



Kuwait and Saudi Arabia sign deal to resume joint oil output

Agreement also inked on demarcation of land and maritime borders

By Faten Omar and Agencies

KUWAIT: Saudi Arabia and Kuwait signed agreements yesterday to resume pumping at two major oilfields in a shared neutral zone shut for five years due to a bilateral disagreement. Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Saudi Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al-Saud inked the deals. Kuwaiti Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Khaled Al-Fadhel and the Saudi minister of energy signed a memo of understanding.

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia's collective histories are dotted with instances of "exemplary cooperation", Fadhel said during a lavish ceremony held at Wafra Joint Operations later yesterday. Production from the Khafji and Wafra fields will not affect the two countries' OPEC commitments to reduce oil output, added the minister, expressing hope that resumed production would pay dividends for the Kuwaiti and Saudi economies.

Prince Abdulaziz said talks between his country and Kuwait on the neutral zone in the past few years focused more on "harmony" rather than striking a deal. On the sidelines of the deal's signing ceremony, the Saudi minister commended the brotherly relationship between HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz, describing it as a basis of the Kuwaiti-Saudi partnership.

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KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives yesterday at Bayan Palace Waleed MUSAED Al-Tabtabaei (left) and Mohammad Nayef Al-Dosari and their families, who thanked him for granting them Amiri pardons. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohamed Al-Sabah exchanges documents with Saudi Oil Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman during an official ceremony at the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry headquarters in Kuwait City yesterday. — KUNA

New ministers take oath in Assembly amid walkouts

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The new Cabinet members yesterday took the oath of office to become members of parliament, as three opposition lawmakers walked out of the session during the ceremony. MPs Adel Al-Damkhi, Mohammad Hayef and Mohammad Al-Mutair were protesting at the inclusion of Ghadeer Aseeri as minister of social affairs and labor, who had tweeted in support of anti-government protests in Bahrain and called on Gulf troops to pull out of the nation. The opposition MPs had threatened to grill Prime Minister HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah if he did not dismiss the minister, but they have done nothing so far.

The Assembly however made an unusually large number of decisions, including asking the Audit Bureau to investigate the multibillion-dollar deal to buy Eurofighter warplanes and other allegations of corruption. MPs also voted to ask the legal and legislative committee to speed up debating bills calling for a general amnesty for political prisoners and report back to the Assembly, setting Jan 7 as the date to debate the bill. But the government expressed reservations over the issue.

Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said he believes the general amnesty or pardon should be requested and not imposed, adding that he hopes the



KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Ghadeer Aseeri takes the oath of office at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

issue will be voted on in the house. Opposition MPs hope to pass the legislation to exonerate a number of former opposition MPs and activists sentenced to heavy jail terms for storming the Assembly building in 2011. The men have been living abroad for close to 18 months.

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Popular Mideast app pulled after spying report

WASHINGTON: A popular mobile application developed in the United Arab Emirates has been removed from both Apple and Google's online marketplaces following a report it was used for widespread spying. The moves come after The New York Times reported Saturday the app ToTok allowed tracking of conversations, movements, and other details of people who installed it on their phone.

Apple told AFP that ToTok was removed from its App Store pending a review, while Google said it was taken down from the Play Store "for a policy issue". The Times reported that ToTok, used by millions in the UAE and the surrounding region, had been designed to look like an easy and secure way to send messages and videos in countries where other services are banned. The report said US intelligence officials and a security researcher determined the app was being used by the UAE government for detailed surveillance.

Security researcher Patrick Wardle, who assisted the newspaper, said in a blog post that ToTok appears to be part of a "mass surveillance operation" which "likely afforded in-depth insight in a large percentage of the country's population". Wardle said the app became popular by offering free calling and messaging to users where services such as Skype and WhatsApp are blocked, and that it was also promoted by what appear to be fake reviews.

Wardle said ToTok appears to trick users of iPhones



and Android devices into handing over access to their location and private data on their devices. "You have access to users' address books, chats, location and more, in a completely 'legitimate', Apple-approved manner!" the researcher wrote. He likened ToTok's data collection to that of the US National Security Agency's "bulk collection" of metadata, only deeper. "Once you know who's talking to whom, and perhaps even what they are saying, you can identify specific individuals of interest and target them with more advanced capabilities," he said.

According to the Times, the app launched this year was developed by Breej Holding, which the newspaper said is likely a "front company" affiliated with DarkMatter, an Abu Dhabi-based cyber-intelligence and hacking firm. In a blog post Monday, ToTok said nothing of the spying allegations but noted that the messaging app was "temporarily unavailable" in the Android and Apple marketplaces "due to a technical issue."

"While the existing ToTok users continue to enjoy our service without interruption, we would like to inform our new users that we are well engaged with Google and Apple to address the issue," the statement said, while adding that the app is also available from its own website and from marketplaces by smartphone makers Samsung, Huawei, Xiaomi and Oppo. — AFP

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Local

Amir receives senior Kuwaiti officials, Saudi energy minister

Sheikh Sabah mourns Indonesia bus crash victims



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman. —Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Public Prosecutor Dherar Al-Asousi and Attorney-General Fahad Hamad Al-Ateeqi.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Furthermore, His Highness the Amir received, with the attendance of His Highness the Crown Prince, Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Dr Khaled Al-Fadhel and the visiting Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman and his accompanying delegation. His Highness the Amir also received Public Prosecutor Dherar Al-Asousi who presented His Highness with newly appointed Attorney-General Fahad Hamad Al-Ateeqi.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received at Bayan Palace His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Public Prosecutor Justice Dherar Al-

Asousi, and Attorney-General Fahad Al-Ateeqi. His Highness the Crown Prince also received Chairman of the Board and Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Sheikh Mubarak Al-Duajj Al-Sabah.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah expressed his deepest sympathies yesterday over the lives lost when a bus plunged into a ravine in Indonesia's Sumatra island, killing at least 25 people. His Highness the Amir extended his condolences in a cable he sent to Indonesian President Joko Widodo, saying he was distraught over the tragic loss of life caused by the transport mishap. 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 the Indonesian president. —KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Public Prosecutor Dherar Al-Asousi and Attorney-General Fahad Hamad Al-Ateeqi.

News in brief

Kuwait applauds 'Khashoggi' sentences

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry said yesterday that Saudi court rulings in the case of Saudi citizen Jamal Khashoggi reflected the kingdom's commitment to the principles of law and its eagerness to put them in place. "The State of Kuwait followed with interest the verdicts issued by the Saudi judiciary (Monday) against those convicted in the murder of Saudi citizen Jamal Khashoggi, which reflect the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's abidance by the principles of law and its keenness to apply them in response to anyone who tries to undermine the kingdom and its just judiciary," an official source at the ministry said in a statement. The State of Kuwait stands by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and backs everything that could lead to safeguarding its security, stability and domestic affairs, the source said. Saudi Arabia on Monday sentenced five people to death and three to jail over the murder of Saudi citizen Jamal Khashoggi, saying that the murder was not premeditated. —KUNA

Kuwaitis injured in Amman

AMMAN: Kuwait's Ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Daihani said Monday that he and the embassy staff are following up carefully the health conditions of the two nationals who were wounded in a traffic accident last Friday. He noted that the crash, which took place on the airport road in the capital, seriously injured the two Kuwaitis. They are currently receiving treatment and healthcare at a hospital in the capital, wishing them a speedy recovery, Ambassador Daihani added. —KUNA

Banks' holiday

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti banks will close on Wednesday, January 1, 2020 and Thursday, January 2, 2020 for New Year's holiday, Kuwait Banking Association chief Hamad Al-Hasawi said in a statement yesterday. The banks will reopen and continue offering their services to customers on Sunday, January 5, 2020, the statement added. —KUNA

Chinese Ambassador praises strong Kuwaiti-Chinese ties

KUWAIT: Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang stressed the deep-rooted Kuwaiti-China relationship thanks to the leaderships of the two countries. Minggang made his remarks in his speech at a symposium held yesterday on the ways to enhance Kuwaiti-Chinese relations, adding that Kuwait was the first Arab country to respond to the Belt and Road Initiative, and signed the relevant cooperation document. He added that this Kuwaiti-Chinese cooperation comes in line with Kuwait's vision 2035 put forward by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

More than 160 countries and international organizations, including Kuwait, have signed nearly 200 cooperation documents to build the Belt and Road with China, he said. He said that the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative focuses on investment in infrastructure, education, building materials, railways and highways, as well as cars, real estate, energy grid, iron and steel. He pointed out that it was the Kuwaiti people who left

with deeper impressions of their diligence, wisdom, dignity and friendship. "As an ambassador of China in Kuwait, I feel that my mission is honorable and my responsibility is heavy. I always work to strengthen the link between China and friends from various fields in Kuwaiti society," he added.

On Chinese-Kuwaiti cooperation, the Chinese diplomat said that the past year witnessed a development of practical cooperation between the two countries in various fields, as the total value of Chinese-Kuwaiti bilateral trade from January to September reached USD 12.7 billion, making Kuwait the fifth largest trading partner of China among the Arab countries. He added that China imported 16.35 million tons of crude oil from Kuwait, which made Kuwait the fourth largest crude oil exporter to China among the Arab countries. The Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) plans to increase the amount of crude oil exported to China to 600,000 barrels per day in 2020, he noted.

Moreover, Chinese companies have actively participated in energy, housing, infrastructure and other fields in Kuwait, the Chinese ambassador said, pointing to the Kuwait Central Bank headquarters project, Kuwait University (KU) new campus in Al-Shadadiya area and Al-Zour refinery projects. In addition, Kuwait actively invested in China and the Kuwait Investment Authority became the first foreign body to invest in high-speed

railways in China. He pointed out that cooperation took place between China and Kuwait at various levels, as the Kuwaiti News Agency (KUNA) opened its first office in China and Kuwait opened its third consulate in China in Shanghai while it is expected that China will open the first Chinese cultural center in Kuwait.

Meanwhile, KUNA Deputy Director-General for the Editorial Sector Saad Al-Ali affirmed that the Kuwaiti-Chinese relations certainly witnessed a significant improvement in the political, commercial and economic fields, reaching all levels, including the media, through the exchange of visits. He pointed out that KUNA recently opened an office in China, which will contribute to strengthening relations between the two countries. China has also recently signed a series of cooperation agreements, not only with Kuwait but also with a number of neighboring countries, Ali said, adding that this confirms China's interest in the Arab world at all levels. He noted that the Chinese media presence in the Arab world is less than the level that we hope will be required, so the presence of the Arab media has become important in China to convey the Arabic civilization and culture. There are steps that have been taken in terms of exchanging experiences and visits at cultural and media levels, Ali confirmed. He expressed his hope that the Chinese ambassador in Kuwait will play a vital role and contribute to a greater understanding of the Chinese culture. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Chinese Ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang (fourth from left) speaks during the symposium. —KUNA

Local

Seven injured in Bneid Al-Gar apartment blaze

Violations hindered firemen's work, KFSD says



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Seven people were injured in a fire reported in a Bneid Al-Gar apartment yesterday. Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) said that the fire was on the ground floor of a 10-storey building, prompting Hilali, Shuhada and technical rescue teams to respond. Power supply was cut and the building was evacuated of about 90 residents

including children, then the fire was contained and put out. But firemen faced several obstacles while tackling the blaze due to violations and the many partitions inside the apartment, KFSD said in a statement to the press. Among the seven injuries, two people were taken to hospital - a fireman suffering from smoke inhalation and a woman with hand burns. The other five were treated onsite.



Govt ok with jet fighters deals' session

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The government has no objection to the parliamentary request to allocate a session to discuss the Eurofighter and Caracal jet fighters deals, said official government sources, noting that the government had already referred the issue to the public prosecution "and lawmakers know this." "It is the problem of those who do not already know, especially since the government has, in public, declared referring the related suspicions to the public prosecution - it is no secret," the sources added.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, the sources stressed that the government prefers lawmakers not getting too much into case details in a way that might affect the judiciary and the litigation process, and called for forming a parliamentary inquiry committee to probe the case details instead of turning it into a political issue rather than a case being heard in court.

Further, the sources said the government might suggest having the State Audit Bureau financially investigate the matter and the procedures followed by the

defense ministry in those deals. "The Audit Bureau is an independent technical body capable of making a suitable report that can be used to uncover the truth," the sources underlined.

Youth centers

Director of the Public Authority for Youth Abdul Rahman Al-Mutairi said that the authority recently launched a radical maintenance and development plan at various youth centers and hostels, starting with the Shamiya youth center. Mutairi added that the plan aims at upgrading these centers to better meet modern youth needs and become attractive to both youths and their family members. Mutairi noted that this was the second phase of the development plan after all facilities inside the centers, such as playfields, courts, swimming pools and administrative buildings, had been maintained. "The new development includes adding special courses for walking and jogging, others for cyclists and building fully-equipped multipurpose halls," Mutairi explained.

Shrimping ban

Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) Director Sheikh Mohammad Al-Yousef Al-Sabah issued a directive yesterday banning shrimping for seven months starting from January until July 2020. Sheikh Mohammad also banned importing live birds from UK and allowed importing them from Belgium.

Municipality inspection reveals violations in Hawally

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Hawally municipality inspection teams toured various governorate areas to remove all state property violations. Head of Hawally emergency teams Ahmed Ramadan said inspectors work round the clock to detect any violations. He also urged everybody to respect municipal bylaws to avoid fines. Chief inspector Ibrahim Al-Sabaan said that the tour resulted in filing 36 citations, removing 14 metal barriers and removing five flowerbeds. Sabaan added a total of 25 meters of chains used to close parking spaces were removed, and seven state property violations were detected.

Meanwhile, Municipal Councilmember Hamdi Al-Azmi said he had contacted Municipality Director Ahmad Al-Manfouhi, who confirmed suspending a previous decision to demolish the historical 'Awazem Cafe,' which has been operating for over 80 years in Souq Gharaballi in downtown Kuwait City. In other news, the Environment Public Authority (EPA) announced receiving reports and inquiries on WhatsApp number 92222157 during official working hours from 8 am to 2 pm Sundays to Thursdays, adding that communication outside official working hours can be done through the hotline number 157 24/7.



KUWAIT: Interior Ministry's Undersecretary Lt Gen Essam Al-Nahham received at his office yesterday the family of late Kuwaiti citizen Ahmad Al-Thafeeri, whose death case is under investigation on suspicions that he died in police's custody. Lt Gen Nahham assured the victim's family that a neutral investigation committee Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh has formed is set to release its report within a week. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A view of Kuwait Towers during the early morning hours. — Photo by Jassem Mohammad (KUNA)

Secretariat continues efforts to boost joint Gulf action: GCC chief

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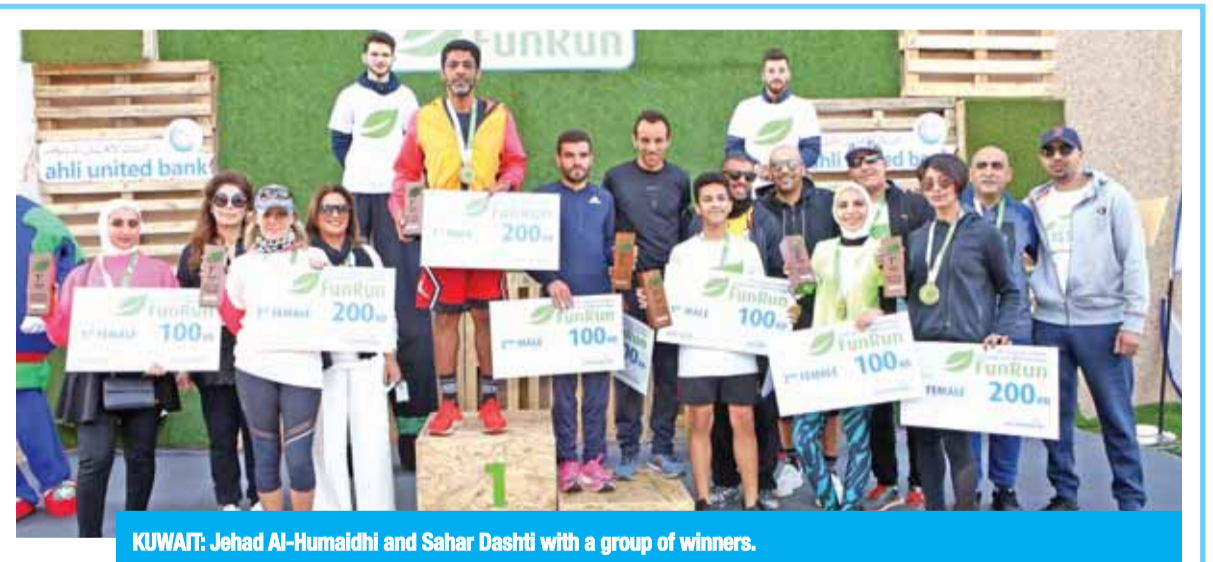
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RIYADH: New Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Nayef Al-Hajraf pledged to work with the Secretariat staff to continue the sincere efforts aiming to push ahead the joint Gulf action. Hajraf made the statement on Monday while he was received by Dr Abdullahif Al-Zayani, the outgoing Secretary General of the GCC, the secretariat said in a statement. During the meeting, Zayani congratulated Hajraf on being appointed as GCC chief, wishing him all success in the duties and responsibilities he will take to promote the joint Gulf action and lauding the sincere efforts by the secretariat staff aiming to boost the march. Hajraf thanked Zayani for the warm reception, expressing his pride for the blessing of the GCC leaders for him in taking the responsibility of the secretariat. He stressed that unified and concerted efforts help meet the aspirations of the GCC leaders and materialize their visions regarding the GCC march, according to the statement. On this occasion, the secretariat held a meeting between Hajraf and all officials. During the meeting, there were cordial talks on the duties and missions should be achieved to serve the joint Gulf work, it noted. The secretariat also made a presentation on the joint Gulf action and the main



RIYADH: The New Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Nayef Al-Hajraf (left) with his predecessor Abdullahif Al-Zayani. — KUNA

strategic goals as well as local, regional and international challenges facing the Gulf march. Hajraf is the second Kuwaiti and the sixth chief of the GCC secretariat since the establishment of the organization on May 25, 1981. He served as Kuwaiti finance minister. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Jehad Al-Humaidhi and Sahar Dashti with a group of winners.

AUB: great success of 'Fun Run' event

KUWAIT: With impressive success and huge turnout, Ahli United Bank (AUB) concluded the 'Fun Run' race held under the slogan 'Plant Palm Trees with Your Steps.' This success basically stems from the Bank's active role and its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program which sets youth and environment on the top of its priorities in alignment with His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah 'New Kuwait Vision 2035.'

On this occasion, Jehad Al-Humaidhi, Acting CEO of Ahli United Bank said: "We are pleased with our success in this event, which further solidifies the role of AUB in community participation through this activity, which attracted a large number of participants who gathered to spread awareness on the importance of following a healthy lifestyle, preserving the environment and supporting those in need. All proceeds from this event will be allocated for planting palm trees, and the produced dates will be dedicated to continuously support needy families. This achieves several commu-

nity noble goals that make us feel pride and encourages us to sustain our purposeful community programs." Humaidhi congratulated all participants and organizers who made this event a great success, which became a milestone for outstanding community programs, especially after the growing success achieved year after year.

Commenting on this event, Sahar Dashti, General Manager of Customer Protection and the Head of AUB CSR Team said: "I cannot find words to express my happiness and pride of the success achieved in the 'Fun Run' initiative," adding, "The biggest sources of happiness are the enthusiasm and engagement I found in all participants. In addition, their belief in the positive values that we seek to spread among all members of the community, including supporting the environment, health awareness and supporting the needy."

Dashti expressed her sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of this event. She also extended her appreciation and gratitude to all those who participated in the race, emphasizing that partnership is the key element that led to the success of this health, charitable and environmental event in its second edition, making it suitably consistent with the vision of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah 'New Kuwait Vision 2035,' which is the basis of our CSR program at AUB.

National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters opens Kuwait free art atelier



KUWAIT: NCCAL's assistant secretary-general for the artistic and theatrical affairs sector Bader Al-Duwaish opens the Kuwaiti free art atelier. —KUNA photos

KUWAIT: The National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) on Monday inaugurated the Kuwaiti free art atelier which includes many artistic items of several generations. Speaking to the press in a statement, NCCAL's assistant secretary-general for the artistic and theatrical affairs sector Bader Al-Duwaish said the exhibition aims to boost communication between veteran and young artists. This happens through many artworks, which address several humanitarian issues and feelings with varied schools, he noted. The show will help young artists display their works at workshops, he said, indicating that the move aims to encourage them to improve their skills and taste fine art, he said. Meanwhile, Diaa Al-Bahar, head of the fine art directorate at the council, said that the show includes 83 fine art items and eight cut-outs portrayed by a number of veteran and young artists. — KUNA



Memorial museum displays Kuwait's culture, history



KUWAIT: 'Thekra' is Al-Shaheed Park's Historical Museum, which opened in 2016 and focuses on Kuwait's history and major battles such as Al-Jahra, Al-Sireef, and Al-Riqqa battles besides the Gulf War. Visitors can learn all about Kuwait's history and participate by sharing their past experiences and memories at the booths inside the museum. This collaboration will allow the museum to fulfill one of its missions to preserve the country's historical and cultural values and pass it on to next generations. 'Thekra' is Arabic for memory. — KUNA



Women's society hosts 'hearing impairment' seminar

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Al-Bustan Hearing-Impaired Children's Nursery held a seminar entitled 'Hearing and Balance Issues' this past Monday at the Women's Cultural and Social Society in Khaldiya. The seminar was presented by Dr Ahmad Khater, audiology consultant at the Faculty of Medicine at Zagazig University in Egypt, and a consultant at the Ear, Nose, and Throat Medical Center in Riyadh- Saudi Arabia.

On the sidelines of the seminar, Dr Khater told Kuwait Times that the event was held to spread awareness amongst mothers of children who have hearing problems. "The seminar [was held to give an presentation] on the cochlear implant hearing aid and how to decide to implant it," he said.

Dr Khater discussed during his seminar how to decide when is the best time to implant the cochlear implant hearing aid, and how to maintain it. He said that early diagnosis of hearing impairment has a lot of benefits for the child, where the 'golden period of language acquisition' is from one year to four years of age. "The earlier hearing impairment is diagnosed, the better the result in language acquisition would be," he said.

He talked about how cochlear implants can help children in acquiring language, and how to develop the child's linguistic skills. "[Hearing impairment] is a main cause of delayed speech among children," he explained. "Therefore, it is necessary to perform hearing examination early and decide wither a child needs a cochlear implant or not to develop speech skills."

Al-Bustan Hearing-Impaired Children's Nursery founded in 1998, established by Women's Cultural and Social Society. It was the first of its kind in the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) area. Its objective is to qualify children with hearing disabilities to acquire the maximum educational experience according to the capabilities of each child. The nursery develops a unique learning schedule for each child and adopts the most recent methodologies in terms of special education requirements, as well as use of modern educational aids and computers.



India beefs up security amid outrage against new law

Tropical storm ruins Christmas plans for thousands of Filipinos



BETHLEHEM: Pierbattista Pizzaballa, apostolic administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, blesses worshippers ahead of Christmas Eve mass at the Church of the Nativity in the biblical West Bank city of Bethlehem yesterday.

Carols and bells in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve

Thousands of pilgrims arrive in Holy Land to celebrate Christmas

BETHLEHEM: Pilgrims from around the world gathered yesterday in the biblical city of Bethlehem, revered by Christians as the birthplace of Jesus, to celebrate Christmas in the Holy Land.

Thousands of Palestinians and foreigners converged on the "little town" in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, with Christmas Eve festivities taking place in and around the Church of the Nativity. Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, apostolic administrator of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and the most senior Roman Catholic official in the Middle East, travelled from the holy city to Bethlehem yesterday afternoon. He was later to lead midnight mass at the church, with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas expected to attend. Bethlehem is close to Jerusalem, but cut off from the holy city by Israel's separation barrier.

After crossing through the wall, Pizzaballa said it was a difficult time but there was reason for "hope".

"We see in this period the weakness of politics, enormous economic problems, unemployment, problems in families—so when we look at this reality, we could say that there is nothing to hope for," he said. "On the other side, when I visit families, parishes, communities, I see a lot of commitment... for the future."

"Christmas is for us to celebrate the hope." In the square outside the church, a few thousand people watched in the winter sun as Palestinian scouts paraded to the

sound of drums. A group of 20 New Zealanders sang carols in front of the 15-metre Christmas tree.

In the morning tourists queued to visit the grotto inside the church, believed to be the exact site where Jesus was born. "I feel really emotional to be here today, it's wonderful," said Germana, an Italian travelling with her husband and two children.

'Bumpy year'

The first church was built on the site of Jesus's birth in the fourth century, though it was replaced after a fire in the sixth century. This year celebrations were bolstered by the return of a wooden fragment believed to be from the manger of Jesus.

Sent as a gift to Pope Theodore I in 640, the piece had been in Europe for more than 1,300 years before being returned last month, Francesco Patton, chief custodian for the Holy Land, said.

"We venerate the relic because (it) reminds us of the mystery of incarnation, to the fact that the son of God was born of Mary in Bethlehem more than 2,000 years ago," Patton told AFP at the time.

In the square by the church, Palestinian tourism minister Rula Maayah told AFP it had been a good year, with 3.5 million tourists visiting the city. But fewer Christians from the Gaza Strip were in attendance than in previous years, as Israel had granted permits to just around 300 of the some 900 people who applied, said Wadie Abunassar, an adviser to church



BETHLEHEM: Pierbattista Pizzaballa, apostolic administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, kisses an icon as he arrives ahead of Christmas Eve mass at the Church of the Nativity in the biblical West Bank city of Bethlehem yesterday. —AFP Photos

leaders in the Holy Land.

The Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza are separated by Israeli territory and crossing between them requires hard-to-get permits.

Around the world, people were getting ready to ring in the Christmas festivities. In her traditional Christmas Day message, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II was to describe 2019 as "quite bumpy" after a year of crises in the royal family. In France, travellers were meanwhile facing more woe in the bitter nearly-three week strike by

train drivers fighting government pension reform plans.

The walkout has ruined Christmas travel plans for tens of thousands of French ticket holders unable to reach loved ones in time for Christmas Day. A frantic scramble for gift promotions left a dozen people injured in an Australian mall. And in the central Philippines, where Christmas is widely celebrated among the country's Catholics, thousands of people were warned to leave their homes as a severe tropical storm approached. —AFP

Gaza Christians say few Israeli permits granted for Christmas travel

GAZA: Fewer than half of Christians from Gaza who sought Israeli permits to visit holy cities such as Bethlehem and Jerusalem at Christmas have so far had their applications granted, members of the small community and Palestinian officials said yesterday.

Israel had said on Sunday it would admit Christians from the Gaza Strip, a territory it keeps under blockade, reversing a Dec. 12 announcement that barred them on security grounds - a departure from its usual Christmas policy. On Tuesday, Christmas Eve, Palestinian border officials said 316 permits had been issued for Christians to leave Gaza for Jerusalem and in

Bethlehem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Church leaders said they had requested 800 such permits.

Gaza has around 1,000 Christians, most of them from the Greek Orthodox denomination who celebrate Christmas on Jan. 7, amid a mainly Muslim population of 2 million Palestinians.

"They issued permits for old people, not the young," said Haifa Assalfiti, 62, before she crossed the Erez border terminal into Israel en route to Bethlehem with her husband.

"My son, my daughter and my daughter-in-law didn't get permits. They are at home angry," she told Reuters.

A spokeswoman for Cogat, the Israeli liaison agency to the Palestinian territories, did not immediately return a call for comment. Israel tightly restricts movements out of the Gaza Strip, a coastal territory controlled by Hamas Islamists who are deemed a terrorist group by Israel and Western powers.



GAZA: A Palestinian artisan sews a Christmas toy at Zeina Association and Cooperative for Handicraft in Beit Hanun in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday. —AFP

Last year, ahead of Christmas Day on Dec. 25, Israel granted permits for close to 700 Gaza Christians to travel to

Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth and other holy cities that draw thousands of pilgrims each holiday season. —Reuters

Sudan strikes deal with rebels, South Sudan talks drift

JUBA: Sudan's new government agreed yesterday to revive a long-dormant irrigation system in the country's central farming region as the latest round of negotiations with rebel groups wrapped up in Juba.

Progress between Khartoum and the rebels came as separate peace talks, also underway in Juba, but over South Sudan's five-year civil war, ended without ground being made. The respective mediations have been underway for two weeks in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, which broke away from Sudan in 2011 but which remains closely tied to its larger neighbor to the north.

Sudan's new transitional government, brought to power after protesters toppled Omar al-Bashir, has been meeting with rebels who fought for years against their marginalization by Khartoum under the ousted leader. In the last round of talks both sides agreed to a permanent ceasefire. But on this occasion, they weren't able to deliver the lasting peace deal being sought by the warring parties.

However, Khartoum did agree to resuscitate the Gezira Scheme in central Sudan—one of the world's largest irrigated farming systems that fell into disrepair following years of underinvestment. The project could stimulate the agricultural economy in central Sudan, which has slipped into ruin from years of government neglect, rebel representatives said. "The people of central Sudan suffered a lot. Now with achieving this, we've put the economy on the right track," said Tom Haju, from a coalition of nine rebel groups called the Sudan Revolutionary Front.

Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, deputy president of the Sudan Transitional Military Council, who lead the delegation in Juba, said the agreement was a step toward a lasting truce. "Khartoum looks forward to reaching a comprehensive peace agreement," he said.

Dagalo returned to Sudan yesterday flanked by Riek Machar, a former South Sudan rebel leader, who lives in exile in Khartoum. Machar was in Juba meeting President Salva Kiir, his former ally turned foe, to discuss a way forward for the country's stalled peace process. The rivals signed a peace deal in September 2018, largely pausing the bloodshed that began five years earlier in the world's youngest country when Kiir and Machar fell out.

But since then, the pair have missed two deadlines to form a power-sharing government, a central tenet of a peace deal that international observers fear is in danger of collapsing.

They have until February to iron out key sticking points—namely how to unify their fighters under one army, and agree on the number and boundaries of states. Kiir's security adviser, Tutkew Gattuak, said the pair "agreed to continue" discussing how to overcome these hurdles. The civil war in South Sudan has killed close to 400,000 people. The talks will resume in January. —AFP

International

India beefs up security amid outrage against new law, anger with police

Govt approves funds for population survey amid protests

LUCKNOW: Indian authorities stepped up security and shut down the internet in various places yesterday while members of the ruling party planned marches backing a new citizenship law even though nationwide protests against it are escalating. An interior ministry official said the government expected all state security officials to be on duty on Christmas Eve and through the holiday week.

"We want the police to prevent an outbreak of violence but we also realize that the situation can get out of control, hence paramilitary forces will be deployed in markets and public spaces," said a senior security official in New Delhi.

At least 20 rallies in support or against the new law were scheduled in different cities with protesters from both sides canvassing on social media to get people out over Christmas and the New Year. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) aims to fast-track citizenship for persecuted Hindus, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Christians who arrived in India before Dec. 31, 2014, from Muslim-majority Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Its passing on Dec 11 triggered demonstrations in the eastern state of Assam, where protesters fear it will make illegal migrants from Bangladesh legal residents.

Elsewhere, critics say the law discriminates against Muslims and is part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist agenda. The government denies that. Activists opposed to the law said they were trying to keep up the momentum and were looking for ways to work around the police clampdown and internet blackouts.

Senior members of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leading rallies to support the law said they were determined to counter what they see as misleading criticism of it. "We want to explain that the law is not anti-Muslim and we want to expose that those who are leading the protests against the law are misleading innocent, uneducated Muslims," said BJP spokesman

Gopal Krishna Agarwal.

At least 21 people have been killed since the law was passed in protests that represent the first major opposition to Modi's legislative agenda since his party's landslide re-election this year.

Police in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), which has seen the most deaths in the protests, suggested that Islamists were stirring up the anti-CAA demonstrations. "We have proof that an Islamic group with its headquarters in Delhi and its strongest base in the southern state in Kerala is behind the violence in the UP," said senior police officer Kalanidhi Naithani.

In the last 10 days, police in UP have taken nearly 900 people into custody for violence, said an official in the state's police control room. More than 2,000 people have been arrested across India.

'Excessive force'

New York-based Human Rights Watch criticized the police action and called on them to stop using unnecessary lethal force against demonstrators. The rights group said police had only used excessive force only against those protesting against the law, including many students.

"The authorities should prosecute violent protesters, but they also need to hold police officers to account for using excessive force," said Meenakshi Ganguly, the group's South Asia director.

In Uttar Pradesh's capital of Lucknow, Tabassum Raza, a 26-year-old Muslim woman, said she was beaten by police who stormed into her home. "After barging into my house, one of the policemen immediately pointed a gun at my forehead and asked me to tell where were the men were hiding," she said.

"When I told them there was no one in they started beating me with batons and damaged everything," Raza said, showing bruised forearms and legs. Vikash Chandra Tripathi, superintendent of police in West Lucknow, said the allegations were baseless and police



AMRITSAR: Activists of the Youth Congress hold placards and shout slogans during a protest against India's new citizenship law in Amritsar yesterday. The wave of protests across the country marks the biggest challenge to Modi's government since sweeping to power in the world's largest democracy in 2014. —AFP

were only searching for people involved in the violence. He said the police would investigate if an official complaint is lodged.

"So far the police have not received any complaints from anyone regarding," he said.

Population survey

India's federal cabinet approved funds yesterday for a census and population survey to be conducted next

year, amid fears that the database could be used to build a controversial citizens register, against which there have been widespread protests. Hundreds of thousands of Indians have taken to the streets to protest against a new citizenship law enacted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government that provides non-Muslim minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who moved here before 2015 a pathway to Indian citizenship. —Reuters

Paralysis in Iraq as protesters harden position

BAGHDAD: Iraqi protesters stepped up their demonstrations yesterday with the authorities in Baghdad increasingly paralyzed as they seek a way out of a political impasse. Once again the capital's iconic Tahrir Square began filling early in the day, with protesters making clear their opposition to names touted by the establishment to fill the post of prime minister.

Portrait pictures of these candidates-marked by a huge red cross-increasingly adorn facades of buildings and tents in the protest area. And once again the main avenues and roads in cities in the south of the country were blocked, as well as entrances to schools, universities and government buildings. After dwindling in recent weeks, the civil disobedience campaign has rediscovered its vigour, as the protesters seek to uproot a political system condemned as deeply corrupt.

Negotiations over a candidate to replace premier Adel Abdel Mahdi, who quit in November in the face of protests against corruption and unemployment, have remained deadlocked since the latest in a series of deadlines expired at midnight on Sunday.

While a pro-Iran camp has tried to impose a candidate, Iraqi President Barham Saleh has reportedly put up resistance.

For Iraqis protesting since October 1, the system installed by the United States after it led a military coalition to overthrow dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003 has become overly beholden to Iran and is beyond reform.

'New candidate every hour'

A long promised economic revival in OPEC's number two oil producer never came, protesters say, with more than half of all oil revenues syphoned off by crooked politicians and their cronies. Rallies have continued despite a campaign of intimidation that has included targeted killings and abductions of activists, which the United Nations blames on militias.

Politicians have been desperately trying to agree on who will be the next prime minister. But unable to find a parliamentary majority, time is running out. The timetable set out in the constitution has already been overshot, with new negotiations due in the face of intransigence by pro-Iranian parties.

Parliament failed to meet as planned on Monday as there was no quorum. "Every hour they come up with a new candidate, but we want someone who is independent," said one young demonstrator, standing in front of burning tyres on a road into southern Basra. "We're ready to continue the general strike, a day, two days, three days ... even a hundred years if that's what it takes," he added, his face covered by a scarf to keep out the acrid smoke.

Officials say Iran wants to install Qusay al-Suhail, who served as higher



KARBALA: An Iraqi man drives a motorcycle past a tire fire at a make-shift roadblock amidst anti-government protests in the central Iraqi holy shrine city of Karbala yesterday. —AFP

education minister in the government of Abdel Mahdi.

'Sacrifices'

Parliament speaker Mohammed al-Halbasi, a Sunni, has announced he has dropped his support for Suhail, after a source in the presidency said Saleh had vetoed the proposed appointment. Instead Halbasi has urged his pro-Iran allies to come forward with another name. As soon as the name of Assaad Al-Aidani, the governor of Basra, began circulating however, protests erupted in his oil-rich southern province, with demonstrators blocking roads to the ports, an AFP correspondent said.

Roads to Nasiriyah, Diwaniyah and Hilla in the south were also cut as well as in Kut and the holy Shiite shrine city of Najaf, as strikers stopped government officials from reaching work and closed the doors to schools. After "all the sacrifices" with close to 460 dead since the start of the demonstrations in early October and 25,000 wounded, the protesters say they will not return home "until all their goals are met".

They are demanding a new constitution, a new electoral law and a complete overhaul of the political system, in a country with crippling unemployment, especially among the young people who make up more than half the population. —AFP

Turkey, Russia talk Syria as thousands flee bombing

ANKARA/BEIRUT: A Turkish delegation was in Russia on Monday for talks on Syria, following reports that Russian-backed attacks there were forcing tens of thousands more Syrians to flee towards Turkey.

Turkey already hosts about 3.7 million Syrians - the world's biggest refugee population. President Tayyip Erdogan said on Sunday it could not handle a new influx and was urging Russia to stop the strikes in Syria's northwestern Idlib province. The Turkey-based Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) said on Monday 120,000 Syrians were fleeing towards the Turkish border - higher than Erdogan's estimate of 80,000. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for an immediate end to the hostilities, which he said had displaced 30,000 people in the last week alone, his spokesman said.

"The Secretary-General reminds all parties of their obligations to protect civilians and ensure freedom of movement,"

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said in a statement. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has vowed to recapture the Idlib region, the last significant area of Syria still under rebel control after 8-1/2 years of civil war.

Russia and Iran have supported Assad's forces during the Syrian conflict while Turkey has backed Syrian rebels fighting Assad. Russian and Syrian army jets have been targeting civilian convoys trying to flee the Idlib city of Maarat Al-Numan, leaving hundreds of families still trapped there, activists and aid groups have said. "It's a tragic situation for civilians remaining in the city since Russian jets are hitting any convoy that leaves the city, while those who were able to reach areas closer to the border have nowhere to shelter," said Mohamad Rasheed, an activist in the area.

Libya also in focus

The Syrian army said on Monday it had fought fierce battles in southeastern Idlib and seized several villages after killing large numbers of what it called terrorists. "People are lying on the ground sleeping in the open with no blankets and under rain and cold," said Feras Saad, who fled the city with his family and found shelter in the border village of Harabosh.

Moscow and Damascus both deny allegations of indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas and say they are fighting Al-



A truck loaded with furniture and other items drives carrying fleeing people away from Maarat Al-Numan in Syria's northwestern Idlib province yesterday as government forces advance. —AFP

Qaeda-inspired Islamist militants. A Turkish diplomatic source said the delegation in Russia will also discuss Turkey's potential troop deployment and military support to Libya, after Ankara and Tripoli signed a military cooperation accord last month.

Russia has said it is concerned about any such deployment. Erdogan said on Sunday Turkey could increase military support to Fayez Al-Serraj's UN-backed

Government of National Accord (GNA), which has been fighting off an offensive by east Libya forces led by Khalifa Haftar.

Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have backed Haftar's forces. Later on Monday, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu held a phone call with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov to discuss developments in Syria and Libya. It did not give further details. —Reuters

Iran arrests family of young man killed in 'riots'

TEHRAN: Iran has arrested the family of a young man killed in street violence that flared during last month's protests against fuel price hikes, Mehr news agency reported yesterday.

The family of Pouya Bakhtiari, who was "killed suspiciously during the recent riots", had been invited for talks with authorities, Mehr said, citing what it called an informed source. They were found to have been "carrying out a counter-revolutionary project" and "anti-structural activities", said the agency, which is close to moderate conservatives in Iran.

"Consequently, these elements were arrested by a judicial order in order to protect the order and the security of the honorable people and others damaged by the rioters," it said without specifying which family members were taken into custody. Bakhtiari was reportedly killed in Karaj city, west of Tehran, in street violence that erupted in mid-November during nationwide protests over a shock decision to hike petrol prices by as much as 200 percent. He was 27.

His Instagram account, which is now reportedly run by his father, announced a ceremony marking 40 days since his death would be held at Karaj cemetery tomorrow.

It was still active with more than 18,000 followers yesterday. Officials in Iran have yet to issue an overall death toll for the unrest, but international human rights group Amnesty International has put the number at more than 300. An Iranian security official rejected a foreign media report on Monday that the figure was as high as 1,500, saying it was based on "false propaganda".

"This way of news writing and making accusations is essentially nothing special," said Alireza Zarifian Yeganeh, head of the information and communications secretariat of Iran's Supreme National Security Council.

'Ludicrous claims'

Quoted by the Tasnim news agency, he dismissed the reports as "a series of ludicrous claims". "And when you would ask this media about its source, it would refer to some invisible creatures and there is no possibility of verification." The days of unrest in Iran from November 15 saw police stations attacked, shops looted and banks and petrol stations torched as authorities imposed a week-long internet blackout. Videos that have surfaced since purport to show scenes from the crackdown that followed, including footage of security forces firing at unarmed demonstrators or beating them with batons.

The United States, France and Germany have all condemned Iran over the bloodshed.

Iran has repeatedly denied casualty figures issued abroad. In a report on December 2, state television charged that foreign media had been "hyping up" the death toll.

It also said that security forces "had no choice but to resort to authoritative and tough confrontation in order to save people from the hands of the rioters, and a number of rioters were killed". —AFP

International

No more US sniffer dogs to Egypt, Jordan after deaths

'Dogs play a critical role in our counter-terrorism efforts'

WASHINGTON: The United States has temporarily stopped sending bomb detecting sniffer dogs to Jordan and Egypt after several of the animals died due to what US officials say was lack of care. "Any death of a canine in the field is an extremely sad event and we will take every measure possible to prevent this from happening in the future," a US State Department official told reporters on Monday.

The dogs "play a critical role in our CT (counter-terrorism) efforts overseas and in saving American lives," the spokesperson said. The State Department's own independent Office of Inspector General (OIG) began looking into the well-being of the animals after reports of canine mistreatment surfaced in mid-2017.

In a report out in September, the inspectors discovered numerous cases of negligence in the care of some 135 dogs, including Belgian Malinois, German Shepherds, Labradors, and other dogs trained in detecting explosives.

These US-trained animals were provided to fewer than a dozen countries as part of a counterterrorism cooperation program. The main concerns were with Jordan, the first beneficiary of the program, where one dog died due to inadequate care and another had to be euthanized upon its return to the United States.

The OIG investigators recommended that the US government stop supplying Jordan with sniffer dogs—but the

State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security, which sends sniffer dogs abroad, refused to comply. In a new report out in December the OIG discovered that in June and September two other dogs had died in Jordan of "unnatural causes"—one due to heat stroke and the other poisoned by pesticides sprayed by Jordanian police in or near the dog's kennel.

The deaths could have been avoided with better care, the report said. Furthermore, three of the 10 dogs supplied to Egypt in 2019 also died prematurely—one from lung cancer, the second from gallbladder disease, and the third from heat stroke, an especially terrible death due to negligence and improper care, according to a veterinarian cited in the document.

The investigators renewed their earlier recommendation to stop sending dogs to Jordan, and now added Egypt to the black list. This time the State Department complied. "We concur with the OIG recommendations to cease temporarily providing additional canines to Jordan and Egypt until those countries implement our requirements to ensure the canines' health and welfare," the State Department official said.

The December report also urged US officials to seek ways to better monitor the sniffer dogs. In Egypt, for example, US officials have been denied access to the kennels or the airport where the animals are deployed. — AFP



A German sniffer dog. —AFP

Prison clashes leave 36 dead in Honduras

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras: At least 36 people were killed in weekend clashes in Honduran prisons as the military and police try to regain control after a spate of murders linked to the criminal gangs plaguing the country.

On Sunday afternoon, 18 gang members died in a clash between inmates at El Porvenir prison, 60 kilometers (40 miles) north of the capital Tegucigalpa.

"Firearms, knives and machetes" were used in the brawl, which also left 10 wounded, Lieutenant Jose Coello, a spokesman for the National Inter-Institutional Security Force (Fusina), told local media.

On Friday night, 18 prisoners died and 16 were wounded in a shooting at the prison in the port town of Tela, northwest of the capital. The killings came shortly after President Juan Orlando Hernandez grappling with a wave of prison killings—ordered the army and the police on Tuesday to take control of the country's 27 prisons, which are badly overcrowded with some 21,000 inmates.

The security forces later said they were deploying about 1,200 military and police in 18 facilities classified as "high risk."

Hernandez announced the crackdown



TEGUCIGALPA: Relatives of an inmate killed in a shooting at the El Porvenir prison, north of Tegucigalpa, cry after learning about the fate of their loved one, outside the morgue in the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa, on Monday. — AFP

after the killings on December 14 of five members of the feared MS-13 gang by a fellow detainee at the high-security prison in La Tolva, east of Tegucigalpa.

That came just a day after Pedro Idelfonso Armas, the warden of Honduras's main high security prison in Santa Barbara, El Pozo, was shot dead in the south of the country.

The security ministry had suspended Armas shortly before his death, amid an investigation into his presence during the October 26 murder of Magdalena Meza, a

drug kingpin whose confession and notebooks linked him to the president's brother, Juan Antonio "Tony" Hernandez. Meza's account books were used as evidence in the New York trial of Hernandez, who was subsequently convicted on four counts of drug trafficking. He faces sentencing—possibly for life—in January.

The president condemned the conviction of his younger brother, saying it was based on "the testimony of confessed assassins." A video circulating on social media shows the 52-year-old Armas talk-

ing with Meza when prison guards opened a locked gate, allowing a dozen inmates to burst in to stab and fatally shoot him.

In statements to the AFP, Meza's lawyer, Carlos Chajtur, publicly accused the government of having ordered his client to be killed in retaliation for having collaborated with US justice in the trial against Hernandez.

Drugs, gangs, poverty

On Sunday night military and police chiefs told the press that the wave of violence inside prisons "is an escalation of the criminal world to try to prevent Fusina (...) from imposing the necessary controls in the country's penal centers". The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras (OHCHR) said it observed "with alarm the violence inside prisons", and urged the state "to guarantee the life and respect of human rights to those deprived of liberty and proceed to a prompt, effective and transparent investigation."

Honduras is plagued by drug trafficking, gangs, poverty and corruption. It suffers one of the highest murder rates in the world outside areas of armed conflict, having registered 41.2 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2018. To fight this scourge, Hernandez created a military police force financed by a new tax, and built special prisons for gang members. The sky-high crime rate has been a key factor behind a wave of migration toward the United States, notably by minors who say they fear being forced into gangs. —AFP

Biryani, bankers and burqas: Inside a sit-in protest on an Indian highway

NEW DELHI: In a working-class corner of south Delhi, a nearly 1-kilometre (half mile) stretch of a wide, six-lane highway connecting India's capital city with a burgeoning suburb has been blockaded for 10 days.

Hundreds of men and women, some in Muslim burqa robes and many accompanied by children, have occupied the stretch of road at Shaheen Bagh to protest against a new citizenship law and a proposed citizens' register that has brought hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets across India.

India has been rocked by demonstrations since Dec. 12, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government enacted the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that provides non-Muslim minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who moved here before 2015 a pathway to Indian citizenship.

While some protests have turned violent - at least 21 people have been killed in clashes with police - Shaheen Bagh's occupation is entirely peaceful. From the maze-like, Muslim-dominated neighborhood that flanks one side of the highway, a volunteer group of more than 100 people run the site, working in shifts and providing everything from crowd-control and food to bedding and medicines.

They are a diverse group.

Tabish Qamar, a banker, runs a four-person perimeter security team, spending the day at the office and his nights at the protest. Wahid Raza, an engineering student on holiday, is in charge of food for between 200-300 people during lunch and dinner, including feeding them plates of meat and rice biryani. "My job is to ensure no one goes hungry," he said.

Umair Khan, 19, works with nearby clinics and pharmacies to provide medical facilities for all protesters. But there has been little to do, he said, because there has been no violence, so far.

Humera Sayed, a zoology student from Delhi University, runs a team of 30 women volunteers, helping women protesters access to food, medicines, and restrooms.

"We had initially appealed to women to only stay here till 10 p.m.," she said, her hair covered by a bright pink hijab headscarf. "But they aren't willing to leave this site, till the CAA is withdrawn."

Donations in kind

Deputy Commissioner of Police Chinmoy Biswal said he was negotiating with protesters, and was hopeful the site would empty out soon as local support for the demonstration waned.

For now, though, there is little sign the demonstrators plan to give up. At the heart of the site is a makeshift stage, laid out under a blue tarpaulin, festooned with Indian flags and surrounded by loudspeakers and CCTV cameras installed by protesters.

The masterminds of the intricately organized operation are two young engineers, trained at the elite Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) - Aasif Mujtaba and Sharjeel, who gave only one name.

Mujtaba said he and Sharjeel identify volunteers, delegate tasks, bring in speakers from outside the area, and made sure the protesters avoided any confrontations with police. Siddharth Saxena, an accountant from a Hindu family, is one of the handful of volunteers handling funds.

Local residents have entrusted him with 10,000 Indian rupees (\$140), most of which have gone on banners and stationery, he said. But many times that amount has come via donations made in kind, including dozens of mattresses, an assortment of tables that form the foundation of the stage and endless cups of steaming tea that provide warmth on cold winter days.

As the occupation draws on, both Mujtaba and Sharjeel are aware of the risks they face, the possibility of legal action and even their careers getting derailed.

But both seem to have accepted the consequences. "At least tomorrow, I won't feel that I could have spoken up for my rights but I didn't," said Mujtaba. "Whatever happens tomorrow, at least we'll be happy, that we could have done it, and we did it." — Reuters

DR Congo ex-PM calls for war on Rwanda

KINSHASA: A former DR Congo prime minister and opposition leader on Monday called for the government to wage war on neighboring Rwanda as a way to end militia violence.

The Democratic Republic of Congo was at the heart of two bitter regional wars between 1997-2003 involving its neighbors Rwanda and Uganda. Kinshasa accused Rwanda and Uganda of trying to destabilize the DR Congo while its neighbors said militias opposed to their governments had used DR Congo as a rear base for attacks. "We have to wage war on Rwanda to restore peace in our country. Rwanda influences our politics. So does Uganda," former premier Adolphe Muzito said at a press conference in Kinshasa.

"We can only make peace by threatening Rwanda, by occupying its territory if possible by annexing it," he said. Two other leaders of Lamuka, the country's main opposition, Moise Katumbi and Jean-Pierre Bemba, distanced themselves from Muzito, saying they were "surprised" by his comments.

AFP was unable to immediately reach the government for reaction. For a quarter of a century, the eastern part of the DRC has been plagued by insecurity due to the presence of dozens of local and foreign armed groups. Earlier this year five Great Lakes countries—the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda—decided to combine their military operations in the region.

On Saturday, hundreds of Rwandans linked to a militia in South Kivu province were handed back to Rwandan authorities weeks after they were captured.

The Congolese army has in recent months claimed several victories over the militia known as the CNRD—a group created by refugees after the 1994 genocide of Tutsis by the majority Hutus in Rwanda. Rwanda's Tutsi-dominated government has welcomed the anti-militia operations in DR Congo, saying their territory has also been targeted by the Hutu rebels. — AFP

Prince Philip released from hospital after four nights

LONDON: Britain's Prince Philip left the hospital yesterday after a four-night stay that renewed concern about the 98-year-old's health. Images broadcast by British media showed Queen Elizabeth II's husband, dressed in a suit, taking a few steps and being helped into an SUV vehicle before being whisked away.

Philip did not respond to photographers as he got into the vehicles, Britain's Press Association reported. Multiple police stood guard around the hospital as well as royal protection officers. The Duke of Edinburgh was now expected to join the queen at Sandringham, the central England country retreat where the royal family traditionally spends Christmas.

Philip was admitted to London's King Edward VII hospital on Friday. Buckingham Palace said it was "observation and treatment in relation to a pre-existing condition", adding that it was a "precautionary measure". The duke was reportedly flown there by helicopter from the royal Sandringham estate in eastern England, where he has been based since retiring from public duties in 2017.

The Sun tabloid reported that Philip has suffered a month

US military tracking Santa and any 'Christmas gift' from North Korea

DENVER: While the North American Aerospace Defense Command stays alert for any signs of a North Korea missile launch - what officials in Pyongyang have described as a "Christmas gift" - it is also tracking the legendary figure who delivers presents to children across the world, the command said on Monday.

Based in Colorado Springs, Colorado, NORAD is a combined US and Canadian military command whose mission is to issue aerospace and maritime warnings and controls across North America.

For more than six decades, it has also offered real-time animated tracking of Santa Claus, also known as Kris Kringle,



LONDON: Britain's Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh leaves the King Edward VII hospital in west London yesterday. Britain's Prince Philip left a London hospital yesterday after a four-night stay that renewed concern about the 98-year-old's health, in time to join the royal family for Christmas. — AFP

of ill-health, including a "bad fall" which left him confined to bed for a couple of days. In recent years, he has been admitted to hospital for abdominal surgery, bladder infections and a blocked coronary artery, while he is also reported to suffer from arthritis in his right wrist.

In January, the duke was involved in a car crash near Sandringham. He pulled out onto a main road, hitting another car and flipping his Land Rover. A woman in the other car broke her wrist, for which Philip apologized. He subsequently gave up his driving license, but faced no further action. — AFP

as his reindeer-powered sleigh traverses the globe delivering Yuletide gifts to children.

"As NORAD conducts its primary mission of defending North America from threats, we're proud to continue our tradition of tracking Santa's journey around the world," NORAD said in a statement.

NORAD's Santa tracking website www.noradsanta.org gets nearly 15 million unique visitors from more than 200 countries and territories across the globe, the agency said.

NORAD in recent years has been tracking North Korean long-range missile tests. Pyongyang warned Washington earlier this month of a possible "Christmas gift". That came after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un gave the United States until the end of the year to propose new concessions in talks over his country's nuclear arsenal and reducing tensions between the two long-time adversaries.

NORAD's Santa-tracking tradition started in 1955 when a Colorado Springs department store misprinted the phone number to the North Pole in a newspaper advertisement, according to its website.

The first call came from a little girl and went to US Air Force Colonel Harry Shoup, director of what was then known as the Continental Air Defense Command. — AFP

International

Tropical storm ruins Christmas plans for thousands of Filipinos

Hundreds stranded after authorities ask residents to leave coastal areas

MANILA: Thousands of people in typhoon-prone central Philippines have had their Christmas plans ruined after they were told to leave their homes as a severe tropical storm approaches.

Officials on Christmas Eve said residents should evacuate coastal areas, and thousands more were stranded at ports with ferry services shut down as the nation hunkered down for rain and strong winds. Damaging gale- to storm-force winds were forecast over the Asian nation's Pacific coast in the afternoon ahead of Tropical Storm Phanfone's projected landfall on Samar island as early as 5:00 pm (0900 GMT), the state weather service said.

Though much weaker, Phanfone was tracking a similar path as Super Typhoon Haiyan, the country's deadliest cyclone on record which left more than 7,300 people dead or missing in 2013. All ships on the storm's projected path through the central islands were ordered to stay in port, while local executives there told residents of the coasts as well as flood- and landslide-prone areas to move to safety.

"Some families are reluctant to evacuate because they want to celebrate Christmas at home, but local officials will force them out if they refuse to heed our warnings," regional civil defense official Reyden Cabrigas said.

Cabrigas, speaking by phone from the central city of Tacloban, said evacuations were underway there as well as

nearby Samar, but added he did not immediately have a total count. "We are aiming for zero casualties," Cabrigas added. More than 21,000 ferry passengers trying to get home for the mainly Catholic nation's Christmas holidays have been stranded at ports as shipping shut down, the coast guard said yesterday. Local carriers also suspended dozens of domestic flights.

The state weather service said Phanfone, Laotian for "animal", may strengthen into a typhoon with sustained peak winds of more than 120 kilometers (62 miles) an hour overnight Wednesday.

It advised residents, including those in Manila, to stay indoors on Christmas Day to avoid the high winds which can cause damage to weaker structures. The Philippines is the first major landmass facing the Pacific cyclone belt, and the archipelago gets hit by an average of 20 storms and typhoons each year, putting millions of people in disaster-prone areas in a state of constant poverty.

Strong winds and associated dangers like floods, landslides, and, more rarely, giant walls of seawater pounding the coasts kill scores of people each year, wipe out farmers' harvests and destroy infrastructure.

Homes built with flimsy materials, as well as populated areas along the coasts, floodplains, and mountainous interiors, are often the most vulnerable. — AFP



BORONGAN, the Philippines: Residents rest in an evacuation centre, as typhoon Phanfone makes landfall, in Borongan, Eastern Samar province, central Philippines yesterday. Typhoon Phanfone smashed into the central Philippines leaving thousands of people unable to get home for the Christmas holidays and forcing many others to evacuate in the face of the onslaught. — AFP

Missing from India's citizenship law: 100,000 Sri Lankan refugees

MUMBAI: Nearly 100,000 Sri Lankan refugees living in India are not eligible for citizenship under a new law, sparking concerns they may be forced to return to the island nation they fled during a decades-long civil war, many with no homes to return to. India's Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) aims to fast-track citizenship for persecuted Hindus, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Christians who arrived in India before Dec. 31, 2014, from Muslim-majority Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The law excludes nearly 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamils, an ethnic minority, who live in India, including about 60,000 in camps in southern Tamil Nadu state, according to the home department.

Most of these refugees are Hindu or Christian, whose forefathers were born in India, said S. Velayutham, an advocacy officer at the non-profit Organization for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation in the southern city of Chennai. "Many were sent by the British as indentured laborers on



COLOMBO: An ethnic minority Tamil woman arrives with her daughter to go to her native village after arriving from India on a passenger ferry at a Colombo port. According to a press release from the UN, they are among the first group of 37 refugees who are returning to the island nation after escaping to India 20 years ago due to a 25-year civil war between the government's military and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). — Reuters

Sri Lankan tea plantations, and hoped for a better life in India when they came here during the war," he said.

"Some 25,000 children were also born in the camps. They do not know any country but India, but now they may have no choice but to go to Sri Lanka," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

At least 25 dead in Indonesia bus plunge

PALEMBANG: At least 25 people died and 14 others were injured after a bus plunged into a ravine in Indonesia, a rescuer said on Tuesday.

The bus carrying dozens of passengers careened into a 150-metre (500-foot) ravine in South Sumatra province just before midnight (1600 GMT) on Monday and ended up in a river, police said earlier.

Originally the death toll given by police was 24, but the head of the local search and rescue team Bertly Kowas said another body was found, taking the number to 25.

"Currently the evacuation is ongoing and some divers are searching (for victims) around the bus," Kowas told Metro TV on Tuesday. Footage shared by the rescue team showed bodies being taken out of the water on to stretchers.

Police and rescuers were scouring the

river and the nearby slopes to look for victims and several passengers were feared missing. "It crashed into the concrete road barrier before plunging into the ravine. Some people are still trapped inside the bus," local police spokesman Dolly Gumara told AFP on Tuesday, adding no other vehicle was involved. Search and rescue teams have been deployed to look for victims, Gumara said, adding injured survivors were taken to hospital.

The accident happened in a remote and steep area near the town of Pagar Alam, hampering the efforts to rescue the victims.

According to a passenger manifest, the regional bus left Bengkulu province for Pagar Alam with 27 on board but some survivors told police there were around 50 people inside when the accident happened.

"Some passengers were probably added along the way so there's a possibility some more people are still missing in the river," Gumara said, adding the cause was being investigated.

Traffic accidents are common in the Southeast Asian archipelago, where vehicles are often old and poorly maintained and road rules regularly flouted.

In September, at least 21 people died



PAGAR ALAM: Indonesia's national search and rescue agency (BASARNAS) rescue personnel retrieving a victim after a bus careened into a 150-metre deep ravine and ended up in a river killing dozens, near Perahu Dipo village in Pagar Alam, South Sumatra. — AFP

when a bus plunged into a ravine in West Java's Sukabumi region.

Several months earlier, 12 people were killed and dozens more injured when a passenger tried to wrest control of a bus

steering wheel following an argument with the driver on the same toll road in West Java as Thursday's accident. The bus smashed into two cars, causing a truck to roll. — AFP

Australian PM announces paid leave for public servant firefighters

SYDNEY: Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison yesterday announced four weeks of paid leave for public servants taking time off to fight fires as volunteers, during his tour to fire-affected areas across the country. Morrison spoke to media in Mount Baker in South Australia, where ongoing fires have destroyed about 87 homes and 500 other buildings.

He began his tour to fire zones in New South Wales and on Monday (December 23) was given an aerial tour of the Gaspers Mountain fire in the Blue Mountains region. Devastating bushfires have burnt more than 4 million hectares (9.88 million acres) of land across five states and killed nine people since September.

Uncontrolled fires are still burning in South Australia, after ripping through the state's prominent wine region, and around the country's largest city Sydney.

Calls for Morrison to resign have littered social media platforms after it was revealed he was holidaying in Hawaii while the country battled a bushfire emergency and his return has failed to douse the criticism.

Voters have taken to social media calling for leadership at a time of crisis, and along with some of the country's political editors, have criticized Morrison's refusal to take tougher action on climate change.

Similar to the criticism of US President Donald

Trump by American comedians, Morrison has been ridiculed on social media, portrayed as a deformed creature sitting in a burnt out forest on Christmas Day patting a lump of coal he calls "precious" to a flying superhero called "Bullshit Man".

On Twitter yesterday, #NotMyPrimeMinister, #MorrisonMustGo and #ScoMoResign were the top trending topics in Australia after a viral video showed a volunteer firefighter, Jacqui, shaking hands with Morrison as she said "not my prime minister".

"Jacquie is all of us," Twitter user Yabba said. Another user @bugwannastra tweeted "she's only saying what more than 12 million think..." The tweet prompted Morrison to issue a clarification on Tuesday. "Indeed, as Jacqui joked with me yesterday, I'm not her PM, because she's British, Boris Johnson is," he tweeted.

Devastating bushfires have burnt more than 4 million hectares (9.88 million acres) of land across five states and killed nine people since September. Uncontrolled fires are still burning in South Australia, after ripping through the state's prominent wine region, and around the country's largest city Sydney.

Hazardous smoke blanketed Sydney for days this month, heightening public anger and raising political pressure on the government to do more to battle climate change.

When it was revealed Morrison and his family had slipped away to Hawaii for a holiday voters became angry. On his return Morrison further inflamed his political critics by saying there would be no change to climate policy and denied suggestions of a split within his government after his deputy agreed more action was needed. He also ruled out holding a summit with the nation's fire chiefs and compensation for thousands of volunteer firefighters who have battled blazes for months. — Reuters

German student says he's told to leave India after joining protests

BENGALURU: A German exchange student said yesterday that Indian authorities had ordered him to leave the country after he took part in protests against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's new citizenship law. Jakob Lindenthal, a 24-year-old pursuing a master's degree in physics, said he took part in two rallies in the southern city of Chennai against the law, which critics say discriminates against India's minority Muslims.

A photo circulated on Twitter shows Lindenthal holding a sign that reads: "1933-1945 We have been there," a reference to Nazi Germany. Lindenthal said he was summoned to a meeting with India's immigration authorities on Monday and told that he had violated the conditions of his student visa due to his "political activities outside the campus", and must therefore leave the country.

During the meeting, Lindenthal said, he was asked for his views on the protests against the new Indian law, which grants citizenship to non-Muslim religious groups fleeing persecution from three Muslim-majority countries. "I think nobody can claim that I was just there to exploit my student visa to go on anti-government demonstrations and harm the country's integrity or something. But that was how they presented it to me," said Lindenthal, who spoke to Reuters from New Delhi while awaiting a Christmas day flight back to Germany.

India's Home Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment, while a spokesman for the foreign

Seven Afghan troops killed in Taliban attack

MAZAR-I-SHARIF: Seven Afghan soldiers were killed in a Taliban attack on a base in northern Afghanistan yesterday, officials said, as local and international forces brace for another deadly winter.

According to the Afghan defense ministry, "terrorists" attacked a joint military base in the Dawlat Abad district of Balkh province near the Uzbekistan border.

The base was shared between the army and the National Directorate of Security, Afghanistan's secretive intelligence agency. "As a result of this attack, seven Afghan army soldiers died and three others were wounded. Meanwhile, in this attack, three NDS staff were also injured," the defense ministry said in a statement.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said 20 soldiers had been killed in the attack, including a commander. "Six soldiers were wounded and four arrested. The base was captured," Mujahid wrote on Twitter.

The attack comes one day after the Taliban claimed responsibility for the death of an American special forces soldier, who was killed in Kunduz province, also in the north. The Taliban said they had attacked the vehicle he was in, whereas the US military said he died when a weapons cache he had been investigating exploded. Winter once again marked a slowdown in the so-called "fighting season", with Taliban fighters returning to their villages while snow and ice made attacks more difficult to pull off. But in recent years, the distinction between seasons has all but vanished.

According to German intelligence officials at Camp Marmal, a German-run base outside Mazar-i-sharif in Balkh, January 2019 saw one of the highest-ever numbers of attacks in the north.

"If there is no game changer on the strategic level, it will be a 'hot' winter," one official told AFP.

"We are talking about two dozens of security incidents average per day" across NATO's northern command, he added. In October, local officials said a column of hundreds of Taliban fighters on motorbikes attacked Shortepa district police headquarters in Balkh, briefly capturing the facility.

The German intelligence official said the number was exaggerated, with likely only "dozens" of fighters. Still, it highlights how quickly Taliban fighters can mass and then disperse back into the local population. "There's fierce fighting going on all through the year, meaning that the Taliban managed to expand into some territories that haven't been their traditional ones," the official said. — AFP



CHENNAI: Jakob Lindenthal (center), a German student, attends a march to show solidarity with the students of New Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia university after police entered the university campus following a protest against a new citizenship law, in Chennai, on December 16, 2019. — Reuters

ministry declined to comment. The Indian Express newspaper quoted an official at India's Foreigners Regional Registration Office as saying that while he was unaware of Lindenthal's case, it appeared to be a "clear case" of violating visa rules.

Indian opposition leaders, who accuse Modi's Hindu nationalist government of strong-armed tactics to muzzle dissent, decried Lindenthal's expulsion. "This is dismaying. We used to be a proud democracy, an example to the world... No democracy punishes freedom of expression," tweeted Congress lawmaker Shashi Tharoor. — Reuters

Analysis

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FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125
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P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

7 uses of facial recognition that sparked debate

From identifying voters in Afghanistan to speeding up service for tea lovers in India, the use of facial recognition surged in 2019 with expectations that it will become even more widespread next year, fuelling concerns over misuse. There has been growing global debate over the technology, with supporters saying it can increase security and streamline services, while critics denounce it as intrusive and often inaccurate. Here are seven uses of facial recognition that sparked discussion around the world in 2019:

1. INDIA - FACE FOR TEA - A popular Indian tea-house chain faced a backlash in November after it rolled out a facial recognition feature at some of its stores to speed-up service and payment for returning clients. Customers at Chaayos took to social media to complain about the camera technology they said captured images of them without their consent, with no information on what the data would be used for, and no clear option to opt out. Chaayos said data was encrypted, would not be shared, and customers could choose to opt out, but the incident led to calls from human rights advocates for the government to speed up the introduction of laws to protect privacy.

2. BRITAIN - MALLS AND MUSEUM - In August, revelations that a property developer in London's King's Cross area used facial recognition surveillance cameras triggered a public backlash and an investigation by Britain's data protection watchdog. It later emerged that a Sheffield mall and a Liverpool museum had also trialled the technology in cooperation with police. Civil liberties group described the trend as a nationwide "epidemic".

3. UNITED STATES - POLICE NO MORE - In May, San Francisco became the first US city to ban the purchase and use of facial recognition by city personnel, including police. The action reflected growing discontent in the United States over the technology, which government agencies have used for years and now has become more powerful with the rise of cloud computing and artificial intelligence technologies. Oakland and Berkeley in California and Somerville, in Massachusetts, have since put in place similar regulations.

4. AFGHANISTAN - UNVEILED VOTE - Afghan authorities photographed all voters in September's presidential election, using facial recognition software as an anti-fraud measure, after elections in 2009 and 2014 ended in disputes over rampant ballot stuffing. But women's rights campaigners complained the photo requirement was likely to prevent large numbers of women from voting, especially in conservative areas, where most adult women and older girls cover their faces outside the home. Ahead of the vote, the election commission said women could have had their pictures taken by female election staff, but acknowledged that at least 1,450 of the nearly 30,000 polling stations employed no women.

5. CHINA - INTRUSIVE WILDLIFE - In October, a law professor in China took a wildlife park in Hangzhou to court after it deployed facial recognition at the entrance, requiring members submit a face scan to access to the site, local media reported. The professor argued the data collection was unnecessary and violated his consumer rights, in a lawsuit said to be the first of its kind in China. The case triggered a debate over use of the technology which is increasingly widespread across the country, where it is used by authorities as well as a growing number of private institutions, including schools, hotels and gyms.

6. KAZAKHSTAN - BUS RIDE - A facial recognition app allowing commuters to pay for a bus ride with a scan of their face instead of purchasing a ticket was trialled in Kazakhstan capital of Nur-Sultan in October, local media reported. Right activists and some users complained the system was intrusive and could lead to extra surveillance.

7. WORLD - SPEEDY BOARDING - In April, US authorities' use of facial to verify the identity of travellers entering and leaving the country hit national attention after a tweet by a traveller questioning the practice went viral. Run in partnership with air and cruise lines, the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) pilot program aims to enhance security and speed up custom controls but has drawn criticism from human rights groups. Whether to speed up boarding or boost security, facial recognition is being rolled out at airports in numerous other countries, including India, Singapore, Britain and the Netherlands. — Reuters

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



In this photo taken on Dec 14, 2019, a protester displays a placard during a demonstration against India's new citizenship law in New Delhi. — AFP

WhatsApp wars over India protests divide families

WhatsApp with misinformation and even abuse over their stand on India's new citizenship law, young women are hiding their identities on social media to voice outrage and find alternative families. Young people, particularly women, have been at the forefront of the ongoing wave of protests over the law, but this can be dangerous in a largely conservative and patriarchal society.

When Priya takes part in protests, for example, the fear of the riot police - 25 people have died in the past almost two weeks - comes second to the terror of her bigoted Hindu father finding out her whereabouts and halting her education. "He just has this hatred of Muslims - every opportunity he has lost in life, he blames them," says Priya, 20, too scared to give her real name in case her New Delhi family find out. "I have tried so many times to talk to him. But every conversation we have ends with him threatening to pull me out of college and get me married off," the student tells AFP.

Her story is reflected across India's dining tables, FaceTime chats and WhatsApp family groups in what is turning out to be the biggest challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi since he rose to power in 2014. "My father keeps spamming me on WhatsApp with fake news and videos - it's really frustrating," says Priya. She used to hit

back with links to fact-checking websites before his threats to end her education forced her to hide her political views from her parents. Her father, she says, has no idea about her Twitter account, where she uses a handle that shields her identity.

'Entitled parents'

These WhatsApp wars have effectively upended personal relationships, says Anshul Tewari, editor-in-chief of Youth Ki Awaaz, a crowdsourced news website focusing on India's youth. "Young people today care enormously about having a voice and being heard," Tewari tells AFP, pointing to the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong and climate change marches around the world. But unlike their global counterparts, young Indians have to find ways to express themselves against the backdrop of a culture which places a huge premium on parental authority.

"In many cases, Indian parents feel entitled to decide who their children should love, how they should live and even how they should think," says Tewari. That sense of control is particularly pronounced when it comes to the lives of young women, he adds.

'Black sheep'

At 27, Sweta Bagaria - not her real name - describes herself as the black sheep of her family because she insist-

ed on getting a job, the first woman in her family to do so. Bagaria accuses her conservative Hindu parents of physical and financial abuse - controlling her bank account, beating her, and refusing to hand over documents required to rent a flat. Like Priya, the Mumbai-based video editor has been actively involved in the demonstrations against the citizenship law, which she calls "a gross violation of human rights".

Her views have driven an even bigger wedge between her and her parents, who she describes as bigots unwilling to employ or work with Muslims. "I used to feel really alone until this year, when I found an online community on Twitter who are going through similar conflicts at home," she says, referring to them as her "alternate family". "Also, at the end of the day, I know that my struggles are nothing compared to what others in this country, especially Muslims, are going through," she says. "That makes it even more important for me to show up."

Since the demonstrations kicked off, Bagaria - who is an avid Twitter user - has shared pamphlets and produced a video urging others to protest. She has chalked up a few successes on that front, such as convincing a friend who had never even bothered to vote to participate in a string of demonstrations. But she has little hope of ever being able to persuade her family. "I tried for years. There's no reaching them," she says. — AFP

Exodus casts pall over Christmas in southern Syria

Gerges Rizk put the final touches on a newly renovated church in the southern Syrian city of Daraa, but hundreds of congregants who once packed its pews will be missing this year. Dressed in a black robe, the priest adjusted a large crucifix at the altar of the Sayyidet Al-Beshara church, its pristine floors shining beneath his feet. "More than 500 Christian families lived in the city of Daraa before the start of the conflict," Rizk told AFP. "Now the number has dropped by at least half."

Retaken in July 2018 by forces loyal to President Bashar Al-Assad following a series of surrender deals with rebels, Daraa is struggling to revive its Christmas cheer. Of the city's three churches, the main Evangelical church has closed because most of its congregants have left. A second Catholic church has been without a priest most of the year, with its current pastor living outside the province.

But the Sayyidet Al-Beshara church, led by Rizk, has gained a new lease on life after restoration works were completed this week ahead of the planned Christmas mass. The church never stopped holding the annual prayers, even when it found itself on the frontline between rebels and regime forces between 2013 and 2018. The recent repairs have fixed its rocket-hit roof, bullet-riddled walls and smashed windows, in a move



Wasila Thiab sits alone facing the altar after Sunday mass at the Greek Orthodox church of Saint George in Izra town. — AFP

Rizk hopes will draw large crowds this year. But the priest expects their number will not match those before the war.

'Celebrate alone'

The last Sunday mass before Christmas was attended only by a few dozen elderly people in a small reception hall, ringed by empty seats. "Only the elderly remain after an exodus of young (Christians) searching for safety and jobs," Rizk told AFP. North of Daraa city, the town of Izraa is home to Byzantine-era churches, including the Greek Orthodox church of Saint George.

Priest Eliya Tafnakij, who oversees the cathedral, counts the number of congregants who have left the country since the start of Syria's war in 2011. Out of the 100 Christian families who live in the town, some 80 young people have fled the country, he said. "In many

homes, only the elderly remain," he added. "I hope for the day I will count the number of those returning."

Beneath the church's arched entrance, rows of empty benches lined the broad-aisled nave. Wasila Thiab sat alone facing the altar, with no-one but the priest around. The 76-year-old said she is not in the mood to celebrate this year. She has not put up a Christmas tree at her home or prepared sweets after four of her six daughters left Syria. "Christmas is about family, but my girls have left (North) America and Europe," she said. "Am I supposed to celebrate alone?" She said she dreams of the day her entire family will gather again for Christmas but laments that it is unlikely. "Canada is very, very far away, and so is Holland. I don't think I will ever see my girls again."

'Joy is lacking'

Less than 10 km away lies the mainly Christian town of Shaqra, emptied of most of its Christian residents after a spate of attacks by rebels and militants during the conflict. Such attacks have stopped since the area came back under regime control, but very few Christian families remain. The Arsheed family is one of them. Bullet holes are still visible on the walls and windows of their house.

But for the first time since the start of the war, the family is putting up a Christmas tree. Maryam, 74, decorates it with the help of her daughters and granddaughters, recalling the festive mood that once reigned over the town. "We used to prepare large quantities of sweets when the town was bustling with people," she said. "But today we only make enough for the few who remain." Sitting nearby, her son agreed this holiday season was a sombre one. "Our Christmas joy is lacking," said Nazeer. "I don't expect any of the people who left will come back." — AFP

Families of Sudan protest 'martyrs' await justice

Sudan has celebrated one year since the start of peaceful protests that ended a dictatorship, but families of the slain "martyrs of the revolution" are still waiting for justice. The autocrat who ruled for three decades, Omar Al-Bashir, is now behind bars, but many who served in his security forces have legal immunity from prosecution. "The killers are known, we want justice," said Samah Ahmed, 27, the sister of Tarek, who was killed on December 21 last year. "If we don't achieve justice, it means nothing happened."

Tarek, then aged 22, was among the first to take to the streets in the dusty industrial city of Atbara, the cradle of the uprising 350 km northeast of Khartoum. It was here on the banks of the River Nile that Sudanese held their first rallies in Dec 2018 against a government decision that tripled the price of bread. The protests swept across the African nation and by April, they had toppled Bashir-but Tarek never witnessed that triumphant moment.

His mother, Naimat Abdel Wahab, 52, recalled seeing his bloodied body in the local hospital, a day before he had been due to sit his final engineering exam in college. "I tried to call

him, 'Tarek, Tarek', and called him by his nickname," she said. "When he didn't answer, I saw that he had passed away. His friends who were with him at the protest saw who shot him and they are ready to testify in front of any court."

'Remove immunity'

Doctors linked to the protest movement say more than 250 people were killed during the months of demonstrations. Amnesty International, which says at least 177 people were killed, has called on Sudan's new leaders to ensure that those in the security forces "who committed horrific crimes or used excessive force against protesters" must be held accountable. However, under Sudanese law, members of the Sudanese army, police and intelligence services still enjoy immunity from prosecution.

This also applies to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group that was involved in repressing Khartoum sit-in protests and is also accused of crimes in the Darfur conflict that erupted in 2003. That immunity can only be waived if the military superiors of the accused authorize it after a specific request from the Prosecutor General's Office. That office issued a statement last Thursday - on the day Sudanese celebrated the first anniversary of the protests - calling on the security forces "to remove the immunity faster".

However, it did not specify whether any requests for the lifting of immunity had already been made to the various security forces. The transitional civilian government of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok has stepped up measures to dismantle the former regime and to meet the aspirations



The family of Mukhtar Abdallah poses for a picture with a banner bearing his portrait in Atbara city, on the banks of the River Nile, northeast of Sudan's capital Khartoum on Dec 15, 2019. — AFP

of protesters. In September, Hamdok formed a committee to investigate the crackdown on the Khartoum sit-in, which is due to report back within three months.

And days ago Sudan announced it would investigate 50 former regime figures over the Darfur conflict, for which Bashir is wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. But for now, some key figures remain in the state apparatus, among them RSF chief Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who is a member of the civilian-military council overseeing the post-Bashir transition. — AFP

Business

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France's President Emmanuel Macron (center) reviews troops as he is greeted by Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou (left) at the Diori Hamani International Airport, on Sunday in Niamey, as part of a three-day visit to West Africa. —AFP

West Africans divided over CFA franc reform

Deal seeks to provide currency stability for 8 countries in WAMU

DAKAR: Plans to overhaul the CFA franc, a France-backed currency used by former colonies in West Africa, have drawn reactions ranging from skepticism to cautious optimism. Some experts in the region questioned whether the change amounts to much but others thought it a step forward, although vital issues remain to be tackled.

Introduced in 1945 during colonial times, the CFA franc is linked to the euro under an arrangement that requires African members to lodge half their reserves in the Bank of France.

The deal provides currency stability—and a dampener on inflation—for the eight countries in the West African Monetary Union (WAMU). They comprise Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo, which are former French colonies, as well as Guinea-Bissau, a former Portuguese colony.

But the dependence on France, and even the name of the currency itself, are under fire.

Critics have directed withering fire, describing the CFA franc as a symbol of colonialism and past French meddling and an affront to economic sovereignty. On Saturday, Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara and French President Emmanuel

Macron announced a major shift.

Under it, the CFA franc will be renamed the “eco” and its member countries will no longer be required to keep reserves in France. The currency will retain parity with the euro, and France will quit its managerial institutions. However, France will provide back-up, in the form of a line of credit, if WAMU countries hit a currency crisis.

Divided opinions

The description of the change as “historic” ran into immediate flak. “It’s six of one and half a dozen of the other,” the Ivorian opposition newspaper Notre Voie (“Our Way”) said, while the Quotidien de Dakar daily in the Senegalese capital said: “The outside has changed, but inside, nothing has moved.”

Some economists agreed. Senegalese expert Makhtar Diouf said the announcement was a “non-event” while Ivorian economist Mamadou Koulibaly, an opposition candidate in next year’s elections, said, “there are reasons for feeling confused.”

Donaldine Amangbedji, a researcher at the Abomey Calavi University in Benin, saw no tangible benefit for the public except for “stirring debate on

possible alternatives”.

But Togolese economist Kako Nubukpo, a key figure in the attacks on the CFA franc, said the announcement was “marvelous news... (a) historic moment.” He cautioned, however: “We will however remain vigilant about the currency regime, which should be sorted out soon—the fixed parity (with the euro) is transitional.” Senegalese economist Felwine Sarr, writing on Facebook, said the change was “a step forward, but not a revolution nor a fundamental break.”

“At the present time, this reform... only concerns the most symbolic aspects, but leaves major components of the former relationship unchanged,” Sarr said.

Pressing questions

Several important questions will have to be answered in the coming months. Perhaps the most pressing is when the new currency will be launched in real terms—a task with many political and technical challenges. Macron on Saturday said: “The eco will see the light of day in 2020, and I welcome it.” Also unknown is whether other members of the regional bloc ECOWAS—which has also planned to launch a single currency—will team up with the eco.

Eight WAMU countries are members of ECOWAS, although the bloc’s economy is dominated by Nigeria, the regional powerhouse. Participating countries in ECOWAS will need to narrow their differences, on debt and inflation and other macro-economic essentials, to make the eco a success.

“Many ECOWAS countries are not ready,” warned Amangbedji.

“If a currency is created in these conditions, it will be completely devalued. Some say that the risk is worthwhile, others say it will lead to wild ride.” A third question is the response of six other African countries that also use a central African version of the CFA franc.

On the streets of the capital Dakar, many Senegalese said they were cautious.

T-shirt seller Mamadou Abdoulaye Ndiaye said “it’s important to free ourselves from France, provided there’s no trap.” Shoe trader Mamadou Ndiaye said he feared “ulterior motives” by France.

He pointed to France’s 50-percent devaluation of the CFA franc in January 1994, a sudden move that sought to spur agricultural exports in WAMU countries but at the cost of hiking the price of imported goods. —AFP

Gloomy Christmas Eve on the 20th day of French strike

PARIS: Christmas Eve 2019 was an unusually gloomy one for France, as the 20th day of a transport strike left many scrambling yesterday to reach their loved ones for the traditional family feast, while others simply gave up. The protest against pension reform has led to thousands of trains being cancelled or delayed, with taxis, ride-sharing services and car rental agencies unable to make up the shortfall.

“We’re not sure what to do,” said Joel Rossignon, 66, visiting Paris from the east of France to spend Christmas with his son, who lives in a far-flung suburb of the capital to which there will be none of the usual trains yesterday evening.

“We even tried to book a taxi, yesterday already, but there were none,” he said, standing with his suitcase on the street. Kady Dao, 23, said she will stay at home in a suburb southwest of Paris with her nine-month-old daughter, as her usual public transport route has been cut off. “I have no choice.” Negotiations with unions last week failed to find middle ground, and strikers vowed there would be no holiday truce unless the government scraps its plan to merge the country’s 42 pension schemes into one. Talks will resume on January 7, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe’s office said Monday. Since it started on December 5, the strike has hit daily commuters hard—especially around Paris and other large cities—and is now impeding tens of thousands of ticket holders who had planned to spend the festive season with family or friends.

‘This is horrible’

Rail operator SNCF provided only 40 percent of its usual high-speed TGV and regional TER train services yesterday, and 20 percent of inter-city and Paris suburban trains. Between a third and two-thirds of trains to some European destinations were running. And in the capital, six of 16 metro lines were closed, eight provided a much-reduced service, and only two—which are driverless—functioned as usual.

For suburb dwellers hoping to spend Christmas in the City of Light, there was bad news too. The SNCF will close several railway lines Tuesday afternoon, with some reopening today late morning, and others only tomorrow.

The government’s pension overhaul, which it says would create a fairer system, would see some public employees—notably railway staff—lose early-retirement benefits. But workers balk at the inclusion of a so-called “pivot age” of 64 until which people would have to work to earn a full pension—two years beyond the official retirement age. “This is horrible. These three weeks have been hard for me,” said Ristic Nevena, 29, who works as a manager in Paris, and travels daily from Montfermeil about 17 kilometers (10.5 miles) away. —AFP

IMF calls for ‘urgent’ action by India amid slowdown

WASHINGTON: India’s government must take steps quickly to reverse the economic slowdown of an economy that has been one of the engines of global growth, the International Monetary Fund said Monday.

Declining consumption and investment, and falling tax revenue, have combined with other factors to put the brakes on one of the fastest growing economies in the world, the IMF said in its annual review. After lifting millions out of poverty “India is now in the midst of a significant economic slowdown,” Ranil Salgado, of the IMF Asia and Pacific Department, told reporters.

“Addressing the current downturn and returning India to a high growth path requires urgent policy actions.” However, the government has limited space to boost spending to support growth, especially given high debt levels and interest payments, the fund warned.

IMF chief economist Gita Gopinath last week said India’s slowdown had “surprised to the downside,” and said the fund is set to significantly downgrade its growth estimates for the Indian economy in the World Economic Outlook which will be released next month.

The IMF in October slashed its forecast for 2019 by nearly a full point to 6.1 percent, while cutting the outlook for 2020 to 7.0 percent. Salgado said India’s central bank has “room to cut the policy rate further, especially if the economic slowdown continues.”

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) cut the key lending rate five times this year to a nine-year low, but at its last meeting earlier this month defied expectations by keeping policy unchanged.

The central bank slashed its annual growth forecast to 5 percent from 6.1 percent, as consumer demand and manufacturing activity contracts. India’s economy grew at



IMF chief economist Gita Gopinath last week said India’s slowdown had “surprised to the downside.”

its slowest pace in more than six years in the July-September period, down to 4.5 percent from 7.0 percent a year ago, according to government data. Salgado said “the government needs to reinvigorate the reform agenda,” including restoring the health of the financial sector in order to “enhance its ability to provide credit to the economy.” —AFP

Business

Emirates to bring its crowd-puller flagship A380 to the Kuwait Aviation Show 2020

Airbus A380 to be decorated in blue livery, representing 'mobility' theme of Expo 2020

KUWAIT: Emirates, the world's largest international airline, is set to showcase its latest flagship Airbus A380 to visitors and spectators on 15 January at the Kuwait Aviation Show 2020. Visitors to the show will be able to tour the popular double-decker's signature interiors and experience its industry trendsetting products across all three classes, including Emirates' latest generation Onboard Lounge.

Always a popular draw for aviation enthusiasts, industry visitors and the general public, Emirates' latest generation Airbus A380 will be decorated in blue livery, representing the 'mobility' theme of Expo 2020, and spreading awareness about the world's greatest show which will be hosted for the first time in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asian region. EXPO 2020 Dubai will be held between 20 October 2020 and 10 April 2021.

Adil Al-Ghaith, Senior Vice President, Commercial Operations, Gulf, Middle East & Central Asia for Emirates said: "Emirates is proud to be part of the Kuwait Aviation Show 2020, an event that welcomes spectators as well as members of the aviation and aerospace industry across the Gulf region. The Expo 2020 'mobility' themed Emirates A380 being showcased during the Aviation Show demonstrates our

long-standing commitment and contribution to Kuwait's air transport sector, which is investing in development projects and progressively positioning itself for future growth. It also highlights the importance of air connectivity and mobility as a facilitator of trade, tourism and strong relations between Kuwait and the UAE."

Emirates has been serving Kuwait for 30 years, and today operates to the country's capital with 6 daily flights, providing business and leisure travellers with choice and connectivity to over 150 global destinations. The airline also operates its latest world-class products to Kuwait, including its latest Boeing 777-300ER aircraft fitted with the 'Game Changer' First Class suites.

Anticipated to be popular with aviation enthusiasts as well as the general public, the Emirates A380 will feature 14 luxurious First Class suites, 76 flatbed seats in Business Class and 429 spacious seats in Economy Class.

While touring the double-decker, visitors will be able to experience the aircraft's two decks, experiencing the spacious cabins with high ceilings in Economy Class, lie-flat seats in Business Class and the airline's signature First Class Private Suites.



Guests will also get to see the A380 Shower Spas and Onboard lounge that will be both fully set-up and equipped to mimic an authentic inflight experience.

Emirates flies its flagship A380 to over 50 destinations around the world, and currently has as 115 A380s in service.

New Boeing CEO is corporate veteran who will be tested

NEW YORK: Throughout a storied career in corporate America, David Calhoun has risen through the ranks at General Electric, taken Nielsen Holdings public and helped manage private equity giant Blackstone.

Calhoun, 62, who is set to become chief executive of Boeing in January following a shakeup announced Monday, will need all of his wiles as he takes the helm at the troubled aerospace giant mired in crisis after two deadly crashes on its best-selling jet. Boeing announced that Calhoun would shift from chairman to CEO after it ousted Dennis Muilenburg, who stumbled over the company's response to the disasters, alienating regulators, customers and victims' families. The crisis led to last week's decision to suspend production of the 737 MAX, which provoked uncertainty in employees and suppliers, as well as hitting US growth forecasts, with no clear indication of when the aircraft will be clear to fly again. In Calhoun, Boeing has found a man who once led GE Infrastructure and who has experience with corporate turnarounds at both Nielsen and Blackstone.

"I strongly believe in the future of Boeing and the 737 MAX," Calhoun said in a press release. "I am honored to lead this great company and the 150,000 dedicated employees who are working hard to create the future of aviation." But his background is in financial management and corporate strategy rather than engineering and the nitty-gritty of safety policy, leading some analysts to question whether he will turn out to be an interim leader to get Boeing through a bad period while it attempts to restore its reputation and win approval to return the MAX to the skies.

The incoming CEO spent much of Monday communicating with government officials, members of Congress, major airline CEOs, suppliers and investors, a spokesman said.

Calhoun is "reaching out to many of our stakeholders to pledge his partnership and open line of communication," a Boeing spokesman said in an email.

Lawrence Kellner, a former Continental Airlines CEO who was tapped Monday as Boeing's new board chairman, said Calhoun



David Calhoun

"has deep industry experience and a proven track record of strong leadership, and he recognizes the challenges we must confront."

Long-term pick?

After studying accounting at Virginia Tech, Calhoun joined GE's corporate audit staff in 1981, the start of a nearly four-decade career where he ultimately led GE Infrastructure, a division that oversaw aircraft engines, rail, among other units. Calhoun outlined his philosophy of leadership at a 2005 commencement address at Virginia Tech, saying, "No one needs me for the normal course of business. The role of leaders is to inspire change."

The executive left GE in 2006 to lead VNU Group, which later became Nielsen Company, going public in 2011. At Blackstone Group, where Calhoun has worked since January 2014, he has focused on boosting the value of company holdings, telling Bloomberg in 2017 interview that he prefers when a leadership team "plays offense instead of defense."

Jim Hall, the former head of the National Transportation Safety Board, said the shakeup at Boeing was a positive development, calling Muilenburg's departure "long overdue."

"Boeing clearly needs to reset the table and put someone in who puts safety first," Hall said. But Hall said it was not clear whether Calhoun was a long-term choice, adding "If he's going to do it long-term, I would think that someone who has more knowledge of aeronautical the industry-hands-on experience might be a good choice."

Richard Aboulafia of the Teal Group, a research consultancy focused on aviation and defense, said Calhoun "seems good for short-term stabilization." But for the long-term, "I'm not sure this is the right move. Calhoun's background is in private equity, and in Jack Welch-era GE. That background brings skills that Boeing already has in abundance." —AFP

NBK launches NBK Geo Alerts service

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has launched the NBK Geo Alerts service, through which customers can receive location based notifications about offers, discounts and promotions via the NBK Mobile Banking App while shopping. The new service came in line with the bank's commitment to continuously upgrade the NBK Mobile Banking App through providing the top-notch digital solutions to satisfy the customers' needs.

NBK customers can activate the new service when they download or update the NBK Mobile Banking App, as they will receive notifications for discounts, offers and tailor-made promotions at specific stores on their phones while shopping. The new alerts service is currently available at The Avenues, and Kuwait International Airport (Terminals 1 and 4).

"We are committed to introduce new updates to the NBK Mobile Banking App in line with the needs of our customers, so that they can enjoy an outstanding banking experience and embrace a full-fledged package of distinguished banking services," stated Hesham Al-Nusif, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait.

"The NBK Geo Alerts is a location based notification service and one of the advanced enhancements added to the app. The NBK Rewards Program is Kuwait's largest loyalty program with a network of 900 partner outlets across Kuwait, so we seek to get our customers aware of the

latest promotions and offers through the new significant notifications service," Al-Nusif noted.

"We are maintaining our well-established position as a provider of the most disruptive digital banking services as well as payment solutions, backed by our digital transformation strategy, which ensures clients, get the most innovative services, and accordingly, a total of 17 new services have been added to the NBK Mobile Banking App throughout 2019," Al-Nusif concluded.

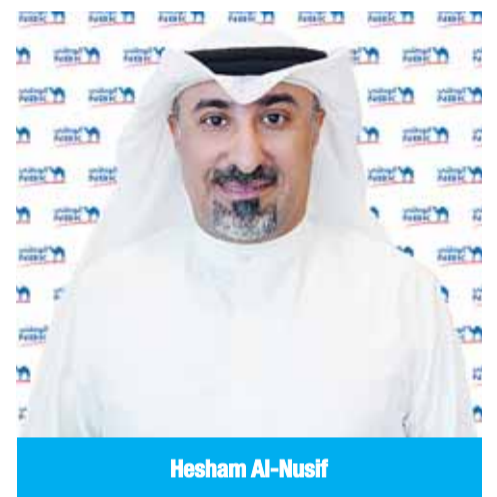
The new services introduced to the NBK Mobile Banking App throughout 2019 included applying for a loan or a credit card, increasing your credit card limit, open a new account or a term deposit on the spot, Smartwatches enhancements, activate your dormant account without visiting the branch, investment transfers, establishing standing orders, dark mode feature and geo alert service. In addition to using the cardless withdrawal feature on ATM machines through Mobile Banking.

The new enhancements also included integrating WhatsApp with NBK Quick Pay to receive payments around the clock. Customers can accept money transfers instantly from NBK customers or non-NBK customers holding debit cards, as they will receive the transfer request as a link via SMS, email or WhatsApp.

In addition to these features, NBK Mobile Banking allows customers to manage their cards while travelling, increase their monthly transfer limit, contact the bank call center on the toll free number, and update their contact details via receiving the one-time password (OTP).

Steps to activate the NBK Geo Alerts service on the NBK Mobile Banking App

- Download or update the "NBK Mobile Banking App" to activate the service;



Hesham Al-Nusif

- Once you update the NBK Mobile Banking App, a notification message will appear, tap on "Accept" to activate NBK Geo Alerts;

- If you have previously declined this service, you can still manage it by going to NBK Mobile Banking App settings and selecting "NBK Geo Alerts";

- The first time you log in after updating the NBK Mobile Banking App, a pop-up message will be displayed promoting "NBK Geo Alerts" asking you to allow the App to access the location. Tap on "Accept";

- A pop-up message will ask your permission to use your device's Bluetooth. Tap on "Accept"

- A pop-up message will be displayed asking for access to your location after subscribing to this service even when you are not using the App. Tap on "Always Allow";

- In order to get the notifications, make sure you enable Bluetooth and WiFi;

- You will start receiving notifications once you are close to one of the participating outlets.

Argentina okays economic measures to end crisis

BUENOS AIRES: Argentina's center-left government approved on Monday a package of emergency measures aimed at lifting the South American country out of its worst economic crisis in years.

Argentina is in a recession caused by a currency collapse that struck 18 months ago.

Poverty levels in the country of 44 million still top 40 percent in a country that was among the world's wealthiest in the early 20th century. The emergency economic package was announced by new President Alberto Fernandez, who took office two weeks ago with a vow to put Argentina back on its feet.

The emergency measures were announced just after 5:00 pm in the government's Official Bulletin—several hours after it was expected due to some last-minute changes. Fernandez's plan involves tax hikes on foreign currency purchases, agricultural exports and car sales. The government says the tax hikes will only affect the upper and middle classes. The bill passed the lower house of Congress on Friday and the Senate on Saturday. Fernandez has described this crisis as almost as bad as that

of 2001 — when Argentina defaulted on a \$100 billion debt.

Its current foreign debt stands at around 90 percent of GDP. "It is not the same as 2001. But it is similar. At that time, poverty was at 57 percent, today we have 41 percent poor people; then we had a debt default, today we are in virtual default," Fernandez said in an interview with TV program La Cornice on Sunday.

The new law will allow the executive extra powers over finance, tax, administration, pensions, tariffs, energy, health and social issues. The government's aim is to "attend to the needs of the most vulnerable sectors and to ... spark growth." Social Security Administration chief Alejandro Vanoli said. —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	304.300
Euro	338.990
Sterling Pound	396.660
Canadian dollar	232.380
Turkish lira	51.710
Swiss Franc	311.460
US Dollar Buying	297.000

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.782
Indian Rupees	4.273
Pakistani Rupees	1.973
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.673
Nepali Rupees	2.668
Singapore Dollar	225.490
Hongkong Dollar	39.037
Bangladesh Taka	3.545
Philippine Peso	5.989
Thai Baht	10.105
Malaysian ringgit	77.826

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.201
Qatari Riyal	83.633
Omani Riyal	790.903
Bahraini Dinar	808.560
UAE Dirham	82.904

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	22.350
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Egyptian Pound - Transfer	18.990
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.222
Tunisian Dinar	110.250
Jordanian Dinar	429.350
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.203
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.235

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	303.940
Canadian Dollar	231.780
Sterling Pound	396.680
Euro	338.285
Swiss Frank	301.260
Bahrain Dinar	808.290
UAE Dirhams	83.155
Qatari Riyals	84.390
Saudi Riyals	81.945
Jordanian Dinar	429.975
Egyptian Pound	18.991
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.674
Indian Rupees	4.274
Pakistani Rupees	1.950
Bangladesh Taka	3.551
Philippines Peso	5.990
Cyprus pound	18.085
Japanese Yen	3.775
Syrian Pound	1.590
Nepalese Rupees	2.667
Malaysian Ringgit	74.320
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	43.805

Thai Bhat	11.050
Turkish Lira	51.605
Singapore dollars	223.191

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
British Pound	0.386389	0.400289
Czech Korune	0.005208	0.014504
Danish Krone	0.041057	0.046057
Euro	0.329662	0.343362
Georgian Lari	0.105784	0.105784
Hungarian 0.000926	0.001116	0.001116
Norwegian Krone	0.029878	0.035078
Romanian Leu	0.053565	0.070415
Russian ruble	0.004873	0.004873
Slovakia	0.009095	0.019095
Slovenia	0.028189	0.033189
Swedish Krona	0.303055	0.314055
Swiss Franc		
Australian Dollar	0.202091	0.214091
New Zealand Dollar	0.195165	0.204665
Canadian Dollar	0.225848	0.234848
US Dollars	0.300200	0.304750
US Dollars Mint	0.300700	0.304750
Bangladesh Taka	0.002976	0.003777

Chinese Yuan	0.042089	0.045589
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036992	0.039742
Indian Rupee	0.003590	0.004362
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002695	0.002875
Korean Won	0.000251	0.000266
Malaysian Ringgit	0.069511	0.075511
Nepalese Rupee	0.002624	0.002964
Pakistan Rupee	0.001317	0.002087
Philippine Peso	0.005933	0.006233
Singapore Dollar	0.218935	0.228935
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001318	0.001898
Taiwan	0.009961	0.010141
Thai Baht	0.009748	0.010298
Vietnamese Dong	0.000013	0.000013
Bahraini Dinar	0.801015	0.809065
Egyptian Pound	0.018933	0.021674
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000085
Iraqi Dinar	0.000199	0.000259
Jordanian Dinar	0.423210	0.432210
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000101	0.000251
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021180	0.024180
Omani Riyal	0.785262	0.793154
Qatar Riyal	0.082928	0.083762
Saudi Riyal	0.080060	0.081360
Syrian Pound	0.001290	0.001510
Tunisian Dinar	0.103139	0.111139
Turkish Lira	0.044633	0.054478
Turkish Lira	0.082217	0.083043
UAE Dirhams	0.009989	0.010169
Yemeni Riyal		

Business

Global markets fly out of holiday lethargy on Boeing CEO shakeup

Festive world markets pause for breath near record highs

NEW YORK: The surprise announcement that Boeing ousted its embattled CEO invigorated Wall Street, while trading was muted on European and Asian stock markets as many investors were already away for Christmas. Shares of Boeing climbed around three percent after the aviation giant announced it was ousting Dennis Muilenburg as chief executive, replacing him with David Calhoun as the grounding of the 737 MAX drags on after two deadly crashes. Gains by Boeing helped the Dow to score its third straight record, lifting the blue-chip index by 0.3 percent. The S&P 500 and Nasdaq also ended at records.

World stocks flatlined near record highs and remained on track for their best year in a decade, as China's latest policy easing pledges added to the optimism generated by signs of detente in the 17-month long Sino-US trade war.

Blue-chip shares in China rose 0.7 percent after Premier Li Keqiang said the government was considering more measures to lower corporate financing costs and hinted at "targeted" cuts in banks' reserve requirement ratio. Beijing also on Monday announced plans to remove import tariffs on a range of goods next year. However, lingering trade concerns and the recent run of gains kept most bourses under pressure, with Korean shares weakening 0.7 percent, pressured by Monday's data that showed exports in the first 20 days of the month had fallen again.

MSCI's index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan was likewise flat while its all-country benchmark was unchanged, having added 3 percent this month and 24 percent since the start of 2019.

A pan-European equity index also hovered near record highs though many continental markets were closed for Christmas and others saw thin trading volumes. "It's been a strong run up to Christmas for stock markets and it seems traders are taking a little breather in this shortened trading week," said Craig Erlam, an analyst at online broker OANDA. "It's been a good few weeks for investors, spurred primarily by the de-escalation in the trade war, with Trump only this weekend claiming it will be signed very shortly."

He was referring to comments by President Donald Trump on Saturday, which spurred Wall Street to new all-time highs on Monday. The S&P 500 hit its eighth straight

intraday record. New York was also lifted by a 3 percent surge in Boeing which sacked CEO Dennis Muilenburg over the crisis surrounding its 737 MAX jetliner that followed two fatal crashes. Equity futures hinted at a flat to firmer open for Wall Street.

Stellar year but what next

World markets are heading into the end of a stellar year, with most major asset classes, from emerging market bonds to US tech shares, enjoying robust returns.

But uncertainty remains on how long the trade truce will last as Trump kicks off his re-election campaign next year. Worries have also resurfaced about how Britain will navigate the transition period for its exit from the European Union. Those concerns pushed sterling to a near four-week low versus the euro and a three-week trough against the dollar.

The pound was flat at \$1.2927 versus highs above \$1.35 after the Dec. 12 general election. Against the euro it was at 85.720 pence, coming off the Dec. 13 highs of 82.780 pence. "Risks to the outlook receded this year, which supported financial markets, but we cannot say the same thing about next year," said Hiroshi Miyazaki, senior economist at Mitsubishi UFJ Morgan Stanley Securities in Tokyo.

Euro zone bond markets were shut but 10-year US Treasury yields slipped one basis point to 1.926 percent after Monday's slight rise following lacklustre demand for two-year bills at auction.

However, yields have risen more than 20 basis points off the 1.69 percent levels of early December, lifted by the equity rally and signs the US Federal Reserve has paused its rate-cutting cycle. In Japan, two-year bond yields hit 16-month highs after the message from the minutes of the Bank of Japan's meeting prompted money markets to erase rate cut expectations. Brent oil futures ticked up 0.2 percent after Russia's energy minister said cooperation with OPEC to support prices would continue.

Meanwhile, more positive news on the US-China trade front also boosted sentiment, as Beijing said it will lower import tariffs on more than 850 products including frozen pork from next month. And while the move does not appear to be linked to the bruising trade war between China and the US, which has seen Washington and Beijing



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) during the beginning of the Christmas holiday week on Monday in New York City. — AFP

exchanging levies on goods worth hundreds of billions of dollars, it will likely help reduce tensions.

The news "has lifted the mood on Wall Street," said analyst David Madden at CMC Markets UK.

In Europe trading was muted, which many investors taking a break for the holidays. Global equities have enjoyed a flourish as they head towards the end of the year, having been on a roller-coaster ride for 12 months owing to the long-running US-China trade row and Brexit. "It's been a strong run up to Christmas for the stock markets and it seems traders are taking a little

breather in this shortened trading week," said analyst Craig Erlam at trading firm Oanda.

"It's been a good few weeks for investors, spurred primarily by the de-escalation in the trade war, with Trump ... claiming it will be signed very shortly." Observers say that with those two major issues looking less uncertain, 2020 could see a healthy run-up in prices, boosted by looser central bank monetary policy and signs of improvement in economies around the world. With very little by way of market-moving events on the horizon, analysts are expecting a quiet week. — Agencies

Gauging retail performance in an online world

NEW YORK: Marshal Cohen has religiously visited the same stores every holiday season since 1999.

But rather than snapping up bargains and favorite gifts for friends and family, the chief retail industry adviser is there to scrutinize the purchasing habits of others as online shopping upends the retail business. Major shifts in consumer behavior and preferences have forced Cohen, who works for market research firm NPD Group, and other retail analysts to approach their jobs very differently than two decades ago.

"If you were to try and replicate research methodology, or even store observation, in today's world, you've got a problem," Cohen told Reuters. "It's no longer good enough to just look at store traffic or parking lot counts."

Cohen and his peers need to get it right because their insights, reported to investors and retail clients, influence marketing, move share prices and guide investment decisions.

A record number of US consumers spending more online, coupled with a condensed holiday shopping season and year-round discount wars among retailers, has forced analysts to get creative, with many shifting away from old-school tactics to measure a company's overall performance. Instead of simply asking shoppers why they left a store empty-handed, analysts are probing the effect of online giant Amazon.com Inc, asking whether customers started Christmas shopping in July on Prime Day, now a major event in the annual retail calendar to rival Thanksgiving weekend's Black Friday.

Calculation of sales per square foot is giving way to a tally of how many Instagram-native, exclusive and private fashion brands are offered on a retailer's sales floor and website, and analysts—rather than simply seeing how many bags a shopper leaves with—are now counting how many younger millennial and Gen Z shoppers frequent a store and whether they make a purchase. Craig Johnson of Consumer Growth Partners says that traditional metrics such as foot traffic, average selling price, and average basket size can often still be highly indicative of what's happening in stores.

But other retail analysts said online shopping and a slew of services like "buy online, pick up in-store" can hinder the ability to estimate a retailer's conversion rate—a traditional measure of the proportion of visitors who make purchases. Brian Field, senior director of global retail consulting for ShopperTrak, part of retail data firm Sensormatic Solutions, said it was particularly difficult to figure out if traffic reported by retailers came from people buying items in-store or shoppers picking up online orders. "It is kind of synonymous with the fact that retailers are reporting blended sales, which include sales online and sales in-store together," Field said. "I think what it really boils down to is the customer journey has changed—it can start anywhere, in-store, online and end anywhere."

Suspicious

When Marie Driscoll, Coresight Research's managing director of luxury and fashion, received an email from Saks Fifth Avenue less than a week before Black Friday alerting her that several small leather designer goods such as wallets were on sale, she took note. The department store, she thought, might have been struggling to sell such items, which are often given as gifts.

Saks, owned by Hudson's Bay Company, disagreed. "It would be flawed to gauge category performance based on customer



NEW YORK: A record number of US consumers spending more online, coupled with a condensed holiday shopping season and year-round discount wars among retailers, has forced analysts to get creative, with many shifting away from old-school tactics to measure a company's overall performance. — Reuters

emails, as the majority include personalized recommendations derived from a client's shopping preferences," a company spokesperson said.

Consumer Growth Partners' Johnson keeps close tabs on how many fashion brands born on Instagram are on the sales floor when he visits Nordstrom Inc these days. That tells him whether the retailer is catering to young shoppers who search for labels on their smartphones.

A source with knowledge of the matter said Nordstrom looks for opportunities to launch new brands and expand existing partnerships with limited distribution and emerging brands to differentiate their product line.

Flying blind

US holiday retail sales during November and December are expected to increase by around 4 percent from 2018 to as much as \$730.7 billion, according to the National Retail Federation (NRF) — a per-

centage rise dwarfed by the 13.6 percent annual jump Adobe Analytics has already seen in online sales between Nov. 1 and Dec. 19, to \$125.6 billion. Smartphones accounted for 35.3 percent of that revenue.

But analysts say retail companies are providing too little information too late, forcing them to draw conclusions from very limited data. "You don't get the full holiday picture until months later...until (the retailers) actually report, you're flying blind," said Charlie O'Shea, who has worked as a retail analyst for Moody's for 17 years covering Walmart Inc, Target Corp, and Best Buy Co Inc among others. "All the retailers talk about is sales...we need to know how much money you made," he added.

O'Shea says he sometimes uses third party sales data and Adobe Insights data for online numbers. "You're looking at a stew here...with a bunch of different ingredients, and then you just try and frame a picture." — Reuters

Importance of quality management in Islamic banking

By Ahmad Al-Hajri

KUWAIT: It is impossible to understand the important role that quality management plays in the banking industry across the world, especially in Kuwait. Quality is a priority to nearly every Islamic bank. Assurance of high-quality standards helps ensure the requirements of customers, both internal and external.

It must be noted that the personnel play a significant role in the banking industry when it comes to efforts to enhance the quality of service delivery. This explains why Islamic banks manage service quality through effective management of employees, such as through continuous improvement of their capabilities, knowledge, and skills.

Training fosters a culture of high-quality standards by equipping employees with up-to-date knowledge and skills related to banking services that they can serve the consumers better resulting in improved consumer satisfaction. Besides training employees to achieve high-quality standards, Islamic banks integrate tools and techniques necessary to foster quality management and quality assurance, such as ISO 9000 and quality management tools like cause and effect diagrams, fishbone or Ishikawa diagram, and checklists.

Values related to the quality of service provision in the banking industry include honesty—truth, integrity, and transparency. Honesty inspires a culture of integrity and transparency, which is consider indispensable to achieving transparency objectives. Other values that help promote the quality of service delivery in the banking industry include teamwork, respect, professionalism, and commitment.

Employees in the banking industry work on most projects as teams and are expected to respect differences and embrace professionalism and dedication to guarantee the delivery of high-quality service. A combination of these values and appropriate service and product delivery models play a significant role in fostering the delivery of quality service. —Ahmad Al-Hajri is a student of School of Business, the Australian College of Kuwait

US business spending on equipment appears soft

WASHINGTON: New orders for key US-made capital goods barely rose in November and shipments fell, suggesting business investment will probably remain a drag on economic growth in the fourth quarter.

The White House's 17-month-old trade war with China has hurt business confidence, undermining capital expenditure. Despite a recent easing of tensions, regional manufacturing surveys showed business confidence remaining subdued in December. Even if business confidence were to improve in early 2020, a surge in capital expenditure is unlikely. Boeing announced last week it would suspend production of its best-selling 737 MAX jetliner in January as fallout from two fatal crashes of the now-grounded aircraft drags into 2020. Boeing on Monday ousted Chief Executive Dennis Muilenburg.

"We expect industrial momentum will remain muted in 2020 amid an environment of sluggish global growth, persistent trade policy uncertainty and subdued corporate profitability," said Oren Klachkin, lead US economist at Oxford Economics in New York. "Boeing's decision to

halt production of the 737 MAX will present a continuing drag on orders."

The Commerce Department said orders for non-defense capital goods excluding aircraft, a closely watched proxy for business spending plans, edged up 0.1 percent last month as a surge in demand for electrical equipment, appliances and components was partially offset by a drop in machinery orders.

These so-called core capital goods orders rose by an unrevised 1.1 percent in October. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast core capital goods orders gaining 0.2 percent in November.

Core capital goods orders rose 0.7 percent on a year-on-year basis in November.

The dollar held near a two-week high against a basket of currencies, while US Treasury prices slipped. Stocks on Wall Street were trading higher, with Boeing shares surging following Muilenburg's ousting.

Shipment drop

Shipments of core capital goods dropped 0.3 percent last month. Core capital goods shipments are used to calculate equipment spending in the government's gross domestic product measurement. Core capital goods shipments rose by a downwardly revised 0.7 percent in October. They were previously reported to have jumped 0.8 percent. Economists said the weak core capital goods shipments posed a downside risk to fourth-quarter GDP growth estimates, which range from as low as a 1.5 per-

cent annualized rate to as high as a 2.3 percent pace. The economy grew 2.1 percent in the third quarter.

While manufacturing is struggling, the housing market is steadily rising, driven by the Federal Reserve's three interest rate cuts this year. In a second report on Monday, the Commerce Department said new home sales rebounded 1.3 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 719,000 units last month, lifted by gains in activity in the Northeast and West regions.

October's sales pace was, however, revised down to 710,000 units from the previously reported 733,000 units. New home sales are volatile on a month-to-month basis because they are drawn from a small sample of houses selected from building permits. Sales jumped 16.9 percent from a year ago.

"We expect housing activity to remain supported with now-lower mortgage rates and a Fed on hold, but do not expect a further substantial pick-up in activity into 2020," said Veronica Clark, an economist at Citigroup in New York. Business investment has contracted for two straight quarters, with weak spending on equipment and nonresidential structures such as gas and oil well drilling contributing to the decline that has pushed manufacturing into recession.

Boeing's biggest assembly-line halt in more than 20 years is expected to disrupt supply chains, further depressing manufacturing, which accounts for 11 percent of the economy. Economists estimated the suspension of the 737 MAX aircraft production could cut first-quarter

2020 gross domestic product growth by at least half a percentage point.

Last month, overall orders for durable goods, items ranging from toasters to aircraft that are meant to last three years or more, tumbled 2.0 percent after gaining 0.2 percent in the prior month.

Durable goods orders were held down by a 72.7 percent plunge in demand for defense aircraft orders and parts last month. Economists expect a rebound after the US Congress passed a huge defense spending bill last week.

"The big, bipartisan defense bill that passed Congress last week ensures defense spending will be robust next year, however," said Chris Low, chief economist at FHN Financial in New York. "It's not a recipe for gangbusters growth, but capital spending should no longer detract from growth next year."

Orders for transportation equipment dropped 5.9 percent after edging up 0.1 percent in October. Motor vehicles and parts orders increased 1.9 percent in November as the end of a strike at General Motors boosted auto production. Orders for non-defense aircraft and parts fell 1.8 percent last month. Overall shipments of durable goods nudged up 0.1 percent in November, reversing October's 0.1 percent drop. Durable goods inventories increased 0.4 percent last month. They have risen in 16 of the last 17 months. Unfilled durable goods orders fell 0.4 percent in November after being unchanged in October. — Reuters

Business

AUB holds seminar on UK real estate tax update, impact of Brexit on British taxes

Bank continues its commitment to provide financial awareness to its clients

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous efforts to disseminate and develop financial and banking knowledge to its customers which ensures their access to various financial services in an integrated framework of transparency and in a manner that promotes their access to their rights undiminished, and enables them to make sound and informed decision, Ahli United Bank (AUB) organized a seminar for its Private Banking and Wealth Management customers under the theme "UK Real Estate Tax Update & Developments", as part of AUB's continuous efforts to provide its customers with value added services. The seminar was held to enhance awareness regarding the expected effect on UK taxes of Brexit and steps required when buying or selling real estate in UK.

Held at the Hilton Metropole - London, the seminar targeted a select segment of AUB's Private Banking Services and Wealth Management customers who are in London and are keen to attend this series of seminars regularly organized by Ahli United Bank for its customers in order to keep them aware of the changes in the economic and real estate areas.

In his opening speech, Senior General Manager for Private Banking Services and Wealth Management at Ahli United Bank, Medhat Tawfik, said: "By organizing these forums we seek to give our Private Banking Services and Wealth Management customers the opportunity to remain informed on the consequences of the UK leaving the European Union (Brexit) and recent development in Real estate Taxes.

Tawfik added: "The advice that AUB provides to its customers helps them better manage their investments and succession plans in changing market environment. These are a key element of our specialized services." In her lecture at the seminar, Sara Maccallum, Senior Partner - Head of Commercial Tax at Boodle Hatfield Law Firm in London, outlined that property taxes are unlikely to have Brexit related changes in the short term and the expected tax effects on non-residents in the United Kingdom. The Annual Tax on Enveloped Dwellings (ATED) (residential properties) owned by offshore companies, with a value exceed Stg. Pound 500,000. Corporate structure can now be less advantageous if you need to occupy the property yourself (or allow family members to occupy). The Non-Resident Capital Gains Tax (NRCGT), which was introduced and applied in 2015 on residential properties and subsequently expanded in 2019 to include all real estate properties and indirect disposals, now needs consideration if you dispose of shares in a structure (as well as when you dispose of a property. Finally, the switch to the Corporation Tax which will include rental income (from April 2020) and capital gains on real estate properties (from April 2019).

Sara Maccallum then addressed the matter of Inheritance Tax in the United Kingdom and the expected changes in this tax, as well as the predictable effect of the political and tax changes on investors. She concluded highlighting the importance of having a tax efficient English Will to cover the properties and avoid unnecessary tax on death. Shaima Jilloud, Partner in Real Estate Investment Middle East at Boodle Hatfield Law Firm, then gave a detailed presentation outlining



The Paddington Garden's project

the various stages of a real estate purchase transaction.

- Offer: Once you have found the property you would like to buy, an offer is made, usually through the buying agent and once this has been accepted by the vendor, a Memorandum of Sale is issued to all parties. In the instance where a new build property is being purchased, a reservation deposit is paid.

- Negotiation: The next stage is about negotiation. The contract will need to be negotiated by your lawyers and due diligence will need to be undertaken on the property you wish to buy, to ensure it is thoroughly investigated. The investigations may result in a detailed report on the title and searches that are investigated.

- Property taxes are unlikely to have Brexit related changes in the short term and we will keep clients informed if this changes

- Concluding on the right structure for a UK property investment is a complex area so take advice on the tax implications and what is best for you in the long term. Tax position will very much depend on your expected use of the property

- Corporate structures can now be less advantageous if you intend to occupy the property yourself (or allow family members to occupy). Annual Tax on Enveloped Dwellings (ATED) can be an expensive annual tax. Now is a good time to consider de-enveloping (removing the properties from the corporate structure). There are some tax implications but often benefi-



Medhat Tawfik highlighting the importance of the project



Sara Maccallum



Shaima Jilloud during her presentation

cial in the long-term

- Non-resident Capital Gains Tax (NRCGT) now needs consideration if you dispose of shares in a structure (as well as when you dispose of a property)

- Important to also have tax efficient English Wills to cover the properties and avoid unnecessary tax on death.

Most important part is to obtain proper tax advice to insure proper protection to your investment. In her presentation, Shaima Jilloud outlined the situation in the event of late completion by the buyer, the role of lawyers in the final stage of collecting the keys by the buyer, land registration and payment of the stamp duty land tax. This is very important to avoid any late penalties on completion.

At the conclusion of the seminar, Medhat Tawfik said:

"we are very happy with the results of this event, which reaffirms the commitment of Ahli United Bank to providing quality services to its customers and highlighting the latest developments in UK Real Estate Tax development. Also, he announced the new agreement with Meritas, the developer of Paddington Gardens' project, which will add more services to our clients. Needless to say, the bank will continue to offer first-class banking services to its customers."

At the end, a short walk visit to the Paddington Garden's project took place in a private tour. Paddington Garden's project the most recent project in Paddington area and was developed with highest quality and luxury and a very strategic location. This private exclusive tour gave the attendees a good opportunity to see details of the project.

S&P is the decade's runaway winner

NEW YORK: US stocks are poised to close out the decade with the longest bull market in history still intact. The run, which began on March 9, 2009, has narrowly avoided falling into a bear market several times over the past 10 years but for now appears on track to continue into next year.

With less than two weeks left in the decade, the large cap S&P 500, with reinvested dividends, has easily outperformed other major asset classes and benchmark commodities, climbing over 250 percent. The Bloomberg Barclays US Aggregate Bond Index, a broad-based index that includes Treasuries, corporate bonds and other fixed-income products, rose 47 percent. At the other end of the spectrum, WTI crude oil lost more than 20 percent over the same period.

Buoyed in part by an accommodative monetary policy from the Federal Reserve, which drove bond yields to near historic lows, the S&P 500 has been the best performing benchmark equity index over the decade out of the 10 largest global economies. But while this has been the longest bull run on record, the Twenty-tens fell short of the showing for several prior decades for equities. The best of the past eight - dating to the 1940s - was the '90s, which topped 300 percent, followed by the '50s and the '80s, both north of 200 percent.

The gains in the US stock market were fueled by the technology and consumer discretionary sectors, with each climbing more than 300 percent over the decade. Energy was the weakest group, narrowly avoiding a loss and was up only 4.3 percent through the Dec. 19 close. While investors showed virtually no preference between growth or value stocks in the early years of the decade, growth as an investing style has handily outperformed value stocks in the last leg of the '10s.

The preference for growth names is also reflected in the performance of individual stocks over the decade, led by the gain in Netflix, which notched a staggering 4100 percent through the Dec. 19 close.

Bringing up the rear were several energy names, with Apache suffering the worst performance, down nearly 80 percent over the 10-year time frame. — Reuters

Five keys to Argentina's economic crisis

BUENOS AIRES: South America's third biggest economy is in "virtual default," according to Argentina's President Alberto Fernandez, who claims it is suffering a similar crisis to the worst of its history in 2001.

Mired in recession, with sky-high poverty, inflation and unemployment, Argentina's GDP is expected to fall by 3.1 percent in 2019. Center-leftist Fernandez has blamed his market-friendly predecessor Mauricio Macri's austerity measures for Argentina's economic woes.

Fernandez has announced tax hikes on foreign currency purchases, agricultural exports and car sales while pledging a 10,000 (\$160) peso bonus for pensioners and a six-month freeze on public utility prices.

Here, AFP looks at the five keys to Argentina's economic crisis and the task facing Fernandez to try to solve the country's problems.

Inflation

Argentina is one of the few countries in the International Monetary Fund's emerging market and developing economies that has failed to control inflation. While the average for the group is expected to end 2019 at 4.7 percent, the IMF predicts Argentina will hit 57 percent: outstripped only by Venezuela and Zimbabwe. Already in 2018, Argentina registered inflation of 47.6 percent, worsening a situation that began with its 2001 crisis after the country ended its 11-year-old policy of

Canada economy shrinks for first time in 8 months, hit by US auto strike

OTTAWA: Canada's economy unexpectedly shrank by 0.1 percent in October, the first monthly decline since February, partly because of a US auto strike that hit manufacturing. Statistics Canada data indicated on Monday.

Analysts in a Reuters poll had forecast a gain of 0.1 percent following a 0.1 percent advance in September. Goods-producing industries posted a 0.5 percent loss while service sectors were essentially unchanged. October's growth figures were the

pegging the peso to the US dollar.

Argentina's crisis was sparked by a sudden crash in the peso's value 18 months ago. It lost more than 50 percent in 2018 and is down another 38 percent this year.

The rampant inflation and falling value of the peso has hit Argentines' spending power drastically.

Recession

Argentina has been in recession since the second quarter of 2018. Last year, the economy shrank by 2.5 percent. The IMF expects the economy to shrink by another 3.1 percent this year and 1.3 percent in 2020. It has already contracted for the last 17 months in a row. The new government is hoping to stimulate the economy by encouraging buying and refunding taxes to small and medium-sized businesses—an important sector in the bid to prevent unemployment, which has hit almost 10 percent, from continuing to increase.

Poverty

Rising poverty, which currently affects 41 percent of Argentina's 44 million people, is one of the biggest concerns. Earlier this year, Congress adopted a food emergency law to allocate greater resources to social programs. Fernandez has launched a plan alongside businesses and social organizations to "tackle hunger" by distributing food stamps.

Deficit

Macri's tough austerity measures enabled Argentina to reduce its primary fiscal deficit from almost 7.0 percent of GDP in 2015 to an estimated 0.9 percent this year. In return, the International Monetary Fund agreed to a bailout loan of \$57 billion, some \$44 billion of which has been disbursed. However, Fernandez has said he will refuse the remainder.

latest in a string of disappointing data that analysts say could put pressure on the Bank of Canada to mull a rate cut.

"Today's report may be seem easy to dismiss on its face given the strike-related disruption was well known in advance, but moving past that impact reveals some concerning weaknesses," said Brian DePratto, a director at TD Economics. "Don't write off monetary easing in 2020 just yet."

The central bank has held its key rate unchanged since October 2018 even as several of its counterparts, including the US Federal Reserve, have eased. In October it forecast fourth quarter annualized Canadian growth would be 1.3 percent but analysts now say that is likely to be too optimistic. "Because some of the softness is likely temporary, we look for growth to snap back above 2 percent in the first quarter of 2020," said Robert Kavcic, senior economist at BMO Capital Markets.

The manufacturing sector contracted by 1.4 per-



BUENOS AIRES: Handout picture released by Argentina's Economy Ministry of Argentinian Minister of Economy Martin Guzman during a press conference, in Buenos Aires. —AFP

Debt

Debt has risen to \$335 billion, including the IMF loan. The IMF expects Argentina's debt as a percentage of GDP to reach 93 percent by the end of the year, compared with 53 percent when Macri came to power. Fernandez says Argentina is in "virtual default" and blames Macri's government for leaving his administration in a position where it cannot pay its debt.

The government has stressed that Argentina wants to pay its debt but insists that "to be able to pay, we have to be able to, and for that, there needs to be growth."

In the meantime, the country unilaterally postponed a \$9 billion maturities payment until August, a move that saw rating agencies Fitch and S&P downgrade its credit rating, though Fitch later reversed that. —AFP

cent, the fourth decline in five months. Durable manufacturing dropped by 2.3 percent as a strike by the United Auto Workers prompted some Canadian plants and parts producers to scale back production.

The Bank of Canada's next fixed rate announcement date is Jan 22 and market expectations, as reflected in the overnight index swaps markets, show operators expect it to stay put.

Statscan said retail trade in October fell by 1.1 percent, the largest decline since March 2016, on broad-based weakness. Transportation and warehousing rose by 0.6 percent on strength in the aviation sector, both in passengers and cargo. "Although the Canadian economy is going through a soft patch in the fourth quarter, some of it is due to temporary disruptions that should be reversed early next year," said Paul Ashworth, chief North American economist at Capital Economics. —Reuters

What's On



IWG visits Arab Fund to explore the Jewel of Kuwait

Within the frame work of the group activities the International Women Group (IWG), visited the headquarters of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, on 19th December 2019, they were received and greeted by the General Manager and Chairman of the Board, Abdul Latif Al-Hamad.

Eng Osama Wanas accompanied the group through their tour to explore the various treasures of the building, while also learning more about the structure's unique and beautiful landmarks design, the building full of traditional and modern paintings and handicrafts from across the Arab world.

These artisanal aspects, including the tallest custom-made mashra-biya in the world, highlight the skills and craftsmanship of Arab artisans around the region. The idea is to try and recreate the feeling of a traditional Arab home. In the old days, our houses would have a main atrium and all the rooms were around it," explains Eng Osama Wanas, head of maintenance of the Arab Fund building.

The Arab Fund building is not only home to the best of Arab art and craftwork, but also a piece of art itself.



Ahmadi prepares for rainy season



Ahmadi Governor, Sheikh Fawwaz Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah expressed appreciation of the efforts exerted by relevant bodies in preparation for the rainy season in various Ahmadi governorate areas.

Speaking on a tour, he made at Sabah Al-Ahmed area, Al-Sabah said he was briefed about the preparations done in anticipation of the rainy season as well as the maintenance operations conducted there.

On his part, Ahmadi fire chief, colonel Ahmed Al-Bairami stressed that all fire and civil defence teams are ready for the season and to provide utmost safety and security for residents of Sabah Al-Ahmed and all other areas.

Also speaking on the occasion, Ahmadi roads and grids maintenance manager, Ammash Al-Rasheedi said that work was going according to a plan set by the cabinet and a scientific team headed by MPW undersecretary.



TIES Centre

The TIES Center cordially invites you to the second session of our repeated course on Purification and Prayer today, December 25th, at 11 am.

In this class, we will learn more about difference between cleanliness and purity from the Islamic point of view, their significance and implications. We will also examine the importance of water for cleanliness and purification, its sources, and types.

Finally, we will discuss the incident when a Bedouin urinated in a mosque, the reaction of both Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his bona-fide companions, and elicit lessons to implement in our lives. Come and learn the hows and whys of physical and spiritual purity to perfect your prayer.

Christmastide program 2019-2020 Holy Family Cathedral

December 25th 2019 Wednesday - Christmas Day - Masses Holy Day of Obligation

- 03.00 a.m. Malankara Holy Mass
- 07.00 a.m. English Holy Mass
- 08.30 a.m. English Holy Mass
- 10.00 a.m. Syro-Malabar Holy Mass
- 10.00 a.m. English Holy Mass
- 10.00 a.m. Korean Holy Mass
- 12.00 Noon Maronite Holy Mass
- 02.00 p.m. Tagalog Holy Mass
- 02.30 p.m. Konkani Holy Mass

December 31st 2019 Tuesday (Morning) - Normal Masses

- 06.30 a.m. Holy Mass in English (Cathedral)
- 07.00 a.m. Holy Mass in English (Cathedral)

December 31st 2019 Tuesday New Year's Eve - Masses

- 05.30 p.m. Malayalam (Latin) Holy Mass
- 06.00 p.m. French Holy Mass
- 06.30 p.m. Malankara Holy Mass
- 07.00 p.m. Tagalog Holy Mass
- 08.00 p.m. Korean Holy Mass
- 08.30 p.m. Solemn Pontifical Holy Mass
- 10.30 p.m. Konkani Holy Mass
- 10.30 p.m. New Catechumenal Holy Mass
- 10.30 p.m. Coptic Arabic Holy Mass
- 11.45 p.m. Syro-Malabar Holy Mass
- 10.00 p.m. Maronite Holy Mass

January 1st 2020 Wednesday New Year's Day Holy Masses

- 07.00 a.m. English Holy Mass
- 08.30 a.m. English Holy Mass
- 10.30 a.m. English Holy Mass
- 12.00 Noon Maronite Holy Mass
- 02.00 p.m. Tagalog Holy Mass
- 03.15 p.m. Konkani Holy Mass
- 04.00 p.m. Tamil Holy Mass
- 04.30 p.m. Konkani Holy Mass
- 04.30 p.m. Bengali Holy Mass
- 05.30 p.m. English Holy Mass
- 05.45 p.m. Sinhala Holy Mass
- 06.30 p.m. English Holy Mass
- 07.45 p.m. Malayalam (Latin) Holy Mass
- 06.00 p.m. Spanish Holy Mass
- Salmiya Basement
- 08.00 p.m. Arabic Latin Holy Mass Salmiya Basement.



Health & Science

Climate change may be death knell for Madagascar lemurs

PARIS: At least two species of Madagascar lemurs teetering on the brink of extinction because of deforestation could be pushed over the edge by climate change, researchers said Monday. Ruffed lemurs could lose more than 90 percent of their habitat within 50 years as a result of global warming and habitat loss combined, they reported in the journal Nature Climate Change.

Because the tree-hugging, saucer-eyed fruit eaters are the only vehicle for distributing the seeds of numerous rare plants in Madagascar's rainforest, their demise could damage entire ecosystems. "Loss of either species will probably have cascading effect on the structure and integrity of remaining forest," the researchers said.

Varecia variegata and its close cousin Varecia rubra are already "critically endangered" on the IUCN's Red List because of hunting, habitat loss, forest fragmentation and invasive species. More than 95 percent of Madagascar's 101 lemur species are endangered to one degree or another, probably

making them the most imperiled group of vertebrates. "As one the world 'hottest' biodiversity hotspots, Madagascar is experiencing all of the key global change threats," the researchers note.

The island nation accounts for five percent of the world's unique plant and animal species. So far, global warming has had less impact than other drivers of extinction, though one degree Celsius warming over the last century has been enough to push fauna and flora towards more hospitable climes.

Threat multiplier

But climate change impacts could increase dramatically in the coming decades as temperatures continue to climb, scientists say. To measure the survival prospects of ruffed lemurs, more than 20 researchers led by Toni Lyn Morelli from the University of Massachusetts department of environmental conservation looked at three sets of data.

The first projected changes in rainforest cover out to 2070, based on two scenarios: "strict" or

"relaxed" protection. Since the mid-20th century, Madagascar has lost about 45 percent of its forest cover. The scientists also looked at the likely impact of climate change over the next 50 years, again assessing scenarios ranging from optimistic (deep and immediate cuts in carbon pollution) to business-as-usual (no change).

Finally, they looked at how much healthy rainforest would be left in 2070 where the docile mammals might be able to thrive, or just survive. Deforestation alone would reduce the animal's range by 30 percent even under "strict" protection, and by twice as much with lax oversight, they found.

Climate change by itself could shrink the area by between 15 and 75 percent. When combined, the impact of global warming and habitat loss becomes devastating, they predicted, with the area in which the lemurs might live reduced by 95 percent. Madagascar has one of the highest rates of poverty in the world, and lacks resources for conservation and natural resource management. — AFP

Vietnam seizes two tons of ivory, pangolin scales

HANOI: Vietnam seized more than two tons of ivory tusks and pangolin scales hidden inside wooden boxes shipped from Nigeria, state media reported yesterday. The bust comes at the end of a year of big wildlife seizures destined for communist Vietnam, a hotbed of the illicit but lucrative trade in animal parts from elephants, pangolins, tigers and rhinos.

Authorities in northern Hai Phong city found 330 kilograms (730 pounds) of ivory and 1.7 tons of pangolin scales after checking three container shipments from Nigeria, according to Hai Quan Online, the official mouthpiece of Vietnam's customs department. The manifest listed the goods as high-end lumber, the online site said, adding that the haul was hidden in boxes at the back of the containers. Published photos showed a rectangular wooden box full of pangolin scales, with elephant tusks mixed in. Both items are highly sought after on the multibillion-dollar illegal wildlife market. Vietnam outlawed the

ivory trade in 1992, but the illegal market still persists and shops sell items predating the ban for decorative and medicinal purposes. The pangolin is considered the most trafficked animal on the planet, and over one million have been snatched from Asian and African forests in the past decade. They are destined for markets in China and Vietnam, where their scales are used in traditional medicine and their meat is bought on the black market. Hanoi has vowed to crack down on the illegal wildlife trade, but conservationists say it persists thanks to weak law enforcement.

In May, Vietnamese police found 5.3 tons of pangolin scales hidden in a shipment from Nigeria at a southern port. Some two months later in July, authorities in Singapore seized nearly nine tons of ivory and a huge stash of pangolin scales destined for Vietnam. During the same month dozens of live pangolins smuggled from Laos were discovered dehydrated and weak on a bus in a central region of the country. — AFP

Rhino poaching rises in Botswana

GABORONE, Botswana: Thirteen rhinos have been poached in Botswana in the last two months, the tourism ministry said, as the gov-

ernment tries to crackdown on hunting of the endangered species.

The country is home to just under 400 rhinos, according to Rhino Conservation Botswana, most of them roam the grassy plains of the northern Okavango Delta. "From October 2019 to date, 13 more rhinos have been poached," the ministry said in a statement released over the weekend, adding that the

number of rhinos poached since October 2018 now stands at 31. Twenty three of those were white rhinoceros and eight were black rhinoceros, which are classified as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). "This unfortunate situation on the country's population has continued with more rhinos being killed from October 2019 to date," the ministry said. — AFP

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

مسشفى دار الشفاء
Dar Al Shifa Hospital
Tele:1802 555

daralshifa
Email: aalhaddad@daralshifa.com

DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
Consultant Pediatrician

Consultant Pediatrician-Canadian & American Board in Pediatrics-Canadian Board in Pediatric Emergency

Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368
Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St.1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B

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- ◆ Faculty member of (BEST).
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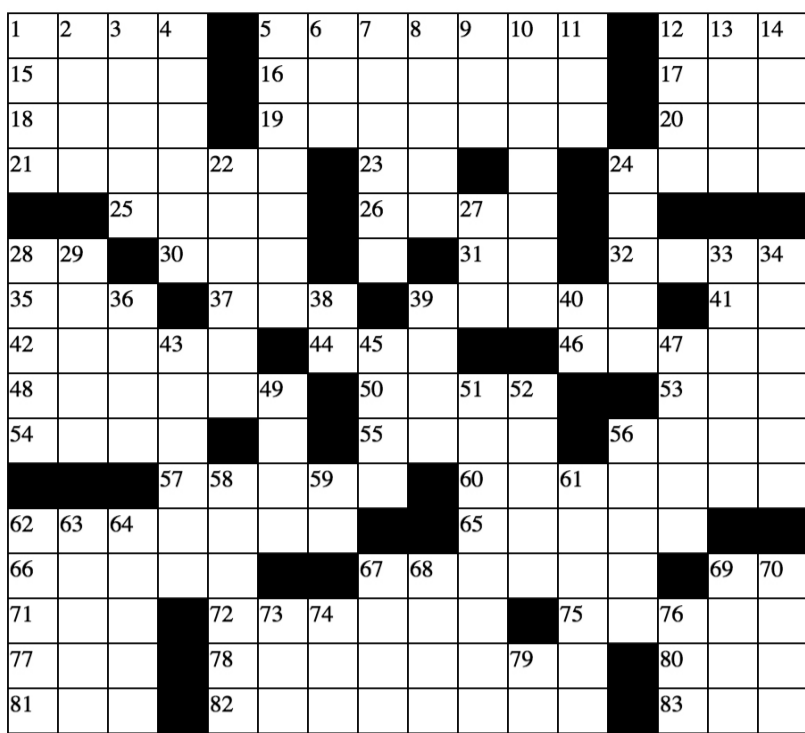
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Stars

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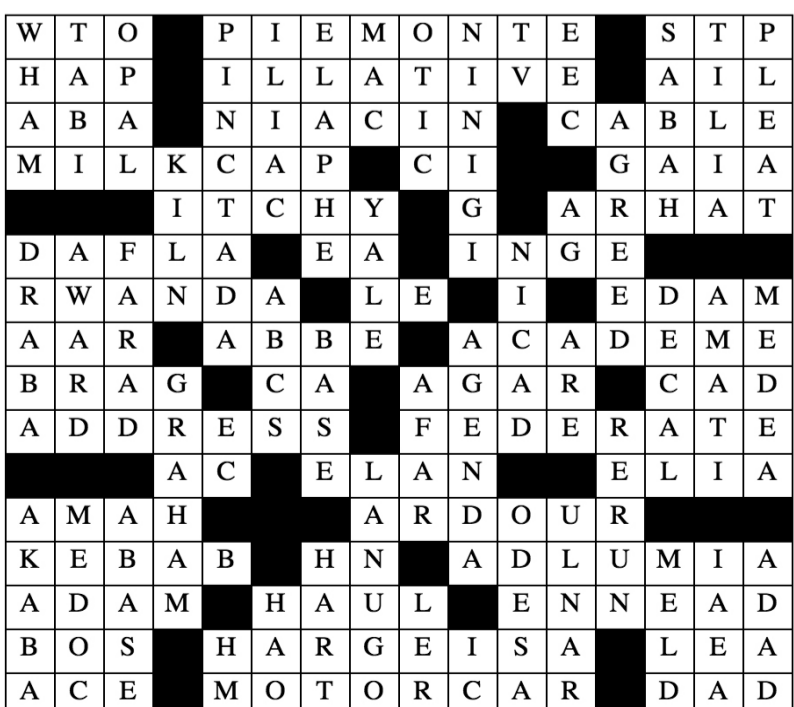
ACROSS

1. The biblical name for ancient Syria.
5. Battle in which the ruler of Afghanistan defeated the Mahrattas in 1761.
12. (slang) A gangster's pistol.
15. (Babylonian) A goddess of the watery deep and daughter of Ea.
16. Of a leaf shape.
17. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
18. An independent ruler or chieftain (especially in Africa or Arabia).
19. Pacific news.
20. One of the most common of the five major classes of immunoglobulins.
21. A shrub or tree of the genus *Rhus* (usually limited to the non-poisonous members of the genus).
23. A state in New England.
25. A dull persistent (usually moderately intense) pain.
26. Chief port of Yemen.
28. A soft silver-white ductile metallic element (liquid at normal temperatures).
30. Relating to or characteristic of or occurring in the air.
31. An informal term for a father.
32. A Bantu language spoken in southern Zaire.
35. Hormone produced early in pregnancy by the placenta.
37. Counting the number of white and red blood cells and the number of platelets in 1 cubic millimeter of blood.
41. A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
42. Of or relating to or characteristic of Ireland or its people.
44. United States musician (born in Japan) who married John Lennon and collaborated with him on recordings (born in 1933).
46. Ruined by overcooking.
48. A town in northern France on the Strait of Dover that serves as a ferry port to England.
50. Distant in either space or time.
53. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
54. A translucent mineral consisting of hydrated silica of variable color.
55. The basic unit of money in Uruguay.
57. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
60. Only extant member of the order Rhynchocephalia of large spiny lizard-like diapsid reptiles of coastal islands off New Zealand.
62. An oleoresin used in varnishes and ointments.
65. Signal going into an electronic system.
66. American Revolutionary patriot.
71. An emotional response that has been acquired by conditioning.
72. Discrimination in favor of the able-bodied.
75. Belonging to or befitting a supreme ruler.
77. Inquire about.
78. Edge of a way or road or path.
80. The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
81. An association of countries in the western hemisphere.
82. A great raja.
83. The cry made by sheep.

DOWN

1. Type genus of the Anatidae.
2. Tall New Zealand timber tree.
3. (Jungian psychology) The inner self (not the external persona) that is in touch with the unconscious.
4. 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.
5. Any of various herbaceous plants whose leaves or stems or flowers are cooked and used for food or seasoning.
6. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
7. Conforming with or constituting a norm or standard or level or type or social norm.
8. Overgrown with ivy.
9. Committee formed by a special-interest group to raise money for their favorite political candidates.
10. The capital and largest city of Greece.
11. A beverage made by steeping tea leaves in water.
12. (Greek mythology) Goddess of the earth and mother of Cronus and the Titans in ancient mythology.
13. Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
14. An official language of the Republic of South Africa.
22. Affectedly trendy.
24. A chain of more than 200 islands about 400 miles long in the western central Pacific Ocean.
27. A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment.
29. Disposed of as useless.
33. A town in east central Maine on the Penobscot River.
34. Remote city of Kazakhstan that (ostensibly for security reasons) was made the capital in 1998.
36. A river that rises in western New Mexico and flows westward through southern Arizona to become a tributary of the Colorado River.
38. A heavy odorless colorless gas formed during respiration and by the decomposition of organic substances.
39. United States feminist who was active in the women's suffrage movement (1819-1910).
40. A logarithmic unit of sound intensity.
43. A deep bow.
45. Plant with an elongated head of broad stalked leaves resembling celery.
47. The capital of Morocco.
49. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
51. (ophthalmology) Impaired eyesight resulting usually from irregular conformation of the cornea.
52. (used of living things especially persons) In an early period of life or development or growth.
56. A short composition for a solo instrument.
58. Remove offensive capability from.
59. A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
61. South American cay.
63. A port city of south central Ukraine on an arm of the Black Sea.
64. United States civil rights leader who refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man in Montgomery (Alabama) and so triggered the national civil rights movement (born in 1913).
67. The capital and chief port of Qatar.
68. A former communist country in eastern Europe and northern Asia.
69. A small cake leavened with yeast.
70. Type genus of the Alcidae comprising solely the razorbill.
73. A long thin fluffy scarf of feathers or fur.
74. The syllable naming the sixth (submediant) note of a major or minor scale in solmization.
76. Light informal conversation for social occasions.
79. A person who announces and plays popular recorded music.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Your words may get you into trouble today, so be careful of what you say. Try to keep a lid on hasty comments fueled by intense emotions. These comments may come out the wrong way and be used against you later. Bring your cheerful disposition to the group and leave your stubborn attitude at home. Goals and discipline may be major themes today.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You may be a bit confused today. Other people's actions may send you into a whirlwind of conflicting emotions. You may be sensitive regarding your goals. Discipline is a key aspect of today. Stay true to the principles you hold most dear and you won't go wrong. Friends are waiting in the wings to help you with whatever bothers you. Don't hesitate to ask for assistance.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Communication is key today. Make your intentions known right away to avoid unnecessary confusion. The more you can settle now, the better off you'll be down the road. You're the missing piece of the puzzle, so step up to the podium in order to fill your very important role. The bridge you provide fills in a critical gap that will be of great aid to others.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Channel your energy into constructive tasks. Look to where you can make important connections. There's a fine line between helpful suggestions and manipulation. Try to avoid the latter. There's something holding you back. This restriction is probably for the best. You could get burned out by constantly going to extremes in every action. Trust your energy and follow your instincts.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Restrictive forces may come into conflict with you today. The good news is that you should be able to find a space of peace within your emotions. Seek a mediator who can help you sort out stalemates that may exist between you and others. Opportunities for freedom and autonomy are out there waiting for you to grab. Seek the bizarre and unconventional ways of doing things.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

A planned, disciplined approach works best today. One thing to keep in mind is that it's important to connect with others now. Trying to do things alone may seem like the right thing to do, but you're much more efficient when you enlist the help of others. Don't be shy about approaching people you don't know very well.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

This is a terrific day for you. Your emotional state of mind is wonderfully upbeat. Things should be flowing your way, and there's an instinctual knowing that will help you navigate through whatever rough spots may come your way, if any. Take this opportunity to secure commitments from others and nail down plans that you intend to complete.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Things may be mentally focused today, which could conflict with your emotional nature. Strong opinions may crop up, and you should take the time to listen. Don't force things to come out if they aren't ready. If the apple isn't ready to fall from the tree, don't wrench it off. Wait until the apple is ripe and the fruit will fall to you effortlessly.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Communication is a big theme of the day for you. Every time you speak, a large audience is listening to every word. The stronger you are at expressing your opinions, the better. You're flighty today, jumping from one thing to the next, but this is fine. You may get quite a bit done when you act in this fashion.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Your emotions may feel restricted today, but this could be for the best. Try to take a lighthearted approach to the situation, and don't get too serious about anything. The more flexible your attitude, the better off you'll be. Keep your feelings under control by not reading too deeply into the subtleties of things.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

This is a great day for you. You should find that your general mood is excellent. You'll have the perfect thing to say in every situation. Your adaptable nature will come in handy, as people around you will be quite rigid and unyielding. The more disciplined you are when it comes to emotions, the better off you'll be. Feel free to be the social butterfly.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

It may be hard to come to grips with your emotions today. You may be flightier than usual. Realize that this is to your advantage. Come out of the quicksand and take a breath of fresh air. An upbeat attitude is critical to making progress in anything you undertake. Find the answers you seek in conversations with others.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Spiders 1

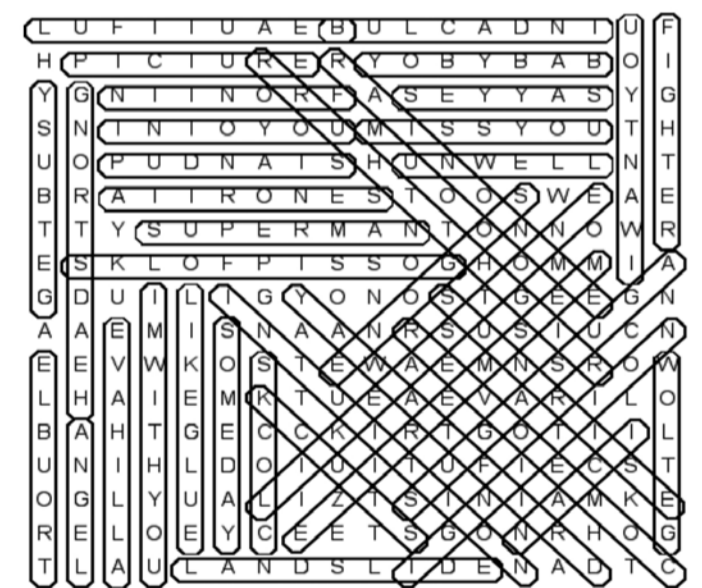
Find and circle all of the spider species and anatomy words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message.



- | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|------------|---------------|
| ABDOMEN | FANGS | MOUSE | SPINNERETS |
| BLACK WIDOW | FISHING | OGRE FACED | TARANTULA |
| BOOK LUNGS | FUNNEL WEB | ORCHARD | TEXAS RECLUSE |
| BRAZILIAN WANDERING | GIANT HUNTSMAN | PEACOCK | THORAX |
| CAMEL | GOLDEN HUNTSMAN | PEDIPALPS | TRAPOOD |
| CARDINAL | GRASS | PELICAN | VENOM |
| CHELICERAE | HEAD | REDBACK | VIOLIN |
| CLAWS | HEART | RED WIDOW | WATER |
| EIGHT LEGS | INTESTINE | SETAE | WEBS |
| ESOPHAGUS | LICHEN | SILK GLAND | YELLOW GARDEN |
| EXOSKELETON | MIRROR | SILKHENGE | YELLOW SAC |
| EYES | | | |

Yesterday's Solution

Songs From the Year 2003



- | | | | |
|------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| ALL I HAVE | GET LOW | LANDSLIDE | SO GONE |
| ANGEL | GOSSIP FOLKS | LIKE A STONE | SOMEDAY |
| BEAUTIFUL | HEADSTRONG | LIKE GLUE | STAND UP |
| CLOCKS | I CAN | MESMERIZE | STUCK |
| COME OVER | I WANT YOU | MISS YOU | SUGA SUGA |
| DRIFT AWAY | I'M WITH YOU | PICTURE | SUNRISE |
| FIGHTER | IGNITION | RAIN ON ME | SUPERMAN |
| FRONTIN' | IN DA CLUB | RIGHT THURR | TROUBLE |
| GET BUSY | INTO YOU | SAY YES | UNWELL |
| | INTUITION | SENORITA | |

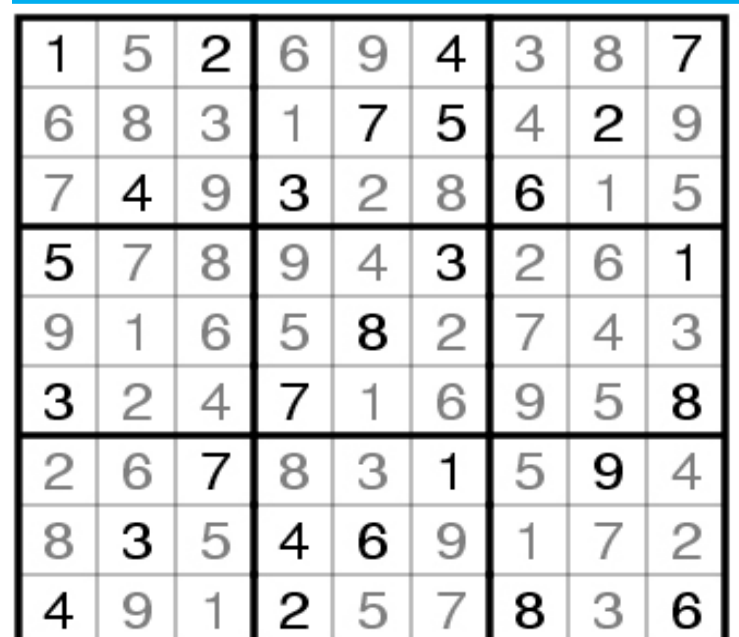
The hidden song title is: HOW YOU GONNA ACT LIKE THAT

Daily SuDoku



very hard

Yesterday's Solution



hard

Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2019



A youth takes a picture of a neon sign reading "2020" placed along the Mediterranean Sea waterfront in Gaza City on Monday. — AFP photos

In Gaza, a somber Christmas after permits row

With a shining tree, tinsel and Santa miniatures, Hanadi Missak's apartment is all ready for Christmas, yet she still feels sad about spending the holiday at home. The 48-year-old is one of hundreds of Christian Palestinians from the Gaza Strip who applied for Israeli permission to travel to Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Church leaders say the normally straightforward process has this year been incredibly difficult, with only around one in five applications granted.

With time running out until the celebrations begin, Missak had given up on travelling. "I was hoping to go to Bethlehem, but the circumstances did not allow it," Missak, who is deputy principal at a Christian school in Gaza, told AFP. "There is the real celebration - the prayers, decorations in all the streets and the church," she said. "The midnight mass is wonderful."

'Still hope'

There are barely more than 1,000 Christians in all of Gaza, where two million people live crammed into a territory only 40 km long and a few wide. It is geographically separated from the West Bank - the Palestinian territory where Bethlehem is located - by Israel, and crossing between them requires hard-to-get Israeli permits. A few hundred Gazan Christians have traditionally been granted permits to attend Christmas festivities in Bethlehem and Jerusalem each year.

This year, Israel initially didn't announce any permits, prompting criticism from church groups and media. On Sunday, a statement from COGAT, the Israeli military body responsible for the permits, said some would be granted "in accordance with security assessments". Gaza is ruled by the Islamist group Hamas, which Israel accuses of abusing the permit system to plan attacks against its citizens.

Wadie Abunassar, an advisor to and spokesman for church leaders in the Holy Land, told AFP Monday that out of 951 applications so far, 192 had been granted. "We still hope there will be more to come. We were promised by many Israeli bodies... but Christmas begins tomorrow," he said. "We are saying this is a basic human right that should be respected." Missak said she had travelled to the West Bank multiple times before for Christmas and didn't know why the permit hadn't been granted this year. COGAT did not respond to multiple requests for comment regarding



Palestinian children decorate a Christmas tree at a restaurant in Gaza City on Monday.

the number of permits awarded or Missak's case.

'Try to make joy'

AFP reached out to a number of Palestinians from Gaza who were able to leave the enclave, but none wished to speak out of fear they would jeopardise future chances of getting permits. Nabil Al-Salfiti and his wife Fatten were among those lucky enough to receive permits, but ultimately decided not to travel when their son's application was denied. They also cited financial constraints for their decision. Israel maintains a crippling blockade of Gaza it says is necessary to isolate Hamas.

Israel and other critics of the Islamist group, which along with its allies has fought three wars with the Jewish state, accuse it of persecuting minorities. Local authorities

in Gaza used to hold a large celebration for Christmas, but it was stopped after Hamas seized control in 2007. "People come offer us congratulations and we offer congratulations to them," Fatten said, but, he added, "There is not much joy - the real joy is in Bethlehem where Christ was born."

Despite not travelling this year, Missak is determined to enjoy Christmas. Hanging on the wall in her apartment is a stitched "Merry Christmas" sign, while the bannisters are covered in fake holly. Missak said Muslim friends and neighbors would pass by the house to take part in the festivities. "Despite all the misery in Gaza, I try to make joy and celebrate Christmas." — AFP



Hanadi Missak, a 48-year-old Christian woman, adjusts the ornaments on her Christmas tree during an interview in her house in Gaza City on Dec 22, 2019.



Palestinian youths pose for a selfie by the Mediterranean sea waterfront.



Nabil El-Salfiti looks on as his wife Faten places a star on top of a Christmas tree at their home in Gaza City on Dec 22, 2019.



Palestinian artisans make Christmas toys at Zeina Association and Cooperative for Handicrafts in Beit Hanun in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday.



Guido Pacelli works in the association Salvamamme on Dec 19, 2019 in Rome. — AFP photos



Rome's 'Geppetto' fixes broken toys for underprivileged children



An aid worker prepares Christmas gift boxes for families.



An aid worker welcomes children.

Frayed teddy bears and broken toy cars resurrect under the magic touch of Guido Pacelli, a modern-day Geppetto who works overtime so that Rome's poor and sick children wake up to a gift on Christmas morning. Armed with a screwdriver, a microscope and a small welder, "Guido Aggiustagiocattoli", aka Guido the Toy Fixer, has mended between 50 and 70 toys a day these past two months, in preparation for the festive season.

"The best present for me is when these children who have been through so much smile at me," said Pacelli, a 68-year-old retired aviation technician from Italy's flagship airline Alitalia. Once up and running, the repaired toys are meticulously disinfected, carefully wrapped and labelled for the families. Salvamamme (Save Mothers), which hosts Pacelli's workshop in premises lent by the Italian Red Cross, then distributes the gifts to poor, migrant or sick children.

Pacelli remembers a Caterpillar tractor he repaired for a little boy. "He called me every day until I managed to repair it," said Pacelli, a volunteer for the charity since an early retirement in 2011. "People leave batteries in and they oxidate," he said, as he changes those of a green plastic electric guitar, extracted from a pile of soft toys, mini computers and wind-chimes for children.

Nicknamed Geppetto - the creator of Pinocchio in Carlo Collodi's novel - because of his blue overalls and glasses, Pacelli plays an essential role in the charity. "This toy was even sent by the manufacturer because it was faulty. I've mended it and now it will go to a child in a hospital," said Pacelli.



20,000 toys a year

"We distribute more than 20,000 toys a year," said Maria Grazia Passeri, head of Salvamamme which also hands out food, nappies and clothes to families with very little means. The products come from official organisations, hospitals or local parishes. Passeri, wrapped in a red shawl, said that she founded the charity 20 years ago to help "all these women who give birth in secret or go through horrible experiences".

On distribution day at Salvamamme, mothers fill out forms and children amuse themselves amongst the piles of parcels ready to be sent and play with toys awaiting Pacelli's intervention, stacked in heaving piles. Many former beneficiaries who manage to lift themselves

out of poverty become volunteers at Salvamamme. Jonathan, a 29-year-old Argentinian, arrived in Italy 12 years ago without work or a family to start a new life. "I am very grateful, I will never forget the help I received. All my free time I give it to the association," he said.

Anna Moticalca has a family of five to feed, three of whom are children. She arrived from Moldova to Rome eight years ago and is unemployed. She is also grateful for the charity. "I asked for a little help and they helped me enormously," she said, above the sound of children's laughter as they play and gobble down a slice of Pandoro, a typical Italian Christmas dessert. — AFP

Myanmar child nuns dream of conflict-free lives

Teenager Dhama Theingi dreams of becoming an engineer and playing football, but for now she must rise for dawn prayers before pounding Yangon's streets to collect alms as one of Myanmar's growing number of child nuns seeking refuge from conflict. With shorn heads and swathed in pink robes, the girls of Mingalar Thaikti nunnery sit cross-legged on wooden floorboards as they begin to pray, bleary-eyed and stifling yawns.

Darkness still blankets the impoverished Yangon suburb as their Buddhist chants compete with the whines and snarls of street dogs. All of the nunnery's 66 girls - aged between four and 18 - are from the Palaung ethnic group and were born in an area of eastern Shan state plagued by conflict between local rebel groups and the military. "There was a lot of fighting," Dhama Theingi, 18, told AFP, explaining why her parents sent her hundreds of kilometres from home nine years ago. "It wasn't easy to study and the schools were far away."

The Buddhist-majority country's borderlands have been plagued by conflict since independence, as ethnic insurgencies battle the state over autonomy and natural resources. Civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi has pledged to make peace, but fighting



Buddhist nuns from the Mingalar Thaikti nunnery collect alms in Yangon.

grinds on. "Armed conflict and poverty mean numbers of students just keep going up," says Sein Maw, Yangon director of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture. He said there are nearly 18,000 child nuns and novice monks attending monastic schools in the commercial capital.

A life in robes

Monastic life is often harder for girls than boys. Myanmar's strict Buddhist hierarchy combined with a conservative and patriarchal society means monks are offered far more respect than nuns, who generally receive smaller donations. They are also commonly teased for choosing a monastic life as a last resort after failing to find a boyfriend or husband.

But the routine for both genders remains much the same, with the girls of Mingalar Thaikti rising at 4:00 am for two hours' prayers before breakfast. Two days a week they then crisscross the neighborhood to collect alms, chanting outside houses to receive spoonfuls of uncooked rice or small change. Collecting enough money early is crucial as they use this to buy snacks or lunch.

In keeping with Buddhist traditions, both nuns and monks refrain from eating from midday until breakfast the following morning. On other days the girls attend a school staffed by volunteers, following the national curriculum in Burmese. Nobody speaks the language when they arrive, says head nun Wara Nyar Ni, who also joined as a child. "But they're not forced to stay," she says, adding there are always girls to replace the handful who choose to leave each year.

Counting down

Trips back home come rarely, if at all. Khin Mar Thi, 17, was sent to the nunnery with her four sisters, and their parents simply cannot afford the journey for visits. Like many who persevere with a monastic life until the end of high school, she has resolved to remain a nun rather than returning to the secular world. But even Khin Mar Thi confesses to the odd pang of envy when she sees normal teenage girls. "I sometimes wish I could be beautiful like them," she says, adding she also misses her parents.

Dhama Theingi, however, is itching to leave and start training as an engineer - if she obtains the grades. "There are lots of things we can't do as nuns and it really annoys me," she says. Her passion is football, yet she has not played for a year and a half because doing sport as a nun is frowned upon. "I just love scoring goals," she says with a smile, adding that she - like many in football-mad Myanmar - roots for Manchester United. — AFP



This photo taken on October 19, 2019 shows Buddhist nuns from the Mingalar Thaikti nunnery going out to collect alms in Yangon. — AFP photos



Buddhist nuns having breakfast at the Mingalar Thaikti nunnery.

Glittering symbol of press, Newseum set to close doors



A news chopper hangs inside the lobby of the Newseum on Pennsylvania Avenue which will be closing down on New Year's Eve after 12 years in Washington, on Dec 19, 2019. —AFP photos



Visitors tour the Newseum on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Just steps from the US Capitol, the Newseum's gleaming glass-and-steel structure has for over a decade been a shining symbol for the press and free expression. But in a reflection of the woes facing the US media industry - which is itself struggling financially while also facing repeated attacks from political leaders - the Newseum will be closing its doors on Dec 31. The museum, with exhibits covering the Sept 11 attacks and the Berlin Wall as well as a daily display of front pages from around the world, announced earlier this year it would sell its building designed by architect James Polshek to Johns Hopkins University for \$372.5 million.

The Freedom Forum, a nonprofit group created by USA Today founder Al Neuharth which operates the facility, has pledged to continue its mission of educating the public about the importance of a free press, but has not indicated if it will open a new public exhibit space. "The future of the Newseum is unclear at this time," said spokeswoman Sonya Gavankar. "It's going to take us at least six months to de-install the exhibits and move them to our dedicated archive facility. After that process is complete, we're going to start looking at what the future holds for us."

The next step could be another museum structure, traveling exhibits or merely an online presence which relates the importance of journalism and a free press. The first Newseum opened in 1997 in Arlington, Virginia, and in 2008 it moved to a \$450 million building with a seven-story atrium on Pennsylvania Avenue between the Capitol and the White House. Over its two decades, the Newseum has welcomed some 10 million visitors and hosted hundreds of media events and conferences.

Deepening crisis for press

The fate of the Newseum mirrors a media sector embroiled in a deepening crisis. Thousands of American newspapers have closed amid financial troubles. Newsroom employment has fallen by around 25 percent over the past decade in all media, and by nearly half in the newspaper sector, according to the Pew Research Center. Trust in the media has also been eroding. Only around four-in-10 US adults have "a great deal" or "fair amount" of trust in newspapers, television and radio to report the news accurately and fairly, according to a Gallup poll released in September, down from more than



A visitor looks at a display as he tours the Newseum.

70 percent in the 1970s.

Even though trust has been declining for years, President Donald Trump's labeling of the media as "the enemy of the people" has accelerated that trend, especially among his political allies. The Newseum has sought to be nonpartisan while promoting the five freedoms outlined in the constitution's First Amendment: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to assembly and the right to petition the government, according to Gavankar. "In this building, a lot of people of all political affiliations come together and speak openly about the future of all five freedoms of the First Amendment," she said.

Missing the experience

Visitors to the Newseum in its final days said they would miss the place. Cathy Cawley of Ashland, Virginia, said she had wanted to see the Newseum for a second

time before it closed for its "expansive and beautiful" exhibits, and found the monument to journalists killed doing their jobs particularly moving. "I was looking at the wall showing the exhibit about journalists killed in action, and it makes me realize how important a free press is," she said.

Julia Greenwald, who teaches English at Friendship Public Charter School in Washington, brought a group of her elementary and middle school students before the Newseum closing. "It's one of the coolest museums in DC. It's sad that it's closing," she said. "In the current political climate, it's so important for kids to be media-literate, to learn about the value of a free press." — AFP

Newspaper front pages are on display at the Newseum.



A control tower from the Berlin Wall is seen inside the Newseum.



Visitors look at a section of the television antenna that once sat atop the World Trade Center's north tower, at the Newseum.



Two teenagers read a news report from a teleprompter and see themselves in action at the "Be a TV Reporter" station at the Newseum.



Visitors tour the Newseum on Pennsylvania Avenue.

What next for 'Star Wars' after 'Rise of Skywalker' grand finale?

The Rise of Skywalker dominated movie theaters this weekend. But diminishing box office returns, scathing reviews and a plot that wrapped up the space saga's major story arcs all beg the question - what next for "Star Wars"? Marketed as a grand finale to the decades-spanning, nine-film "Skywalker Saga," the latest film hauled in \$177.4 million domestically on its opening weekend. While that would be a stratospheric figure for any other film - indeed, it was the third-biggest movie opening of 2019

- it is notably less than the last two major "Star Wars" installments, "The Force Awakens" and "The Last Jedi". Reviews were mainly negative, accusing the movie of falling back on the same overworn "Star Wars" tropes. A fear of franchise fatigue has already led Disney boss Bob Iger to signal a slowdown in releases, admitting his previous plan to produce a new "Star Wars" each year was "a little too much, too fast". Nonetheless, Iger was bullish about future "Star Wars" films at last week's world premiere, telling AFP that "this is just the beginning," with potentially "endless" more stories on the way. "We know that fans will want another film, or another few films, and we'll make them," he said. "But as I've said for a long time about movie making, it's really important not to make a film until it's ready... And don't release it until it's really finished and you feel great about it. So we're in no rush."

New characters, new worlds

Details of what is in store remain tightly under wraps and are the subject of much speculation. Currently, no "Star Wars" films appear on Disney's release slate until Dec 2022, to be followed by further untitled movies in 2024 and 2026. Doug Chiang,

Lucasfilm vice-president and executive creative director, confirmed to AFP he is already working on design ideas for a new "Star Wars" movie. "Now that the 'Skywalker saga' is done, we can actually push on and discover new characters and new worlds and new planets. So I find it really exciting," said Chiang.

Who will oversee the project is less clear. "Game of Thrones" showrunners David Benioff and D.B. Weiss had been due to head up the next trilogy starting in 2022 but dropped out after signing a massive Netflix deal. A separate, planned trilogy from Rian Johnson - director of the divisive "Last Jedi" - remains in development. But Lucasfilm head Kathleen Kennedy said in a recent interview that "Star Wars" may even seek to move away from the trilogy format.

"I think it gives us a more open-ended view of storytelling and doesn't lock us into this three-act structure," she told the LA Times. Kevin Feige, the man behind the extraordinary success of the Marvel superhero films, is set to produce a "Star Wars" film - but it remains at an early stage of development, she added. J.J. Abrams, director of "The Rise of Skywalker" and "The Force Awakens", is unlikely to be involved. He recently penned an exclusive deal with rival studio Warner Bros.

'Endless set of tales'

If there is an undoubted bright spot on the horizon for "Star Wars", it is the recently launched Disney+ series "The Mandalorian". The franchise's first live-action TV show has proven a hit, not least due to the viral popularity of the impossibly cute "Baby Yoda", known in the show as "The Child". A second season is in the works. As Disney increasingly focuses on its own streaming platform - a direct rival to Netflix, Amazon and Apple, with more competitors on the way in 2020 - it plans further high-profile "Star Wars" shows.

Ewan McGregor will return as Obi-Wan Kenobi for one series, while the stars of hit 2016 spin-off "Rogue One" will also receive their own prequel show. "As 'Mandalorian' points out, this is just the beginning of what could be an endless set of tales told from galaxies far, far away," Iger told AFP. "The Mandalorian" has given us the ability to be even a little bit more patient because we feel we're serving Star Wars fans," he added. "And that gives us, I think, the luxury of being even more methodical about this." — AFP

Queen admits 'bumpy' year in Xmas message

Queen Elizabeth II called 2019 "quite bumpy" in a Christmas message at the end of a chaotic year which saw Britain feud over its split from the European Union and her scandal-plagued son Prince Andrew withdraw from public life. The 93-year-old monarch's received good news when husband Prince Philip checked out of a London hospital after a four-night stay in time to join the royal family for Christmas. But the year was filled with disappointments for the queen - a seminal figure in British public life who assumed the throne in 1952 and is beloved by much of the nation.

None may have been more bitter than a calamitous BBC interview in which her second son Andrew tried to distance himself from American pedophile Jeffrey Epstein. Andrew promised to "step back from public duties" after his denial of having sex with one of Epstein's alleged victims was ridiculed in the UK media and reportedly criticized in Buckingham Palace. The queen's traditional address - to be aired in full on Christmas Day - will point to the life of Jesus as an example of "how small steps taken in faith and in hope can overcome long-held differences and deep-seated divisions".

The remarks were widely interpreted as a reference to the Brexit debate that has torn Britain apart since it voted to leave the EU in a 2016 referendum. "The path, of course, is not always smooth, and may at times this year have felt quite bumpy, but small steps can make a world of difference," the queen will say. Royal commentators said the queen's use of the word "bumpy" marked her most explicit admission of turmoil since her headline-grabbing description of 1992 as an "annus horribilis". The marriages of three of her children fell apart and her

beloved Windsor Castle nearly went up in flames in that "horrible year".

Missing picture

The queen found herself dragged into the tortuous political drama of Brexit when she approved Prime Minister Boris Johnson's request to suspend parliament in August. Critics claimed it was an attempt to silence opponents to his EU withdrawal plans. The Supreme Court subsequently ruled that Johnson's request had been unlawful and many people blamed him for making the queen look bad.

The queen was also rumored to have been disappointed by her grandson Prince Harry and his American former actress wife Meghan Markle. The young couple made waves by speaking out about their struggle with life in the public eye and then suing three British newspapers for prying into their private lives. Their picture was notably absent from the collection of family photographs on the queen's desk in her televised address. "With the queen, nothing ever happens by accident," The Times newspaper wrote. "It can be taken as read that the significance of each picture has been carefully considered."

'Spirit of reconciliation'

The queen has remained one of Britain's most popular figures despite the royal family's travails. A poll by YouGov in November showed 72 percent of respondents had a positive opinion of the monarch. The queen's Christmas Day message also reflected on the heroism of British forces during the D-Day landings in Normandy that turned the course of World War II in 1944. Her trips abroad are becoming increasingly rare, but she made



A picture released yesterday shows Britain's Queen Elizabeth II posing for a photograph after she recorded her annual Christmas Day message in Windsor Castle west of London. — AFP

one in June to attend the 75th anniversary commemorations in France.

"For the 75th anniversary of that decisive battle, in a true spirit of reconciliation, those who had formerly been sworn enemies came together in friendly commemora-

tions either side of the Channel, putting past differences behind them," the queen will say in her message. "By being willing to put past differences behind us and move forward together, we honor the freedom and democracy once won for us at so great a cost." — AFP



Two women walk past the Museum of Hangovers in Zagreb on Dec 3, 2019. — AFP photos



A woman plays darts with special glasses simulating heavy drunkenness at the entrance of the Museum of Hangovers.

Zagreb's 'hangover museum' makes light of blurry nights

For those struggling to piece together the black holes of a boozy night, a one-of-a-kind museum in Zagreb is offering up some inspiration. The "Museum of Hangovers", which opened in the Croatian capital this month, is showcasing objects and amusing stories from drunken escapades around the globe. "We wanted to collect objects that people woke up with without knowing where they picked them up," explained 24-year-old Roberta Mikelic, who opened the museum with her boyfriend Rino Dubokovic.

The museum, which the duo says is the first of its kind, currently focuses solely on the "fun" side of these forgotten nights. But they plan to also delve into the dangers of binge drinking and blacking out in the future. The stories and paired objects, such as stop sign and a plastic potted plant, are laid out in a series of rooms meant to recreate the zig-zaggy walk home from the bar. Visitors start in the "Street" room, whose walls are covered in graffiti, before winding through the room of "Mirrors" that represent storefronts, past a home's "Garden" and into a messy "Room" where the party finishes the night. They are also invited to complete the sentence, "I woke up with..." on a chalkboard.

"Two stray dogs", "My ex", "a lot of pumpkins", read some of the contributions. The idea was sparked by a conversation in which a friend recalled waking up hangover with a bicycle pedal in his pocket, explained

Dubokovic. "I thought, as I listened to him, why not set up a place, a museum, with a collection of these objects and stories that will illustrate in a funny way these evenings of drunkenness and the hangover the next day," he said.

'Bad memories'

In one story a young man describes making it to his front-door in the early morning and flashing an ID card to his father, a policeman dressed for work. The boozier thought he was entering another club. His dad "let me inside the house. However, I was not allowed to go out for a while," he wrote. "If you wake up on the balcony of an elderly home, you know you've had a good night!" writes a Bulgarian about a night out in the Netherlands.

So far the museum is drawing a steady flow of visitors, mostly on the younger side. "I'm very impressed but also very horrified because it brings back very bad memories, or good memories at the same time," chuckled Andrew Hardie, a 29-year-old tourist from Edinburgh. The dangers of binge drinking - from adverse health effects to injuries - are not mentioned. According to the World Health Organization, the harmful use of alcohol leads to 3.3 million deaths annually. Among people between the age of 20 and 39, nearly a quarter of deaths are attributable to excessive drinking.



A man visits the Museum of Hangovers.



Roberta Mikelic, co-owner of the Museum of Hangovers.

The museum's founders say they plan to create a "dark room" where these risks will be explored, and where warnings will be displayed. For now, museum-goers are offered a glass of local brandy on arrival and a chance to play darts with goggles that simulate the effects of inebriation. If they hit the bulls-eye, they can enter for free. So far, everyone has had to pay. — AFP



Rino Dubokovic, co-owner of the Museum of Hangovers.



A room in the Museum of Hangovers.

Director urges Bollywood stars to break silence over citizenship law, violence



One of Bollywood's leading directors called on its three superstar actors to break their silence about a new citizenship law that has triggered riots in India, saying they could influence millions of fans. At least 21 people have died since crowds took to the streets enraged by the Hindu nationalist-led government's legislation, which critics say discriminates against Muslims.

The violence and the political storm raging around it has posed a dilemma for a film industry that is dominated by Muslim actors, directors and crew but caters for India's broader, predominantly Hindu population. A handful of figures have spoken out against the law and the violence, some at rallies in Mumbai, the heart of Bollywood. But none of its three leading stars - Aamir Khan, Salman Khan and Shah Rukh Khan - have made public statements. All three are Muslim.

"I am really angry at anyone who has not spoken out," director Anubhav Sinha, a critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, told Reuters. "These three actors and their fan following is something else. One word from them can influence millions," added Sinha, who directed Shah Rukh Khan in the 2011 film "Ra One". He said it did not matter what they said about the law or the violence, just that they contributed to the debate. "I am not saying they should agree with me or others. Their opinion can be the opposite of what we have."

None of the three Khans, who are not related, responded to Reuters requests for comment. Industry insiders say the lack of comments or condemnations by some of the industry's biggest names points to a broad cultural difference from Hollywood - where actors regularly take up political causes and criticize the government. "In America, (President Donald) Trump cannot use the government machinery to go after actors who disagree with him, but here, that fear is very much there," film critic and journalist Rajeev Masand told Reuters.

Modi has regularly appeared alongside actors and film industry figures at public events. The industry has, in turn, produced films that some critics have said approached political endorsements. Three movies have appeared this year with lead actors in prime ministerial roles, including a biopic titled "PM Narendra Modi". Actress Sayani Gupta - who appeared with Shah Rukh Khan in his 2015 film "Fan" - last week retweeted a selfie that popular young actors including Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt took with Modi at an event. She added the message: "The time has come to speak up guys." A representative for Ranveer Singh said he was not available for comment while Bhatt's spokeswoman did not immediately respond.

For protesters, especially those at Jamia Millia University in New Delhi, where Shah Rukh Khan was enrolled in his youth, his silence feels like a betrayal. "Someone like him staying silent is unacceptable," said literature student Zoya Nadeem Azmi. — Reuters

Classifieds

Wednesday, December 25, 2019



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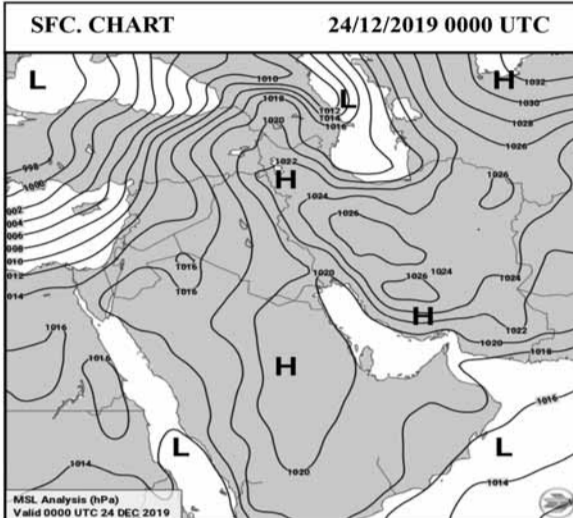


Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 66819 - 66817
Fax: (+965) 24348714
www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light variable wind changing to light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Cold with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 06 - 30 km/h with a chance for mist forming over some areas.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 24/12/2019 0000 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	21 °C	11 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	21 °C	05 °C			
ABDALY	21 °C	06 °C			
BUBYAN	19 °C	08 °C			
JAHRA	22 °C	08 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C			
SALMIYAH	19 °C	13 °C			
AHMADI	16 °C	14 °C			
NUWAISIB	24 °C	08 °C			
WAFRA	23 °C	05 °C			
SALMY	21 °C	06 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Wednesday	12/25	Fair	21 °C	07 °C	SE	18 - 38 km/h
Thursday	12/26	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	23 °C	11 °C	SE-S	12 - 40 km/h
Friday	12/27	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear later on	23 °C	09 °C	SE-NW	08 - 30 km/h
Saturday	12/28	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	21 °C	10 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 35 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:14
Sunrise	06:39
Zuhr	11:47
Asr	14:37
Sunset	16:55
Isha	18:18

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	20 °C
MIN. Temp.	06 °C
MAX. RH	92 %
MIN. RH	29 %
MAX. Wind	W 21 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Fernandes Joseph Lawrence, holder of Indian Passport No J4441403, having permanent address at Janata Colony, House No. GSG 58, Worli Village, Mumbai 400-030, Maharashtra, India, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Given name: Joseph Lawrence and Surname: Fernandes. (C 5697)

I, Abdul Majeed Abdul Sattar, holder of Indian Passport No. S4690318 do hereby change my name to given name: Abdul Sattar, Surname: Abdul Majeed for all purpose. I also undertake of effect the change in all my other public documents. (C 5696)

I, Thodeentavida Aslam Edam, with given name as Thodeentavida and Surname as Aslam Edam, son of Moidu, holder of Indian Passport No. P0723755, issued at Kuwait on 19/07/2016, Civil ID No.

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Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Turkish Airlines	1884918
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22456700
Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073

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Flight Schedule

Arrival Flights on Wednesday 25/12/2019				Departure Flights on Wednesday 25/12/2019			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
FEG	441	Asyut	00:05	AIC	988	Hyderabad/Chennai	00:05
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	JZR	713	Sohag	00:10
THY	772	Istanbul	00:20	MSC	412	Asyut	00:15
JZR	254	Amman	00:20	MSR	615	Cairo	00:30
DLH	625	Dammam	00:50	FDB	072	Dubai	00:30
KAC	102	London	00:50	BBC	044	Dhaka	00:40
JZR	734	Cairo	01:00	FEG	342	Sohag	01:05
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:00	JZR	723	Alexandria	01:05
MSR	618	Alexandria	01:35	IGO	409	Delhi	01:10
UAE	853	Dubai	01:40	JZR	1758	Kochi	01:10
KLM	446	Bahrain	01:45	KAC	677	Dubai	01:50
THY	1464	Istanbul	01:50	THY	773	Istanbul	01:50
KKK	1268	Istanbul	01:55	DLH	625	Frankfurt	01:50
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	KAC	417	Manila	02:00
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	KAC	285	Dhaka	02:00
KAC	414	Bangkok	02:40	JZR	363	Colombo	02:00
THY	1404	AYT	02:45	KAC	111	Doha	02:10
PGT	860	Istanbul	02:50	MSR	619	Alexandria	02:35
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:50	THY	765	Istanbul	02:50
JZR	402	Lahore	02:55	KKK	1269	Istanbul	02:55
KAC	156	Istanbul	02:55	ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
RJA	648	Amman	03:05	KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:10
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05	UAE	854	Dubai	03:30
OMA	643	Muscat	03:05	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:00
NIA	1604	Luxor	03:10	OMA	644	Muscat	04:05
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	NIA	1404	Sohag	04:10
KAC	418	Manila	03:20	QTR	1087	Doha	04:15
QTR	1076	Doha	03:30	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:00	PGT	861	Istanbul	04:20
KAC	382	Delhi	04:05	KAC	JZR	1735	Cairo
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	RBG	1152	Alexandria	05:00
RBG	1153	Asyut	04:10	JZR	1077	Doha	05:00
ETH	3424	Bahrain	04:15	OHY	351	Istanbul	05:00
KAC	796	Madinah	04:25	MSR	575	Sharm el-Sheikh	05:00
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:25	KAC	502	Beirut	05:10
JZR	1738	Cairo	04:45	QTR	1072	Doha	05:15
JZR	404	Hyderabad	04:50	KAC	103	Damascus	05:20
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:05	ETH	3425	Addis Ababa	05:45
FDB	069	Dubai	05:05	THY	1465	Istanbul	06:00
IGO	1759	Delhi	05:10	FDB	070	Dubai	06:00
THY	770	Istanbul	05:20	IGO	1765	Delhi	06:10
JZR	502	Mumbai	05:25	RBG	216	Sohag	06:15
KAC	344	Chennai	05:30	THY	771	Istanbul	06:30
RBG	215	Sohag	05:35	GFA	212	Bahrain	06:50
UAE	873	Dubai	05:40	RJA	649	Amman	07:00
KAC	552	Cairo	05:45	UAE	874	Dubai	07:10
JZR	112	Doha	05:50	KAC	167	Paris	07:15
BAW	157	London	06:10	JZR	121	Dubai	07:15
JZR	708	Luxor	06:15	KAC	113	Doha	07:30
KAC	284	Dhaka	06:15	KAC	126	Rome	08:00
KAC	714	Sohag	06:20	KAC	171	Frankfurt	08:00
KAC	678	Dubai	06:40	JZR	211	Jeddah	08:00
KAC	206	Islamabad	06:50	BAW	156	London	08:00
KAC	302	Mumbai	07:05	IGO	1767	Mumbai	08:10
IGO	1766	Kochi	07:10	JZR	151	Mashhad	08:15
KAC	358	Dubai	07:25	FDB	054	Dubai	08:35
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	KAC	539	Sharm el-Sheikh	08:50
JZR	724	Alexandria	07:50	KAC	501	Beirut	08:50
KAC	354	Bengaluru	08:00	KAC	545	Cairo	08:50
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	KAC	561	Amman	08:55
KAC	332	Trivandrum	08:05	KAC	613	Bahrain	09:00
KAC	384	Delhi	08:10	KAC	117	New York	09:05
UAE	855	Dubai	08:25	KAC	511	Mashhad	09:05
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:50	QTR	1085	Doha	09:10
OMA	641	Muscat	09:00	KAC	787	Jeddah	09:15
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:00	KAC	671	Dubai	09:15
IRA	665	Shiraz	09:15	KAC	157	Istanbul	09:35
QTR	1070	Doha	09:20	KAC	773	Riyadh	09:40
GOW	061	CNN	09:30	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:40
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	JZR	731	Cairo	09:45
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	UAE	856	Dubai	09:50
JZR	410	Delhi	09:50	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	09:55
SYR	341	Damascus	10:00	OMA	642	Muscat	10:00
AKB	889	Mangalore/Bahrain	10:20	KAC	101	London	10:05
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	IRA	664	Shiraz	10:15
MEA	404	Beirut	10:55	GOW	062	Colombo	10:30
QTR	1074	Doha	11:00	QTR	1071	Doha	10:30
KIS	6032	Mashhad	11:00	KAC	617	Doha	10:40
JZR	1736	Cairo	11:05	IGO	1754	Ahmedabad	10:40
JZR	114	Doha	11:10	FDB	056	Dubai	10:40
IGO	1755	CNN	11:30	SYR	342	Damascus	11:00
NIA	1405	Sohag	11:30	JZR	221	Riyadh	11:20
JZR	122	Dubai	11:45	AXB	890	Mangalore	11:20
KIS	6032	Mashhad	11:45	GFA	214	Bahrain	11:35
TBZ	6605	Mashhad	11:55	JZR	305	Istanbul	11:45
IAW	157	Al Najaf	12:00	MEA	405	Beirut	11:55
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30	KIS	6033	Cairo	12:00
RBG	553	Alexandria	12:30	JZR	213	Mashhad	12:05
THY	766	Istanbul	12:30				
KAC	614	Bahrain	12:30				



Palestinian fishermen retrieve their fishing nets back from the Mediterranean Sea at sunset in Gaza City on Monday. — AFP

Iraqi protesters' ire at Iran extends to goods boycott

KARBALA: Anger over Iran's stranglehold on Baghdad's political system has helped propel an unprecedented protest movement - and now Iraqi activists are hitting the Islamic Republic where it hurts, with a goods boycott. Tehran has held enormous sway over its neighbor since dictator Saddam Hussein was toppled by a US-led invasion in 2003. And that influence has spilled over into the commercial arena, with exports from Iran to Iraq ten times those moving in the opposite direction.

Using the slogan "let them rot", protesters who have taken to the streets since Oct 1 to demand wholesale political change are now shunning everything Iranian - from fruit to sugary drinks. For 24-year-old protester Hatem Karim, the boycott kills two birds with one stone. "It allows us to create jobs for Iraqis and means our money stays in the country", he told AFP.

There are even hopes the boycott could help revive domestic industry, battered by forty years of intermittent war, a decade of sanctions under Saddam, and ineffectual policy since the invasion. "We must boycott all foreign goods to support our own national production", Karim urged. Impromptu open air markets at protest encampments have stands offering "Made in Iraq" goods to patriotic consumers, in a country where one in four young people are jobless.

Only Turkey exports more to Iraq than Iran, which sends products including cars, dairy and fresh produce, amounting to a total annual value of around \$9 billion. Iraq is the OPEC cartel's second biggest oil producer, but more than half of all hydrocarbon revenues have been siphoned off by crooked politicians and their cronies under recent administrations. The private sector is almost non-existent and industry is on its knees, with

the non-oil trade balance in heavy deficit.

Numerous factories that shut during the 1990s trade embargo or because of war - the latest devastating conflict came against Islamic State militants from 2014 to late 2017 - have simply never reopened. Iraqi factories lack the capacity to supply national demand, warns economist Ahmad Tabaqchali at the Institute of Regional and International Studies in Sulaymaniyah. "Either they are too small, or they are not profitable", because there is no private sector to cover the basic needs of 40 million Iraqis. "Nearly everything is imported", he told AFP.

And if the boycott of Iranian goods escalates, the main beneficiary will not be Iraqi industry, he says. Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Jordan will likely gain the most. Amman recently signed an agreement with Baghdad exempting taxes on the export of some products. Local producers are demanding the state drastically increase import taxes to protect them. They complain they cannot compete with Iran, whose exports have received support from a currency that has been in free-fall since the US reimposed sanctions last year.

But the young protesters are determined to direct their apparently boundless energy into changing all that. They have launched Facebook groups and film adverts for locally produced fizzy drinks with sparkling studio quality. "We want a renaissance at all levels, including trade", says one protester. In the Shiite holy city of Karbala, some 100 km south of Baghdad, Bassem Zakri looks at yoghurts and white cheeses leaving his factory's production line. The increasingly revered words "Made in Iraq" appear on each pot. Production has increased five-fold since the start of the protests on October 1, reaching forty tonnes per day, he said. — AFP



KARBALA: An Iraqi protester flashes the victory gesture while standing by a makeshift roadblock in this central Iraqi holy shrine city yesterday. — AFP

Putin accuses Poland of colluding with Hitler

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin upped the ante in a war of words with Europe yesterday, accusing Poland of colluding with Hitler and of anti-Semitism. Tensions are running high between Moscow and Warsaw, with NATO and EU member Poland fearing what it has described as Russian military adventurism and imperialist tendencies.

Speaking to military top brass and using bad language at one point, Putin said that Poland was in cahoots with Hitler during World War II. "Essentially they colluded with Hitler. This is clear from documents, archival documents," Putin said in an emotional end-of-year speech at the defense ministry.

Resorting to bad language, Putin said a war-time Polish ambassador allegedly promised to put up a statue of Hitler in Warsaw for his pledges to send Jews to Africa. "A

b*****d, an anti-Semitic pig, you cannot put it any other way," Putin said, referring to what he said were the diaries of the Polish ambassador in Germany. "He expressed full solidarity with Hitler in his anti-Semitic views," the Russian leader said. He slammed what he called attempts to erase the memory of Soviet victory in countries in Moscow's former sphere of influence. "It is people like those who negotiated with Hitler - it is people like that who today are tearing down monuments to the liberating warriors, the Red Army soldiers who freed Europe and the European people from the Nazis," Putin fumed. "Little has changed and we should take this into account when we build our armed forces, among other things."

Russia is developing state-of-the-art weapons and is no longer playing a game of catch-up with the West, Putin said. "This is a unique situation in our modern history: They are playing catch-up with us," he added. He once again lashed out at the European Parliament over a resolution it passed in September urging Russia to come to terms with its Stalinist totalitarian past, saying it had lacked the same scrutiny as Nazi crimes. —AFP

Ahmad Al-Dhafiri, a man with special needs, amid allegations of torture. New Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh has already ordered an investigation into the incident. He vowed he will take action against those proven guilty.

MPs formed a five-member committee to investigate allegations that appointments in oil companies violated Kuwaiti laws. The Assembly however rejected a draft law calling to amend the country's electoral constituencies and the method of voting by raising to two the number of candidates a voter can select in general elections. MP Mohammad Al-Dallal claimed wide-scale corruption is taking place right now with some hopefuls moving voter registrations from one constituency to another to boost their chances of winning.

The Assembly also elected a number of temporary panels, including committees for the environment, human rights, housing, youth and sports and human resource development.

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia sign deal...

Continued from Page 1

After a meeting with HH the Amir, the Saudi minister affirmed that what links the two countries is greater than borders - history and brotherly ties. He also pointed out that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman played a prominent role in reaching this agreement and the memorandum of understanding. KUNA news agency reported that the two countries also signed an agreement on the demarcation of land and maritime borders in the neutral zone.

The two fields were pumping some 500,000 barrels per day before production was halted, first at Khafji in October 2014 and then at Wafra seven months later, over a dispute between the neighbors. Riyadh said at the time that the decision was due to environmental issues. The oil produced in the neutral zone in the border area is shared equally between the two nations.

Khafji, an offshore field, was jointly operated by Kuwait Gulf Oil Co and Saudi Aramco Gulf Operations, while the onshore Wafra field was operated by KGOC and Saudi Arabian Chevron. Kuwait had blamed Saudi Arabia for unilaterally halting output at Khafji, noting it was entitled to five years' notice under a joint agreement signed in 1965. The two countries have been negotiating to resolve the row and resume production since June 2015.

Yesterday's agreement comes as oil prices are under pressure due to abundant reserves and weak global economic growth. Continued soft pricing has prompted OPEC and its allies to make deeper production cuts starting next month. OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia pumps just under 10 million barrels per day (bpd), while Kuwait

produces around 2.7 million bpd.

"The most important point is the final demarcation of the entire border ... in addition to defining sovereignty on both sides of the divided zone which translates into a real achievement," Saudi economist Fadl Alboainain said. A source familiar with the negotiations told Reuters that the talks had turned serious in October and the breakthrough came at a meeting of Gulf Cooperation Council countries in Riyadh this month.

"During the latest GCC meeting in Riyadh there were very clear signs that the negotiations told Reuters that the talks had turned serious in October and the breakthrough came at a meeting of Gulf Cooperation Council countries in Riyadh this month. "The agreement was reached after a lengthy process in which a large team of political, technical and legal representatives from both sides were involved. "The two countries are not in a rush to resume production from the neutral zone oilfields due to the production cuts agreement so it will take easily up to six months to resume production," Kuwaiti oil market analyst Kamel Al-Harami said.

President of Saudi Arabian Chevron Mohammed Al-Marri said that the agreement reached between the governments of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait embodies the strong ties that bind the two countries, considering this event as historic. He affirmed that Chevron Arabia has worked in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait for more than 30 years and although production operations were interrupted, Chevron maintained strong ties with KGOC. CEO of KGOC Abdullah Al-Sumaiti said the Kuwaiti and Saudi partners have maintained the facility during the past five years, and many plans have been made to resume production and preserve assets and profits.

US oil major Chevron said it expects the Wafra field to return to full production within 12 months. A former senior official in KCOC said he expects production to resume in Khafji first. "The Khafji oilfield will most likely be the first to resume production as its equipment is far better maintained than Wafra," he said.

New ministers take oath in Assembly...

Continued from Page 1

MPs also agreed to debate today a deal to acquire French Caracal helicopters for one billion euros over alleged technical problems with the aircraft. The lawmakers however rejected a motion to form a committee to probe allegations of forgery in Kuwaiti citizenship, as the government abstained from the vote. Ghanem said he will continue to work on this important issue in order to find an appropriate solution.

The Assembly also agreed to form a three-MP committee to investigate the death in police custody of

Sports

Norway's Windingstad storms to first win in Alta Badia parallel slalom

Austria's Leitinger took his first podium finish in third

ALTA BADIA: Norway's Rasmus Windingstad stormed to his first World Cup win as the favourites struggled in the parallel giant slalom night race at Alta Badia in northern Italy on Monday. Windingstad finished 0.45sec ahead of Germany's Stefan Luitz in the final under floodlights in the Dolomites. The 26-year-old blitzed down the hill to deny Luitz a second World Cup win after the giant slalom in Beaver Creek last season.

Austria's Roland Leitinger took his first podium finish in third, ahead of Norway's Leif Kristian Nestvold-Haugen, in the head-to-head duel on runs that are side by side. "Absolutely amazing, I can't say that I'd been expecting to win any time soon," said Windingstad.

"My team is more than 80 percent of the reason I'm here. I would probably have quit many years ago if it wasn't for the chemistry in our team. "This year we've new younger guys. I'm getting to be one of the more experienced ones, and it's working out really well. "You try to be as honest as possible with yourself concerning potential or possible goals. "Today I just felt great.

"We had parallel training a few days ago and I was definitely not the fastest one. I think we have something to look forward to in this discipline going forward."

Windingstad's only previous podium finish was second place in the giant slalom at Kranjska Gora in Slovenia last March. But the skier who made his World Cup debut back in February 2014 said he had been boosted by his seventh place in Sunday's giant slalom in Alta Badia.

"My seventh place was my third best result ever in Giant Slalom," he said. "Of course I took confidence from

this race, but this is a completely different thing. Sometimes you have a good day and sometimes you don't. "For sure today I had a really good day."

Reigning world champion Henrik Kristoffersen of Norway, winner of Sunday's giant slalom, finished seventh, with France's Alexis Pinturault a disappointing 25th. Pinturault complained of picking up an adductor injury in a race he likened to "a lottery".

In the final standings, three quarters of the skiers on the "red" run had the edge over their rivals on the parallel "blue" run. "I didn't have good races but the conditions were far from easy," continued the three-time Olympic medalist. "There were several injuries because the track was not ready at all. "This parallel format does not delight many people. "It's a lottery! Just look at the podiums, the regular athletes usually in the first places are not there." The 25-year-old Kristoffersen holds the overall World Cup lead 67 points ahead of Austria's Vincent Kriechmayr, with Pinturault third 77 points behind the Norwegian. Pinturault said he would have to decide whether he is fit for the World Cup combined in Bormio next weekend, an event in which he is the reigning world champion. "It's difficult to say, it could be a strain but we hope that it is not more serious like a tear," he said. "I'll see in the next few days how the pain develops, then we will decide whether or not to do an ultra-sound. "But I don't want to be too alarmist."

The World Cup continues with two downhills in Bormio, in the Italian Alps, including the cancelled race from Val Gardena, on Friday and Saturday, as well as Sunday's combined. — AFP



ALTA BADIA: Norway's Rasmus Windingstad reacts after crossing the finish line of the second run of the Men's Giant Slalom of the FIS Alpine World Cup in Alta Badia, Dolomites. — AFP

Moorar to be All Blacks assistant coach

WELLINGTON: The All Blacks received an early Christmas present yesterday with Welsh club Scarlets agreeing to release coach Brad Moorar for an undisclosed sum. New Zealand Rugby announced.

Moorar, who was only six months into a three-year contract with Scarlets, will become an assistant under Ian Foster in the new All Blacks coaching set up. It is understood the Welsh club had put a price tag of around 200,000 pounds (around US\$260,000/233,000 euro) on Moorar, who joined the club after being part of the highly successful coaching team at Super Rugby champions Canterbury Crusaders.

"We're pleased to announce that we have reached an agreement with Scarlets which will see Brad return to New Zealand in June at the conclusion of the club's European competitions," New Zealand Rugby's head of professional rugby Chris Lendrum said. "We recognise the difficult position it put the club in, but they, like us, also recognised that it was a fantastic opportunity for Brad — the chance to coach his country." Lendrum said details of the agreement between New Zealand Rugby and Scarlets were confidential, but he confirmed "it did include the payment of some compensation" for the Welsh club. Foster, who took the helm of the All Blacks after Steve

Hansen stepped down following their semi-final loss to England in the World Cup two months ago said he was "delighted to have Brad confirmed to join us".

Moorar will look after the attack in the new All Blacks coaching set-up, with former Wellington Hurricanes coach John Plumtree the forwards' coach. Greg Feek is the new scrum coach while Scott McLeod remains in charge of defence. The 45-year-old Moorar was the attack coach for the Crusaders during their run of three Super Rugby championships from 2017-19 and previously worked in South Africa as backs coach for the Southern Kings Super Rugby side. — AFP

Dallaglio using rugby to save lost children

LONDON: Lawrence Dallaglio's towering rugby career originated through a sense of wanting to belong after a family tragedy and he is now using that experience to help give hope to children excluded from mainstream education. Dallaglio — a pivotal figure when England won the 2003 Rugby World Cup — said his family was "blown apart" when his only sibling, 19-year-old Francesca, was one of 51 people who drowned after the pleasure boat Marchioness sank in the Thames in August 1989.

The 85-times capped former backrow forward was just 16 at the time and admits he had a couple of years where, deeply affected by his sister's loss and the impact it had on his parents, he was "definitely errant". "You know, if you lose a member of your family it blows your family apart," Dallaglio told AFP.

"I had a couple of years where I was really struggling. "It was not just me and my mom and my dad, the families of every other victim of the Marchioness were as well, I would imagine.

"I then saw my parents (Vincenzo and Eileen) and they were really struggling, as you'd imagine, when you bury one of your own children."

He was put back on the right path when he joined the then London-based rugby club Wasps.

"It was not because I wanted to play rugby, I know it sounds odd," he said. "I joined the rugby club because I needed a sense of belonging, camaraderie, I needed someone, a family. "The lovely thing about rugby, bizarrely, is it welcomes everyone.

"They (his parents) came to watch me and they felt something very strong and it brought a smile back to their face. "That was the reason why in so many ways I owe rugby an enormous amount because it brought my family back together."

Dallaglio, who drily remarks that rugby owes him a few teeth in a career that also saw him undergo 14 operations, drew on that experience and set up Dallaglio RugbyWorks six years ago.

He is justifiably proud it is now part of the curriculum at 83 schools nationwide — schools that act as a safety net for pupils excluded from mainstream education. His foundation is currently helping over 650 children aged 14-17 and the cost is considerable — a three-year programme costs Dallaglio RugbyWorks up to £20,000 (\$26,000) per school per year.

"The fun part for them is playing rugby," he says, but then they get them into the classroom and work on "things like CV writing, interview workshops, just general confidence". The aim, or as Dallaglio puts it the "flag in the sand", is helping them into full-time employment. He claims children that have passed through the scheme have an 88 percent success rate in finding a job compared with 50 percent nationally.

According to RugbyWorks figures, each year on average 2,720 young people between the ages of 14-16 are excluded from mainstream education in Britain. A

"It is about opening their eyes and giving them a different perspective," said Dallaglio, prior to a session of touch rugby for one of the schools in the project at the Crystal Palace National Sports Centre in south London.

"It is about putting your arms around them, building long-term care and trust and teaching them about not only respect to other people, but for themselves as well." Dallaglio — whose late mother liked to refer to him as an emerald and Francesca as a diamond — says he wonders whether headmasters in mainstream schools are too quick to expel students. — AFP

Kuwait continues its domination in Arab Fencing Championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait continued its domination of the third day competition of the Arab Fencing Championship in the open category for men and women by winning two gold, one silver and one bronze during the championship which concludes today.

Khalid Abdulkareem Yousuf won the foil gold medal by beating Yasser Ali Nasser in the final match 15-14, leaving the bronze medal to Yaqoub Al-Shatti and Qatar's Ali Owaidah.

Reem Al-Shatti won the individual women's Epee gold medal, beating Lebanon's Rita Abu Judeh, while UAE's Al-Anoud Al-Saadi, and Syria's Najlaa Al-Sharqi took the bronze.

Country	Gold	Silver	Bronze
Kuwait	4	2	2
UAE	1	-	3
Syria	1	-	1
Lebanon	-	3	-
Saudi Arabia	-	1	-
Iraq	-	-	-4
Qatar	-	-	1



Kuwait Fencing Association Board member, Head of National Teams Committee Dr Mohammad Tandeel lauded Kuwaiti fencers achievements so far.

He said the achievements were made due to hard joint work year long, and plans by the board under the supervision of National Teams Technical Director

Abdulkareem Al-Shamlan.

He congratulated the athletes for their achievements, and hoped current efforts be crowned by Yousuf Al-Shamlan, Abdelaziz Al-Shatti, and Yasser Nasser qualifying for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

Burgan Bank announces its sponsorship to 'Equestrian Sports Club'



KUWAIT: Burgan Bank has announced the sponsorship of the "Equestrian Sports Club" activities for the season 2019-2020, as part of its ongoing commitment to support young athletes, Kuwait's sports culture and elevate its legacy locally and internationally. The long-standing partnership between the Bank and the renowned Club fall within the framework of social responsibility.

The sponsorship of the national equestrian tradition comes as part of Burgan Bank's commitment to enhance Kuwaiti heritage and sports among the community. Ensuring more opportunities to demonstrate their skills and capabilities, Burgan Bank is also proud to facilitate

Kuwait's talented youth with such high-level platforms. Participants and trainers are instilled with perseverance and discipline through such contexts which demand rigorous training and physical activity.

Burgan Bank's partnership with the "Equestrian Sports Club" continues throughout the year of 2020 wherein a comprehensive schedule of activities and multiple tournaments such as jumping competitions and the Amir's Cup, which is the largest event in the equestrian sports arena witnessed in the presence of prominent and distinguished guests. Burgan Bank will continue to participate and support similar sporting events

and athletic activities to accommodate and encourage talented youth.

The Bank's support of this initiative falls under its dynamic full-fledged community program entitled 'ENGAGE' - Together to be the change. This program sheds light on important aspects affecting every segment of the society by promoting social welfare through educational, cultural and health driven initiatives. Burgan Bank's approach to 'ENGAGE' begins with a vital principle that as a leading Kuwaiti financial institution, its conduct and policies should be aligned with the needs and interests of the community.

Sports

Leafs notch high-scoring win over visiting Hurricanes

Blues score four in first period, cruise past Kings

TORONTO: Mitch Marner had two goals and three assists, and the Toronto Maple Leafs scored twice in six seconds to take the lead during the third period on the way to defeating the visiting Carolina Hurricanes 8-6 on Monday afternoon. John Tavares added a goal and two assists for Toronto. Auston Matthews, Tyson Barrie and Jason Spezza each had a goal and an assist, and William Nylander and Pierre Engvall each had a goal. Zach Hyman had three assists for the Maple Leafs, who have won five straight. Frederik Andersen made 34 saves for Toronto. Martin Necas had two goals and two assists for the Hurricanes, and Erik Haula added two goals and an assist. Brock McGinn and Andrei Svechnikov also scored goals while Lucas Wallmark and Ryan Dzingel each had two assists.

BLUES 4, KINGS 1

Brayden Schenn scored two goals in a first-period onslaught as visiting St. Louis extended its winning streak to six games with a victory over Los Angeles. Jaden Schwartz and Vince Dunn also scored in the opening period as the Blues improved to 2-0-0 on their current three-game road trip after winning all four of their games on a homestand that ended last week. Jordan Binnington made 29 saves as the Blues improved to 2-0-0 against the Kings this season after rolling to a 5-2 victory at home on Oct. 24. Alex Iafallo scored a first-period power-play goal for the Kings, who lost their third consecutive game (0-2-1).

AVALANCHE 7, GOLDEN KNIGHTS 3

Pierre-Edouard Bellemare scored two goals, and Valeri Nichushkin added a goal and assist to lead Colorado to a victory in Las Vegas. It was the first two-goal game of Bellemare's career. Gabriel Landeskog, playing in his 600th NHL game, scored a goal for the Avalanche, as did Mikko Rantanen, Matt Nieto and Nazem Kadri. J.T. Compher added two assists while Pavel Francouz had 29 saves to improve to 9-0-1 in his past 11 starts. Max Pacioretty, William Carrier and Ryan Reaves scored for Vegas. Marc-Andre Fleury finished with 31 saves while allowing seven goals in a regular-season game for just the second time in his career.

DEVILS 7, BLACKHAWKS 1

Jack Hughes snapped a nearly two-month goal-scoring drought in the first period to begin a stretch of seven unanswered goals by New Jersey, which enjoyed its most lopsided win in more than a year by routing host Chicago. Devils goalie Mackenzie Blackwood made 32 saves. P.K. Subban scored the go-ahead goal 51 seconds into the second period for the Devils, who also received goals from Damon Severson, John Hayden, Travis Zajac, Blake Coleman and Pavel Zacha. New Jersey hadn't won a game by six goals since blanking the Washington Capitals 6-0 on Oct. 11, 2018. Zack Smith scored early in the first period for the Blackhawks, who absorbed their most lopsided loss since falling to the Florida Panthers 7-0 on March 25, 2017.

SENATORS 3, SABRES 1

Jean-Gabriel Pageau scored two goals, and Ottawa defeated visiting Buffalo. Brady Tkachuk had an empty-net goal and two assists, and Craig Anderson made 43 saves for the Senators in his first game since Dec. 7, when he sustained a lower-body injury against the Philadelphia Flyers. Zengus Girgensons scored for Buffalo, which is 1-3-1 in its past five games, and Linus Ullmark made 27 saves. Jack Eichel didn't produce a point after he managed at least one in 18 consecutive games played. His streak officially ended after 17 games when he sat out Thursday due to an upper-body injury.

FLYERS 5, RANGERS 1

Travis Sanheim scored two goals and added one assist while Kevin Hayes scored two goals to carry host Philadelphia past New York for its fourth straight win. Nicolas Aube-Kubel scored one goal while James van Riemsdyk and Justin Braun had two assists apiece for the Flyers, who scored five unanswered goals after falling behind 1-0. Flyers goaltender Carter Hart made 34 saves and improved to 11-1-2 at home. Jesper Fast scored the lone goal for the Rangers. New York goaltender Henrik Lundqvist stopped 25 shots.

WILD 3, FLAMES 0

Devan Dubnyk turned aside all 22 shots he faced,



LOS ANGELES: Blake Lizotte #46 of the Los Angeles Kings stick handles between Jacob de la Rose #61 and Alexander Steen #20 of the St. Louis Blues during the second period at Staples Center yesterday in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

BRUINS 7, CAPITALS 3

Patrice Bergeron scored twice, and David Krejci had a goal and two assists to lead Boston past visiting Washington. The Bruins scored four goals in the first period, during which the Capitals committed five penalties. Brad Marchand and Charlie Coyle had a goal and an assist, and Jake DeBrusk and Anders Bjork also tallied as the Bruins picked up their second win in their past 10 games (2-4-4). Tuukka Rask made 39 saves. Alex Ovechkin, Lars Eller and Garnet Hathaway scored for the Capitals, who lost for only the third time in their past 13 games. Braden Holtby (seven saves) was pulled from the net by Washington at the end of the opening period. Ilya Samsonov took over and allowed a goal on four shots the rest of the way. — Reuters

and Joel Eriksson Ek scored in his return from injured reserve as Minnesota shut out Calgary in Saint Paul, Minn. Luke Kunin also tallied in the second period and set up Eric Staal's empty-net goal in the third as the Wild enter the NHL's holiday break on a 12-4-4 run. Minnesota had allowed 19 goals over the previous four games (1-3-0) but answered a 6-0 shellacking by Winnipeg in its last contest with a sterling performance against Calgary. Dubnyk was making his third appearance following a pronounced absence due to a serious health issue involving his wife, Jennifer. The 33-year-old followed up a relief appearance against the Jets by turning aside all seven shots he faced in the third period to preserve his first shutout of the season and the 32nd of his career.

Red Bull Off-road Junior Program unleashes the champs of tomorrow

KUWAIT: The three stars of the future representing the Red Bull Off-Road Junior Program in 2020 are Blade Hildebrand, Mitch Guthrie Jr and Seth Quintero. This trio of young, raw-talented and hungry drivers will compete at a worldwide calendar of famous off-road races in the coming year under the stars and stripes banner of Red Bull Off-Road Team USA.

The Red Bull Off-Road Team USA off-roaders will travel the globe in 2020 to compete in iconic races. In their native North America they plan to race the Mint 400, Baja 500, Vegas to Reno and more. You'll also see the young drivers at international cross-country events such as the Silk Way Rally, Morocco Rally, Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge and the most extreme off-road race on the planet, the Dakar Rally.

The goal of the Red Bull Off-Road Junior Program is to scout, develop and grow the next generation of off-road champions. As well as being part of a professional team set-up, members of the program will also benefit from a mentor scheme that has proven so successful with the Red Bull Junior Team in open wheel racing.

The first appointment for Red Bull Off-Road Team USA will be the toughest rally of them all, the Dakar Rally. Blade Hildebrand and Mitch Guthrie Jr. will both be in Saudi Arabia racing the purpose built OT3 by Overdrive. The OT3 is the first prototype side-by-side (SxS) machine ever constructed specifically for rally-raid and cross-country. During testing its fearsome 1000cc rear-mounted turbo engine produced an impressive 177 horsepower and 290Nm of torque in its FIA version.

Even though Blade Hildebrand has just turned 21 years old, he's already a Dakar champion. The off-roader from California's Yucca Valley won the OP1 class at the 2019 Dakar and is ready to jump in his brand-new OT3 side-by-side (SxS) machine for another shot at glory. The OP1 race at Dakar covers a vehicle category based on the US off-road race SCORE Series that includes the Baja 1000.

Blade Hildebrand will also race the OT3 package at races in the United States next year. He'll be aiming to add to his two wins at the Laughlin Desert Classic and take full advantage of the opportunities being part of Red Bull Off-Road Team USA will give him.

"Having the right backing - the right group of people who want to see you succeed - is a big part of it. I think the main goal of everyone on the team is to step up. I don't want to sound cocky, but I want to go out there and win. That's the ultimate goal." - Blade Hildebrand

Making his Dakar debut in Saudi Arabia in January is 23-year-old Mitch Guthrie Jr. The native of Glendora, California is already an established name on the SxS racing scene in North America thanks to a stack of career wins: including the Baja 1000 (2017), Mint 400 (2017, 2019) and King of the Hammers (2018, 2019).

"I think that in 2020 and beyond this program is going to really raise a lot of awareness for people in the United States, letting them know what international racing is all about. And it's also going to build a lot of hype here for Dakar." - Mitch Guthrie Jr.

Mitch Guthrie Jr. will also race the OT3 by Overdrive



at the Dakar and other international cross-country rallies, but will represent Red Bull Off-Road Team USA in a Polaris RZR Turbo SxS when competing in North America. The turbocharged Polaris RZR has proven successful across a range of North American desert races, thanks in no small part to its 168 horsepower and cooling system designed to give reliable performance in harsh conditions.

The third member of Red Bull Off-Road Team USA is 17-year-old Seth Quintero, a bona fide phenom on the off-road racing scene. The resident of San Marcos, California won the youth UTV World Championship at age 11. Fast-forward to today and he's added two Pro UTV titles to his résumé. The teenager has also been crowned a World Off-Road Championship Series (WORCS) winner twice. He's recently made history by becoming the youngest ever driver to win the UTV Pro class in five Best In The Desert races. And he's just getting started...

"Red Bull Off-Road Team USA is a team that is going to allow for young kids like me to really progress in the sport. Having the opportunity to work with the best equipment and having the best people around me is definitely going to help me in my career in 2020 and beyond. For me to be chosen for this team at 17 years old is a real honor." - Seth Quintero

Just like Mitch Guthrie Jr., Seth Quintero will race a Polaris RZR Turbo at races in the USA (but in the Pro Production N/A class) and get behind of the wheel of an OT3 for international cross-country rallies once he

turns 18 years old.

As well as competing at top races worldwide as part of a professional team, the three members of the first-ever Red Bull Off-Road Junior Program have the chance to learn from some of the best in the business. Three-time Dakar car class winner Nasser Al-Attiyah has given his input into the OT3 machine that the team will drive at the Dakar and five-time Dakar bike race winner Cyril Despres is in place to mentor the trio throughout the season.

"We've already got to hang out with Cyril Despres. He was a legend standing in front of us, but he made us feel really comfortable. We were able to talk with him about any issues that we had." - Seth Quintero

It's going to be an action-packed year for Red Bull Off-Road Team USA as they criss-cross the globe to compete in illustrious races. You can follow their progress by watching Destination Dirt on Red Bull TV.

Destination Dirt will follow these young drivers throughout the season as they are thrown into a brand-new level of competition. Traveling across the globe to far-flung and exotic destinations such as Russia, Morocco, China and Saudi Arabia, the three must learn to stand on their own amidst unfamiliar cultures and grueling competition.

Although many were interested in joining the team, the selection of the three drivers was made through an internal process run by Red Bull and its industry experts. The drivers were picked based on a combination of past performance and future potential.

New Zealand look to Boulton in rare Boxing Day Test

MELBOURNE: New Zealand are hopeful of having pace spearhead Trent Boult back to help halt a rampant Australia in the Black Caps' first Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in more than 30 years. The veteran, suffering a side strain, was badly missed during the opening Test in Perth, when the visitors were thrashed by 296 runs in stifling conditions. But he has been toiling in the nets and expects to be ready for a rare appearance by his country on one of the best-known dates of the cricket calendar.

"I want to really embrace it and appreciate that stage for what it is," the left-armers told reporters of the special atmosphere that comes with a Boxing Day Test in the 100,000-capacity arena. "This is the stage that a lot of people dream of being on so to get this opportunity in my career, it's definitely something that I'm looking forward to."

"If I can tick all the right boxes with my body and get myself fit, then I can't wait to get out there," he added. A big crowd is expected with New Zealand fans snapping up thousands of tickets to witness the December 26 appearance by their team at one of cricket's most famous grounds.

Extra flights were reportedly scheduled between Auckland and Melbourne to cater for demand. The last time New Zealand faced Australia in a Boxing Day Test was 1987, before many of the current squad were born, with the home side holding on for a draw despite blistering bowling from legendary quick Richard Hadlee. What sort of wicket they find on Thursday is the great unknown. Only a fortnight ago, play was abandoned during a domestic Sheffield Shield game at the ground due to a dangerous pitch, with erratic bounce seeing balls rise sharply and unexpectedly to pummel the batsmen. Ground curator Matt Page has since been working to prepare a new pitch.

PATIENCE

Australia go into the second of three Tests without bowling kingpin Josh Hazlewood who was injured in Perth. James Pattinson is set to replace him as the third quick alongside Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc, who has been lethal this summer. "James Pattinson, we know what he brings to the team — he brings so much energy, bowls good pace, he's played a lot at the MCG," coach Justin Langer said. New Zealand will need everything in their arsenal to stymie Australia who have won all three Tests at home this summer after retaining the Ashes in England.

Starc and hard-working spinner Nathan Lyon have been instrumental, although it has been the batting exploits of number three Marnus Labuschagne that have been a revelation. The 25-year-old smashed a first-innings century in Perth — his third in a row — and a second-innings 50.

Australia had a scare this week when David Warner was struck on the hand during a net session and needed treatment, but Langer confirmed yesterday he would be fit. "There was a little concern for about two seconds, but then he saw the doctor and he's hitting balls again. He'll be ready to go," said the coach.

Boult said patience and consistency would be New Zealand's best weapons in Melbourne. "Basically, I think the same rules apply to a lot of batsmen," he said. "If you can kind of be patient and outlast them and try to put some pressure on them to draw the error, then that would be the starting point." — AFP

Sports

Rudiger racism row takes new twist amid reports of Son abuse

Tottenham insist any fan found guilty would receive a lifetime ban

LONDON: The latest racism row engulfing English football took a fresh turn Monday amid reports Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-min as well as Chelsea's Antonio Rudiger had been abused by spectators during Sunday's fractious London derby. Chelsea's 2-0 Premier League win at the Tottenham Hotspur stadium saw referee Anthony Taylor halt play during the second half when Rudiger complained of hearing monkey noises from spectators. Moments earlier, the Chelsea defender had been involved in a clash with Son that saw the South Korean sent off.

But late Monday a report on the website of Britain's Guardian newspaper said a Chelsea supporter had been arrested for racially abusing Son on Sunday. London's Metropolitan Police told AFP an arrest concerning a possible racially aggravated public order offence, without specifying if the person in question was a supporter of either club.

A force spokesman added: "Police were made aware of alleged racist chanting during the second half of the Tottenham vs Chelsea match on Sunday, 22 December. Officers will work with the club in an attempt to identify any people responsible."

Meanwhile Tottenham, having promised a thorough investigation of the Rudiger incident, said Monday their initial inquiries had failed to find a culprit despite "many hours" reviewing images from stadium video cameras and having professional lip-readers study the footage.

Tottenham insisted any fan found guilty would receive a lifetime ban, but stressed: "At this time, however, we should point out that our findings are inconclusive". Shortly after the stoppage brought about by Rudiger's complaint, Taylor halted play and spoke to both managers, Jose Mourinho and Frank Lampard, while an announcement over the stadium's public address system warned "racist behaviour among spectators is interfering with the game".

The announcement was repeated, with Tottenham saying

this had created a "misconception that any issue was ongoing" because Taylor had implemented the first stage of European governing body UEFA's protocol for dealing with racist incidents, rather than the equivalent Premier League regulation. After the match, Rudiger tweeted: "It's just such a shame that racism still exists in 2019. When will this nonsense stop?" the German added. England's Professional Footballers Association, called late Sunday for a government inquiry into racism within football, adding its members were "on the receiving end of the blatant racism that is currently rife in the UK, but they are not alone". A Downing Street spokesman responded Monday by condemning "racism of any kind. Clearly there remains more work to be done by the football authorities in tackling this issue and we are committed to working with them on this to stamp it out."

Sports minister Nigel Adams, following talks with football officials, said the government would wait to see how the game dealt with the issue "before deciding on any further action". UEFA chief Aleksander Ceferin insisted earlier this month his organisation was working to tackle the rising problem after several incidents across the continent including the hurling of racist abuse at England players during a match in Bulgaria.

But Ceferin has accused British Prime Minister Boris Johnson of fuelling the problem, a point echoed by former Manchester United and England defender Gary Neville. "We've just had a general election in this country with both main parties and the leaders of both main parties accused constantly of fuelling racism and accepting racism in their parties," Neville told Sky Sports on Sunday.

"Maybe we have to empower the players to walk off the pitch and stop the entertainment while it is happening," he added. Chelsea boss Lampard said any walk-off "would depend on what the players were feeling and saying".

"But I would be absolutely, 100 percent behind them if (they wanted to walk off)," he said. Sunday's ugly scenes



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's South Korean striker Son Heung-Min (C) reacts beside Chelsea's German defender Antonio Rudiger (R) as he's sent off during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Chelsea at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, on December 22, 2019. — AFP

overshadowed Willian's double that gave Lampard a memorable triumph at the expense of his former Chelsea manager Mourinho. Spurs boss Mourinho also condemned racism but still took a swipe at Rudiger, accusing him of play-acting by

clutching his ribs to get Son sent off. "We need to eradicate any form of discrimination and in this case we are talking about racism," Mourinho said Monday. "Football and society needs help." — AFP

Pogba hailed as 'best midfielder in the world' by Solskjaer

LONDON: Paul Pogba has been hailed as the "best midfielder in the world" by Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer after the Frenchman returned from a long injury lay-off. The World Cup winner was in action for United for the first time since late September as a substitute in their chastening 2-0 defeat at Watford on Sunday.

He could be in the starting team against Newcastle

tomorrow as Solskjaer desperately seeks the creativity the team needs to break down stubborn opposition defences. "Let's see how he reacts to this, how he feels," said Solskjaer. "He did really well when he came on. Big, big plus and it might be that we do get him in from the start." Pogba, who had only played twice since the end of August due to an ankle injury, was introduced on Sunday with United already trailing by two goals and went close to scoring during a late attacking flurry from the visitors.

"He can play anywhere, he can play the whole midfield," said Solskjaer. "He's a box-to-box midfielder. He can drop deep, get it, play long passes. He can get it higher up and combine like he did today."

"That's the beauty of having Paul, because he is the best all-round midfielder in the world," added the United boss, who has said the 26-year-old will not be leaving in the January transfer window despite links with Real Madrid. Solskjaer said he was looking for a reaction from his players against Newcastle after

United again failed to turn dominance of possession into a positive result at Watford. "One of the good things about the team this year, we have reacted after bad results," he said.

"We haven't kept the consistency as we would have liked the other way but we've never gone on a big (bad) run like we did towards the end of last season so there will be a reaction, definitely." United are struggling in eighth place in the Premier League, seven points behind fourth-placed Chelsea despite recent morale-boosting wins against Tottenham and Manchester City.

Solskjaer admitted progress had been slower than expected but said he was focused on developing a team that could dominate and break sides down. "It's taken Liverpool a few years to get to that stage and we need to keep on building because that's what we want to get to," he said. "Yes, we're good at counter-attacking. Yes, we've got pace and fast players. We should always keep that because that's in our tradition. Now we need to be better at breaking lower blocks." — AFP

Guardiola ready to back players in racism walk-off

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola has said he would back his players if they ever found themselves compelled to walk off during a game in protest against racist abuse. The Manchester City manager was talking following the scenes that marred Chelsea's 2-0 win away to Tottenham Hotspur in the London derby on Sunday.

Chelsea defender Antonio Rudiger reported he was subjected to racist abuse by home supporters which resulted in the Premier League's anti-racist protocol being initiated for the first time. Those measures could have seen players leaving the field — a stance Guardiola insisted Monday he would support should it happen in a game involving reigning English champions City. "Of course, I support my players, I support the initiative," Guardiola told a news conference.

"What happened, you have to battle day by day. It's not about one club or one person or anything specific that happened. I said many times, in the football world it is more in vision because every game, every week, every day, a lot of actions happen." The Catalan added: "It is a battle we have to fight it every day, in schools especially, in the families at home to try to make a better society in the future for the next generation. It is a battle day-by-day. Of course, all the initiatives, it happened for the players and the federation, we are going to support."

Guardiola has been an outspoken anti-racism advocate in his time in the English game but believes the issue extends far beyond football and may never be fully defeated. "I don't think it will be completely eradicated. We have to fight but we will need a lot of time to eradicate it," he said.

"It was a problem that's happened for decades, centuries. Now you can visualise it more because the media is closer and more up front about the problem."

"It has happened for a long time. We have to fight, again and again, especially for the little kids, in the schools. Of course, if it happens be strict to avoid these kinds of persons to avoid it happening." Meanwhile Guardiola, who expects to be without Sergio Aguero, David Silva and John Stones for Friday's visit to Wolves, also responded to comments from former club captain Vincent Kompany who urged City to sign his old boss to a long-term contract.

"If I was in a deciding position at City now, I would do everything I can to keep Pep for as long as I can. He is truly the best," said Kompany. "To say anyone will ever come near, it is speculating in a ludicrous way." Guardiola is under contract until after the end of the 2020/21 season and has repeatedly insisted he will see out his current deal, despite reports that he has a 'break' clause which would allow him to leave City following the conclusion of the current campaign.

"This season is the fourth season and one more, next season will be five because I'm trying to stay here next season too," he said. The former Barcelona and Bayern Munich manager added: "That's a long time. I'm incredibly good here."

"To sign a contract you have to see how it works and if I deserve it," explained Guardiola, whose side are 11 points behind runaway Premier League leaders Liverpool.

"We've increased our levels a lot and the expectations are higher. We'll see if we can handle it. It's not just my desire. Now we have a little break with the family over Christmas and we have time to think about the future." — AFP

Kuwait bowling team has a 'bright future'

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait bowling national team player Jassim Al-Saqer said the game has a bright future, as it made a



quality move during the past short period, by the opening of Kuwait Bowling Center, which is considered the best in the Middle East, and one of the most prominent in the world, that in addition to an ambitious strategy by the board of directors to transform Kuwait into an international bowling center, by hosting the strongest world championships, that in addition to the interest in establishing a large base of juniors and beginners and have them physically and technically ready by competent trainers. He said the development plan began in 2007 and started to make results in few years.

Al-Saqer lauded President of International, and Asian Bowling Federations, Chairman of Kuwait Bowling Club Sheikh Talal Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and board members for their role in the giant leap Kuwait bowling had made in a short time, with a plan that has many stages that made Kuwait bowling team the best in Arabia, and among the best four teams in Asia, besides South Korea, Malaysia, and Hong Kong, and this is said through achievements made by Kuwait athletes in all categories.

Al-Saqer who won the Asia's youth teams gold medal in 2007, and the bronze medal for teams and individuals in 2009, and the silver medal of the Asian championship held in Kuwait October 2019, said Kuwait team seeks more achievements in Asia's 26th Championship to be held next year. He said Kuwait team is able to win more medals in the four categories as they are experienced and skilled to do so.

Al-Saqer said Kuwait bowling awaits a busy year of important international events, and the first abroad event will be in Sweden at the start of January 2020. Followed by another in Finland Open Bowling Championship.

He said "We will participate to compete for top places, and the world championship Kuwait will host in 2020 will be the crown of championships."

It is worth mentioning that Kuwait team has 15 players who train 3 hours daily, five days a week.



Iachini appointed Fiorentina coach

MILAN: Giuseppe Iachini has been appointed coach of struggling Fiorentina, the Serie A club confirmed on Monday. Iachini, 55, replaces Vincenzo Montella who was sacked on Saturday with the team trailing in 15th place, three points above the relegation zone.

"The current ranking has forced us to change coach," said Fiorentina owner Rocco Comisso. "We chose Iachini because he is a man of substance, tied to Florence and Fiorentina. "Now we have to stay united and get back on the right track as soon as possible."

He added: "I would like to thank Vincenzo Montella for the commitment and professionalism he showed

during his time at the club." Former Fiorentina midfielder Iachini lined out 127 times for the Tuscany club between 1989 and 1994 during his playing career.

Since turning to coaching in 2002 he has managed Italian teams including Sampdoria, Palermo, Sassuolo and Udinese. He has been without a club since being sacked by Empoli last March, after just four months in charge.

Iachini will be presented to the press on December 28, leading his first training session the following day. Fiorentina lost 4-1 at home to Roma on Friday and have taken just two points from their last seven games.

Buoyed at the start of the season by the arrival of Franck Ribery, the team has been struggling since the Frenchman suffered a serious ankle injury that will keep him out until February. Fiorentina have started their winter break and do not play again in Serie A until January 6 against Bologna. — AFP



Giuseppe Iachini

25 Norway's Windingstad storms to first win in Alta Badia parallel slalom

26 Leafs notch high-scoring win over visiting Hurricanes

27 Rudiger racism row takes new twist amid reports of Son abuse



Nuggets edge Suns, extend win streak



PHOENIX: Devin Booker #1 of the Phoenix Suns shoots the ball during the game against the Denver Nuggets at Talking Stick Resort Arena in Phoenix, Arizona. — AFP

PHOENIX: Jamal Murray had 28 points and seven assists, and he hit a go-ahead basket with 2.5 seconds left as the visiting Denver Nuggets beat the Phoenix Suns 113-111 on Monday. Nikola Jokic finished with 22 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists for his sixth triple-double of the season. Will Barton scored 13 points, Jerami Grant had 11 and Paul Millsap added 10 for Denver, which has won seven straight. Ricky Rubio led Phoenix with 21 points and added nine assists. Kelly Oubre Jr. had 14 points, and Dario Saric and Frank Kaminsky had 13 each. The Suns have lost seven in a row. Denver led by as many as 13 in the third quarter, but Phoenix cut the gap to 82-81 heading into the fourth. The Suns were on top 101-92 with 5:54 left, but the Nuggets rallied for the victory.

assists. Griffin shot just 2-for-14 from the field and scored eight points.

SAN ANTONIO SPURS 145 - MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES 115

LaMarcus Aldridge poured in a season-high 40 points, 28 of them in the first half, and DeMar DeRozan added 26 points and 10 assists as visiting San Antonio rolled to a victory over Memphis. Aldridge was 17 of 25 from the floor and earned the eighth 40-plus-point game of his career. DeRozan hit 10 of 11 from the field for San Antonio, which outshot Memphis 67.4 percent to 46.9 percent. San Antonio produced season highs for scoring and shooting percentage. Jaren Jackson Jr. led Memphis with 22 points while Ja Morant had 19 points for the Grizzlies. Jonas Valanciunas added 18 points and 12 rebounds.

MIAMI HEAT 107 - UTAH JAZZ 104

Bam Adebayo had 18 points, 12 rebounds, six assists, three steals and three blocks as host Miami ran its home record to 13-1 by defeating Utah. Miami used a 19-4 run to open the fourth quarter. The Heat received 20 points and eight rebounds from Jimmy Butler, 17 points from rookie Tyler Herro (including nine in the fourth quarter) and 15 points from Goran Dragic. Miami also got a double-double from Meyers Leonard (11 points, 10 rebounds). Utah, which had its five-game winning streak snapped, got a season-high and game-high 27 points from Joe Ingles, including 16 in the first half. Jazz forward Bojan Bogdanovic scored 19 points, and center Rudy Gobert had 18 points, 20 rebounds and five blocks.

CLEVELAND CAVALIERS 121 - ATLANTA HAWKS 118

Collin Sexton scored 25 points and host Cleveland held off Atlanta to record its first three-game winning streak of the season. Sexton was 12 of 20 from the field and has scored 23-plus points in four of the past six games. He also added six rebounds. The Cavaliers trailed 94-90 late in the third quarter before going on a 16-2 run and eventually led by 14 points. But Atlanta closed with a 13-2 run and used a Trae Young 3-pointer to close the margin to three points with 49.8 seconds left. It was still 121-118 when Atlanta had a chance to tie, but Young missed a 3-pointer at the buzzer. Young finished with 30 points, his fifth straight game reaching

that mark. The Hawks also celebrated the return of John Collins from his 25-game suspension for violating the NBA's drug policy. He had had 27 points and 10 rebounds. Young led Atlanta with 30 points.

ORLANDO MAGIC 103 - CHICAGO BULLS 95

Terrence Ross scored a team-high 26 points off the bench, and Orlando held on for a win over visiting Chicago. Nikola Vucevic added 21 points for the Magic, who snapped a three-game losing streak. Aaron Gordon posted a double-double with 16 points and 11 rebounds, and Jonathan Isaac and Markelle Fultz had 13 points apiece. Zach LaVine led the Bulls with 26 points despite shooting 8 of 26 from the field. Tomas Satoransky had 20 points, and Lauri Markkanen scored 10 as Chicago wrapped up a four-game road trip with two wins and two losses.

WASHINGTON WIZARDS 121 - NEW YORK KNICKS 115

Bradley Beal scored 30 points as a depleted Washington squad nearly blew a 17-point lead down the stretch but held on in New York, beating the Knicks for the 19th time in the past 22 meetings. Washington also snapped a three-game losing streak and won for only the fourth time in its last 16 games despite missing three key players to injury and Isaiah Thomas serving a suspension for going into the stands during the fourth quarter in Philadelphia to confront a heckler on Saturday. Beal shot 13 of 38 from the field, setting a career-high for field-goal attempts as the Wizards shot 47 percent and survived being outscored 16-5 in the final 4:40. Troy Brown Jr. added a career-high 26 for Washington. Julius Randle led the Knicks with 35 points. — Reuters

INDIANA PACERS 120 - TORONTO RAPTORS 115 (OT)

Aaron Holiday made two 3-pointers late in overtime and finished with 19 points and 10 assists as Indiana ended Toronto's five-game winning streak with a win in Indianapolis. Myles Turner and T.J. Warren each added 24 points for the Pacers. The Raptors, who defeated the Dallas Mavericks on Sunday after trailing by 30 points in the third quarter, came back from a 15-point, second-quarter deficit against the Pacers but couldn't pull out the win. Domantas Sabonis scored 12 points and grabbed 17 rebounds for Indiana. Jeremy Lamb, who missed the previous two games with a groin injury, had 12 points, as did T.J. McConnell.

PHILADELPHIA 76ERS 125 - DETROIT PISTONS 109

Tobias Harris poured in 35 points, Ben Simmons notched a triple-double and Philadelphia handed host Detroit its fifth straight defeat. Harris made 14 of 21 field goal attempts, including four 3-pointers. Simmons racked up 16 points, 13 rebounds and 17 assists. Furkan Korkmaz delivered 21 points off the bench and Joel Embiid had 20 points, eight rebounds, three blocks and three assists for the Sixers. Andre Drummond, the league's top rebounder, was not in the starting lineup for Detroit after missing the morning shootaround. He came off the bench and scored a team-high 27 points with nine rebounds and three assists. Derrick Rose contributed 16 points and seven assists, and Svi Mykhailiuk added 13 points and four

Bahrain's Baqer gets 10-game ban for racist gesture

LONDON: FIFA has banned Bahrain defender Sayed Baqer for 10 matches for 'discriminatory behaviour' in a World Cup qualifier against Hong Kong, soccer's world governing body has said. Baqer, 25, was captured on video making a slant-eyed gesture in the direction of Hong Kong supporters after a goalless draw in the city on Nov. 14.

FIFA opened disciplinary proceedings against Baqer last month and announced that the player had also been fined 30,000 Swiss francs (\$30,549.90) and warned over his conduct. The suspension follows the governing body's July announcement that it had doubled the minimum ban for racist behaviour to 10 games.

A number of high-profile racist incidents have marred the game this season. The most recent involved the arrest of a Chelsea fan for allegedly racially abusing Tottenham Hotspur's South Korean forward Son Heung-min in a Premier League match

in London on Sunday.

Chelsea defender Antonio Rudiger also alleged he was racially abused in the same game, prompting the Professional Footballers' Association to call for a government inquiry into the proliferation of racist incidents in English soccer.

Italy has also been front and centre this season with Inter Milan's Romelu Lukaku and Brescia's Mario Balotelli being targeted by rival fans during Serie A matches. In a separate ruling, FIFA ordered Indonesia to play one match behind closed doors without fans and fined the country's soccer association 200,000 Swiss francs over security failings during a World Cup qualifier with Malaysia last month.

Malaysia were fined 50,000 Swiss francs for the behaviour of their fans. Sierra Leone have also been told to play one game behind closed doors and were fined 50,000 Swiss francs for a lack of order during a qualifier against Liberia in September. — Reuters