a bill, that among other things, did support Palestinian statehood and strongly opposed Israeli annexation of any part of the West Bank.

But none of these efforts have gone as far as the Levin letter which in an unprecedented manner holds Israel accountable to international law. While Democrats have been emboldened on Israeli-Palestinian issues as a result of their disgust with the Trump/Netanyahu marriage, what is impressive about the Levin letter is that it isn't tied to or focused on Democrats revulsion with both men. Rather, the letter focuses on the importance of the US upholding international human rights law and demands that Israel adhere to its requirements - whoever is in office in Israel or the United States.

A final point about the importance of Levin letter was the fact that it was signed 107 Members of Congress. There have been strong principled letters on Israeli-Palestinian issues in the past, but never one that drew the support of so many. While they were all Democrats, the diversity they represented was impressive. There were senior leaders in the party, as well as freshman and there were African American, Latino, Arab Americans and American Jews.

What was troubling was the fact that the Levin letter was largely ignored by the US media. Because it was a letter and not a law, some may have failed to grasp the important shift it represents in the political landscape. These changes have been percolating under surface for years. Now they are breaking out into the open. This story is still being written.

Corbyn: Shattered dreams of global far-left revolution

Jeremy Corbyn had hoped to become the vanguard of a global socialist movement but will step down in humiliation after overseeing his party's worst election defeat since 1935. To his supporters, the 70-year-old offered a chance to deliver a radical leftist agenda, shaking up the economy and reversing a decade of Conservative public spending cuts. His vision attracted droves of young supporters, celebrity backing and the endorsement of other figures of the global socialist movement, with high-profile US congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez sending a supportive tweet on polling day.

But the wider public failed to warm to him, a situation made worse by his refusal to take a position on Brexit and accusations of anti-Semitism and sympathizing with terrorists. With two seats left to declare, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservatives inflicted Labor's worst loss since 1935. One of the first results emphasized Labor's woes, with the former safe seat of Blyth Valley in a one-time mining area in northeastern England voting Tory for the first time in its history.

As he announced he was stepping down as leader, Corbyn defended his "manifesto of hope" and maintained his proposals were "extremely popular" during the campaign. But his message was eclipsed by Brexit. Critics from the centre of Labor rounded on the leader, while the hashtag #Corbynout was quickly trending on social media. "Essentially the election was a referendum on Corbyn," said Andrew Adonis, who served as a minister under former Labor premier Tony Blair.

Brexit neutrality

Bearded and teetotal, with a love of making jam and spotting manhole covers, Corbyn was a lifelong campaigner on socialist causes who spent many years happily on the fringes of the Labor party. But he put himself forward for the Labor leadership in 2015 to ensure a left-wing voice was represented - and surprised everyone by winning, propelled to power thanks to grassroots support. He commands cult-like adoration from young supporters in England's larger urban centers, and in the 2017 election used this to huge effect.

He held huge rallies around the country, and that year tens of thousands sang his name as he addressed the Glastonbury Festival. But he lost some of his sheen for many pro-European youngsters with his ambivalent stance on Brexit, and the wider public were not convinced. He went into this election as the most unpopular opposition leader to have contested a British vote. Corbyn caused some trouble for Johnson by accusing the prime minister of plotting to sell off the National Health Service in a "toxic" post-Brexit trade deal with US President Donald Trump.

His warnings of the impact of years of austerity also helped shift the debate, with the Conservatives promising more money for public services. — AFP

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Business

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GILROY: Employees work with garlic on the production line at Christopher Ranch in Gilroy, California. In trade negotiations with China, President Donald Trump has made it a priority that the Asian giant buys tens of billions of dollars in US farm goods. Achieving that goal is another matter. — AFP

US, China cool their trade war

Washington, Beijing announce 'Phase one'; Trade deal cuts tariffs

WASHINGTON: The United States and China cooled their trade war yesterday, announcing a "Phase one" agreement that reduces some US tariffs in exchange for what US officials said would be a big jump in Chinese purchases of American farm products and other goods. Beijing has agreed to import at least \$200 billion in additional US goods and services over the next two years on top of the amount it purchased in 2017, the top US trade negotiator said Friday.

If the purchases are made, they would represent a huge jump in US exports to China. China bought \$130 billion in US goods in 2017, before the trade war began, and \$56 billion in services, US Bureau of Economic Analysis data show. In return, the United States would suspend tariffs on Chinese goods due to go into effect on Sunday and reduce others, US officials said. The 86-page agreement is due to be signed the first week of January in Washington by principal negotiators.

"We have agreed to a very large Phase One Deal with China," US President Donald Trump tweeted Friday morning. Officials in China have "agreed to many structural changes and massive purchases of Agricultural Product, Energy, and

Manufactured Goods, plus much more," he said. Trump later told reporters at the White House that he thought China would hit \$50 billion in agricultural purchases, repeating a promise he made to US farmers in October. At a news conference in Beijing, Chinese officials said the two sides had agreed on the text of a deal, but offered no specific details on the amount of US goods China had agreed to buy.

US markets have gyrated on rumors and leaks about the trade deal in recent months, but were muted on Friday on news it had been agreed. The agreement was announced as the US House Judiciary Committee voted to charge Trump with abuse of power and obstruction during an impeachment inquiry. It also followed closely on the heels of a deal with the US Congress paving the way for passage of a new North American trade agreement.

China AG buys

Beijing has committed to buying \$32 billion more in farm products over the next two years, or about \$16 billion a year, US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer told reporters at the White House, on top of a baseline of \$24 billion in Chinese purchases in 2017. In addition, Beijing said it

would make a big effort to spend an additional \$5 billion a year. "To me it's an enormously important first step in our relationship," Lighthizer said. "This is China taking real commitments to do real things in a reasonable period of time, that's enforceable."

He said China would be free to buy things when "it's the perfect time in the market to buy things." China will import more US wheat, corn, and rice, China's vice agricultural minister said on Friday, without elaborating. China has not been a major buyer of US corn, wheat or rice in the past - though in recent years it has been the No 3 or 4 buyer of one particular variety of wheat, US spring wheat used for blending. China was a top 5 buyer of US corn from 2011 to 2014 but has not been a major buyer since.

Soybeans made up half of China's agricultural purchases in 2017. Demand has since cratered because the pig herds that eat it have been reduced by African swine fever, however. Asked about Trump's \$50 billion figure, officials in Beijing said on Friday that details would be disclosed later. Some American farmers said they were waiting for more. "Is China going to live up to their commitment?," said Burton Eller, executive director of the National



BEIJING: In this file photo US President Donald Trump (left) and China's President Xi Jinping leave a business leaders event at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. The United States and China announced a major thaw in their trade war, including immediate cuts to punishing import tariffs, but markets were not impressed. —AFP

Grange, an agriculture advocacy group, and a beef cattle farmer.

"Are we going to get something in black and white that says they're going to buy this much over this much time or this kind of commodity they're going to need?" he said. Lighthizer said China also

agreed to buy more US manufactured goods, energy and services, but provided no details. He said the agreement included specific targets for those broad areas that would be published later, and specific targets for specific products that would remain classified. —Reuters

What's in the US-China 'phase one' trade deal

WASHINGTON: The United States and China have agreed on the terms of a "phase one" trade deal that reduces some US tariffs on Chinese goods while boosting Chinese purchases of American farm, energy and manufactured goods and addressing some US complaints about intellectual property practices. Following are details of the deal released by both sides. The broad outlines were similar to a deal in principle announced by Trump in October that was dominated by increased Chinese purchases of US agricultural goods.

Tariffs

The United States will not proceed with 15% tariffs scheduled to go into effect on Sunday on nearly \$160 billion worth of Chinese goods, including cell phones, laptop computers, toys and clothing. China canceled its retaliatory tariffs due to take effect that same day, including a 25% tariff on US-made autos. The United States will cut by half the tariff rate it imposed on Sept 1 on a \$120 billion list of Chinese goods, to 7.5%. US tariffs of 25% on \$250 billion worth of Chinese goods will remain unchanged, providing US negotiating leverage for a second phase of negotiations next year.

Trade deficit

US officials say China agreed to increase purchases of American products and services by at least \$200 billion over the next two years, with an expectation that the higher purchases will continue after that period.

The purchases include manufactured goods, agricultural goods, energy and services, and are expected to reduce the \$419 billion US trade deficit with China, officials said. China bought \$130 billion in US goods in 2017, before the trade war began, and \$56 billion in services, US data show.

Agriculture

China has committed to increase purchases of US agriculture products by \$32 billion over two years. That would average an annual total of about \$40 billion, compared to a baseline of \$24 billion in 2017 before the trade war started. Trump has demanded that China buy \$50 billion worth of American farm goods annually. US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer said China agreed to make its best efforts to increase its purchases by another \$5 billion annually to get close \$50 billion. China has committed to reduce non-tariff barriers to

agricultural products such as poultry, seafood and feed additives as well as approval of biotechnology products.

Intellectual property

The deal includes stronger Chinese legal protections for patents, trademarks, copyrights, including improved criminal and civil procedures to combat online infringement, pirated and counterfeit goods. The deal contains commitments by China to follow through on previous pledges to eliminate any pressure for foreign companies to transfer technology to Chinese firms as a condition of market access, licensing or administrative approvals and to eliminate any government advantages for such transfers. China also agreed to refrain from directly supporting outbound investment aimed at acquiring foreign technology to meet its industrial plans-transactions already restricted by

stronger US security reviews.

Currency

The currency agreement contains pledges by China to refrain from competitive currency devaluations and to not target its exchange rate for a trade advantage-language that China has accepted for years as part of its commitments to the Group of 20 major economies. The deal subjects any violations of currency commitments to the agreement's enforcement mechanism, under which they could incur US tariffs. A senior Trump administration official said the currency agreement is based on provisions in the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement trade deal, which require the three countries to disclose monthly data on international reserve balances and intervention in foreign exchange markets, along with quarterly balance-of-payments data and other public reporting to the International Monetary Fund. —Reuters

Caution lingers on US-China deal as shares gain, oil rises

Pound surges as Conservative Party scores solid majority

NEW YORK: Global equity markets and oil prices rose on Friday after China and the United States agreed on an initial trade deal...

Beijing agreed to buy \$32 billion in additional agricultural goods over the next two years, US officials said, up from a baseline of \$24 billion purchased in 2017, before the trade dispute started...

MSCI's gauge of global equities rose 0.55%, while the pan-European STOXX 600 index gained 1.25%, boosted by hopes of an orderly Brexit after a landslide victory for UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson...

that is not going away, that is probably with us for a long time," he said. MSCI's gauge of global stock performance and the three main US equity indexes hit record highs.

Investors are weary of the rhetoric, while on the margin Johnson's victory is bigger news than what could be viewed as trade positioning, said Jack Ablin, chief investment officer at Cresset Capital Management.

"If there are two great countries locked in a strategic war, which is what a great power struggle is, then

drag on for months, if not years. UK shares exposed to Britain's economy surged, with the benchmark FTSE 100 index gaining more than 2% at one point as the rally offset the drag from a jump in sterling. The pound

MSCI's world index, US stocks hit record highs



rose to a 19-month high against the US dollar and shares in Europe rose to near all-time highs as investors cheered the likelihood of an orderly Brexit.

The dollar fell against a basket of currencies as the prospect of a China-US trade deal and the British election results sapped safe-haven demand for the greenback.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) settled up 89 cents at \$60.07 a barrel. During the session, both contracts jumped to their highest levels since Sept 17, with WTI topping \$60 a barrel.

US-China trade war: The dates

WASHINGTON: Key dates in the trade battle between the United States and China, who on Friday announced a "phase one" trade deal to end a 21-month standoff.

March 2018: Tax on steel

On March 8, President Donald Trump announces tariffs of 25 percent on steel imports and 10 percent on aluminum from a number of countries in a bid to slash the huge US trade deficit...

July 2018: Tit-for-tat

On July 6 the US slaps punitive duties on about \$34 billion of Chinese imports including cars, hard disks and aircraft parts. Beijing imposes tariffs of equal size and scope, including on farm products, especially soybeans...

May 2019: Hostilities resume

After a truce of several months, Washington reignites its trade war on May 10 by increasing to 25 percent duties on \$200 billion in Chinese imports. Opening a new front, Trump on May 15 bars US companies from using foreign telecoms equipment...

August: Yuan devalued

In early August, China allows the yuan to fall below 7.0 to the dollar for the first time in 11 years. Washington accuses Beijing of manipulating its currency to help its exports, a charge it denies.

China announces on August 23 it will hit US soybeans, lobsters, peanut butter and other imports worth \$75 billion with new tariffs in retaliation for the looming hikes. It says it will also reimpose a 25 percent tariff on US autos...

NBK: Enjoy up to 50% cashback on your everyday shopping

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to reward its customers with its cashback campaign until the end of December 2019. Customers will enjoy up to 50% guaranteed cashback on purchases made using their eligible NBK Visa Credit Cards...

The campaign is exclusive to NBK Visa Platinum, NBK Visa Signature and NBK Visa Infinite Credit Cardholders, and is valid on purchases made at the following retailers: Cinescape 50%, Ooredoo 15%,

VIVA, Huawei ink MOU to develop 5G services

KUWAIT: VIVA (an STC Company), a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, and enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait has signed Memorandum of Understanding with Huawei Technologies Kuwait Co WLL...

This agreement is a road methodology promoting synergies and best practices in line with the digital transformation to deliver outstanding services to VIVA customers not limited to consumers, home and enterprise...

"I'm extremely proud of what VIVA and Huawei team have accomplished in our time together through a rare combination of passion, dedication and innovation; moving forward, we will continue to invest in customer experience and 5G solutions to meet the needs of our consumers and enterprise business development..."



Ryan Ding said, "5G in particular also promises to accelerate Kuwait's digital transformation to various industries from oil/gas industry to smart cities to public safety and achieve new business growth for all participating parties..."

Lebanon seeks IMF, World Bank's help

BEIRUT: Lebanon's caretaker prime minister has asked international funding bodies for support in drawing up an emergency rescue plan for his protest-ravaged country. Donors including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have rebuffed a plea for financial aid...

made phone calls to World Bank president David Malpass and IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva, his office said. "Hariri stressed his commitment to preparing an urgent rescue plan to resolve the crisis, while waiting for the formation of a new cabinet able to implement it..."

"He discussed with both the technical support the World Bank and IMF could provide in drawing up this plan," it added. Lebanon has been rocked by unprecedented popular protests since October 17 over official mismanagement and corruption demonstrators blame for a deteriorating economy...

dollar and used in everyday transactions, banks have gradually restricted greenback withdrawals, causing a dollar liquidity crisis that has made imports increasingly difficult and expensive.

Hariri also spoke to the president of the World Bank about "the possibility of the bank... increasing its contribution to funding international trade to Lebanon" to help importers bring in essential goods. Lebanon has been without a cabinet since Hariri stepped down on October 29, with a bitterly divided political class unable to agree on a new premier ever since...

EXCHANGE RATES

Table with columns for Al-Muzaini Exchange Co., EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES, ASIAN COUNTRIES, GCC COUNTRIES, ARAB COUNTRIES. Lists various currencies and their exchange rates.

Table with columns for Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd., Rate for Transfer, Selling Rate. Lists various currencies and their exchange rates.

Table with columns for BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL, CURRENCY, BUY, SELL. Lists various currencies and their exchange rates.

Table with columns for various currencies and their exchange rates. Includes Chinese Yuan, Hong Kong Dollar, Indian Rupee, etc.

Business

Investors slash bets on weaker pound after Johnson's victory

Pound jumps to \$1.35 after Conservatives' election win

LONDON: Sterling was well supported yesterday as investors rushed to unwind bets on a weaker pound after a resounding election victory for Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative Party. Johnson's win will allow him to end three years of political paralysis and take Britain out of the European Union in an orderly manner in a matter of weeks. The pound was last trading up 1.1% at \$1.324, giving up some of the gains it made overnight when it surged to a 19-month high of \$1.3516. Against the euro, the pound was up 1.3% at 83.43 pence, having skyrocketed to a 3-1/2-year high of 82.78 pence.

It had jumped more than 2.5% after exit polls pointing to the scale of the Conservatives' win were published, making it at that time its biggest one-day gain in nearly three years. This was a remarkable jump for a currency that has become extremely volatile since Britain voted to leave the EU in a referendum in 2016. Vasileios Gkionakis, global head of FX strategy at Lombard Odier, said he had now sold sterling after increasing his holding in the currency when it was languishing at \$1.26. "From a risk-reward perspective it makes sense to take profit," he said. But Gkionakis believes sterling could rise to \$1.40 as there was a chance Johnson could now seek to extend the post-Brexit transi-

tion period beyond December 2020 in order to complete negotiations on a future trade deal with the EU. During the election campaign, the prime minister had pledged not to do this. Moreover, with a strong majority in parliament, "Johnson will not rely on Eurosceptics to hold him hostage," Gkionakis said.

Rate cut bets scaled back

Analysts from HSBC expect sterling to rise to \$1.45 and to 76 pence against the euro by the end of next year, now that the "politically driven undervaluation" has been removed. It had previously forecast targets of \$1.37 and 80 pence. HSBC said that sterling will again be driven by economic data after years of being politically driven. In the options market, the premium for pound puts over calls—the right to sell pounds versus the right to buy them—during the next week shrank to its lowest since mid-November at nearly 1.75%, a day after it reached its highest since September 2016.

That means fewer investors expect the pound to fall over the coming week. On top of that, the three-month sterling implied volatility gauges, which include the Jan. 31 Brexit deadline, have fallen to a five-month high of 7.13 vol, suggesting traders have removed protection against unexpected



BLYTH: A trawler is seen at the port in the town of Blyth in northeast England after the former mining town voted in a Conservative MP for the first time in its history contributing to the Tory party's landslide victory. — AFP

moves in sterling. Expectations of aggressive rate cuts by the Bank of England were also scaled back as investors bet the lifting of political uncertainty would prompt policymakers to take a more optimistic view of the economy.

"The potential for a smooth Brexit removes some of the downside risk for the UK economy, and this should be positive for both business and consumer confidence," said Guy Foster, head of

research at wealth manager Brewin Dolphin. Along with the pound, the mid-cap stocks index FTSE 250, which is home to many companies with high UK revenues, surged about 5% to record highs. Britain's 10-year gilt yield also jumped to a six-month peak of 0.895% and was last up 3 basis points at 0.86%. The gap between Irish and German 10-year government bond yields shrank to its smallest since Jan. 2018. — AFP

Murex expands presence; partners with Gulf Bank

KUWAIT: Murex, an industry leader in trading, risk management and processing solutions for capital markets, announces that Gulf Bank, one of Kuwait's largest banks, has selected MX.3 to modernize and digitalize its capital markets and treasury IT. The decision to select Murex is part of Gulf Bank's wider re-platforming of its IT landscape in which Murex will be delivering a fully integrated solution for Gulf Bank's treasury and capital markets func-



Sami Mahfouz

Murex said: "Our partnership with Gulf Bank marks an exciting step toward the bank's digital transformation - significantly increasing the sophistication and capabilities

of its treasury operations, which will extend the capabilities of the bank's treasury operations and enable it to extend its client solutions offering.

Through this new partnership, Gulf Bank will deploy Murex's MX.3 platform, providing a robust technology infrastructure for core and support operations, as well as risk management.

Philippe Helou, Co-founder and Managing Partner at Murex said: "Our partnership with Gulf Bank marks an exciting step toward the bank's digital transformation - significantly increasing the sophistication and capabilities

of its treasury operations. It's also a strategically important announcement for Murex, as we consolidate our presence in the Middle East with a string of new partnerships transforming regional banks' core systems and operations." Commenting on Gulf Bank's new partnership with Murex, Sami Mahfouz, General Manager - Treasury at Gulf Bank said: "Gulf Bank is committed to delivering the best solutions for our customers, which is why we are constantly working to ensure our internal processes and core operations are up to the highest industry standards.

By partnering with Murex, we are working with a worldwide leader in technology solutions for capital markets and treasury. We have no doubt that our partnership will further optimize our client centric model and help drive Gulf Bank's operational excellence across our various business functions."

German central bank slashes 2020 outlook

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: Germany's central bank on Friday slashed its 2020 growth forecast for Europe's largest economy in half, but said an export-powered rebound was on the cards in the following years. The Bundesbank predicted 0.6 percent expansion next year, half the pace it had reckoned with in its last outlook in June. That represents little change from the expected 0.5 percent reading for 2019, one third of last year's rate. But in 2021-22 growth should pick back up to around 1.4 percent.

"Along with noticeably supportive fiscal policy, very expansive monetary policy and above all exports will be vital to the improved economic prospects," Bundesbank president Jens Weidmann said in a statement. Export-dependent German manufacturers above all have in recent months suffered from slowing global growth and trade and increased uncertainty over US-led trade conflicts and Brexit. Meanwhile the powerhouse economy has enjoyed low unemployment and a strong services sector, although economists point to signs industrial weakness is beginning to spread to other areas.

Boris Johnson's resounding victory in British parliamentary elections Thursday could reduce one element of uncertainty. The Conservative leader many now have the necessary freedom of manoeuvre to see through Brexit and strike a trade deal with the European Union after Britain's departure. A decisive outcome in the UK would mean "an element of uncertainty which is probably loosening and will give us a bit more clarity," European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde said ahead of the results Thursday.

In her maiden press conference, she also pointed more generally to "initial signs of stabilization in the growth slowdown" that has sapped Europe in recent months. And even as Lagarde was speaking, US President Donald Trump tweeted that he was "getting VERY close to a BIG DEAL with China", powering American stock markets to new highs. — AFP

Taiwan offers halal products to Kuwait, Turkey and UAE

By Ben Garcia

Four Taiwan-based halal companies showcased their products during a trade mission on Thursday. Commissioned by the ministry of economic affairs, the Taiwan External Trade Development Council's (TAITRA) well-established Taiwanese suppliers representing Taiwanese halal industries visited Kuwait, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates from Nov 10 to Nov 18, 2019. The purpose of this visit was to facilitate business cooperation between the Taiwanese delegates and their counterparts in Turkey and the Middle East.

TAITRA arranged a series of trade meetings in Turkey and Kuwait to provide local buyers with a valuable platform to discuss business cooperation with the participating Taiwanese companies. The Taiwanese suppliers provided information on their latest products.

Speaking with Kuwait Times, Shallowye Hsu, Director of Amis Nature Farming Company Limited, said her company has been in the market for years and that most of their products are made and derived from organic farming and farmed by indigenous people in Taiwan. Amis produces rice from the east of Taiwan - in Fuli in Hualien - and uses non-fried baking technology to not only preserve the nutrition of ingredients, but also to simplify processing and develop high quality grain products without fried and chemical additives and less sugar and salt.

"Our products are organically farmed in Taiwan. But more importantly, we incorporate the modern use of technology and engage people from far-flung areas to preserve the cultural heritage and environmental sustainability," she said. The company takes pride not only in its rice products, but also rainbow noodles, which are considered the best in the world. The noodles are made from natural ingredients, like cuttlefish powder, made from 100 percent cuttlefish powder. They also have black noodles used as a tribute to pilgrims in ancient times. Black rice contains protein, fat, carbohydrate with vitamin B, calcium, phosphorus, iron and other minerals. Purple sweet potato, burdock and blue algae noodles are also produced. Amis also takes



pride in its organic brown rice cake, quinoa and black rice cracker, popcorn rice cracker and rice fermented drink (non-alcoholic).

If you are looking for healthy living, meet GR Global Co-Founder and Managing Director Antonia Lee. She said her company is named after the sun (Aton), as it represents life and brightness. Her company offers herbal and fruit tea with a combination of ingredients from Germany and the mountains of Taiwan. "My products are all halal certified and are the best. Their taste is amazing and can heal your body and mind too. They are farmed in the best location in Taiwan; that is why we have the best tea products ever," she said.

"My objective is true harmony of the world through a sip of our teas, where West meet East. The oolong tea is farmed at Ali Mountain in Taiwan, where the mixture of climate, soil and weather are too good to grow the best teas in the world," she said. Aton makes a series of natural, healthy formulated drinks with herbs from Germany and halal-certified oolong tea from Taiwan. It makes creative and conventional teas, agricultural

products and handmade natural herbal soaps.

Have you tried eating rose petals? According to Rose Wu, rose petals can change one's mood. "The intake of rose and the byproducts of rose can actually change one's mood and can greatly affect our mind and body," said Rose, President of Madam Rose Coffee and Tea Salan Company Limited. Rose takes pride in her variety of rose products. Madam Rose Coffee and Tea is classified as a high quality and distinguished brand in the catering industry. Madam Rose has researched and developed a series of products with roses, such as rose coffee, rose milk tea, rose nougat and so on. "I developed rose products because I know how important it is to our body. I love rose myself, so I came up with these unique products," she noted.

UQing Co Ltd has a number of catering brands, including Halalan & Toyiyban Mart, which is responsible for the operation of Muslim-friendly restaurants and halal food and beauty supermarkets. It makes tapioca balls, pure honey, pineapple cake, fruit vinegar, extra

virgin camellia oil, ready-to-eat fish steak, dried fish floss, handmade vermicelli, chocolate crackers and halal cosmetics.

Kuo-Hsien Yeh, Managing Director UQing Company Limited, said: "I love catering to the Muslim population in Taiwan. We only have a few restaurants offering halal food, so what I offer in my restaurants are the best halal products. The products I brought here are prime products like bubble tea, fish flakes and best soya in the world. I have camellia seed oil, also the best in the world. I have a variety of fruit vinegar juice made from apple, blueberry and passion fruit," he noted.

In April, 2017, the Bureau of Foreign Trade of the Ministry of Economic Affairs entrusted TAITRA to set up the Taiwan Halal Center. This will serve to assist professionally in promoting the Taiwan halal industry, both locally and globally. The core value of the Taiwan Halal Industry Promotion Center is being "people-centered". It aims to create a Muslim-friendly environment, in which Muslims can purchase quality products made in Taiwan without worry, and have more convenient lives. Its missions are to build up the strength of the local halal industry, build trust with Muslims abroad, expand the Muslim market, and establish a halal ecosystem in Taiwan.

Today, many more Taiwanese firms have developed a better understanding of the halal industry. Currently, 1,082 Taiwanese firms hold halal certifications, mainly in foods, cosmetics and nutritional supplements. These companies provide quality halal products that can help meet growing demand in the Middle East.

In the recent 2019 Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) released by MasterCard International, Taiwan was promoted to the third-best destination of non-Organization of Islamic Cooperation countries for Muslim travelers for the first time. Taiwan is committed to optimizing its receptive environment for Muslims and quickly gaining international recognition for adapting its infrastructure and tourist attractions for the Muslim market. In addition, TAITRA received the Gold Award Muslim-Friendly Environment & Facilities from the Malaysia Tourism Council in Oct 2018. Taiwan was the only winner from overseas.



Business

Wall St Ahead: Trade deal removes major hurdle for rally in Apple, tech

China to boost imports of US energy, pharmaceutical, agricultural products

SAN FRANCISCO: US President Donald Trump's limited trade deal with China removes a major hurdle for Apple and other technology stocks that have already surged this year to record highs. The so-called Phase One deal announced, but still not signed, on Friday suspends the planned imposition of new 15% tariffs on Sunday that would have hit \$160 billion in Chinese consumer goods just weeks before Christmas, including \$115 billion worth of iPhones, laptops and other electronics.

The deal would also see the United States reduce existing tariffs on other goods. China has agreed to boost imports of US energy, pharmaceutical and agricultural products, although Chinese officials offered no details on the amount of US goods Beijing had agreed to buy. If it is signed, Trump's long-awaited deal will be a relief to Apple, among the US companies with the most to lose in the trade war between the world's two largest economies, along with chipmakers who make the components in its devices, which are mostly made in China.

"The Street has been laser focused on this additional 15% next round of tariffs and we believe this ultimately signals a green light for tech stocks heading into year end with the impending \$160 billion tariff no longer a near-term concern," Wedbush analyst Dan Ives wrote in a note on Friday. Ives estimated that the tariffs that would have hit iPhone imports on Sunday would have clipped about 4%, or 50 cents, off of Apple's 2020 earnings per share.

Even amid trade uncertainty, Apple surged over 70% this year to all-time highs on broad investor confidence in recent months that Washington and Beijing would eventually strike a deal. Apple's stock has also benefited from progress increasing its services revenue as it diversifies from declining iPhone sales. Confidence the trade war would be settled has also pushed the S&P 500 up 26% in 2019 and fueled a 44% rally in the information technology sub-index.

Still, investors are divided over whether Trump's trade deal is fully priced into the market, or whether

shares of Apple, its suppliers, like Qorvo and Skyworks Solutions, and other US technology and trade-sensitive stocks have room to rise. The S&P 500 edged up 0.01% on Friday to close at its second record high in two days, while Apple rose 1.36% to an all-time high. Chip stocks including Qorvo and Advanced Micro Devices sold off from recent record highs.

"I wouldn't be surprised to see some profit-taking," said Tim Ghriskey, Chief Investment Strategist at Inverness Counsel in New York. "On the other hand, the deal could really give corporate management better visibility into the economic outlook, and help them start spending again." Reflecting Wall Street's mostly upbeat view toward Apple, BofA Global Research analyst Wamsi Mohan on Wednesday raised his price target on the company, predicting the eventual rollout of 5G would drive three years of robust iPhone sales.

The Philadelphia Semiconductor Index has surged 56% in 2019, as the rollout of 5G wireless technology appeared likely to end a downturn in global chip

demand and on confidence the trade war would be resolved. The global chip market is set to recover by 5.9% in 2020 after shrinking 12.8% this year, according to a forecast by World Semiconductor Trade Statistics. But gains in technology stocks have stretched their earnings multiples, increasing the risk should their bottom lines not grow next year as much as expected, or should Trump's trade deal sour. The S&P 500 information technology sector is trading at over 20 times expected earnings, its highest multiple since 2005, according to Refinitiv.

Earnings for the tech sector are expected to grow by about 10% next year after falling 1% in 2019, according to Refinitiv's I/B/E/S data. That is mostly in line with broader expectations for the S&P 500, with analysts predicting around 10% profit growth next year, up from 1% in 2019. "Markets are clearly seeing through this year's flat S&P earnings and expect much better results in 2020," Nicholas Colas, co-founder of DataTrek, wrote in a note. —Reuters

Kuwait witnesses the launch of WaynYo: Platform rivaling global social networking sites

KUWAIT: WaynYo, the first trend-focused platform in the region, officially launched in the Middle East, with Kuwait as its first operating market. The application, available on Google Play and the App Store is a revolutionary way of aggregating content based on popularity and likes, with the ability to track most liked and engaged with content within a certain geolocation. This one-of-a-kind platform was founded by Wissam Tamer and Dany Moghnie, two telecommunication entrepreneurs - who had a single-minded vision of empowering people of all ages with the power to influence and ability to have their content seen by millions around the region.

Commenting on the launch of WaynYo, Wissam Tamer said: "WaynYo enables users to discover the trendiest photos and videos circulating in their area. It's an application that is able to aggregate the most liked and engaged with content, so users have an unbiased way of seeking out content that actually trends in a certain area."

Tamer added, "With WaynYo, we all have the power to become influential and to have our content seen by anyone and everyone without the risks of complicated algorithms and advertising implications. It's a simple formula - the more likes you get, the higher your chance of having more people view your content."

WaynYo is an open public application, meaning that any content posted can be seen, liked and "super-liked" by any user and can be shared and linked to other social media platforms, including Instagram. WaynYo has established a partnership with a Kuwait based angel investor in being their partner in reaching a wider audience in Kuwait and reaching more potential users in the region in the upcoming months. To find out more about WaynYo, follow @waynyo_app on Instagram or visit waynyo.com



flydubai touches down in Krabi

KUWAIT: flydubai's inaugural flight has touched down in Krabi in Thailand, becoming the first UAE-based airline to offer flights to the popular holiday destination. The daily flights are operated via a short stop in Yangon, Myanmar and are codeshared with Emirates. Onboard the inaugural flight was a senior delegation led by Sudhir Sreedharan, Senior Vice President, Commercial Operations (UAE, GCC, Subcontinent and Africa) at flydubai.

Upon arrival, the aircraft was greeted by Somkuan Khanngern, the Vice Governor of Krabi, Attaporn Nuangudom, the Director of Krabi Airport, Uthit Limsakul Director of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Krabi Office and Pichaya Saisaengchan, Director of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Dubai and Middle East Office. "We are delighted to mark the inaugural of our new route to Krabi and to see our network grow further East", said Sudhir Sreedharan, Senior Vice President, Commercial Operations (UAE, GCC, Subcontinent and Africa) at flydubai.

"Over the past ten years we have shown our commitment to opening up underserved markets and enabling millions of passengers to travel to more places more often. This new route will present more travel options for passengers from the UAE and beyond, while



giving people from Thailand direct access to Dubai's travel hub", Sreedharan added. flydubai has become the first carrier in the UAE to operate flights to Krabi and with the new daily service from the UAE, the GCC and those connecting from Europe and the USA on the Emirates network now have more options to explore Asia and the Far East. Passengers from Thailand have more opportunities to benefit from direct flights to Dubai and beyond.

Attaporn Nuang-udom, the Director of Krabi Airport said: "The opening of the new route (Krabi) is a great opportunity to promote and facilitate the connection

between Thailand and the Middle East. Also, it is a good chance for enhancing tourism in Southern Thailand. Your dedication and support for the Thai travel market means a great deal to all of us. Thank you very much." Krabi is a popular holiday destination for beach goers and adventures alike. While limestone cliffs, dense mangrove forests and the famous Phi Phi Island will amaze nature enthusiasts, Krabi also offers activities like diving, hiking or exploring the Huay Toh Waterfall in Phanom Bencha National Park.

Pichaya Saisaengchan, Director of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Dubai and Middle East Office said, "We

are pleased to have flydubai launch its new route to Krabi, which is illustrative of the UAE being the most comprehensive market for inbound tourism from the Middle East, as well as the largest. Last year, Thailand welcomed nearly 200,000 visitors from the UAE, both Emiratis and residents, and we anticipate that the new flydubai route will further enhance visitor numbers between the two countries. As well as providing convenient access for travelers, the new link will be great opportunity to explore Thailand's off the beaten path islands and scenic beach resorts in the hidden-gem of the Andaman sea."

KFH participates in 9th Industries and Construction exhibition

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has participated in the 9th Industries and Construction exhibition, which is currently held at Jumeirah Hotel with the participation of public and private entities, traders, suppliers and companies specialized in materials and construction. Organized by ExpoTag For Exhibitions and Conferences, the exhibition is an opportunity for KFH to communicate with the participating companies, offering financing services in the field of materials and constructions, and collaborating with suppliers and traders to provide all customer needs and requirements.

Dedicated team of direct sales and financing services from KFH has participated at the exhibition through the bank's booth. They were ready to answer customer and visitors' queries, as well as



explaining KFH's financing services to customers that include all building requirements. Under "With KFH Your Finance is Easier" campaign, KFH showcased its funding solutions that are designed for customers wishing to purchase construction materials or concluding construction contracts.

The campaign has provided integrated benefits to facilitate the financing process, in addition to consulting engineering before and during construction. The campaign provided consulting on building materials and work in terms of

the best sources and affordable prices, with following up on the implementation of work in cooperation with specialized engineers. As salary transfer is not required, KFH's campaign also offered competitive profit margin while profits are not deducted in advance.

TOYOTA ranked the 'Best Global Automotive Brand'

KUWAIT: Interbrand, a brand consultancy firm has ranked Toyota as the best automotive brand in the Best Global Brands report for 2019 that was announced recently. Considering Interbrand's unparalleled wealth of 20 years of brand valuation data, this year's report examines the world's most successful brands through the lens of Iconic Moves, focusing on the end of a traditional approach to brand positioning and industry leaders' navigation of the rapid ongoing change among consumers and competitive landscapes.

Toyota believes that mobility goes beyond cars: it is about overcoming challenges and making dreams come true. The 'Start Your Impossible' initiative reflects these values and highlights the company's goal to provide freedom of mobility for all. As a worldwide partner of the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games, Toyota aims to encourage creating a peaceful society without discrimination through sports and a commitment to building a sustainable society through mobility.

Over its long history, the company has grown into an innovative leader that has enabled vehicle electrification on a mass scale with the development of the Prius hybrid electric car 20 years ago and more recently, the Mirai hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicle. As a Mobility Company, Toyota is Committed to Freedom of Movement for All. Toyota will provide a total of around 3,700 mobility products and/or vehicles for Tokyo 2020. The majority, or nearly 90 percent, of the official vehicle fleet will be electrified.

Electrified vehicles include Hybrid Electric Vehicles (HEV), Fuel Cell Electric Vehicles (FCEV), such as the hydrogen-powered Mirai, Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEV), the Prius PHV, and Battery Electric Vehicles (BEV), including the "APM" (Accessible People Mover) and the e-Palette as well as TOYOTA LQ Concept, which will provide a unique and wide-range of diverse mobility. Among the electrified vehicles provided, Toyota will include approximately 500 FCEVs and approximately 850 BEVs, the largest of any fleet for a Games to date.

Interbrand's ranking of the brands is based on three main factors: brand strength currently, which is how positive is the perception of the brand across the world; what value does the brand itself add to the company; and, what plans does the brand have for the future. The firm then calculated "overall financial return to an organization's



investors, or its economic profit," as well as "the ability of the brand to create loyalty and, therefore, sustainable demand and profit into the future."

The efforts to improve and increase the diversity of electrified powertrain options is tied directly to Toyota's 'Environmental Challenge 2050,' wherein the company aims to achieve annual electrified vehicle sales of 5.5 million units by 2030. To achieve its goal, Toyota unveiled plans to have 10 Battery Electric Vehicle (BEV) models available worldwide by the early 2020s, and from around 2025, the company aims to have an electrified version available for all vehicle models across its global lineup.



Ali Alghanim & Sons Automotive Company inaugurates new boutique showroom at 360 Mall



Ali Alghanim management in a group photo.



- 400-square-meter showroom facility showcases the most luxurious brands under the company portfolio such as BMW and Land Rover
- 8 test drive vehicles available in mall parking near the showroom to offer test drive experiences conveniently to customers

KUWAIT: Ali Alghanim & Sons Automotive Company, the exclusive importer for BMW, MINI, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, Land Rover and McLaren in Kuwait, has opened a new boutique showroom in 360 Mall, the luxury shopping destination in Kuwait.

The 400-square-meter luxury showroom boasts a privileged location in the leading shopping destination in Kuwait, where this new showroom fits up to

seven cars and includes a range of accessories and clothing from the same car brands. The facility will be a fully functional showroom that offers customers the ability to evaluate, trade-in, purchase and configure vehicle specifications on demand, with the ability to test-drive one of eight models available in the mall parking area near the showroom.

Speaking at the launch, Engineer Fahad Ali

Mohammed Thunayan Alghanim, Managing Director of Ali Alghanim & Sons Automotive Company, said: "I am very delighted and honoured to inaugurate this new boutique showroom at 360 Mall. This exclusive location at one of Kuwait's most high-end retail destinations demonstrates our vision of offering convenience to our clientele by allowing them to experience our products and services in a luxury environment.

We are also pleased to be the first car dealer in Kuwait with the ability to offer test drive experiences to our clientele around the mall vicinity".

The operating hours of this new boutique showroom at 360 Mall from Ali Alghanim & Sons Automotive Co. will be 10am – 10pm on Sunday to Wednesday and 10am – 11pm on Thursday to Saturday. For more information, call 1846464.



Health & Science

How ethanol plant shutdowns deepen pain for US corn farmers

RACCOON TOWNSHIP: When the US ethanol industry was booming, Indiana farmer Paul Hodgen made good money selling about a quarter of his crop to a local facility that produced the corn-based fuel. Now that plant has stopped churning out ethanol and has instead converted to a grain elevator for storage, Hodgen still sells his corn there, but for a fraction of the price. "We are suffering for demand," said Hodgen, a 40-year-old father of four.

Hodgen's troubles reflect the increasing difficulties faced by America's corn farmers as a meltdown in the ethanol industry hits the corn market - adding strains to farmers already facing poor weather and the US trade war with China. Some 13 ethanol plants have shut since November 2018, roughly 4.4% of the nation's capacity, in a decline the biofuel industry blames on the Trump administration's expanded use of waivers to exempt oil refineries from blending ethanol into gasoline.

Several other ethanol plants temporarily reduced production during that time. The issue could test the Farm Belt's support for President Donald Trump in next year's election: farmers that have largely forgiven the administration for the dire impacts of the trade war are less forgiving when it comes to its biofuel policy. "That was really felt as a betrayal," Hodgen said.

"All of us knew that China was going to have to be dealt with. It hurt but it needed to be done," said Jeff Gormong, another Indiana farmer. "The small refinery exemp-

tions are benefiting the petroleum industry at the expense of the ag industry." Under the US Renewable Fuel Standard, oil refiners are required to blend some 15 billion gallons of ethanol into their gasoline every year, but small facilities can be exempted if compliance would hurt them financially. The Trump administration's Environmental Protection Agency, which administers the RFS, has handed out roughly four times more exemptions to small refiners than Obama's EPA.

The Renewable Fuels Association, a biofuel industry trade group, estimates that waivers given out for the 2016-2018 compliance years undercut renewable fuel blending obligations by 4.04 billion gallons. Both the oil industry and the Environmental Protection Agency dispute that the expanded waivers have significantly affected US demand for ethanol. "The only area where there has been meaningful reduction is in exports, which is likely the result of our ongoing trade conflict with China," said Chet Thompson, president of the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers trade association.

Still, US farmers have become increasingly reliant on the biofuel industry's demand for corn, the most-grown US crop. Ethanol producers took 37.3% of the US corn crop in 2018, more than triple from 2002, according to Agriculture Department data. USDA predicts that around 5.375 billion bushels of corn will be needed for ethanol in the 2019/20 marketing year, a

drop of 230 million bushels from two years ago when corn used for ethanol peaked at 5.605 billion bushels.

Double-edged sword

When an ethanol plant shuts, it hurts growers twice: They lose the demand from the plant, and competing grain elevators and processors pay less as the unused grains flood into the market. That dynamic played out for Hodgen this summer. Ethanol producer POET, a privately held company, announced it was converting its plant in Cloverdale, 28 miles from Hodgen's 6,000-acre farm, from a biofuel plant to a grain elevator, in August. Before the shutdown, it was offering \$4.09 for a bushel of corn. The price dropped to \$3.59 by early September when the facility completed its transformation to a grain elevator.

The ripple effect spread with a nearby processor and river terminal also cutting prices. For farmers like Hodgen who produce more than half a million bushels of corn a year, the pennies quickly add up. Farmers in areas affected by ethanol plant shutdowns stand to lose millions of dollars. "Without the ethanol industry there to mop up all this excess corn, we would have a huge problem in the Farm Belt," he said. "I don't know what other crop we would shift to because there is a glut of everything else."

Judgment day

The Renewable Fuels Association, the nation's biggest biofuel producer group, estimates that - in addition to the difficulties being



SCRIBNER: An aerial image shows the farm of Sid Ready near Scribner, Nebraska. — AFP

faced by corn farmers, plant shutdowns have cost about 2,300 jobs. "Think of the number of trucks that run in and out of an ethanol plant every day and the rail jobs impacted," RFA President Geoff Cooper said. He added the livestock industry was also feeling the pinch because of a reduced supply of distillers' grains, the low-cost byproduct of ethanol production that can be fed to livestock.

Cooper said farmers and ethanol producers will keep a close eye on trade negotiations between the United States and China, as well

as the Trump administration's final ruling on blending requirements for 2020 under the RFS. "That's going to be a Judgment Day for farmers and the biofuels industry on whether the administration and the White House truly support our industry and support farmers," he said. Hodgen says he still supports Trump. But his father, Abe, thinks Trump's biofuel policy shows he is out of touch with farmers. "Ethanol is the biggest damn deal that happened in my lifetime as far as raising corn," Abe Hodgen, 68, said. — Reuters

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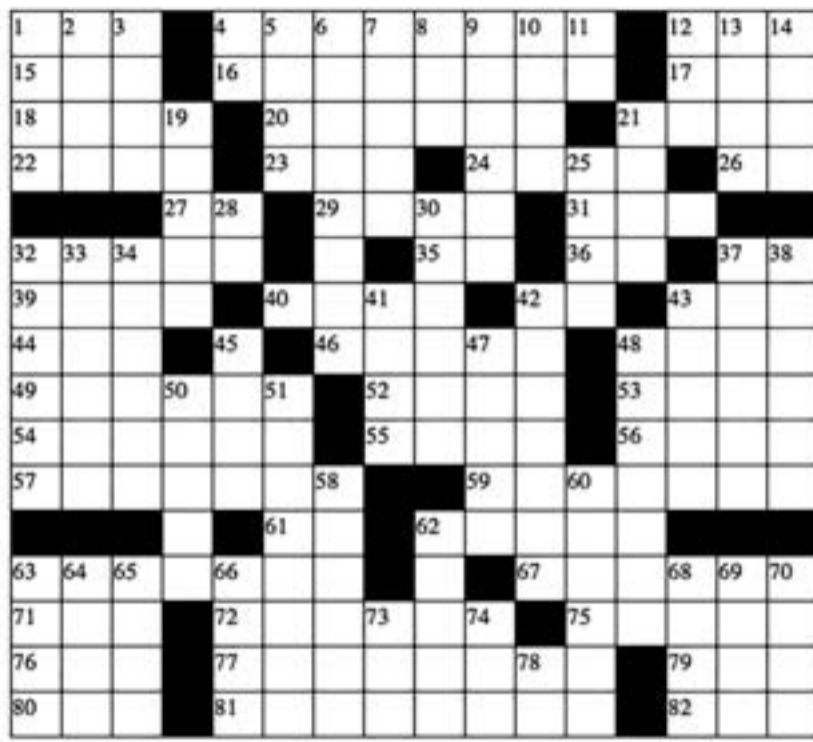
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CROSSWORD 2385



ACROSS

1. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
4. Situated between the earth and the moon.
12. An American doctorate usually based on at least 3 years graduate study and a dissertation.
15. Any high mountain.
16. (anatomy) A notch or small hollow.
17. A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
18. An accidental hole that allows something (fluid or light etc.) to enter or escape.
20. Agile long-tailed nocturnal African lemur with dense woolly fur and large eyes and ears.
22. A rounded thickly curled hairdo.
23. A flat wing-shaped process or winglelike part of an organism.
24. (Welsh) Underworld god.
26. A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
27. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
29. The highest level or degree attainable.
31. The executive agency that advises the President on the federal budget.
32. A river that rises in central Germany and flows north to join the Elbe River.
35. A highly unstable radioactive element (the heaviest of the halogen series).
36. A rare silvery (usually trivalent) metallic element.
39. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
40. Of a temperature scale that registers the freezing point of water as 32 degrees F and the boiling point as 212 degrees F at one atmosphere of pressure.
44. Of or relating to a member of the Buddhist people inhabiting the Mekong river in Laos and Thailand.
46. Small tropical shrubby tree bearing small yellowish fruit.
49. Any of various strong liquors distilled from the fermented sap of toddy palms or from fermented molasses.
52. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
53. Essential oil or perfume obtained from flowers.
54. (Roman Catholic Church) A book containing all the prayers and responses needed to celebrate Mass throughout the year.
55. A pilgrim who journeys to Mecca.
56. A quantity of no importance.
57. A tray for making cubes of ice in a refrigerator.
59. Worn until no longer useful.
61. A state in midwestern United States.
67. An organ in its earliest stage of development.
71. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
72. Organized opposition to authority.
75. American professional baseball player who hit more home runs than Babe Ruth (born in 1934).
76. The universal time coordinated time when a transmission is sent from Earth to a spacecraft or other celestial body.
77. The state capital of South Australia.
79. A user interface in which you type commands instead of choosing them from a menu or selecting an icon.
80. A sweetened beverage of diluted fruit juice.
81. A great raja.
82. A condition (mostly in boys) characterized by behavioral and learning disorders.

DOWN

1. Offering fun and gaiety.
2. A musical notation written on a staff indicating the pitch of the notes following it.
3. South American armadillo with three bands of bony plates.
4. Being one more than one hundred.
5. Any tree or shrub of the genus Inga having pinnate leaves and showy usually white flowers.
6. White Southerner supporting Reconstruction policies after the Civil War usually for self-interest.
7. Of a pale purple color.
8. North American republic containing 50 states - 48 conterminous states in North America plus Alaska in northwest North America and the Hawaiian Islands in the Pacific Ocean.
9. A solid lump of a precious metal (especially gold) as found in the earth.
10. Beside one another in a row or rank.
11. An intensely radioactive metallic element that occurs in minute amounts in uranium ores.
12. Perennial herb of East India to Polynesia and Australia cultivated for its large edible root yielding Otaheite arrowroot starch.
13. German chemist who was co-discoverer with Lise Meitner of nuclear fission (1879-1968).
14. An informal term for a father.
19. Sluggish tailless Australian arboreal marsupial with gray furry ears and coat.
21. A federally chartered corporation that purchases mortgages.
25. A Hindu theistic philosophy.
28. A light strong brittle gray toxic bivalent metallic element.
30. A percussion instrument consisting of a pair of hollow pieces of wood or bone (usually held between the thumb and fingers) that are made to click together (as by Spanish dancers) in rhythm with the dance.
33. Fungus used in the preparation of punk for fuses.
34. Traveling on horseback.
37. A period of 10 years.
38. Away from the mouth or oral region.
41. (poetic) Tranquil silence.
42. Genus of South and Central American heatlike evergreen shrubs.
43. Bringing death.
45. A mark left by the healing of injured tissue.
47. Indras's thunderbolt.
48. A Chadic language spoken in the Mandara mountains in Cameroon.
50. Out of bed.
51. A city in western Lithuania on the Baltic Sea.
58. A name for the Old Testament God as transliterated from the Hebrew YHVH.
60. Fairly small terrestrial ferns of tropical America.
62. Big-eyed scud.
64. A United Nations agency created to assist developing nations by loans guaranteed by member governments.
65. Willing to face danger.
66. The biblical name for ancient Syria.
68. Type genus of the family Arcidae.
69. Made from or covered with gold.
70. A town in north central Oklahoma.
73. Leaf or strip from a leaf of the talipot palm used in India for writing paper.
74. Brief episode in which the brain gets insufficient blood supply.
78. A person who announces and plays popular recorded music.

Friday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You may find yourself wanting to discover more about your roots. Where did you come from? What obstacles did your ancestors face? This is a great time to do some research and discover more about your heritage. Just as the past seems to be of great importance to you, so is the future. You are in a great frame of mind to do some future planning. Get your affairs in order. Spend some time researching the financial investments you have been considering. Change can bring great reward. Aries. This is a great time to develop a financial plan for your future and for the future of your descendants.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You may find yourself in a bit of a conflict when it comes to balancing your Home Life and work life. You may find yourself passing an opportunity by at work because it will interfere with time with your family. This may be a hard decision to make at this time, but the payoff with your family will be well worth it. In a time for you to make sure your priorities are straight. You have a strong appreciation of your past. You are able to reflect and realize the obstacles and problems of your past talk to the lessons that made you and you are today. You are able to appreciate hardships and look at them in a more positive manner knowing you will come at a stronger person in the end.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You are a practical person with an abundance of common sense. You are able to use both of these qualities as assets to make your way to the top in the career world. You may be feeling a need to change your focus and tighten your circle a bit. You feel as if you need to spend more of your time and attention on you and yours. At this point you may have accomplished your goal in the workplace but feel you need to continue to work on your goal at home. This will be a balancing act to continue to make sure you thrive in every area of your life. Your communication skills are at all time high and you are able to relate and interact with ease to all who surround you.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Love and expressing all the deep emotions you have for others becomes very important to you. You may be feeling a need to be needed. Never doubt that you are. You may find yourself in deep appreciation of everyone and everything around you. You are able to find beauty in every situation and in everything that surrounds you. This is time in your life filled with love and others are drawn to your loving ways and kind heart. Be careful today, as all around you becomes so appealing.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You don't care how, you want it now! This is your attitude when it comes to life today. You have taken love a step farther. Obsession is a more appropriate description of how you feel about your goals. This could be an extremely passionate time in your world. Jealousy and possessiveness may be emotions that play a role in your world. You may find your ambition is in overdrive and you will not stop until you have exactly what you want.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Family seems to be where your focus is. You desire a strong foundation and have been working hard to establish this in your world. You may find someone younger seeking advice and looking to you for assistance. You will be able to guide them with ease. Helping others brings great satisfaction to you and in a way will fulfill the need to be needed you have been desiring. It is a great time to sit and have a meaningful conversation with a loved one. Virgo, you will be able to relate your ideas with ease and grace and this conversation will be very beneficial to your relationship. Today will find you very successful when organizing the actions of those around you. You are very focused on those closest to you. These personal relationships are your driving force and you are in a very content and peaceful state.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Out with the old. Bring on the new, exciting and wild. What a rebel you are! If it goes against tradition you are all about it today. You crave excitement and the same old, same old, just isn't going to cut it for you. Change is in the air. A new hairstyle, a new outfit, or a visit to a new place tonight may be just what you need to add a little excitement to your life, Libra. Go have some fun!



Scorpio (October 23-November 19)

You are a practical person with an abundance of common sense. You are able to use both of these qualities as assets to make your way to the top in the career world. You may be feeling a need to change your focus and tighten your circle a bit. You feel as if you need to spend more of your time and attention on you and yours. At this point you may have accomplished your goal in the workplace but feel you need to continue to work on your goal at home. This will be a balancing act to continue to make sure you thrive in every area of your life. Your communication skills are at all time high and you are able to relate and interact with ease to all who surround you.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

The sky is the limit for you today. You are optimistic and can accomplish anything you set your mind to. You have faith and are willing to take chances on an emotional level that may bring great reward and happiness your way. You may be deep within your feelings and have a desire to experience something new. An emotional wanderlust, if you will, is the desire of your heart. Today you are all about you. Your wants, needs, and desires, take over and all you can do is pursue what your heart wants. This is a very productive day for you physically and emotionally. You will find peace and happiness in accomplishing the goals you have set for yourself today, Sagittarius. Reach for the stars! You may just be the one that can touch them.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You may feel as if you are encountering negativity and not everyone is supportive when it comes to very sensitive issues you are dealing with in your life. These issues are very personal, and you may just be sharing with the wrong people. You will find someone close to you who will serve as a confidant who is extremely understanding and supportive of all that makes you unique. Capricorn, now is a great time to think outside of the box and follow that new path or project that is calling your name. You may reap great reward from trying something new.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday. The sun came up this morning, and you are still here. Try to focus on the present. Stressing ahead rearily changes outcomes. Many of the "what ifs" you fret about will never happen. Save your energy to deal with the realities. You are flexible, and you have the coping skills to handle whatever comes up. No problem is too large for you to conquer.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You are one of a kind. Relationships take on greater meaning in your life. You want everything in your world in its place and everything running smoothly. One thing out of place will cause stress and tension in for you. You have a talent for bringing those around you into harmony and this makes you a wonderful leader. You are placing great focus on your marriage or a close relationship with someone dear to you. This is a great move and will result in a strong bond you have been craving. Pisces, all is well in your world and the steps you are taking will develop feed the deep roots needed for lasting love and support from many close to you.

Wordsearch Puzzle

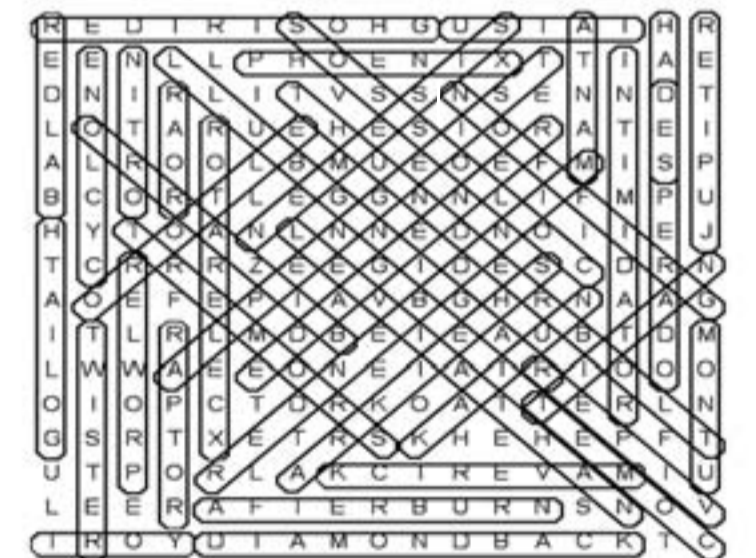
SCUBA Diving

Find and circle all of the SCUBA Diving words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the meaning of the letters of SCUBA.



- | | | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| AIR PRESSURE | CURRENT | HYPOOTHERMIA | RECOMPRESSION | TIDE |
| ALTITUDE DIVING | DECOMPRESSION | LEEWARD | REGULATOR | TOXICITY |
| ANOXIA | DEPTH GAUGE | LUNGS | SCOOTER | TRIMIX |
| ATMOSPHERE | DIVE COMPUTER | MASK | SEA LEVEL | UNDERSEA |
| BAROTRAUMA | DIVE FLAG | MEMBRANE | SHEARS | UNDERSUIT |
| BOOTIES | DIVE MARSHAL | MOUTHPIECE | SHOAL | UNDERWATER |
| BOUNCE DIVE | DRYSUIT | NARCOSIS | SILICONE | VALVE |
| BUBBLES | EDDY | NEOPRENE | SNORKEL | VISION |
| BUDDY SYSTEM | EMBOLISM | NITROGEN | SPEAR GUN | VOLUME |
| BUOYANCY | GAS CYLINDER | NITROX | STROBE | WATER |
| C CARD | GAS MIXTURE | OCEAN | SWIM FINS | WEIGHT BELT |
| COMPASS | GIANT STRIDE | OXYGEN | SWIMMING | WEIGHTS |
| COMPRESSOR | HELIX | PANIC | TANK | WETSUIT |
| CORAL REEF | HOSE | REBREATHER | THE BENDS | WINDWARD |

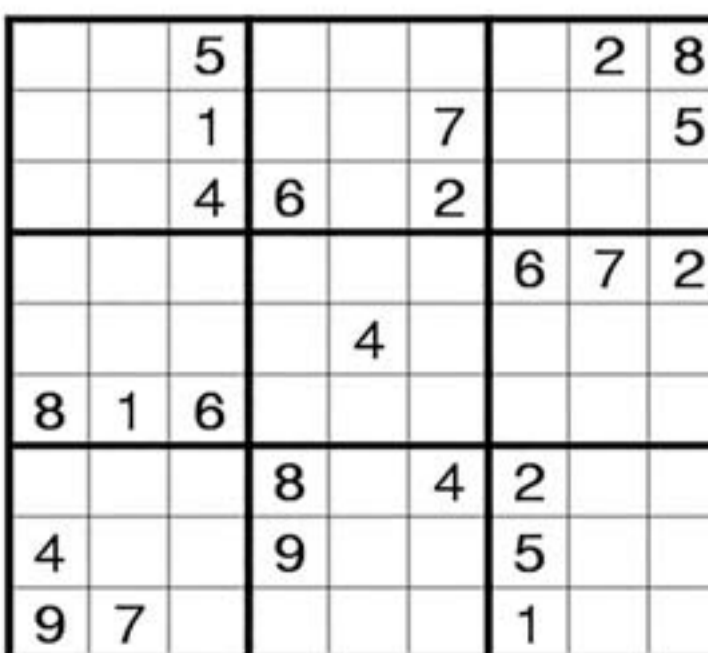
Roller Coasters



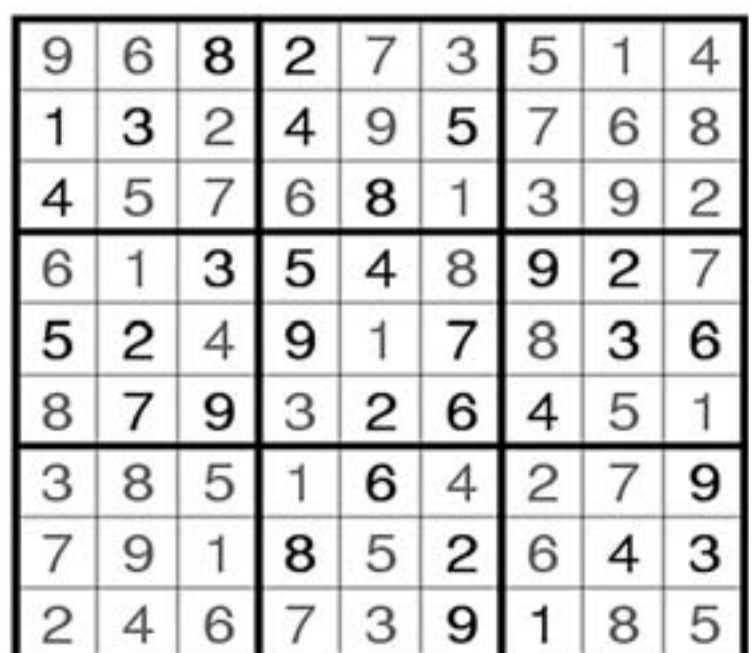
- | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| AFTERBURN | GHOSTRIDER | MIND BENDER | SHEIKRA |
| ALPENGEIST | GOLIATH | MONTU | TATSU |
| BALDER | GRIFFON | NEMESIS | THUNDERBOLT |
| BIZARRO | HADES | NITRO | TITAN |
| COLOSSOS | INTIMIDATOR | PHOENIX | TREMORS |
| COMET | JUPITER | PROWLER | TROY |
| CYCLONE | KATUN | RAGING BULL | TWISTER |
| DESPERADO | LEVIATHAN | RAPTOR | VIPER |
| DIAMONDBACK | MANTA | RENEGADE | XCELERATOR |
| EL TORO | MAVERICK | ROAR | |

The hidden message is: LIVE LIFE TO THE FULLEST

Daily Sudoku



Friday's Solution



Lifestyle

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2019



Sumo wrestlers exercise during a training session at a stable in Tokyo. The quintessentially Japanese sport of sumo stops the whole country during the six big tournaments per year, with millions glued to the live action on national broadcaster NHK. — AFP Photos

BEATING, HOMESICKNESS: TOUGH PATH TO THE TOP FOR GEORGIAN SUMO STAR



Georgia-born sumo wrestler Levan Gorgadze known by his Japanese wrestling name of Tsuyoshi Tochinoshin speaks during an interview with AFP following a training session at a sumo stable in Tokyo.



A sumo wrestler sweeps the clay ring or 'dohyo' after a training session at a stable in Tokyo.



A sumo wrestler resists as he is pushed in the ring or 'dohyo' during a training bout at a stable in Tokyo.

The sumo champion hauls his giant frame from the ground, sand and clay caking his sweaty back and fury flashing from his eyes as he chastises himself for his defeat. His 178-kilogramme body and white mawashi, or belt, are commonplace, but his bright blue eyes and Western features instantly mark out Georgia-born Levan Gorgadze as different in the traditional Japanese sport.

As a teen in 2006, Gorgadze left his mountain village in the Caucasus near the ancient Georgian city of Mtskheta for the bright lights of Tokyo, a city with 10 times as many people as his entire home country. It hasn't been an easy path for Gorgadze, one of a growing number of foreign sumo stars, who has faced homesickness, injury and even being beaten with a golf club on his way to the top of the sport.

His story typifies the difficulties encountered by overseas sumos, who started making their mark in the 1980s and have to negotiate the sport's arch-conservatism and spartan lifestyle if they are to succeed. Sumo has also been dogged by multiple scandals in recent years including allegations of bullying, illegal betting and links to organized crime. "My mother was against it but I took the decision on my own," Gorgadze, 32, told AFP in a rare interview for a sumo, speaking at his stable after training. He quickly found that the life of a trainee sumo wrestler was not for the fainthearted.

'Fastidious rules'

Cloistered in a stable, or heya, in the Tokyo sumo district of Ryogoku, the wrestler's days are filled with chores and punishing early-morning training sessions. One thing he does not lack is food: wrestlers have to consume gargantuan portions of chankonabe, a high-calorie stew designed to add bulk. The heyas are one of the last vestiges of traditional Japanese life and there is no privacy — the junior wrestlers eat, train and sleep as a group. Despite this, Gorgadze said that "at first, I felt sad and isolated... annoyed by the (obligatory) wearing of a kimono and fastidious rules". He pined for his native village. "I couldn't speak Japanese... I didn't even have a mobile phone to call home."

However, he persevered and rose up the

ranks to become ozeki, the second-highest grade after yokozuna (grand champion). Now known by his Japanese wrestling name of Tsuyoshi Tochinoshin, he says he "learned everything" in Japan, above all "look after your colleagues because we all have to live together". The camaraderie is clear at training as the wrestlers move around the sumo dohyo, or ring, with surprising grace, bringing each other water or brushing dirt from the back of a defeated stablemate.



A sumo wrestler exercises during a training session at a stable in Tokyo.

Beaten over a kimono

The inspiration for Gorgadze came back in 2005 when he watched compatriot Kokkai, then a low-ranked 24-year-old, defeat Mongolian yokozuna Asashoryu for the first time, a win that sent shockwaves through the sumo world. As a junior judo star, Gorgadze took easily to sumo and trained initially at the prestigious club at Nihon University to become one of the sport's expanding cohort of foreigners. His journey to the rank of ozeki was not without incident, however. In 2011, he was one of three wrestlers beaten with a golf club for appearing in public without a kimono. He also suffered injuries that ruled him out of several tournaments, or bashos, and has had to win back his rank after demotion. He has recently suffered another demotion after an injury-hit basho.

When in Tokyo, he sometimes gets a taste of home by listening to ancient Georgian polyphonic chants or eating traditional fare such as khachapuri — bread stuffed with cheese — or satsivi, chicken in a walnut sauce. Back in Georgia, he is treated as a returning hero and greeted by huge crowds at Tbilisi Airport on his occasional trips home. "I can only say good things about Levan. Ever since childhood, he was a good kid. And he has become a successful man the whole village adores."



A sumo wrestler takes a break after a training bout at a stable in Tokyo.

said one neighbor, 43-year-old Nino Suramelashvili. His mother has now changed her mind about her son's unusual career choice.

"I am very proud, I am very happy that my son has achieved such success. In the sports world, he is a bright star. And besides that, he is a very good person with his human qualities," says Nunu Markarashvili under the shade of the vines. And his uncle Tristan Maghradze cries: "Long live Tochinoshin. Levan Gorgadze. My famous nephew whom I am proud of, he is a worthy person." Gorgadze is not sure what his future holds but one possibility is obtaining Japanese citizenship to be able to open his own sumo stable. His dream is to see "lots of Georgians taking up sumo". — AFP



In this photograph taken on Sept 23, 2019, youth climate activist Greta Thunberg speaks during the UN Climate Action Summit.



In this file photograph taken on Oct 3, 2019, Carola Rackete, German captain of rescue vessel Sea-Watch 3, attends a European Parliament Committee's public hearing on the situation of search and rescue in the Mediterranean in view of latest developments and the legal framework in Brussels.



In this photograph taken on May 16, 2019, US computer scientist Katherine Bouman speaks during a House Committee on Science, Space and Technology hearing on the "Event Horizon Telescope: The Black hole seen Round the World" in the Rayburn House office building in Washington DC.



In this photograph taken on Jan 23, 2019, Venezuela's National Assembly head Juan Guaido shouts as he speaks to the crowd during a mass opposition rally against leader Nicolas Maduro in which he declared himself the country's "acting president", on the anniversary of a 1958 uprising that overthrew a military dictatorship, in Caracas. — AFP photos

Emerging from obscurity: 2019's unforeseen history-makers

Of the many people who made history in 2019, some surprised themselves and the world by emerging from obscurity to make their mark, though one remains anonymous for the time being - "The Whistleblower" behind the impeachment probe into US President Donald Trump. Following are brief profiles of eight history-makers in politics, climate and humanitarian activism, music and astronomy who were unknown quantities in 2018.

Trump impeachment 'Whistleblower'

Although huge efforts have been made to expose him, the person whose complaint threatens to bring down the president of the United States is still known only as "The Whistleblower". Reliably reported to be a mid-level, male CIA analyst in his early 30s who specializes in Eastern European issues and previously worked in the White House, he filed an anonymous complaint in August charging that Donald Trump pressured Ukraine counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky to help find dirt on his Democratic rivals - a violation of US laws against seeking foreign help in US elections.

It was a finely written, nine-page memo describing specific Trump actions, and while it was based on secondary sources - his colleagues in the intelligence and diplomatic communities - first-hand witnesses have corroborated what he said, and more, in the months since it surfaced. By sending his complaint to the inspector general for the US intelligence community, The Whistleblower set in motion a series

of reviews and then news articles that quickly snowballed into the House impeachment probe that will see Trump put on trial in the Senate in the new year.

Hong Kong students

Brandishing Molotov cocktails, black-clad Hong Kong students cast off their bookish, meek image in 2019 to become a global symbol of democratic resistance in the face of unyielding authoritarian power. Crowds have marched peacefully for greater freedoms since Britain's handover to China in 1997. But this year saw pent-up anger explode in ways once unimaginable for a financial hub that has always prided itself on stability and safety.

What started as a popular protest over a proposed bill allowing extraditions to mainland China morphed into a popular anti-Beijing revolt and turned the city's tourist shopping districts into brick-strewn urban battlegrounds. The typical frontline protester is university educated and under 30. Arrest and injury figures suggest around a third of those who have taken to the streets are women. Gas masks with bright pink filters - dubbed "pig snouts" in Cantonese - became ubiquitous as people sought to conceal their identities.

In a year that saw major unrest in the streets of Catalonia, Chile and Venezuela, the David and Goliath image of the leaderless protest movement in Hong Kong caught the global imagination, triggering messages of solidarity from around the world and statements of support from the EU, UN and United States. Embracing the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our time", protesters have battled with riot police, stormed the local legislature and spray-painted their core issues and demands across the city, shredding the notion of a peaceful transition to complete Chinese control in 2047 envisaged in the 50-year "one country, two systems" deal.

Close to 6,000 protesters have been arrested with nearly 1,000 charged. But the crowds keep coming and there is little sign the movement's more moderate supporters are going to abandon frontliners they have dubbed "the braves". Faced with regular warnings from Beijing of disastrous consequences should the unrest continue, the protesters have responded with their now omnipresent chant: "If we burn, you burn with us."

Venezuela's Juan Guaido

For a long time he didn't distinguish himself as an outspoken critic of President Nicolas Maduro, but when he proclaimed himself president in January, Juan Guaido suddenly emerged as the socialist leader's main opponent. A key challenge now is to continue to inspire a wilting opposition.

When he burst on the scene in January, the 36-year-old lawmaker initially energized a weakened opposition whose key leaders were imprisoned, exiled or in hiding.

On January 23, a few days after taking the helm as speaker of parliament, the only state institution controlled by the opposition, Guaido proclaimed himself acting president, declaring Maduro's reelection illegitimate. He was swiftly recognized by the United States and about 50 other countries. His popularity rating among Venezuelans soared to 63 percent. By October, however, it had dropped more than 20 points.

A trained industrial engineer, Guaido said he has "tried everything" to push Maduro out of office, as the country endures a deep economic crisis that has driven 3.6 million people to flee since 2016. With great fanfare on Feb 23, Guaido tried to break a border blockade to bring stockpiled international food and medical aid into the country, calling on the military to abandon Maduro. The gambit failed.

On April 30, a military uprising won support of only a handful of officers and was quickly subdued by the government. Guaido, married with a two-year-old daughter, describes himself as a survivor of the "Vargas tragedy" - a Dec 1999 landslide in the northern coastal state where he lived with his mother and five siblings, which killed thousands.

The Venezuelan prosecutor's office, considered a branch of government by the opposition, has filed a number of lawsuits against him, for which he could face up to 30 years in prison. But Washington has repeatedly warned Caracas that jailing Guaido would be Maduro's "last mistake". On Jan 5, his term as parliament speaker officially ends. Agreements between political groupings could allow him to remain in the post, despite a drop in his ability to inspire mass protests, most Venezuelans having abandoned the street to focus on the daily business of survival.

Revolutionary 'icon' Ala Saleh of Sudan

Ala Saleh, dressed in traditional white Sudanese garb and standing atop a car, became the symbol of Sudan's uprising as she led chants against the

now-ousted autocrat Omar Al-Bashir in April. Saleh, 22, was propelled to internet fame after a photograph of her with one hand raised in the air singing and cheering along with crowds of protesters went viral, earning her the moniker of "Kandaka", or Nubian queen.

An engineering student, Saleh grew up in a middle-class Sudanese family in Khartoum and was relatively unknown until her photograph went viral during the anti-Bashir protests. But since earlier this year, she has become a voice for women's rights in the northeast African country, where centuries of patriarchal traditions and decades of strict laws under the former regime have severely restricted the role of women in Sudanese society.

"The existing discrimination and inequality women face, coupled with conflict and violence over decades, has resulted in women being subjected to a wide range of human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence on an epic scale," Saleh said at an open debate at the UN Security Council last month. She told the UNSC that even wearing trousers or meeting male friends took courage as it was criminalized under the former regime.

During Bashir's 30-year rule, authorities enforced a strict public order law that activists said primarily targeted women, through harsh interpretations of Islamic sharia law. On Nov 26,



In this photograph taken on Nov 25, 2019, US singer 'Lil Nas X' arrives for the 2019 American Music Awards at the Microsoft Theatre in Los Angeles. — AFP

the country's new transitional cabinet led by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok scrapped the law, although the ruling sovereign council has yet to ratify the move. Saleh has faced criticism for attracting global attention even as many female activists faced brutal punishments during Bashir's rule. But many defend her rise to fame. "She was a normal person like all others who took to the streets against the former regime," said activist Khalid Tabidi.

Migrants activist Carola Rackete

German Carola Rackete was the captain of a migrant rescue ship in the Mediterranean who became a left-wing hero in Italy for challenging then far-right interior minister Matteo Salvini's "closed ports" policy. The dreadlocked Rackete, 31, was skipper of the Sea-Watch 3, one of several ships used by international charities to aid migrants attempting the perilous sea journey from North Africa to Europe on rickety boats. On June 12, Rackete's ship picked up 53 migrants adrift aboard an inflatable raft off the coast of Libya.

The Italian authorities allowed some of the migrants to be taken in for health reasons but refused entry to 43 others, leading to a two-week stand-off at sea. As conditions on board worsened, Rackete eventually sailed her ship to the island of Lampedusa despite an order from Italian officials not to dock there. She was arrested on June 29, although a judge overturned that order on July 2, saying she had acted "out of necessity" because of the migrants' condition.

Italy's highest court is set to rule in January on whether Rackete's arrest was warranted. Salvini described the incident, in which Sea-Watch 3 allegedly hit a police speedboat, as an "act of war" and referred to Rackete as "the German criminal". During a visit to Italy in November to present her book "The World We Want", Rackete was given a police escort after coming under attack from anti-migrant groups. But she said the harassment "does

not really affect me". "On the contrary, I am now more sensitive to the racism that some people suffer and to the discrimination and social justice that exist in the world," Italian media quoted her as telling supporters at the book launch.

The fairytale rise of Lil Nas X

A little over a year ago, Montero Hill had dropped out of university, was living with his sister, had no job, car or even a driver's license. Today - thanks to record-breaking single "Old Town Road" - he is the millionaire country-rap superstar known as Lil Nas X. The song topped the Billboard Hot 100 for 19 consecutive weeks between April and August, breaking a record dating to the mid-1990s when Mariah Carey and Boyz II Men spent 16 weeks at number one. Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee with Justin Bieber also topped the charts for 16 weeks with "Despacito" in 2017.

All versions of "Old Town Road" have been played more than 1.3 billion times on streaming site Spotify. Lil Nas X, 20, composed the song based on a beat he purchased for \$30 from a Dutch record producer. The result merged thumping bass and rap with a twangy banjo sound more associated with country music. Billboard barred the song from its rankings of country music songs, arguing that it did not have enough elements of that genre to merit inclusion.

A few days later, Lil Nas X released a remix of what was already a hit, starring country star Billy Ray Cyrus, father of pop star Miley Cyrus. Even with the added legitimacy of Billy Cyrus, a two-time Grammy nominee in country categories, the remix was also left out of the country rankings. Both versions went on to become number one in the main Billboard charts, catapulting the previously unknown artist into the celebrity stratosphere.

Lil Nas X has also seduced fans with his down-to-earth personality and humor. He has never hesitated to don traditional country clothing, including cowboy hat, jacket and boots. After successfully achieving a rare marriage of rap and country tunes, the young artist shook the hip-hop world in early July by announcing that he is gay. Although some female rappers had already come out, such as Young M.A. Lil Nas X became the first prominent male rapper to do so. It was a significant development for an industry that, while less macho than in the past, tends to present a more traditional side of masculinity.

The woman who photographed a black hole

US computer scientist Katie Bouman became an overnight sensation in April for her role in developing a computer algorithm that allowed researchers to take the world's first image of a black hole. The 30-year-old, currently an assistant professor at the California Institute of Technology (Cal Tech), was a member of the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) Collaboration when the team captured the image.

Bouman said she first began working on the EHT as a graduate student studying computer vision at MIT and found that black hole imaging shared striking similarities with work she had done on brain imaging based on limited data from an MRI scanner. The EHT Collaboration had spent more than a decade building an Earth-sized computational telescope that combined signals received by various telescopes working in pairs around the world.

However, since there were a limited number of locations, the telescopes were able to capture only some light frequencies, leaving large gaps in information. In 2016, Bouman developed an algorithm named CHIRP to sift through the true mountain of data and fill in the gaps, producing an image. While the images were captured in 2017, the final result had to be independently validated by four EHT teams working around the world to avoid shared human bias.

On April 10, 2019, a final image was released - a moment that Bouman, then a postdoctoral fellow at the Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, described as "truly amazing and one of my life's happiest memories". Testifying before Congress in May about her research, Bouman praised her team that included several early-career scientists - like herself - whose work had been vital to the project. "Like black holes, many early-career scientists with significant contributions often go unseen," she said. But that's not the case with her anymore. — AFP



In this file photograph taken on April 10, 2019, Ala Saleh, a Sudanese woman who propelled to internet fame after clips went viral of her leading powerful protest chants against President Omar Al-Bashir, addresses protesters during a demonstration in front of the military headquarters in Khartoum. — AFP

of reviews and then news articles that quickly snowballed into the House impeachment probe that will see Trump put on trial in the Senate in the new year.

Many whistleblowers stay anonymous, and some collect million-dollar rewards for exposing fraud. But this one will not gain a reward and likely will not remain unknown. Conservatives have already circulated a name and photograph online. Republicans in Congress have tried to expose him, alleging he is a Democrat out to get Trump. But the impeachment process he sparked now fuels itself, meaning that, outed or not, his impact will long be felt in Washington politics.

Greta Thunberg, 16, climate activist

What started as humble protest has turned Greta Thunberg into the world's green conscience and the voice of a generation's frustration with inaction on climate change. It all started in August 2018 when Thunberg decided to skip school and sit outside Sweden's parliament, holding a sign reading "school strike for the climate". Within months her struggle gained worldwide attention and the shy 16-year-old - with her piercing eyes and trademark braids - found herself addressing world leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos and at the European Parliament.

Young people from around the world began staging their own school strikes, and the "Fridays for Future" movement was born. Following her ethos of avoiding air travel, she crossed the Atlantic on a zero-emission sailboat to attend a UN climate summit in New York in September. The Stockholm-born teenager's eyes brimmed with tears and her voice cracked with emotion as she delivered a fiery speech to world leaders. "How dare you?" she thundered. "You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words."

Thunberg, the daughter of an opera singer mother and an actor-turned-producer father, has also faced severe criticism and been subjected to a swarm of online conspiracy theories. Some have mocked her youth, called her a puppet of doomsayers or tried to discredit her because of her Asperger's syndrome, a diagnosis she has never hidden. But no one can deny that the passionate climate activist's struggle has helped put climate change back at the top of the agenda. A survey published by



Flowers left for a father are seen at a grave marker in the Potter's field at Hart Island, October 25, 2019 in New York.



A dinghy sits near the ferry dock and greets visitors to Potter's field.— AFP photos

New York's 'island of the dead' to welcome more of the living

Once off-limits, eroding island in New York where more than a million people are buried in unmarked mass graves dug by prisoners is about to become more accessible. For 150 years, unclaimed bodies, the poor, still-born children and AIDS victims have been laid to rest on the mile-long Hart Island, making it one of America's largest public cemeteries. Often referred to as "island of the dead" or

major development in a years-long campaign to make the site, which has signs reading "prison property keep out," more dignified for the dead and their families.

Hart Island, in the Long Island Sound tidal estuary, became a potter's field in 1869 after the city purchased it from a private landholder to bury unknown and indigent residents. Approximately 1,200 burials, some of unidentified people, still take place every year. Adults are buried in pine coffins stacked three deep; children five deep in plots of 1,000. The boxes are marked with numbers not names, and there are no gravestones. Small white markers indicating the trenches dot the island's burial grounds.

Exhumations

Inmates from nearby Rikers Island, one of America's most notorious jails, are paid \$1 an hour to bury the dead. Around half of the interred are young children, officials say. Many HIV-positive people were buried on a separate site there during the 1980s AIDS crisis, after losing touch with their families or because private graveyards refused to take them over incorrect fears about contagion. Several nationalities are among the dead, including Chinese, Nigerian and Nepali people, notes Justin von Bujdoss, a prison chaplain who gave

AFP a guided tour at the end of October.

"Hart Island represents a cross section of the diversity of New York City, which is why it really ought to be considered sacred ground," he explained. Between 40 and 50 exhumations happen every year, according to officials, after relatives trace a loved one and opt to rebury them in a private cemetery. The island has served as a prison camp for captured Confederates in the US Civil War, a mental asylum, a sanatorium for tuberculosis sufferers, a youth detention center and even a Cold War-era missile base.

Geese roam the windswept, low-lying island. Deer and raccoons are also present, while ospreys nest there and seals bob off its shore. The island is in need of an upgrade. Several dilapidated buildings lie abandoned and erosion, worsened by Superstorm Sandy in 2012, has damaged its shoreline, unearthing some bones. Archeologists have been handling remains to ensure bones do not get mixed up while this September work began on a \$13.2 million project to mitigate the erosion.

'Stigma'

Last month, New York's city council voted to end prison control of Hart Island by transferring jurisdiction to its parks department, in a move hailed by activists. It



New York Mayor Bill de Blasio signs legislation to make Hart Island a public park as Elaine Joseph (center behind de Blasio), Melinda Hunt (left) and Herbert Sweat (second left) watch in New York on Dec 04, 2019.

also pledged to start regular ferry services. "It lifts the stigma of city burials," Melinda Hunt, who has been campaigning for three decades to make the cemetery more accessible, told AFP. Hunt has helped countless relatives, including Joseph, trace their loved ones to Hart Island.

Joseph's daughter died during a snowstorm that shut down New York. She was unable to get to the hospital and amid confusion the city buried the girl in its potter's field. Authorities first started permitting visits in 2007, although relatives were restricted to a gazebo away from the burial plots. After the city settled a lawsuit in 2015, relatives have been allowed to visit gravesites, albeit under controlled conditions and on the specified dates.

Joseph has to apply to the prisons department for prior approval and is not allowed to use her cellphone or take any photos while there. Her visiting time is also limited. Once the transfer of jurisdiction is complete, expected in 2021, Joseph hopes to finally put up a plaque bearing her daughter's name, date of birth, and a small tribute to her. "I want it to be just like any other cemetery," she said. — AFP

White stones mark burial sites at the Potter's field on Hart Island.



A sign on the ferry dock warns against trespassing on Potter's field.

"jail for the dead," the islet has for over a century been run by the prisons department, which heavily restricts access.

Relatives are only allowed to visit on two designated days a month, while correctional officers escort media there just twice a year. AFP was on the most recent trip. "I don't want somebody to tell me when I can visit my baby's gravesite. I want to go when I want to go," Elaine Joseph, 65, told AFP. Her daughter Tomika was just a few days old when she died in January 1978 after being born prematurely. Joseph wasn't able to visit her burial place until 2014.

Soon, the retired nurse will be able to pay her respects regularly thanks to plans to open up Hart Island, which Mayor Bill de Blasio signed last Wednesday. It is a



Drop that donut! Mexico pays portly cops to slim down

It's a sunny morning in Mexico City, and police officers drip with sweat as they do push-ups and squats, part of a program for overweight cops in one of the world's most obese countries. The two dozen officers grimacing through their workout on the pavement of the station house yard — most with round bellies bulging beneath their drenched T-shirts — are just a handful of the more than 1,000 across the capital who have enrolled in the program, "Healthy Police."

They get a bonus of 1,000 pesos (about \$50) a month to participate — though judging by the looks on their faces as their instructor shouts encouragement to finish one

more set, some of them seem to doubt whether it's worth it. But those who stick with the program, which was launched three months ago, say it can be life-changing. "This was all completely new to me... The first month was tough, both mentally and physically," said one, Mauricio Barrera.

"But the program has helped me understand that obesity is an illness," the 26-year-old told AFP. Barrera, who now looks fit and trim, cracked a grin when he revealed how much weight he has lost since he started: 16 kilos (35 pounds).

"This program is a way to fight the obesity problem we have in Mexico, the sedentary

lifestyle," said Javier Ramirez, the buff fitness instructor guiding the beat cops through their routine. "We want them to be in optimal condition so they can do their jobs effectively."

Obesity epidemic

Three-quarters of adults in Mexico are overweight or obese, according to national statistics. Its obesity rate — nearly one-third of the adult population — is second only to the United States in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a 36-member group of developed countries.

Mexico's obesity epidemic is driving high

rates of diabetes and heart disease, according to public health experts. Officials have started looking for ways to combat the problem. In 2014, the country leveled a tax on soda and other sugary beverages. One study estimates it will save 18,900 lives and more than \$983 million over 10 years.

This year, Congress also passed a law requiring manufacturers to put warning labels on junk foods high in sugar, sodium or saturated fat.

'Body feels the difference'

Mexico City's 83,000-member police force is not immune to the problem. "My

health was poor, and I was getting tired at work," said officer Graciela Benitez, 36, taking a break from her crunches.

She has lost around 10 kilos since she started the program, which also includes nutrition counseling sessions to help officers eat a more healthful, balanced diet. "I used to feel sleepy after lunch. I was tired when I got to work," said Benitez. "Now, I don't get tired. My body feels the difference." The authorities are hoping she will serve as an example for more obese police. — AFP



Mexican police officers exercise at a police unit in Mexico City on December 11, 2019. 1,000 Mexico City police officers have joined a program to lose weight, improve their health and do their work more efficiently, in a country where 75% of the adults are overweight or obese. — AFP photos



Mexican police officers exercise at a police unit in Mexico City.

Lifestyle | Gossip

HARRY STYLES NOT 'SPRINKLING
IN NUGGETS OF SEXUAL AMBIGUITY'

The 25-year-old singer refuses to publicly define his own sexuality although he is a vocal supporter of LGBTQ rights and has been seen on stage brandishing Pride flags on multiple occasions but Harry says he is not using the cause to make himself more interesting. He told The Guardian's Weekend magazine: "Am I sprinkling in nuggets of sexual ambiguity to try and be more interesting? No." Harry was also asked about his androgynous style and his 'Fine Line' album sleeve, which, with its pink and blue stripes, the interviewer suggested could be a "gesture at the trans and bisexual

pride flags". Harry said: "In terms of how I wanna dress, and what the album sleeve's gonna be, I tend to make decisions in terms of collaborators I want to work with. I want things to look a certain way. Not because it makes me look gay, or it makes me look straight, or it makes me look bisexual, but because I think it looks cool. And more than that, I dunno, I just think sexuality's something that's fun. Honestly? I can't say I've given it any more thought than that. "What women wear. What men wear. For me it's not a question of that. If I see a nice shirt and get told, 'But it's for ladies.' I think: 'Okaaaay?' Doesn't make me want to

wear it less though.' I think the moment you feel more comfortable with yourself, it all becomes a lot easier." Harry also revealed that he doesn't mind being asked about his sexuality but insisted he has no plans to definitively provide an answer. He explained: "What I would say, about the whole being-asked-about-my-sexuality thing - this is a job where you might get asked. And to complain about it, to say you hate it, and still do the job, that's just silly. You respect that someone's gonna ask. And you hope that they respect they might not get an answer."

Beyonce's dad clarifies
claims about harassment
faced by his daughter

Mathew Knowles - who managed his daughter's group Destiny's Child - previously revealed that when the two groups toured together in the early 2000s, he had to "put the guys off the bus" in order to diffuse the situation. However, after seeing coverage about his remarks, Mathew told the New York Post's Page Six: "I feel the need to clarify that I did not say the girls were sexually harassed while on tour with Jagged Edge in the 2000s. I said 'harassed'. The term 'sexual harassment' may imply to some to mean physical advances. I would classify the harassment they encountered more as unwelcome and inappropriate remarks to minors from adults who should have known better." Speaking previously, Mathew - who

did not name the alleged perpetrators - told Vlad TV: "Now, remember the girls are minors. They're 16 years old... the guys are 21 and 22 years old. I have a fiduciary duty with minors, by the law, there's a certain way I have to manage that. "I got a call from Kelly and Beyonce... saying that they were constantly being harassed by two of the members in Jagged Edge. "I couldn't have that. I literally had to put the guys off the bus in Baton Rouge. That began all of this drama." The talent manager was then asked how he handled a group of men trying to "sleep" with his daughter. He replied: "We won't talk about that on camera." Jagged Edge denied the allegations by sharing a meme on Instagram that read: "A lie don't care who tell it."

Denise Van Outen speaks
to Lee Mead every day

The 45-year-old star split from the actor in 2013 after four years of marriage but they have maintained a close relationship for the sake of their nine-year-old daughter Betsy and she thinks it's "amazing" they can even go off on holiday together. She told Closer magazine: "It's amazing because what I have with Lee and Betsy works so well. "If I have to work one week and can't see her, I don't feel bad because I know Lee will be looking after her and she'll be having a great time with her dad. "I speak to Lee daily, so I always know what's going on, and Betsy knows how loved she is by both of us. "We even all jetted off to Dubai for a family holiday together one year. It's amazing can we do that without there being any problems." Denise is also grate-

ful that Lee and her current partner, Eddie Boxshall, get along well. She added: "I love what I have now with Betsy and Lee. "Betsy is amazing, she is my main priority and we both work to bring her up together. And Eddie and Lee get on really well." Meanwhile, the 'Loose Women' star recently ruled out having children with Eddie because they both have kids from previous relationships. She explained: "Eddie and I had the conversation last year and we probably would have done it together earlier on in the relationship but we didn't and now we don't feel like it's something we need to do together, because we've got kids between us and we're actually in a really nice place with our lives."

Caroline Flack
needed hospital
treatment

The 40-year-old television presenter was taken into police custody on Friday (13.12.19) morning, following allegations of a dispute at the home she shares with her 27-year-old boyfriend Lewis Burton, which took place on Thursday and The Sun newspaper reports that Caroline received an accidental injury and was treated by medical professionals. Speaking about the fight, a neighbour told the newspaper: "I was woken by police and paramedics in the early hours of Thursday morning. "There were several police cars at Caroline's house. I know Caroline and this new man. She's very friendly and always speaks to us. I hope things sort themselves out." A spokesperson for Caroline added: "We confirm that police attended Caroline's home following a private domestic incident. She is co-operating with the appropriate people to resolve matters. We will not be making any further comment for legal reasons." A Met Police spokesperson told MailOnline: "Caroline Flack, 40, of Islington was charged on Friday, 13 December with assault by beating. She will appear on bail at Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court on Monday, 23 December. "This follows an incident at approximately 05:25hrs on Thursday, 12 December after reports of a man being assaulted. He was not seriously injured." Caroline and Lewis have been in a relationship since July this year, and the couple recently became the subject of engagement rumours. However, a representative for Caroline insisted in November the pair are "100 percent not engaged".



Sally Field arrested at Jane Fonda's climate protest

The 73-year-old actress joined Jane at her protest in front of the US Capitol yesterday and has become the latest star to be arrested for her actions. In a passionate speech at the demonstration, Sally said "the time is now" to act on climate change. She added: "We can not sit back in our comfort zones, on our couches, and wonder what can we do. We can get out. We can do something - in the rain, whatever it takes." The demonstration was the 10th consecutive weekly protest from Jane, who was first arrested for her actions back in October. The 'Gracie and Frankie' star's arrest came after she said she was planning to relocate to the US

capital city temporarily, with her main goal being to get arrested during a protest. Jane, 81, was inspired by teenage activist Greta Thunberg, who was "so traumatised" by the threat of climate change that she "stopped eating and speaking for almost a year". When asked what moved her to protest, Jane said: "I read Naomi Klein's new book. It's called 'On Fire: The (Burning) Case for a Green New Deal'. [One of the things about the book that really changed my life] was the way she wrote about Greta. I mean, I knew about Greta, I didn't know she was on the spectrum. And I didn't really understand what Asperger's meant. "When Naomi described it, I realised that

here is this young person who ... she's not influenced by what other people think. ... On the spectrum, if they are interested in something, they have a laser focus on that and whatever the denials and rationalisations the rest of us indulge in, that doesn't come into play with her. "And she read the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] report and she realised that the crisis was barreling straight at us, like a train, and looked around and people weren't behaving appropriately. It so traumatised her that she stopped eating and speaking for almost a year. And that really hit me."

Gemma Arterton's
partner is 'amazing'

The 'King's Man' star is in a relationship with Rory Keenan - who she is rumoured to have married earlier this year - and loves the fact the 'War & Peace' actor is so supportive towards her ambitions. She told Harper's Bazaar: "He's amazing because he believes in me." The 33-year-old actress and her partner have added to their household with the addition of a dog, a cocker spaniel named Luca, which she described as a "silly creature". She gushed: "He's just a bundle of joy - the most loving, sweet-natured, silly creature. Rory and I call him our first-born son." Gemma is "into spirituality" and has beliefs in a "higher" power, and she admitted she would be sad if life on earth was the end of

everything. She said: "I don't have a religion but I'm into spirituality. I definitely like the idea there's something else, and who knows what that is? "I think I'd feel saddened to think this is it." Meanwhile, 'Summerland' actress is keen to direct one day, but not in the near future as she wants to make sure she finds the right project. She explained: "It takes up so much of your life and it's all on your shoulders, so when I do direct, it's got to be something I'm going to fight for - a story I believe in 200 per cent. "Those kinds of projects don't come along very often... [And] I do really love acting - I wouldn't want to stop doing it, ever." Gemma also opened up on the state of the film industry, and insisted it's in a much better place than it was in the past.

Kate Beckinsale follows diet
based on regular blood tests

The 46-year-old actress consults with nutritionist Dr. Goglia - who creates food programmes based on the samples - and her personal trainer, Brad Siskind, also finds the results useful in his work. He told OK! magazine: "Without blood work, you're essentially throwing darts at the board with your eyes closed. "Blood work reveals all truths and then we can create a workout programme to achieve a certain look the client wants." The 'Underworld' star has worked with Brad for two years, and he revealed she always pushes herself hard during their sessions together. He said: "Kate works her tail off in the gym. She's focused when she's training and shows up ready to work. "We've got a great rhythm and the hour just flies by. She makes my job very easy." The pair train for an hour a day, six days a week, and they have a very specific schedule to stick to. Brad explained: "We do whole body training, otherwise known as peripheral heart action, which involves training the upper then lower body, so that the blood is continually moving all over the

body. "This kind of training burns the most calories because we are using the entire body. "It involves eight to 10 exercises, then we finish the round with a quick two-minute cardio interval, which we repeat. Finally we stretch." The 'Farming' actress previously revealed she takes her own packed lunch to set with her because she has a lot of allergies. She said: "I'm incredibly self-sufficient and I always bring my own food. I'm allergic to enough things that it's pointless for me to try the curry. "I have to just make sure I have protein every few hours or I'll keel over."

Kim Kardashian West
releases family Christmas card

The 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians' star took to her Instagram account on Friday (13.12.19) to share the yearly festive greetings card of her, her husband Kanye West and their four children: North, six, Saint, four, Chicago, 23 months, and Psalm, seven months, in matching grey tracksuits. She captioned the photograph: "The West Family Christmas Card 2019." The 39-year-old reality TV beauty has taken a different approach this year as she usually sends a Christmas card featuring her extended family - including her sisters Kourtney and Khloe and mother Kris Jenner - rather than the six of them. Last year, fans were worried they wouldn't get the annual card as there had been talks about whether the famous family would or wouldn't be posing for the photo shoot alongside their children following the drama of 2018. However, Khloe, 35, later teased that there would be one on the way. When one fan asked if they would be keeping with the festive tradition, Khloe wrote on Twitter: "I believe one will be coming very shortly." Kim said at the time that she was trying to organise a spontaneous shoot. She explained: "We're on set today for a secret project. I'm here with all my sisters and my mom. Do you think I should pop

up on them with a photographer and shoot our family Christmas card? I think I can get this done. All right, so I can maybe pull this off in about an hour, but do we want a sister [and] mom Christmas card? Or do we want all the kids in it? I mean, I can try and get the kids here and surprise everyone. What do I do, guys? Christmas card today?" It's not known whether Kim, Kanye and their children will feature in an extended family Christmas card this year or whether there will even be one at all.





RIYADH: People view the driverless rolling stock of the new Riyadh Metro in the Saudi capital. Saudi Arabia is boosting its infrastructure spending and expanding its railways—including a \$22.5 billion metro system under construction in the capital Riyadh—as it seeks to diversify its oil-dependent economy. — AFP



MADRID: Activists from international climate action group Extinction Rebellion protest after dumping manure outside the UN Climate Change Conference COP25 at the 'IFEMA - Feria de Madrid' exhibition centre, in Madrid yesterday. — AFP

Protests erupt; Algeria ex-PM...

Continued from Page 1

The 74-year-old former prime minister took just over 58 percent of the vote, trouncing his four fellow contenders without the need for a runoff, electoral commission chairman Mohamed Charfi said.

All five candidates served under the two-decade rule of Bouteflika, 82, who resigned in the face of mass demonstrations in April. The deeply unpopular election had been championed by the army as a way of restoring stability after almost 10 months of street protests. The candidates - who included another former prime minister, Ali Benflis, 75, and an ex-minister, Azzedine Mihoubi - were widely rejected by protesters as "children of the regime".

Low turnout

A record six in 10 Algerians abstained in the vote, Charfi said - the lowest turnout for a multi-party election since independence from France in 1962. Tens of thousands rallied on election day in central Algiers, where police with water cannon and helicopters tried to disperse them.

On Friday, protesters took to the streets again in response to calls on social media under the slogan "Tebboune is not my president". Said, a 32-year-old engineer from Bouira, said he had made the 100-kilometre journey to the capital to take part in the demonstrations. "I spent the night here so I could demonstrate again... and say we don't recognize their election or their president." Pensioner Farida mocked the official figures after the vote. "Someone added yeast to them to get them to rise," she said. Protests in Algiers dispersed calmly in the late afternoon.

In the mountain region of Kabylie - home to much of the country's Berber minority and historically opposed to the central government - protesters ransacked

polling stations and clashed with police on election day, residents said. The US on Friday congratulated the president-elect but called on Algeria to respect the rights of protesters. "The Algerian people have voiced their aspirations not just at the ballot box but in the streets... The United States supports the right of Algerians to peacefully express their views," State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortogus said.

'Mired in crisis'

Young protesters in the capital slammed those casting their ballots as "traitors of the nation". But some voters said they had turned out because after nearly a year of turmoil it was time for a return to stability. Tebboune faces a mammoth task to be accepted by the electorate in the North African country, where many citizens see the government as inept, corrupt and unable to manage the flagging economy. Addressing reporters on Friday, he vowed to battle corruption and to form a national conference charged with amending the constitution.

"There will be a new electoral law and we will definitively separate money from politics," he said. Tebboune served in Bouteflika's cabinet from 1999 to 2002, returning in 2012 and briefly serving as prime minister in 2017. But Bouteflika sacked him after just three months for criticizing top regime figures, many of whom are now in jail on corruption charges. Tebboune is seen as close to army chief Ahmed Gaid Salah, who has emerged as Algeria's strongman since Bouteflika stepped down.

Since the start of the campaign, Tebboune has sought to distance himself from Bouteflika. The "Hirak" street movement kicked off when Bouteflika announced in February that he would seek a fifth term in office. Protesters have stayed on the streets ever since, demanding the total dismantling of the system that has ruled Algeria since independence. They have also vented their anger at Gaid Salah. "This system is worn out," said Maghreb expert Karima Direche, warning that protesters would continue pressing for change. "We are witnessing the death of the system. It will take as long as it takes," she said. — AFP

been this agitation (against) illegal migration from Bangladesh over many years," Sanjoy Hazarika, a professor at Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia University said.

"They feel that their rights to land, to jobs, and the entire social fabric education, existing social services and so on will be impacted by this." On Friday university students in Delhi clashed with police, who used batons and tear gas shells to quell the protests. The passage of the bill also sparked angry scenes in both houses of parliament this week, with one lawmaker likening it to anti-Jewish legislation by the Nazis in 1930s Germany. Rahul Gandhi of the opposition Congress party has called the law "an attempt to ethnically cleanse the northeast". — AFP

US, UK issue travel warnings for NE...

Continued from Page 1

Assam has long been a hotbed of ethnic tensions. In 1983 some 2,000 people, mainly Bengali Muslims, were butchered in what became known as the Nellie massacre. This year a citizenship registry left off 1.9 million people—many of them Muslims—unable to prove that they or their forebears were in Assam before 1971, leaving them to face possible statelessness. "There has

Anger erupts at the UN climate summit

MADRID: Major economies resisted calls for bolder climate commitments as a UN summit in Madrid limped towards a delayed conclusion yesterday, dimming hopes that nations will act in time to stop rising temperatures devastating people and the natural world. With the two-week gathering spilling into the weekend, campaigners and many delegates slammed Chile, presiding over the talks, for drafting a summit text that they said risked throwing the 2015 Paris Agreement to tackle global warming into reverse.

"At a time when scientists are queuing up to warn about terrifying consequences if emissions keep rising, and school children are taking to the streets in their millions, what we have here in Madrid is a betrayal of people across the world," said Mohamed Adow, director of Power Shift Africa, a climate and energy think-tank in Nairobi.

The annual climate marathon had been due to conclude on Friday, but dragged on with ministers mired in multiple disputes over implementing the Paris deal, which has so far failed to stem the upward march of global carbon emissions. Long-time participants in the talks expressed outrage at the unwillingness of major polluters to show ambition commensurate with the gravity of the climate crisis, after a year of wildfires, cyclones, droughts and floods.

The European Union, small island states and many other nations had been calling for the Madrid decision to signal that the more than 190 countries participating in the Paris process will submit bolder pledges to cut emissions next year. The agreement enters a crucial implementation phase in 2020, when countries are supposed to ratchet up their ambitions ahead of the next

major round of talks in Glasgow. If big economies such as China, India, Japan, Brazil, Australia and others fail to agree more meaningful climate action soon, then scientists say already slim hopes of averting catastrophic temperature rises will all but vanish.

Although no advanced economy is yet on track for the kind of action scientists say is needed to steer the climate onto a safer path, all the EU's 28 member states, bar Poland, agreed in Brussels on Thursday to target net zero emissions by 2050. Krista Mikkonen, Finland's environment minister, speaking on behalf of the EU, told the talks it would be "impossible to leave" without agreeing a "strong message" on the need to redouble pledges to cut emissions next year.

Ministers broke into groups yesterday for eleventh-hour negotiations on a tangle of issues, including finance for climate-vulnerable countries, carbon markets, and the all-important issue of the strength of the summit's final text. With the clock ticking, Andrés Landerretche, Chile's summit coordinator, said the goal was to conclude yesterday. "The vast majority of delegations are asking for a more ambitious text, and that's what we're aiming at," he told reporters.

Campaigners had said a draft text circulating earlier was among the worst they had seen at climate negotiations. "The approach Chile has taken on this text shows how it has listened to the polluters and not to the people," said Jennifer Morgan, executive director of Greenpeace International. The Paris process has been weakened by a move by US President Donald Trump to begin withdrawing the world's largest historical emitter from the agreement last month, making it easier for other big countries to backslide. — Reuters



AMSTERDAM: Greenpeace activists hold banners and flags as they protest to denounce airline pollution in the main hall of the Amsterdam Schiphol airport yesterday. — AFP

Sudan's Bashir sentenced to...

Continued from Page 1

launched in Sudan against Bashir. In May he was charged with incitement and involvement in the killing of protesters, and this week he was summoned for questioning over his role in the 1989 military coup that brought him to power.

Authorities running Sudan under a three-year, power-sharing deal struck in August are eager to demonstrate progress in the country's political transition ahead of the

first anniversary of the start of the uprising against Bashir. On Friday, the Sudanese military officer in charge of removing the powers of the old regime announced that Sudan's bar association and trade union governing bodies were being dissolved, according to state news agency SUNA.

He also announced that a committee was being formed to dissolve the assets of Bashir's National Congress Party. Protests triggered by a deepening economic crisis began to spread across Sudan on Dec 19, 2018. Nearly four months later, a group of military generals removed Bashir from power and jailed him in Khartoum's Kobar prison where he had incarcerated thousands of opponents of his repressive rule. — Reuters

Sports

Huge comeback lifts Internationals with Presidents Cup on knife-edge

Japan's Matsuyama and Taiwanese CT Pan score biggest win of the event

MELBOURNE: A gutsy comeback from Marc Leishman and Abraham Ancer gave Ernie Els' International team a massive confidence boost at the Presidents Cup yesterday as Tiger Wood's Americans stormed into contention.

The pair were five down against Justin Thomas and Rickie Fowler after 10 holes in the afternoon foursomes, or alternate shot format, but fought back to halve the tie at the 18th in a demoralising blow for the US.

Woods' team won the foursomes 3-1 after losing the morning fourball matches 2.5-1.5 to leave the biennial showdown on a knife-edge ahead of today's 12 singles. The Internationals lead 10-8 as they search for a first victory since 1998 — their lone win at the match play event. "It was unbelievable. You talk about coming back from the dead — 5-down and 4-down through eight and nine holes, come back and get that result, I mean, that's a turnaround. That gets momentum," said Els.

"I mean, we had a lead, it looked like it was going to be wiped away, and the guys absolutely played with their guts and I could not be more proud and more happy for those guys in that cabin tonight." World number four Thomas had been in a rich vein of form around the challenging Royal Melbourne sandbelt course, first alongside Woods and then with Fowler before he ran out of steam.

He said he was "speechless" after throwing away the match and it was "unacceptable for us to get a half a point". In contrast, Leishman was over the moon, calling the comeback "pretty awesome".

"It's going to be a big momentum gainer for the

Internationals," he added. Despite the Thomas-Fowler meltdown, playing-captain Woods said the day was a win for his team. "At one point it looked like we were going to be down 1-9, and for the International team only to get one point from that point on, for us to fight back and get eight points, was a huge, huge win for us today," he said.

SHOVED HIM

After relying heavily on Thomas over the first three sessions, where he won three points, his teammates finally stepped up to help the US clinch the foursomes and stay in the hunt. Dustin Johnson and Gary Woodland won, beating veteran Adam Scott and Louis Oosthuizen, while Patrick Cantlay and Xander Schauffele also secured a point, overcoming Australia's Cameron Smith and South Korean Im Sung-jae.

Matt Kuchar and Tony Finau halved their match with South Korea's An Byeong-hun and Chilean Joaquin Niemann after being 2-up for much of it. Earlier, Japan's Hideki Matsuyama and Taiwanese rookie CT Pan scored the biggest win of the event so far, crushing Webb Simpson and Patrick Reed 5 and 3.

They blew away the Americans courtesy of Matsuyama's cool head and Pan's hot putter and laser-like iron play — the pairing's second win. "I just feel we have a chemistry. It's hard to explain. Our game fits each other and that really helps," said Pan.

The match was marred by an altercation between Reed's caddie Kessler Karain and a fan, who was shoved as tensions boiled over after endless barracking



MELBOURNE: International Team player An Byeong-hun of South Korea hits out of a bunker during the third day of the Presidents Cup golf tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

of the player by spectators. Reed was docked two strokes for improving his lie in sand in the Bahamas last week, causing Smith to brand him a cheat and he has been targeted by fans in Melbourne.

"I got off the cart and shoved him, said a couple things, probably a few expletives," Karain said in a statement to broadcaster ESPN on the incident. The PGA Tour banned him from carrying Reed's bags today. — AFP

Kuwait suffers second loss as USA defeat Iran

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Water Polo team hopes to restore its balance when it plays against the USA at 21:50 pm today in the fourth round of Group C in the FINA World Men's Junior Water Polo Championship being held in Kuwait at HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Swimming Pools Complex with 20 countries participating.

Kuwait's team suffered its second loss in front of Montenegro, a team expected to win the championship, with the score of 7-42 of the second round, which saw the USA beat Iran 27-4.

The first round saw Kuwait losing to Iran 7-15, while Italy beat USA 18-11, then Italy beat Iran 16-4 yesterday.

Today's matches, Spain will face Canada at 12:10 pm, while Hungary which lost to Spain 7-9 in the first round,

seeks to recover when it plays Russia at 4:10 pm, bearing in mind that Hungary beat Egypt 19-7 yesterday.

In Group D, Greece, the defending champion will not have any problem in moving to the quarter finals when it meets Uzbekistan at 10:50 am, while it will be a match of equal chances between Brazil and Australia when they meet at 9:30 am.

In Group A it will be a match for the top spot between Serbia and Croatia at 5:30 pm, while Japan will meet south Africa at 1:30 pm.

The second round which was held Friday saw Serbia beat Japan 13-7, China beat South Africa 14-13 in Group A, Spain beat Egypt 18-4, Canada beat Russia 12-10 in Group B, Greece beat New Zealand 14-5 and Brazil beat Uzbekistan 23-6 in Group D.

Meanwhile, President of Asian and Kuwait Swimming Federations Sheikh Khalid Al-Bader said Kuwait hosting the championship place in once again on the world's sports map following a lengthy suspension. He also appreciated the patronage of House Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem of this major event.

He pointed to the support of Public Authority of Sport (PAS) and its



Director General Dr Humoud Fulaiteh and his Deputy Saqer Al-Mulla which made it easy to organize the championship, which coincided with the opening of HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad swimming complex.

Egyptian coach Hisham Nafe said his team is trying hard to reach an advanced

place in the championship, especially that it prepared well.

He said the Egyptian federation brought a foreign expert to overlook the national team's training.

He said Egypt found itself in a tough group with teams that are candidate to win the championship.

NZ Olympic legend Snell dies at 80



Peter Snell

DALLAS: Famed New Zealand Olympic middle distance runner Peter Snell has died in Dallas at age 80, the New Zealand Herald reported yesterday. The newspaper reported sports historian and friend Ron Palenski confirmed Snell had died at his Texas home on Thursday after years of heart problems.

Palenski said Snell's wife Miki had telephoned him to share the news. Snell, considered New Zealand's greatest athlete, won three Olympic gold medals. He took the 800 metres at the 1960 Rome Games and won both the 800 and 1,500 metres at the 1964 Tokyo Games.

He is the only man since 1920 to have won both events at the same Olympics. "Peter Snell was to running what Sir Edmund Hillary was to mountaineering," friend and Olympic marathoner Barry Magee once said.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern remembered Snell as "a legend, here and around the world. Our thoughts are with Sir Peter's wife Miki and their family." Under the guidance of famed coach Arthur Lydiard, the powerfully built Snell became one of the most dominant middle-distance runners in history. He set world records in the mile and 800 metres and also won dual gold at the 1962 Commonwealth Games in Perth. Snell was preparing to celebrate his 81st birthday on Tuesday.

His wife Miki told New Zealand's Stuff her husband was having a good day on Thursday, despite a health scare last month when he passed out while driving and crashed into several parked vehicles.

"He felt good, he had gone and done some activities, and was planning on doing more - he wanted to play table tennis," Miki told the publication. "He lay down to watch the news on TV and fell asleep.

"I tried to wake him up but he wouldn't move. The paramedics came in about five minutes but they couldn't wake him." Snell retired from running in 1965 and later became a sports scientist in the United States.

His work mainly focused on the kind of extreme performance he had personally achieved. "I really wanted to know what made athletes tick... try to understand why Arthur Lydiard's training methods worked so well," he wrote in "Peter Snell: From Olympian to Scientist" in 2007.

Although living in the United States, Snell was always admired in New Zealand. He was elevated to Sir Peter Snell in 2009 and was voted New Zealand's Sportsman of the Twentieth Century.

"Just reading his name says greatness to me," Nick Willis, New Zealand's two-time Olympic medallist in the 1,500 metres, said on Twitter. "He is the greatest ever. Absolute dominance in his era." — Reuters



Kuwait women weightlifters win medals

AMMAN: Bashayer Al-Mayyas and Tofool Al-Hasan both clinched Kuwait's first-ever medals in women's weightlifting amid a newly-formed national team at an Arab event in Jordan on Friday.

The duo won a total six medals, including three silver in the 55kg weight categories going to Al-Mayyas, and three bronze medals across various 49kg events for Al-Hasan, at an Arab youth and juniors weightlifting tournament.

Kuwait Weightlifting Federation is keen to offer an "equal amount of support for women as it does with their male counterparts," Secretary Mesaleem Al-Adwani told KUNA. The federation official hailed the milestones as an "honour" for the country, saying the results were "crucial" on the road to Tokyo 2020 Olympics qualification. Some 35 competitors, representing 18 countries, are participating in the regional event, which concludes on Tuesday. — KUNA



AMMAN: Al-Mayyas and Al-Hasan both clinched Kuwait's first-ever medals. — KUNA

Badminton ace Momota closes on 11th title

SHANGHAI: Kento Momota eased into the semi-finals of the season-ending BWF World Tour Finals on Friday as the peerless Japanese goes after an 11th title of the year.

The world number one swatted aside Jonatan Christie of Indonesia 21-14, 21-14 for his third victory on the bounce in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou.

The 25-year-old is having a spectacular 2019, his run of tournament wins includes the world championships, and will be clear favourite against Taiwan's 19th-ranked Wang Tzu-wei.

Also into yesterday's last four is the reigning Olympic champion and home hope Chen Long, who faces Anthony Sinisuka Ginting of Indonesia.

Former number one Viktor Axelsen of Denmark bowed out after retiring from his match against Ginting complaining of a strained right hamstring muscle and pain in his groin. In the women's draw, world number one Tai Tzu-ying of Taiwan sealed her place in the semi-finals after defeating Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrunphan 21-14, 21-9. — AFP

Sports

Australia take huge lead against New Zealand in first Test

Labuschagne, fifth Australian to score four centuries in succession

PERTH: Australia was in a commanding position despite a late batting collapse on the third day of the first Test against New Zealand at Perth Stadium yesterday. Having led by 250 runs on the first innings, the home side were 167 for six at stumps, with Matthew Head on eight and Pat Cummins on one — an overall lead of 417.

Cruising at 131 for one when Marnus Labuschagne (50) and Joe Burns (53) were at the crease, the Australians lost five for 29 under lights later in the day against some spirited bowling from the Kiwis, with Tim Southee claiming 4-63. Labuschagne, dropped on four by Colin de Grandhomme from the bowling of Neil Wagner (2-40), missed the chance to join elite company when he pulled a short ball straight to Mitchell Santner at mid-wicket from the same bowler.

Without a Test century only a month ago, he was on track to become just the second Australian batsman,

and fifth overall, to score four Test centuries in succession. The only Australian to do so previously was Jack Fingleton in 1936.

Santner couldn't get a wicket with his spin, but he was the centre of attention in the field, colliding with Aleem Dar late in the day and leaving the umpire with a knee injury. Dar, umpiring in a record 129th Test match, spent several minutes lying on the ground and needed medical attention before returning to his post.

Smith's relatively lean summer continued when he holed out to a short ball from Wagner for 16, the first time in his entire 71-Test career he has gone three matches without a half-century.

After the home side made 416 the Kiwis were dismissed for only 166 in their first innings as Australian paceman Mitchell Starc terrorised their batsmen in continued sweltering conditions. Australia didn't enforce the follow-on given the extreme heat and the absence of



PERTH: Australia's batsmen Marnus Labuschagne (L) makes a run on day three of the first Test cricket match between Australia and New Zealand at the Perth Stadium in Perth yesterday. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at the close on the third day of the first Test between Australia and New Zealand at Perth Stadium yesterday:

Australia 1st innings 416		New Zealand 1st innings	
2nd innings			
D. Warner c sub (Blundell) b Southee	19	J. Raval b Hazlewood	1
J. Burns c Nicholls b Southee	53	T. Latham c and b Starc	0
M. Labuschagne c Santner b Wagner	50	K. Williamson c Smith b Starc	34
S. Smith c Raval b Wagner	16	R. Taylor c Smith b Lyon	80
M. Wade not out	8	H. Nicholls c Paine b Starc	7
T. Head c de Grandhomme b Southee	5	N. Wagner b Starc	0
T. Paine b Southee	0	B.J. Watling b Cummins	8
P. Cummins not out	1	C. de Grandhomme c Smith b Starc	23
Extras: (lb3, nb5, w7)	15	M. Santner b Labuschagne	2
		T. Southee c sub (Neser) b Lyon	8
		Extras: (b1, lb2) 3	
		Total: (all out; 55.2 overs) 166	
Fall of wickets: 1-44 (Warner), 2-131 (Labuschagne), 3-148 (Burns), 4-154 (Smith), 5-160 (Head), 6-160 (Paine)		Fall of wickets: 1-1 (Latham), 2-1 (Raval), 3-77 (Williamson), 4-97 (Nicholls), 5-97 (Wagner), 6-120 (Watling), 7-147 (Taylor), 8-155 (de Grandhomme), 9-166 (Santner), 10-166 (Southee).	
Bowling: Southee 19-6-63-4 (3w), de Grandhomme 13-2-26-0 (1w, 2nb), Wagner 17-2-40-2 (3w, 3nb), Santner 8-0-35-0		Bowling: Starc 18-2-52-5, Hazlewood 12-1-0-1, Cummins 14-4-3-46-1, Wade 2-0-8-0, Lyon 14-2-2-48-2, M. Labuschagne 5-1-9-1.	

front line paceman Josh Hazlewood due to injury.

Starc claimed 5-52 and troubled the New Zealanders with his pace and bounce. Only Ross Taylor offered meaningful resistance with 80, but he was caught at slip by Smith off the bowling of Nathan Lyon.

Smith took three catches, including his blinder on the second day to remove Kane Williamson for 34 and end a 76-run third-wicket stand with Taylor. His third was contentious, when de Grandhomme (23) was given

out caught behind by Dar to hand Starc his fifth scalp.

De Grandhomme tried to fend off a rising delivery and the ball deflected off his helmet to Smith in slips, with Dar believing it also brushed the batsman's gloves.

The batsman reviewed and although replays showed no conclusive evidence of contact with his gloves, third umpire Marais Erasmus said there was insufficient grounds to overturn the dismissal and Dar's decision stood. — AFP

Boucher named South Africa head coach

CAPE TOWN: Former wicketkeeper Mark Boucher has been appointed South Africa's head coach ahead of the four-test home series against England that starts on Dec. 26. Cricket South Africa confirmed yesterday. Boucher, who has been given a contract until 2023, was unveiled by new CSA director of cricket Graeme Smith, with Enoch Nkwe to act as assistant coach and former Test opener Ashwell Prince to lead the South African A side.

"I felt at this stage that the Proteas need a hardened guy with international experience, one who is very knowledgeable and tactically very sound, and we also know what qualities he has as a man," Smith said. "We feel Enoch has a lot of qualities that will be very useful to Mark and it is a good opportunity for him to advance his own role in South African cricket going forward."

Boucher spent close on a decade with Smith in the South African test side, and the pair are known to be close. They will now seek to engineer an upswing in fortunes for the test side that has lost five matches in a row, against Sri Lanka and India.

Boucher will scramble to put together a plan to counter England in his next assignment starting on



NEWLANDS: (From left) Graeme Smith, Cricket South Africa interim director of cricket and former Test captain, Enoch Nkwe, the South African Cricket assistant coach, Mark Boucher, the South African Cricket coach, and Linda Zondi, Cricket South Africa's convener of selectors, pose for a portrait at the Newlands Cricket grounds in Newlands. — AFP

Boxing Day. "Our confidence is a bit down, we need to get that back," Boucher said. "There is a wealth of knowledge in this country. We need to get consultants in and get information through to the players to give them the space to do their best."

Boucher took over the domestic Titans franchise in 2016 and within a year was named Coach of the Year at the annual CSA awards. He has led the side to the

country's first-class four-day trophy, two 50-over competition wins and the Twenty20 title.

He made 147 Test appearances for South Africa and took 999 dismissals in all forms of cricket, a world record. He will form part of a selection panel that also includes Nkwe, test captain Faf du Plessis and interim selector Linda Zondi, who will be in the role until April. — Reuters

Upset-minded Falcons ready to face 49ers

SAN FRANCISCO: The visiting Atlanta Falcons hope to do to the San Francisco 49ers what they did to the New Orleans Saints on an earlier trip to Louisiana, when they got another crack at an NFC heavyweight today afternoon.

The NFC West-leading 49ers (11-2) have a chance to clinch their first postseason berth since 2013 when they open a two-game homestand against the NFC South's last-place club. The Falcons (4-9) had lost six in a row before going to the Superdome and shocking the one-loss Saints 26-9 in Week 10.

Atlanta makes this longer trip to the West Coast riding the momentum of two consecutive road wins and a 40-20 thumping of the Carolina Panthers at home last week. Matt Ryan threw for 313 yards and two touchdowns in the victory, reminding 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan and quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo of the Falcons' run to the Super Bowl in 2016. Shanahan was Ryan's offensive coordinator that season, while Garoppolo, 1,000 miles away, found himself playing the role of Ryan on the New England Patriots' scout team in preparation for the championship game.

"That was a long time ago," Garoppolo noted to reporters this week. "It was throw the ball to Julio (Jones) a lot. I remember, so I'm sure that's a big part of the game plan." Ryan must rely on Jones more than usual this week with sidekick Calvin Ridley having been lost for the season with an abdominal injury sustained in the win over the

Panthers. Ridley had already contributed five catches for 76 yards and a touchdown, his seventh of the season, before getting hurt.

While the Falcons were running up 40 points against the Panthers, the 49ers were putting up 48 in a dramatic, two-point victory over New Orleans. The win produced two rewards for the 49ers: Coupled with the Seattle Seahawks' loss to the Los Angeles Rams, they snatched the top record in the NFC with three games remaining, and Garoppolo was selected as the conference's Offensive Player of the Week after passing for 349 yards and four touchdowns. Both quarterbacks appear to catch a break with defensive injuries on the other side of the ball this week. On top of the Falcons losing Ridley, top cornerback Desmond Trufant is done for the rest of the season after he sustained a broken arm against the Panthers.

The 49ers, meanwhile, found themselves pondering practice-squad and waiver-wire options at nose tackle this week, with D.J. Jones (serious ankle injury) and Julian Taylor (ligament damage in elbow) ruled out. Star cornerback Richard Sherman (sprained knee), defensive end Dee Ford (quadriceps, hamstring) and cornerback K'Waun Williams (concussion) also won't play today.

San Francisco's offense also has a key injury with starting center Weston Richburg out for the season after tearing his patellar tendon against New Orleans. Still, while Falcons linebackers coach Jeff Ulbrich admitted his guys will have their hands full dealing with 49ers powerful tight end George Kittle, he believes there's only one real star of the San Francisco show. "It's one of those games where you'd like to say trust your reads, trust your keys, trust your eyes and your rules, but (Shanahan) is going to test them in every way," Ulbrich said of the 49ers coach. "It's going to take discipline from beginning to end." — Reuters

Paceman Thakur replaces Kumar in India ODI squad

NEW DELHI: The Indian cricket board yesterday named paceman Shardul Thakur as replacement for the injured Bhuvneshwar Kumar in the upcoming one-day international series against the West Indies.

Kumar, 29, was rested after he complained of pain in his groin following the third and final Twenty20 international in Mumbai on Wednesday, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said in a statement.

"He underwent an ultrasound scan conducted by a specialist and the BCCI medical team found that his hernia symptoms have resurfaced," it said.

A specialist opinion will now be sought and his management plan will be decided accordingly, the statement added.

Kumar has been beset by injuries over the last few seasons. He battled a lower-back injury through most of 2018 and was sidelined during the round-robin stage of the World Cup with a hamstring strain. Earlier this week, Indian opener Shikhar Dhawan was ruled out of the series after sustaining a deep cut to his left knee.

India, who won the T20 series 2-1, will play the first of the three ODIs on Sunday in Chennai followed by games on December 18 (Visakhapatnam) and December 22 (Cutback).

India's squad for ODIs: Virat Kohli (captain), Rohit Sharma, Mayank Agarwal, K.L. Rahul, Shreyas Iyer, Manish Pandey, Rishabh Pant, Shivam Dube, Kedra Jadhav, Ravindra Jadeja, Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Deepak Chahar, Mohammed Shami, Shardul Thakur. — AFP

Fourth day's play called off in Pakistan Test

RAWALPINDI: Overnight rain and poor light continued to mar Pakistan's first home Test in a decade yesterday, with officials calling the fourth day off before play had begun. Groundsmen wiped water from the pitch covers and rolled out a super sopper, but overcast conditions and poor light forced umpires Richard Kettleborough and Michael Gough to call off play at 12:00 local time (0700 GMT).

Both the Pakistan and Sri Lanka teams remained in their hotel in Islamabad. Sri Lanka had won the toss and opted to bat on the first day, but play was called off after 68.1 overs due to bad light. Only 18.2 overs were possible on day two and 5.2 on the third.

Sri Lanka were 282-6 in their first innings with Dhananjaya de Silva unbeaten on 87 and Dilruwan Perera not out on six. For Pakistan, 16-year-old pacer Naseem Shah (2-83) and Shaheen Shah Afridi (2-58) were the stand-out bowlers.

There is a clear forecast for today but with so many overs lost over the four days, there is little chance of a result in the match. The second Test is in Karachi from December 19. The Test is the first in Pakistan since a militant attack on the Sri Lankan team bus killed eight people in March 2009, leading to the suspension of international cricket in the country as foreign teams refused to visit over security fears. — AFP

Classy Cooney puts Ulster in sight of European Cup quarter-finals

PARIS: Ireland's John Cooney scored 19 points in another impressive display as Ulster moved six points clear at the top of Pool 3 in the European Champions Cup with a 34-10 victory over Harlequins on Friday.

Scrum-half Cooney, 29, who has eight Test appearances but missed out on Rugby World Cup selection, crossed twice either side of the interval as the Irish province remain unbeaten in the tournament ahead of the final two rounds of action in January.

On Sunday, a Clermont victory over bottom side Bath would further Dan McFarland's outfit's claims for a last-eight spot. "I'm happy with the way it's going at the moment. We showed a lot of desire," Cooney told broadcasters BT Sport.

"We're taking those opportunities and it's a reflection of the way we're trying to play," he added. Despite dominating the opening 35 minutes, the Irish province only had a 3-0 advantage thanks to a Cooney three-pointer.

Quins centre James Lang responded with a penalty of his own before Cooney scored his first try of the proceedings in drizzling west London rain. Fly-half Billy Burns broke from his own 22 metre line and the ball eventually ended up with Cooney after coming through the hands of Jacob Stockdale and Matt Faddes and Ulster had a 10-3 lead at the break. — AFP

Sports

Harden scores 54 as Rockets breeze past Magic, 130-107

George, Leonard combine for 88 in Clippers' win over Wolves

CLEVELAND: James Harden delivered another exceptional scoring performance, and the Houston Rockets swept a brief two-game swing against Eastern Conference opponents, cruising past the host Orlando Magic 130-107 on Friday. Two nights after pairing 55 points with eight assists in Cleveland against the Cavaliers, Harden posted 54 points and seven assists to subdue the Magic, who have dropped three straight games. Harden drilled a franchise record-tying 10 3-pointers to lead Houston past the Cavaliers. He then finished 10-for-15 from behind the arc against Orlando en route to his fifth 50-point game of the season. Russell Westbrook chipped in 23 points, seven rebounds and six assists while Ben McLemore shot 6 of 7 from long distance for 18 points off the bench. Houston hit 22 of 39 3-point attempts en route to winning for the sixth time in eight games. Evan Fournier led the Magic with 27 points, and Aaron Gordon added 21.

LA LAKERS 113 — MIAMI HEAT 110

LeBron James compiled 28 points, 12 assists and nine rebounds while leading visiting Los Angeles past Miami for its sixth consecutive victory. The Heat, trailing 112-110 with 8.1 seconds left, couldn't rebound a missed free throw by Kentavious Caldwell-Pope. After another foul and one more Caldwell-Pope free throw, Miami's Jimmy Butler missed a 3-pointer at the buzzer that could've forced overtime. Anthony Davis added a game-high 33 points, 10 rebounds and three blocks for the Lakers, who earned their 13th straight road win. Butler, the reigning Eastern Conference Player of the Week, scored a team-high 23, but his Heat lost at home for the first time this season, falling to 11-1.

MILWAUKEE BUCKS 127 — MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES 114

Giannis Antetokounmpo returned from a one-game absence to post 37 points and 11 rebounds, and visiting Milwaukee rallied past Memphis for its 17th consecutive win. Milwaukee now has the second-longest winning streak in franchise history. The record of 20 was set during the team's 1970-71 championship season. Antetokounmpo, who missed Wednesday's game because of soreness in his right quad, keyed a fourth-quarter surge that saw the Bucks pull away late. Jaren Jackson Jr. scored a career-high 43 points for the Grizzlies, sinking 9 of 15 from 3-point range.

LA CLIPPERS 124 — MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES 117

Paul George scored 46 points and Kawhi Leonard

added 42 as Los Angeles showed off its star power and held on for a victory over Minnesota in Minneapolis. Leonard and George became the first duo in Clippers history to each score at least 40 points in a game. Montrezl Harrell added 18 points off the bench as the Clippers won despite playing without a true point guard. Patrick Beverley sat out after leaving the Wednesday game at Toronto with a concussion, and Lou Williams also was sidelined with a sore right calf. The Timberwolves went to work with their own scoring duo as Karl-Anthony Towns scored 39 points and Andrew Wiggins added 34. Towns added 12 rebounds and stayed in the game despite an injury to his left knee with 1:42 remaining.

PHILADELPHIA 76ERS 116 — NEW ORLEANS PELICANS 109

Tobias Harris scored 31 points, and host Philadelphia defeated New Orleans to remain unbeaten at home while winning its fifth straight game overall. Ben Simmons added 24 points and 11 assists while Joel Embiid had 24 points and 11 rebounds as the Sixers improved to 14-0 at home. It's their longest winning streak at home to open a season since coming up with 22 in the championship season of 1966-67. Brandon Ingram led the Pelicans with 17 of his 32 points in the fourth quarter while former Sixer JJ Redick added 19, but New Orleans dropped its 11th consecutive game and fell to 2-11 on the road.

INDIANA PACERS 110 — ATLANTA HAWKS 100

Georgia native Malcolm Brogdon collected 19 points and 12 assists as Indiana posted a victory at Atlanta. T.J. Warren scored 18 points and Doug McDermott added 16 off the bench for the Pacers, who have won 10 of their past 13 overall and seven straight against Atlanta. Domantas Sabonis recorded 12 points and 14 rebounds to secure his 11th consecutive double-double. Trae Young scored a team-leading 23 points on a 9-for-30 performance from the field for the Hawks, who misfired on all 13 attempts from 3-point range in the first half en route to losing for their 14th time in 16 games. De'Andre Hunter had 21 points and Jabari Parker added 20 in a losing effort.

CHARLOTTE HORNETS 83 — CHICAGO BULLS 73

Devonte' Graham scored a team-high 16 points, PJ Washington recorded 13 points and 10 assists, and Charlotte beat host Chicago by holding the Bulls to the

fewest points scored by an NBA team this season. Miles Bridges added 13 points for Charlotte, which won its third game in a row despite scoring its fewest points in a game this season, as well. Bismack Biyombo had 12 points, and Terry Rozier and Cody Zeller finished with 11 points apiece. Zach LaVine and Ryan Arcidiacono shared the team lead with 12 points apiece for the Bulls. Lauri Markkanen and Thaddeus Young added 10 points apiece for Chicago, which was outscored just 15-10 in the third quarter.



ORLANDO: Mo Bamba #5 of the Orlando Magic shoots the ball against the Houston Rockets at Amway Center in Orlando, Florida. — AFP

UTAH JAZZ 114 — GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS 106

Bojan Bogdanovic scored 32 points and tied a franchise record with eight 3-pointers as Utah rallied from a double-digit deficit in the first half to beat visiting Golden State. Donovan Mitchell scored 28 points and Rudy Gobert added 15 points and 15 rebounds as the Jazz improved to 10-3 at home, just the third Western Conference team with

double-digit victories in its own building. Alec Burks scored 24 points and Damion Lee added 21 for the Warriors, who have lost seven of their past eight games and 10 of their past 12. Golden State fell to 3-13 on the road.

NEW YORK KNICKS 103 — SACRAMENTO KINGS 101

Julius Randle recorded 26 points and nine rebounds, and New York beat host Sacramento to notch back-to-back victories for the first time this season. Elfrid Payton scored 16 points, and Mitchell Robinson added 14 points and nine rebounds for the Knicks, who overcame a 16-point, third-quarter deficit. New York is 2-2 since Mike Miller took over as interim coach after the firing of David Fizdale. Buddy Hield scored 34 points and collected a career-high 12 rebounds for the Kings, who had a three-game winning streak halted. Sacramento's Harrison Barnes scored 18 points. — Reuters

What has gone wrong for Man City?

LONDON: Manchester City's Premier League title defence appears over before Christmas, with Pep Guardiola's men travelling to Arsenal today already 14 points adrift of runaway leaders Liverpool.

City have made the extraordinary routine, winning five of the past six major domestic trophies in England but have dropped as many points in 16 league games this season as in the whole of last season. So what has gone wrong for a hugely talented and expensive squad under the tutelage of one of football's greatest coaches?

INJURIES

Even a squad as rich in resources as City's is not immune to injuries. Leroy Sane and Aymeric Laporte suffered long-term knee injuries in the first few weeks of the season, with Laporte's absence leaving a gaping hole at the heart of City's defence. Fernandinho has had to deputise out of position at centre-back, meaning the Brazilian's influence at the base of City's midfield has also been missed. Manchester United cut their local rivals apart on the counter-attack in winning the derby at the Etihad 2-1 last weekend, while Norwich, Wolves and Liverpool have also exposed City's frailties in defensive transition to inflict defeat on the champions. Benjamin Mendy's lack of fitness and an injury to Oleksandr Zinchenko has also led to a rotating cast at left-back, with none of the options available to Guardiola inspiring much confidence.

BAD PLANNING

Even before Laporte's injury, City appeared short at centre-back following the loss of captain Vincent Kompany, who left at the end of last season to take charge

of Anderlecht. Kompany's final years at the club were ravaged by injury, but he played a vital role late last season as City won their final 14 league games to pip Liverpool to the title by one point.

The Belgian was an inspirational leader and his departure left City without a figurehead when things get tough. Similarly, the issues at left-back were not unforeseen. Mendy has been blighted by injuries since he joined the club but City instead strengthened at right-back over the summer with the signing of Joao Cancelo.

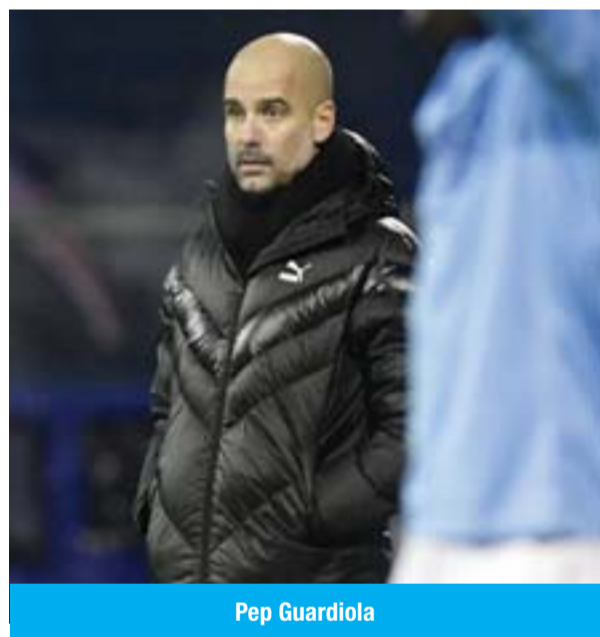
FOURTH-SEASON FATIGUE

Guardiola is into his fourth season at City, matching his longest spell at one club. The Catalan quit Barcelona after four seasons from 2008 to 2012 that left him burned out. In explaining his decision, he suggested after winning 14 trophies in four seasons at the Camp Nou that the Barcelona players needed a new message. Guardiola's intense demands can also have a physically and mentally draining effect on players.

END OF AN ERA

A core of players that have been constants in City's most successful era but Kompany's departure signalled a changing of the guard. David Silva, 33, Sergio Aguero, 31, and Fernandinho, 34, have also been hugely influential, but are all beyond their prime. Silva has already announced he will leave the club at the end of the season. Aguero, City's all-time leading goalscorer, is out of contract in 18 months' time. City have put a succession plan in place for Fernandinho by signing Rodri for a club-record £62.8 million (\$84 million) in July. However, the 23-year-old Spanish international has struggled as he adjusts to the rigours of the Premier League.

There is a local clamour for Phil Foden to be the long-term replacement for Silva and Gabriel Jesus has shared the striker's role with Aguero under Guardiola. But Kompany's departure shows that transition will not be an easy one.



Pep Guardiola

LIVERPOOL CHARGE

City have helped create a monster they are now struggling to compete with. Guardiola's men re-wrote the history books by registering a century of points for the first time in the English top flight in 2017/18 and backed that up with 98 last season.

Liverpool's tally of 97 was the third highest ever and yet still not enough to end the wait for a first league title on Merseyside since 1989/90. In most other seasons, City's return of 32 points from their opening 16 games would at least be enough to keep them in the running.

However, they have raised the bar and Liverpool have risen to the challenge. A relentless run of 15 wins and one draw from the European champions has seen them disappear over the horizon and surely out of reach. — AFP

Rashford adds clinical touch to become complete striker

LONDON: Marcus Rashford has always had the tools to become a world-class forward. Now he has added a clinical touch to his searing pace and box of tricks. The 22-year-old already has 13 goals for United this season — equalling his best-ever return for the club in a single campaign and is the undisputed leader of the team's attack.

Just weeks ago Rashford was struggling for goals in Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's misfiring team, finding the net just once between the opening day of the season and the match against Liverpool on October 20.

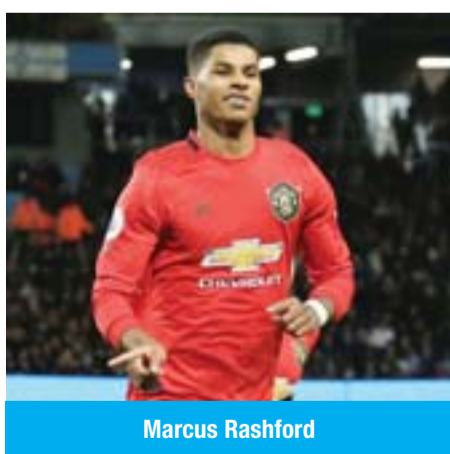
But then things clicked for the former United trainee and he has scored regularly for club and country, including three in his past two appearances, against Tottenham and defending champions Manchester City. His goals have lifted United to fifth in the table, five points behind fourth-placed

Chelsea, after an unbeaten run of five Premier League games, with Everton to come at home today. Playing mostly on the left side of United's lightning-quick attack alongside Jesse Lingard, Anthony Martial and Daniel James, Rashford frightens defenders with his blistering pace and trickery. Solskjaer spoke in glowing terms of Rashford after his two goals in the recent 2-1 win against Tottenham.

"The boy is 22 and he played like he was in the backyard, garden or playground with his mates," said United's Norwegian boss, who has compared his attributes with former United player Cristiano Ronaldo, who also took time to become a prolific goalscorer. "Sometimes, maybe, there is expectation and pressure on him because we do expect a lot from him, as he has shown (what he can do) so many times."

The elegant Rashford says he is tougher on himself than any critic and has talked about minor adjustments he has made to his game. "Just little stuff like, for me holding off defenders is a big one," he said in an interview with former England player Gary Lineker for Goalhanger Films.

"It's something that I speak about quite often a lot with my brothers who see me play all the way through. I always say if you're trying too hard to do it then you're not quite at your maximum." "I feel like this



Marcus Rashford

season I'm doing little stuff that shows that it's becoming a bit more natural and easier," he added.

Rashford's dream is to play as the focal point of United's attack.

"I want to be able to play in all positions," he said. "Number nine is obviously the dream but for me in this day and age now, it's ideal to be as effective as you are in number nine, on the left and the right."

Rashford made his debut as a 18-year-old under the leadership of Louis van Gaal in February 2016, scoring twice against Midtjylland and then repeating the feat against Arsenal a few days later. — AFP

Mourinho backs Spurs for top-four Premier League finish

LONDON: Tottenham boss Jose Mourinho believes his side will finish in the top four of the Premier League this season. Spurs' chances of a fourth successive finish in the Champions League qualification places looked a lost cause when the Portuguese took charge last month with the club 12 points behind Chelsea.

That gap has been cut to six following three wins from four under Mourinho, with a game against Frank Lampard's side to come next week. They will hope to make further inroads against Wolves today in a bid to get back to where Mourinho says they belong.

"We know where we belong, Mourinho said at his pre-match press conference on Friday. "We don't belong to the second part of the table where we were, we don't even belong to position seven or eight where we are in this moment."

"We know where we belong and we believe at the end of the season we are going to be there." Mourinho said he needed time but the squad had the "talent and desire" to improve.

The 56-year-old has had a hectic start to life at Spurs, with six games in 21 days, and he has been unable to put the hours in with this squad to fully implement his ideas.

The fixture schedule eases slightly in January and the Portuguese intends to be on the training ground rather than trying to sign new players. "I want to work," he said. "I'm going to have time to work, which until now I don't have."

"I complain every day with my staff, the frustration of I want to do a certain kind of training, I just can't do it. It's frustrating. I love pre-season to work. I don't have."

Mourinho got a first real look at some of his fringe players in the Champions League defeat by Bayern Munich on Wednesday as Ryan Sessegnon, Kyle Walker-Peters, Giovanni Lo Celso and Juan Foyth all started for the first time under him.

Sessegnon scored and did well while Mourinho singled Foyth out for praise but neither of those players will be in the starting line-up at Molineux. — AFP

Live Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Manchester United v Everton beIN Sports HD 2	17:00	
Wolverhampton Wanderers v Tottenham beIN Sports HD 1	17:00	
Arsenal FC Manchester City beIN Sports HD 2	19:30	
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Getafe CF v Real Valladolid beIN Sports HD 3	14:00	
Celta de Vigo v Real Mallorca beIN Sports HD 3	16:00	
RCD Espanyol v Real Betis beIN Sports HD 3	18:00	
Sevilla v Villarreal beIN Sports HD 3	20:30	
Valencia CF v Real Madrid beIN Sports HD 3	23:00	
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
Hellas Verona v Torino beIN Sports HD 4	14:30	
Bologna FC v Atalanta beIN Sports HD 8	17:00	
Juventus v Udinese Calcio beIN Sports HD 4	17:00	
AC Milan v Sassuolo Calcio beIN Sports HD 7	17:00	
AS Roma v Spal beIN Sports HD 4	20:00	
Fiorentina v Internazionale Milano beIN Sports HD 4	22:45	
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA		
Wolfsburg v Borussia Monchengladbach beIN Sports HD 5	17:30	
Schalke 04 v Eintracht Frankfurt beIN Sports HD 5	20:00	

25 Huge comeback lifts Internationals with Presidents Cup on knife-edge

26 Australia take huge lead against New Zealand in first Test

27 Harden scores 54 as Rockets breeze past Magic, 130-107



Salah stretches Liverpool lead to 10

Leicester stumble, Chelsea poor run continues



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Senegalese striker Sadio Mane (C) heads the ball into goal and scores a goal, disallowed by VAR, during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Watford at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: Liverpool tightened their grip on the Premier League title race thanks to two Mohamed Salah goals in a 2-0 win over Watford to extend their lead at the top to 10 points as second-placed Leicester were held 1-1 at home by Norwich.

Chelsea were also shocked 1-0 at home to Bournemouth to see their lead over the chasing pack in fourth further cut, while Sheffield United moved into fifth with a 2-0 win over Aston Villa.

At Anfield, Liverpool kept their first clean sheet at home this season but only thanks to Watford's wastefulness in front of goal as the Hornets showed why they are the lowest scoring side in the league.

Abdoulaye Doucoure and Ismaila Sarr both failed to make a proper connection with the goal gaping in the first half and the 40-point difference between the sides in the table was shown only in the difference of

quality in the finishing.

Salah struck twice as he rounded off a rapid Liverpool counter-attack from a Watford corner eight minutes before half-time. The Egyptian then settled the home crowd's nerves a minute from time when he cheekily flicked home Divock Origi's mishit shot.

"In December and January especially, you need to show resilience - that's the most important thing and we showed that," said coach Jurgen Klopp, whose side are seven games into a 15-match stretch across five competitions in 50 days.

"We had to fight, that's what we did and that's why we won." Leicester will be Liverpool's next opponents in the Premier League on Boxing Day after the European champions' quest to win the Club World Cup in Qatar later this week.

The Foxes had the chance to cut the gap at the top

to just five points ahead of that meeting had they beaten Norwich and Manchester City next weekend. However, a club record run of eight straight Premier League wins for Brendan Rodgers's men came unstuck against the Canaries.

Teemu Pukki broke clear and finished calmly for his ninth goal of the season to put the visitors in front. Leicester levelled before the break when Jamie Vardy's header from James Maddison's corner was turned into his own net by Norwich goalkeeper Tim Krul.

But the home side could not make their dominance of the second half count to drop points at home for only the second time this season. Chelsea's hold on the fourth Champions League place could be down to as little as two points should Manchester United beat Everton today as their poor run continued.

Frank Lampard's men have now lost four of their last five Premier League games and had only themselves to blame as they had 18 shots on goal without finding a way past Aaron Ramsdale.

Bournemouth had lost five on the spin, but got their reward for staying in the game when Dan Gosling skilfully flicked a loose ball over Kepa Arrizabalaga five minutes from time and VAR overturned a wrongly-raised offside flag against the midfielder.

Sheffield United for now are the Blues' closest challengers as they moved ahead of United and Tottenham into fifth as John Fleck scored twice in the second half to inflict a 2-0 defeat on Aston Villa, while Jack Grealish missed a late penalty for the visitors.

Burnley were also victors, 1-0 over Newcastle thanks to Chris Wood's close-range finish in a game of few chances at Turf Moor. — AFP

Coutinho scores hat-trick as Bayern rout Werder Bremen

BERLIN: Philippe Coutinho scored a hat-trick as Bayern Munich signalled their return to form with a 6-1 thrashing of Werder Bremen in the Bundesliga yesterday. The Barcelona loanee was everywhere for Munich at the Allianz Arena, chalking up two assists in addition to his three goals as Bayern pulled to within four points of leaders Borussia Moenchengladbach.

After Bremen's Milot Rashica opened the scoring in the 24th minute for the visitors, it appeared it could be another long afternoon for the champions, who had lost their previous two games in the Bundesliga.

Two goals in three minutes at the end of the first half however turned the game on its head, with Coutinho and Robert Lewandowski both scoring to fire Bayern into a 2-1 lead. Bayern ran riot after the break, adding four more goals - including two more for Coutinho, one more for Lewandowski and a goal for Thomas Mueller. Coutinho's second, a brilliant chip over keeper Jiri Pavlenka, came right out of the Brazilian trickster's top drawer.

Elsewhere, Borussia Dortmund continued their superb recent form, winning 4-0 away at Mainz to move two points behind Gladbach. Marco Reus scored his first away goal of the season with a stunning volley from the edge of the box, before Jadon Sancho, Thorgan Hazard and Nico Schulz all scored in the second half.

Sancho has now scored in six games in a row for Dortmund, while Schulz's goal was his first in Dortmund colours. In Berlin, Hertha registered their first win under former German national team coach Jurgen Klinsmann, winning 1-0 over a disappointing Freiburg. A goal from Vladimir Darida in the 53rd minute was enough to see Berlin claim the three points.

Struggling Cologne picked up a vital three points at home against nine-man Bayer Leverkusen to take them off the bottom of the table. Leverkusen lost Aleksandar Dragovic and Leon Bailey to red cards in a 15-minute period in the second half and were unable to hold on as Cologne won 2-0.

Union Berlin's recent run of victories came to an end following a 1-1 draw against lowly Paderborn. Union, who had won four of their last five before travelling to Paderborn, started well, scoring through Marcus Ingvartsen in the seventh minute, before Paderborn equalised via Kai Proger in the 33rd.

RB Leipzig have the chance to go top in a late game when they take on Fortuna Duesseldorf. Gladbach are in action away to Wolfsburg today. — AFP



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's German midfielder Serge Gnabry (R) and Bremen's Swedish defender Ludwig Augustinsson (L) vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match Bayern Munich v Werder Bremen in Munich yesterday. — AFP