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Tehran summons Kuwait envoy to protest about 'anti-Iran' meet

US: Iran could take 'provocative actions' • Iraq attack kills US contractor



CHABAHAR, Iran: A handout photo shows Iranian seamen saluting the Russian Navy Neustrashimyy-class frigate "Varoslav Mudry" moored at this Gulf of Oman port city during Iran-Russia-China joint naval drills on Friday. — AFP

GENEVA: Iran summoned Kuwait's envoy in Tehran yesterday to protest about Kuwaiti officials meeting a representative of a "terrorist group" and hosting an "anti-Iranian" meeting, Iran's foreign ministry said in a statement on its website. The ministry did not provide any more details about the group concerned or about which Kuwaiti officials had met the group's representative.

"These kinds of actions are clear interference in the internal affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran and a violation of the principle of good neighborly relations and friendly statements from Kuwaiti officials," the Iranian foreign ministry's representative for the Gulf said, according to the statement.

Acting US Navy Secretary Thomas Modly said on Friday that Iran could carry out "provocative actions" in the Strait of Hormuz and elsewhere in that region in the future despite a period of relative calm. Tensions in the Gulf have mounted since attacks on oil tankers this summer, including off the coast of the United Arab Emirates, and a major strike on oil facilities in Saudi Arabia. Washington has blamed Iran, which has denied being

behind the attacks.

"I think they're going to continue to perform provocative actions over there... and I think they'll look at every opportunity they can to do that," Modly told Reuters, without giving a timeline or details. "There's nothing that suggests to me, short of a regime change there, that you have a different tone set from the leadership, that would suggest to me that they're going to stop doing what they've been doing," he added.

Since May, the Pentagon has sent 14,000 additional troops to the region to deter Iran, including an aircraft carrier. Modly suggested that US reactions to Iranian actions could take away from the Pentagon's focus toward priorities like countering China. "As they start creating mischief over there... our reaction is we send an aircraft carrier over there for 10 months," he said. "What does that do to our carrier readiness? It degrades readiness the longer it's over there."

Modly's warning on future actions coincides with China, Iran and Russia beginning joint naval drills in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Oman. Waters around Iran have become a

locus of international tension, with the United States exerting pressure for Iranian crude oil sales and other trade ties to be cut off, mainly through extensive sanctions. The Gulf of Oman is a particularly sensitive waterway as it connects to the Strait of Hormuz - through which about a fifth of the world's oil passes - which in turn connects to the Gulf.

Asked if he expected Iran to lash out in the region as a result of internal protests, Modly said he had not seen intelligence on that. Demonstrations against a hike in fuel prices turned political last month in Iran, sparking the bloodiest crackdown in the 40-year history of the Islamic Republic. About 1,500 people were killed during less than two weeks of unrest, three Iranian interior ministry officials told Reuters.

The four days of joint naval drills come at a time of heightened tensions since the United States withdrew from a landmark 2015 nuclear deal with Iran in May last year. "The message of this exercise is peace, friendship and lasting security through cooperation and unity... and its effect will be to show that Iran

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Volunteers plant 5,000 tree saplings in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Some 300 volunteers planted, in only two hours yesterday, up to 5,000 tree saplings in Al-Abdaliya natural reserve west of Kuwait City, in the latest effort to beautify Kuwait and improve the climate. Dr Ameerah Al-Hassan, Director of UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Program), said in a statement to the press the saplings were planted in line with global sustainable development objectives, with cooperation between UN-Habitat and Kuwait Oil Company (KOC).

Greening is not merely an act of beautification; it is rather a basic need for the environment and population of Kuwait, she said, indicating that the shrubs and trees are necessary to alleviate impact of dust storms and heat. The planting was part of the "Kuwait Plants" campaign launched on Oct 31, 2019, coinciding with the World Cities Day. The campaign also aims at encouraging and nudging campers to plant trees in the desert, she added.

Omar Sadeq, KOC manager of East Kuwait operations, also in charge of the reserve, said planting at the protected location has continued since opening the reserve in 2011. Work kicked off by greening 1.1 million square meters of land. Later, 1.7 million sq m of land was planted and in the third phase, the greening covered five million square meters of land. This reserve is an ambitious environmental project located in West Kuwait within the operational areas of the KOC. It aims tackling environmental damage and restoring life and biodiversity to the desert.

Al-Abdaliya reserve has been carved out to create better conditions for wildlife, plants and animals through the creation of lakes with surrounding hills for desert plants such as al-arfaj, al-arti, al-ramth, al-qarsi and others that grow in Kuwait. Kuwait, along with associations, volunteers and NGOs, has been sparing no effort to green the country, with natural reserves and public parks including many trees. Trees and plants, particularly palm trees, decorate public places and streets. A sophisticated irrigation system keeps them alive and green during the very hot summer. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Volunteers plant a tree sapling in Al-Abdaliya natural reserve yesterday. — KUNA

News in brief

UAE denies developing app

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates yesterday denied reports that a popular mobile application developed in the country was used for government spying. Apple and Google removed the ToTok app from their marketplaces last week following a report claiming it allowed the UAE government to track users' conversations, movements and other details. But the country's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority said in a statement that UAE laws "prohibit any kind of data breach and unlawful interception". It continued: "The TRA reaffirms that all certified telecommunications applications in the UAE are in compliance with these standards." — AFP



Six killed in Egypt bus crash

CAIRO: A road crash in Egypt killed six people, including tourists from India and Malaysia, and injured at least 24 others yesterday, security and medical sources said. The accident occurred when two buses carrying tourists crashed into a truck east of Cairo on the road to the Ain Sokhna resort on the Red Sea, a security official told AFP. A medical source said two female Malaysian tourists and an Indian man were killed along with three Egyptians - one bus driver, a tour guide and a security guard. At least 24 others were injured, several of them tourists and some left in serious condition, a medical source said without giving further details. — AFP

Massive bomb kills at least 78 in Mogadishu

MOGADISHU: A massive car bomb exploded in a busy area of Mogadishu yesterday, leaving at least 78 people dead, many of them university students, in Somalia's deadliest attack in two years. The blast occurred at a busy intersection southwest of the Somali capital where the presence of a security checkpoint and a tax office often cause traffic jams. Scores of wounded were carried on stretchers from the site, where the force of the explosion left the charred and twisted remains of vehicles.

The attack has not been claimed, however Mogadishu is regularly hit by car bombings and attacks waged by Al-Shabaab Islamist militants allied to Al-Qaeda. President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo condemned the attack in comments carried by the Somalia national news agency SONNA. "This enemy works to implement the destructive will of international terrorism, they have never done anything positive for this our country, they have not constructed a road, never built hospitals and not education centers as well," he said. "All they do is destruction and killing and the Somali public are well informed about this."

Many of those killed are believed to be university students whose bus was hit by the blast. Two Turkish nationals also died, police said.

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MOGADISHU: The wreckage of a car that was destroyed during a car bomb attack is seen yesterday. — AFP

Mars 2020 rover to seek life, prepare human missions

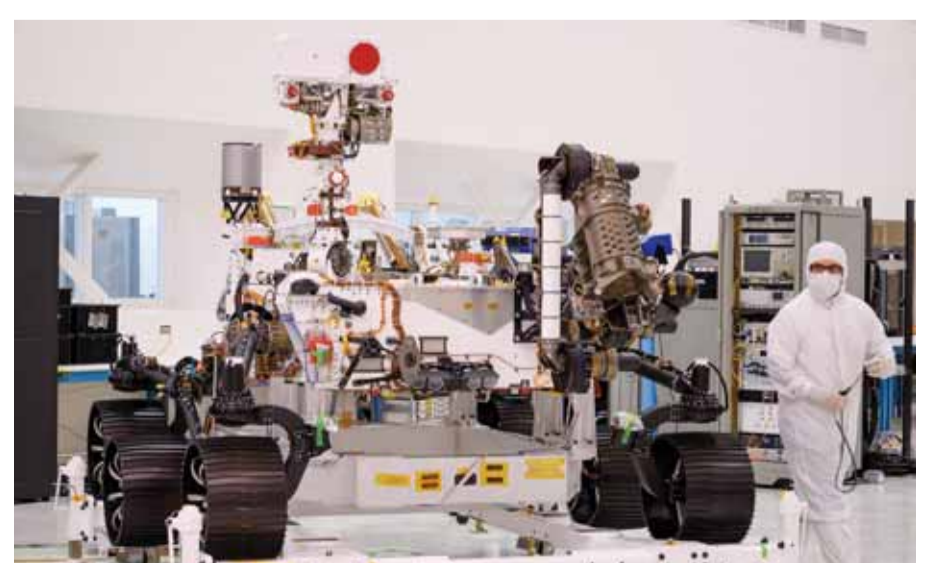
PASADENA, California: The Mars 2020 rover, which sets off for the Red Planet next year, will not only search for traces of ancient life, but pave the way for future human missions, NASA scientists said Friday as they unveiled the vehicle. The rover has been constructed in a large, sterile room at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, near Los Angeles, where its driving equipment was given its first successful test last week.

Shown to invited journalists on Friday, it is scheduled to leave Earth in July 2020 from Florida's Cape Canaveral, becoming the fifth US rover to land on Mars seven months later in February.

"It's designed to seek the signs of life, so we're carrying a number of different instruments that will help us understand the geological and chemical context on the surface of Mars," deputy mission leader Matt Wallace told AFP.

Among the devices on board the rover are 23 cameras, two "ears" that will allow it to listen to Martian winds, and lasers used for chemical analysis. Approximately the size of a car, the rover is equipped with six wheels like its predecessor Curiosity, allowing it to traverse rocky terrain. Speed is not a priority for the vehicle, which only has to cover around 200 yards per Martian

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PASADENA: The Mars 2020 Rover is seen in the spacecraft assembly area clean room on Friday during a media tour at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. — AFP

Major events related to Kuwait's Amir in 2019



RIYADH: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends the opening session of the 40th Gulf Summit in Riyadh on December 10, 2019. —KUNA

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah participated in many events and sponsored others throughout 2019, while also attending major conferences. The following are major events related to His Highness the Amir in 2019:

January 15: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attended Kuwait international anti-corruption conference (Integrity for Development).

January 21: His Highness the Amir received Governor General of Canada Julie Payette on occasion of her visit to Kuwait.

January 29: His Highness the Amir attended the flag-hoisting ceremony at Bayan Palace.

February 4: His Highness the Amir received Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani and his accompanying delegation, on the occasion of his official visit.

February 13: His Highness the Amir attended the 22nd graduation ceremony of Kuwaiti officers' at Ali Al-Sabah Military Academy.

February 18: His Highness the Amir patronized and attended the graduation ceremony for the 45th batch of police cadets at Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Science.

February 24: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad chaired the Kuwaiti delegation to the Arab-European Union Summit in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt.

March 4: His Highness the Amir sponsored and

attended the graduation ceremony for Kuwait University's 48th batch of graduate students for the academic year (2017-18).

March 13: His Highness the Amir patronized and attended the national youth project 'Kuwait is proud' ceremony at Bayan Palace.

March 25: His Highness the Amir attended a ceremony to honor outstanding students of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training for the academic year (2017-18).

March 27: His Highness the Amir sponsored the national operetta 'Kuwait is different' at Bayan Palace.

March 30: His Highness the Amir chaired the Kuwaiti delegation to the 30th Arab League Summit in Tunisia.

April 4: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad ordered dispatching urgent aid to floods' victims in Iran.

April 12: The World Bank announced exceptional award to His Highness the Amir in appreciation of his social and economic support worldwide.

April 16: His Highness the Amir ordered the formation of ministerial committee in order to complete procedures for construction of Kuwait entertainment city.

April 17: His Highness the Amir sponsored and attended Kuwait's 10th International Award for Memorizing the Holy Quran.

April 23: His Highness the Amir patronized and attended final Football match of His Highness the Amir's Cup between Kuwait and Qadsia clubs.

April 24: His Highness the Amir sponsored and

February 11: His Highness the Crown Prince inaugurated 'Al-Fahad's Spirit of Guidance' show and 'Deep-rooted Brotherhood' operetta at Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center.

March 23: His Highness the Crown Prince represented His Highness the Amir at final ceremony of King Abdulaziz Camel festival in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

March 24: His Highness the Crown Prince sponsored and attended the annual graduation ceremony for the 48th batch of Kuwait University for the academic year 2017-2018.

November 19: His Highness the Crown Prince sponsored the international conference for energy research and development.

December 5: His Highness the Crown Prince returned home following a private visit abroad. —KUNA

March 11: The Cabinet approves the addition of the Standing Committee to improving business environment to be part of the State of Kuwait to the Central Authority for Public Tender.

March 18: The Cabinet decides to complete Kuwait International Airport Terminal 2 (T2) project.

April 1: The Cabinet approves a draft law to amend some provisions of Law No. 32 of 1968 on monetary and the Central Bank of Kuwait, to regulate the banking profession, as well as another draft law on the issuance of the preventive settlement, restructuring, and bankruptcy.

April 8: The Cabinet approves draft decrees on air services agreement between Kuwait and Cyprus.

April 8: The Cabinet approves draft decrees on cooperation between Kuwait and Ukraine in the field of tourism.

April 30: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak patronized and attended the opening of the first conference of the Municipal Council.

May 20: The Cabinet forms a committee to regulate and organize fundraising and compensations.

July 8: The Cabinet approved two MoUs with Jordan on cooperation on social affairs and education.

July 16: The Cabinet formed a national commission to coordinate the national strategy for promotion of integrity and fighting corruption.

July 29: The Cabinet approved a media cooperation agreement with Jordan.

July 29: The Cabinet approved an MoU on strategic dialogue with the US.

July 29: The Cabinet approved an MoU on social affairs cooperation with Morocco.

September 9: The government approved setting up the north economic zone.

September 9: The government approved an agreement to encourage direct investment with South Korea.

September 16: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak inaugurated Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad sport facility for the visually impaired, which is located in Maidan Hawally.

September 16: The government approved an agreement with the European Union over the immunity and privileges of members of the EU mission in Kuwait.

September 16: The Cabinet approved an agreement with Iraq on avoiding double taxation and tax evasion.

September 26: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak condemned, during a speech before the UN General Assembly in New York, attacks against Saudi Arabia and voiced support for all measures adopted by

attended a ceremony to honor distinguished teachers and schools, marking World Teacher's Day.

April 29: His Highness the Amir sponsored and attended inaugurate the 'Salam Palace' museum.

May 1: His Highness the Amir attended the inauguration of Jaber Al-Ahmad Causeway.

May 27: His Highness the Amir delivered a speech on the occasion of the last 10 days of Ramadan underlining the delicate situation currently, and said cautiousness and social unity are required to maintain civilian's safety.

May 31: His Highness the Amir delivered an urgent speech in the GCC Summit which was held in Makkah, calling for unity and to put differences aside.

May 31: His Highness the Amir delivered a speech in the extraordinary Arab Summit, appealing for wisdom and discussion instead of disputes.

June 19: His Highness the Amir and his accompanying delegation arrived Iraq for an official visit.

October 16: His Highness the Amir returns home from the US where he underwent medical checkups following a setback he suffered on September 3.

October 29: His Highness the Amir opened the National Assembly's 15th Legislative Term, calling for the strengthening of national unity and rejection of sedition.

November 14: His Highness the Amir accepted the Cabinet's resignation and instructed it to act as caretaker until a new cabinet was formed.

November 18: His Highness the Amir re-assigned His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak as Prime Minister,

who later in the same day apologized and asked His Highness the Amir he did not wish to be assigned.

November 18: His Highness the Amir relieved from their posts First Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Jarrah Al-Sabah. He assigned Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah to run affairs of the Defense Ministry, while assigning Deputy Premier and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh to run affairs of the Interior Ministry.

November 18: His Highness the Amir addressed the nation, and reaffirmed Kuwait was a state of constitution and institutions, and everybody has the right to report to judiciary suspected corruption cases.

November 19: His Highness the Amir assigned Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah as Prime Minister, and bestowed His Highness title upon him.

December 10: His Highness the Amir, addressing the GCC Summit in Riyadh, underlined importance of "positive and constructive" steps achieved as part of Kuwait's mediations to address the Gulf crisis, and said the region was exposed to dangerous escalation threatening its security and stability, which thus required emphasis on dialogue.

December 17: His Highness the Amir signed a decree on the new Cabinet which consists of 14 ministers and headed by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah. —KUNA

Crown Prince participated in many events in 2019

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah had a fruitful year at the domestic and foreign scenes. The following are major events that His Highness the Crown Prince sponsored or participated in:

January 28: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah patronized and attended the final Football match of His Highness the Crown Prince Cup at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

Cabinet's resignation highlights govt's 2019

KUWAIT: The State of Kuwait witnessed multi-faceted events throughout 2019 related to the government and His Highness the Prime Minister. The following are major events related to the cabinet and His Highness the Prime Minister:

January 21: The Kuwait Cabinet instructed the Ministry of Information to launch an awareness campaign to raise the flag of Kuwait and focus on its history for being a national symbol.

January 21: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah directed all government agencies to take measures to implement Kuwait's strategy to strengthen fight against corruption.

January 28: Kuwait Cabinet approved a draft decree to amend the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

January 28: The Cabinet decided to assign a Higher Committee to follow up with the problem of rain and floods, and implement all solutions and recommendations within a specific period.

February 4: The Cabinet assigned Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah to organize by-elections in the second and third constituencies on March 13.

February 11: His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak arrived in the Jordanian capital on an official visit to discuss bilateral relations and open the new building of the Kuwaiti embassy in Amman.

February 18: The Cabinet approved the transfer of three sectors from the Office of the Minister of State for Youth Affairs to the General Authority for Youth Affairs, namely, 'Youth Development,' 'Youth Projects' and 'Supportive Services.'

February 18: The Cabinet approved a draft decree to open an additional appropriation of KD 53.195 million to be added to the ministries and government department's budgets for the fiscal year 2018-2019.

March 10: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah patronized and attended a meeting for Youth Initiatives and Ideas as part of the National Youth Project (Kuwait is proud) at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends the annual graduation ceremony for the 48th batch of Kuwait University on March 24, 2019. —KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (right) poses for a picture with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center) and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah after taking oath as Prime Minister. —KUNA

Riyadh to restore security and stability.

October 13: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak opened Kuwait oil and gas conference and exhibition at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center.

October 20: His Highness the Prime Minister arrived in Cairo on an official visit to Egypt.

October 29: His Highness the Prime Minister addressed the parliament with the government's program, asserting keenness to have positive relationship with the National Assembly towards achieving Kuwait Vision 2035.

November 4: The Cabinet approved Faisal Al-Shaya as President of the State Audit Bureau.

November 4: The Cabinet approved an Amiri decree of an amnesty against Fahad Al-Khanna, who submitted an appeal for His Highness the Amir.

November 12: Minister of state for housing Jenan Ramadhan Boushehri announced her resignation.

November 14: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak submitted the Cabinet's resignation to His Highness the Amir to rearrange ministerial work.

November 18: His Highness the Prime Minister asked His Highness the Amir not to re-assign him as Prime Minister.

November 19: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah took oath before His Highness the Amir as Prime Minister.

December 17: Kuwait's new 14-member Cabinet took oath before His Highness the Amir. —KUNA

Parliament saw major domestic events in 2019

KUWAIT: Kuwait's National Assembly was the scene of key domestic events that dominated the political scene in the country. The following are major interpellations, visits of parliament speaker and parliamentary conferences:

January 8: The National Assembly approved a bill stipulating regulations for credit information.

January 30: The National Assembly approved a bill of voluntary early retirement.

January 30: The National Assembly approved the mental health law.

January 30: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem declared the vacancy of two parliamentary seats.

February 5: The National Assembly approved a draft-law on rotation of convening the Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

February 5: The National Assembly approved a housing welfare bill.

March 19: MPs Bader Al-Mulla and Abdullah Al-Kandari sworn in after winning by-elections of March 16.

March 19: The National Assembly approved a draft law of the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition.

March 20: The National Assembly approved a bill of additional appropriations for Ministries of Oil, Health and Higher Education.

March 27: The National Assembly rejected the motion of no-confidence filed against Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Services Khaled Al-Roudhan.

April 30: National Assembly started a grilling motion filed by MPs Mohammad Al-Mutair and Mohammad Hayef against Deputy Premier and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh, which ended without recommendations presented.

April 30: National Assembly passed a draft law regarding issuing a common system to combat commercial fraud in GCC member states.

May 8: Kuwaiti parliament rejected a no-confidence motion against Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri with a majority of 34 MPs.

June 11: National Assembly started a grilling motion filed by MPs Bader Al-Mulla and Riyadh Al-Adsani against Finance Minister Nayef Al-Hajraf. Confidence in the minister was renewed.

June 24: National Assembly approved draft laws on author's rights, public tenders, government universities and reassigning former teachers' authority.

October 29: The National Assembly, at the start of its 15th Legislative Term, approved appointment of Faisal Al-Shaya as President of the State Audit Bureau.

November 12: Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem cancelled a grilling request by MP Mohammad Hayef to Minister of Finance Nayef Al-Hajraf following the latter's resignation.

November 12: Ghanem said 10 MPs filed a no-confidence motion against Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Jenan Ramadhan Boushehri at end of a grilling by MP Omar Al-Tabtabaie. Another 10 MPs tabled a similar request against Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Sabah following an interpellation by MP Riyadh Al-Adsani.

November 12: Faisal Al-Shaya took oath before the parliament as President of the State Audit Bureau. —KUNA

Kuwait continued flurry of UN diplomacy in 2019

KUWAIT: The State of Kuwait has been an active contributor to the UN Security Council (UNSC) in the second year of its non-permanent membership in 2019. The Gulf nation made sure its voice heard and actions felt as the world was witnessing many developments which posed a threat to international peace and security. The following are major events related to Kuwait's UNSC membership.

March 15: The UN Security Council adopted a statement, proposed by Kuwait and Indonesia, strongly condemning the New Zealand mosque terrorist attack in which dozens were killed and wounded, considered it one of the most serious threats to international peace and security.

May 10: At the initiative of the Permanent Missions to the UN of Kuwait, Indonesia and South Africa, an Arria-formula meeting was held on Israel's construction of settlements attended by Palestine's Foreign Minister Riyadh Al-Malki.

June 1: Kuwait chaired the UN Secretary Council for the third time in its history during its 2018-19 second non-permanent membership, focusing on promoting causes connected with Arab affairs namely the Palestinian cause and defusing tension and war.

June 11: UN Security Council adopted Kuwait-drafted resolution No. 2474 of 2019 on missing person in armed conflict in accordance with the International Humanitarian Law, in a meeting chaired by Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah.

June 13: Kuwait, during Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled's presidency of UN Secretary Council, issued a statement on further cooperation between the Security Council and the Arab League in accordance with the UN Charter, and to take effective steps to enhance this cooperation, which should focus on conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peace-building.

July 24: The United States blocked an attempt by Kuwait, Indonesia and South Africa to get the UN Security Council to condemn Israel's demolition of Palestinian homes on the outskirts of Jerusalem.



NEW YORK: Kuwait's then foreign minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah speaks during a UN Security Council session. — KUNA

September 19: Kuwait, Germany and Belgium called UN Security Council to vote for draft resolution for an immediate ceasefire in Syria's volatile northwestern governorate of Idlib. The blocked resolution called on all parties to immediately cease hostilities to avoid a further deterioration of the already catastrophic humanitarian situation in Idlib Governorate.

November 20: Kuwait and elected countries of UN Security Council stressed rejection of any endeavors aiming to legitimize the illegal Israeli settlements on all occupied Palestinian territories, as Kuwait and Indonesia submitted a draft element to reconfirm that Israel settlement is illegal.

November 25: Arab foreign ministers during their meeting at the Arab League in Cairo decided to assign the Arab group in New York in addition to Kuwait, as the Security Council Arab member to intensify efforts and negotiations to face the US decision to legitimize the illegal Israeli settlements on all occupied Palestinian territories.

December 4: Kuwait, during its speech at the UN Security Council, called for more self-control and refrain from using violence during demonstrations in Iraq, expressing hope that fellow Arab country will overcome the current exceptional circumstances.

December 18: Kuwait, Germany and Belgium tabled a draft resolution to UNSC to renew for one year a mechanism to provide humanitarian aid to Syria through five border crossings, including one from Turkey. China and Russia vetoed the resolution. China submitted another resolution to renew the mechanism for six months but only five members approved the text.

December 21: The US condemned the Russian and Chinese veto for the draft resolution submitted by Kuwait, Germany and Belgium, saying the veto was a shame. —KUNA

Kuwait's main development achievements in 2019

KUWAIT: Kuwait witnessed development achievements throughout the year 2019, accomplishing many milestones in different domains. The following are major development achievements.

Jan 16: Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) acquired its ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 10002:2018 Certification for enhancing performance efficiency and upgrading investor's services.

Feb 4: Kuwait's Petrochemical Industries Company (PIC) obtained the International Standardization Organization (ISO) 31000 certificate in risk management.

Feb 23: Radio Kuwait won the first place at Arab level in programming, productions, and airtime categories during a media event in Algeria.

April 29: The Salam Palace Museum, which is considered a cultural and historic edifice, was inaugurated.

May 1: Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Causeway, which connect Kuwait City to Subbiya and considered the 4th longest bridge in the world and with a total span of 49,900 kilometers, was inaugurated.

May 28: The Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) announced completion of tests of G5 networks in Kuwait.

June 17: Kuwait launches first stem cell clinic in Gulf region: the 'Salwa Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah Stem Cell Clinic.' —KUNA

Iraq discovered suspected Kuwaitis' remains in 2019

KUWAIT: Iraq had announced earlier this year discovery of mass graves containing remains of what was believed to be of Kuwaiti people held captive or went missing during Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait in 1990-91. DNA tests were underway in Kuwait to determine identities of the remains. The following are major events related to this issue:

June 20: A tripartite committee of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) announced discovery of human remains in the Iraqi southern city of Al-Muthanna, believed to be of Kuwaiti citizens who were rounded up by Iraqi forces during the 1990-91 occupation.

July 1: Iraqi Ministry of Defense said it would provide samples of the remains for the Kuwaiti authorities.

August 2: Iraqi Foreign Ministry said it identified what was believed to be identities of 32 Kuwaiti prisoners whose remains were in a mass grave in southern Iraq. It said the mass grave, found in Al-

Muthanna on March 6, consisted of 46 remains and initial DNA tests showed 32 of them believed to be Kuwaitis.

August 6: UN special representative to Iraq Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert met with Iraqi defense minister Najah Al-Shemmeri, and said collaboration between UN mission in Iraq in collaboration, Kuwait and ICRC was successful.

August 8: Kuwait receives, from Iraq, remains of 48 persons believed to be of Kuwaiti prisoners and missing people killed during Iraq's 1990 invasion for DNA tests.

November 3: Kuwait's Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah said Kuwait recovered remains of 236 Kuwaitis who were missing during the Iraqi invasion. They are out of 605 missing Kuwaitis, however only fate of 369 Kuwaitis were identified. The tripartite committee started operations in March 1992. It consisted of representatives from Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the US, France, Britain and ICRC. — KUNA



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KUWAIT: Remains believed to be of Kuwaiti people are being transported from Iraq to Kuwait. —KUNA



Iraq and Kuwait sign paperwork for the handover of remains to Kuwaiti authorities.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The Adaliya water towers, which are part of a network of 31 towers distributed around Kuwait. — Photo by Abdullah Al-Muhareb (KUNA)

UN praise highlights Kuwait's week of humanitarian action

KUWAIT: Kuwait continued its humanitarian efforts and activities last week in different parts of the world met by applause from senior officials and organizations. In Kuwait, newly elected United Nations General Assembly President Tijjani Muhammad-Bande said that His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's UN humanitarian leader accolade was "well-deserved" due to the country's "remarkable" global humanitarian record. Discussions he held with officials, amid a visit to Kuwait, focused on how the country could support nations in need, individually or through collective efforts with other nations, he told KTV at UN House. The UN official's discussions with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also touched on support Kuwait extends to UN agencies. Kuwait has "taken the lead" for many years on humanitarian issues worldwide, particularly through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development initiatives, said the Nigerian diplomat, who was elected UNGA President in June, this year. As a current member of the UN Security Council, Kuwait's efforts are "important for all of us," he pointed out, particularly its "engagement" with other member countries on crucial issues. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was handed the honor for his "exemplary humanitarian leadership" by former UN chief Ban Ki-moon at a ceremony in New York in 2014.

Meanwhile, Muhammad-Bande's visit to Kuwait saw

him giving a speech at the Kuwait Diplomatic Institute, where the UN official listed several matters he viewed as priorities amid his one-year term. The peaceful settlement of disputes through conflict prevention and cooperation, the inclusion of women, youth and the disabled, poverty eradication and urging nations to commit to climate action were amongst the topics of his address. Speaking to KTV, he also alluded to the importance of "partnerships" between nations to solve shortages one nation might face compared to others. Where one nation lacks resources, another, with an abundance, may provide, he suggested.

In the meantime, Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) sent five trucks full of necessities, foodstuff, and relief aid materials to Syrian refugees residing in Jordan. Top official at KRCS Abdulrahman Al-Aoun said that Syrian refugee families in Jordan and nearby Lebanon are in need of such relief aid now. He affirmed that the society would continue to provide aid to the Syrian refugees throughout the upcoming period to assist them during their current predicament. In Lebanon, KRCS provided foodstuff to some 2,940 families. According to head of the KRCS delegation in Lebanon Abdullah Al-Rashidi, the campaign involves the distribution of necessary food items to needy families in Lebanon. On a daily basis, the KRCS-run campaign also delivers around 6,000 loaves of bread to feed Syrian and Palestinian refugees, he affirmed. Lebanese humanitarian officials and nationals always receive the KRCS campaign positively. — KUNA

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Burgan Bank distributes gifts to autistic children

KUWAIT: As one of the lead contributors to child welfare, Burgan Bank participated in a celebration that was organized by the Autism Partnership Kuwait (APK) for the rehabilitation and treatment of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Bringing joy to the children this season, the bank's public relations representatives distributed special gifts and toys to ensure a memorable day.

Burgan Bank's continued support through increased activities and interactions to APK reflects its keenness to elevate the lives of children with autism and facilitate their integration into society. Through its cooperation with Autism Partnership Kuwait, the bank also aims to

raise awareness about autism and highlight the importance of early diagnosis and its treatment methods.

The children and their families expressed their happiness during the celebratory event that included a range of exciting activities and competitions. Burgan Bank's commitment to different humanitarian initiatives reinforces its role as a positive catalyst for dynamic change in society. Burgan Bank will maintain its journey of driving meaningful outcomes in the coming year through its involvement in their many activities and educational workshops.

Burgan Bank's support to this initiative falls under its 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, social and health initiatives. Burgan Bank's approach to 'ENGAGE' begins with a vital principle that as a Kuwaiti financial institution, its conduct and policies should be aligned with the needs and interests of the Kuwaiti society.



Kuwaiti man granted political asylum in Canada

Man sentenced in Kuwait over offensive tweets

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti man was recently granted political asylum in Canada, said Kuwait Liberal Association member Anwar Al-Rasheed, stressing that he has been in contact with the young man sentenced to jail in Kuwait because of some posts he made on Twitter. Rasheed explained that the young man left Kuwait for Canada before the sentence was passed and remained there for a while before applying for political asylum and explaining his motives. "The application was approved and he is now a refugee in Canada," Rasheed explained. Notably, there is a group of Kuwaiti bloggers in London who have been sentenced to prison because of tweets deemed abusive to certain figures or sister countries and incriminated by law.

Expats' degrees

Commenting on the situation of expats who came to Kuwait to work with degrees from accredited universities and how to accredit them in Kuwait, the Public Authority for Manpower stressed that this issue out of its jurisdiction and that it is the responsibility of the ministries of foreign affairs and higher education to oversee this topic.

Meanwhile, the Civil Service Commission stressed that employees contracted over the past three years all matched the regulations of decree number 17/2017,

which prioritizes employing Kuwaitis, then children of Kuwaiti women and then Arab non-Kuwaitis in jobs with not enough Kuwaiti candidates such as doctors, health services and education, or in jobs Kuwaitis refuse to take such as services and crafts (drivers, office boys, undertakers or gravediggers).

Pharmaceutical treatments

Ministry of Health's assistant undersecretary for food and medicine control Dr Abdullah Al-Bader said Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah issued a resolution organizing the registration

and handling of pharmaceutical treatments. Bader explained that previous regulations had not been updated in 40 years and that the new decision came to comply with ministerial instructions to remain updated and cope with the latest developments in international control systems related to importing medicine, registering and handling it.

Teachers' timetables

Minister of Education Dr Saud Al-Harbi stressed his keenness on developing education, achieving stability and justice in teachers' timetables in various schools. Harbi added that he urged the public education sector to reconsider teachers' timetables and the classes they teach per week in a way that achieves justice and equality, adding that he will personally follow up this issue.



Man left Kuwait before court verdict

Abdullah Al-Bader said Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah issued a resolution organizing the registration

local spotlight

Child abuse



By Muna Al-Fuzai

Muna@kuwaittimes.net

Children are vulnerable and can fall victim to physical or verbal harm, especially if family conditions are harsh or insecure. So many governments in the world have issued legal regulations and legislations to protect the little ones.

Kuwait issued law number 21 / 2015 for protecting the rights of the child, such as education, healthcare, housing, culture and protection from assaults. This law protects both healthy children and those with special needs, and has been activated by several agencies, including the ministry of interior, the ministry of social affairs and the ministry of health.

The law also stipulates that children should not be used for work that does not suit their age, travel without the permission of their guardians, or be prevented from seeing either of their parents in the event of divorce. I think the aim of such details in the law is to ensure that no single entity can manipulate a child's life or their wishes.

The government also established the child protection department of the ministry of health, which launched hotline 147 to report any cases of child abuse. The department has the authority to inform the ministry of the interior and the ministry of social affairs, which have the authority to take measures against perpetrators.

With the issuance of this law, some claimed it encouraged the child to rebel and that spanking might be beneficial for them. But these protesters did not accept the fact that beating a child causes psychologically-devastating damage in the long run, leading them to lose their personality and self-confidence as well. The nature of civil society today has changed from the nature of society 100 years ago.

For example, in the past teachers beating students was normal and acceptable by parents and children, who could not object because they would be exposed to more harm. But this situation has changed today and the child has the right to reject corporal punishment, and beating in schools is forbidden. I agree with this because beating a child is a crime and no one should be allowed to harm a young child for any reason.

Last year, Kuwait accomplished a good achievement by obtaining a prize from the International Child Protection Team of the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPAN) for its efforts to support children's rights.

I think that raising awareness for children is the right starting point to tackle this global problem, as the child must be aware from the elementary stage of his physical rights and his dignity and that no one has the right to be subjected to abuse, and that there are legal bodies that are ready to help and protect them from aggressors. So the role of the school is very important.

I believe that stricter laws on child abuse must be implemented. In Kuwait, there are multiple expatriate communities of different nationalities, whether Arab or foreign, so I hope that these groups will make their peers aware of this law, because violence is not related to a specific nationality, and this is something that will happen and we need mutual efforts to stop it.

I believe the child law represents an important legal and social event in Kuwait, as the child protection department has the power to transfer complaints which it receives via the hotline directly to the ministry of interior to intervene, as well as maintain the confidentiality of reports, which was not previously possible.

Ooredoo supports entrepreneurs in Al-Souq Murouj



Mijbil Alayoub



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

crafts, with a 'street food' section aimed at highlighting the culinary diversity of Kuwait's local food community. The market also offers a section dedicated for children's activities. It will be held once a month on weekends, until March 2020.

Commenting on this sponsorship, Ooredoo Kuwait Senior Director of Corporate Communications Mijbil

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

Fahad Al-Salem Street footbridge proposed

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Municipal Council member Maha Al-Baghli proposed building a footbridge in front of the 'Maliya' bus station in Fahad Al-Salem Street in Kuwait City, saying that it became necessary given the fact that the street has become vital with many people frequenting it for its malls, hotels, restaurants and companies in addition to the bus station. Meanwhile, Municipal Council member Fuhaid Al-Muwaizri proposed building a footbridge in front of the applied institute in Ardhya with a contemporary design to safeguard students' lives and to ease traffic flow on the road opposite of the institute. In other news, State Minister for Municipal Affairs Waleed Al-Jassem visited several cleaning centers in Farwaniya governorate that operate on the shifts' system during weekends. The minister was briefed on workers' efforts and was told about the obstacles they face during their work.



Former Interior Ministry official laid to rest

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Khaled Al-Saleh and Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Essam Salem Al-Naham led the funeral of former Interior Ministry Undersecretary Maj Gen Abdullatif Faisal Al-Thuwaini at Sulaibkhat Cemetery yesterday. The minister extended his condolences to the deceased family.



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More than 235,000 flee intense bombing in NW Syria

India citizenship law protests rage on despite security clampdown



LAMATY: Rescuers working at the site of a passenger plane crash outside Almaty. At least 12 people died on Friday when a passenger plane carrying 100 people crashed into a house shortly after takeoff from Kazakhstan's largest city, authorities said. —AFP

Kazakhstan mourns fatal plane crash

12 passengers killed as jet crashes shortly after takeoff in Almaty

ALMATY: Kazakhstan observed a national day of mourning yesterday after 12 people died when an airliner crashed shortly after takeoff and slammed into a house. Witnesses spoke of the terrified screams of passengers as the plane came down on the edge of the country's biggest city Almaty on Friday, but many on board managed to walk away without serious injury.

The jet carrying nearly 100 passengers operated by budget carrier Bek Air was torn apart and its nose crushed on impact with a two-storey building just minutes after taking off en route to the capital Nur-Sultan.

Kazakh authorities have launched an investigation to determine the cause of the disaster, and the plane's black boxes have been sent to Moscow for examination, according to deputy industry minister Berik Kamilyev, cited by Russian news agencies. One survivor told the Tengrinews website of a "terrible noise" just before the Fokker 100 lost altitude, and spoke of the "screams" and tears of passengers.

A young woman also told Russian television network Zvezda of her lucky escape after she and her young children just missed the flight because of school fair. In Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan's largest flag was at half-mast for the day of mourning while officials made urgent appeals for blood donations to help the dozens of injured survivors.

"Tail hit the tarmac on take-off"

Neighboring Russia and China were among the countries to join the Vatican and the European Union in expressing

condolences to the former Soviet Central Asian republic. Officials say the Fokker 100 plane's tail hit the tarmac twice on Friday during take-off before it came down and crashed into the concrete building. "Either this is a pilot error, or there were technical reasons," Deputy Prime Minister Roman Sklyar said at a press conference in Almaty on Friday.

"The aircraft split into two parts. Most of the passengers who died were in the front part." According to Kazakh emergency authorities, the 12 dead included the pilot. Another 47 passengers out of the 98 people onboard were still in hospital on Saturday. Nine of them were children, officials said. An investigation has been opened into "violation of security regulations and air transport operating rules". But the interior ministry is still examining possible causes of the accident. Investigators found scratch marks on the runway. "Before crashing, the aircraft touched the runway with its tail twice, the gear was retracted," Deputy Prime Minister Roman Sklyar told reporters.

"A commission ... will establish whether this was pilot error or technical issues. The runway was in an ideal condition." A Reuters reporter saw the battered remains of the front of the plane and other parts of the fuselage scattered around what was left of the house.

A survivor told news website Tengrinews she heard a "terrifying sound" before the plane started losing altitude. "The plane was flying at a tilt. Everything was like in a movie: screaming, shouting, people crying," she said.

Authorities initially put the death toll at 15 or more but later revised the figure to

12. They said 49 people were in hospitals, some of them in a serious condition. The plane had been carrying 93 passengers and five crew, and the interior ministry said the captain was among those killed.

The ministry said it was investigating a possible breach of flight operation and safety rules, a standard legal procedure. Kazakhstan's aviation committee said it was suspending all flights by carrier Bek Air and those of Fokker 100 aircraft pending the results of the investigation.

"Moans and screams"

Nazaraliyev said he had been seated next to an emergency exit in row 15 and all the rows in front of him were torn off when the plane broke in half on impact. After the shaking started and before the crash "I had enough time to put away my phone and fasten my seatbelt", he said.

"We got out through the emergency exit ... I and other men started getting people out and away from the plane. Some were trapped by concrete debris from the building. There were moans and screams and it was dark."

One of those killed, electrician Abai Nurbekov, was on the plane with his family of six, news website The Village reported. His wife and four children remained in intensive care. In Almaty, residents flooded a local blood donation center. Authorities cordoned off the crash site in the village of Almerek, just beyond the end of the runway. The airport remained operational with other planes taking off after the crash. At the airport at Nur-Sultan, relatives of the passengers - some of whom were going to join their families for the holidays - were being briefed on their

fate and offered flights to Almaty. "Those responsible will face tough punishment in accordance with the law," Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev tweeted, expressing condolences to the victims and their families. He also ordered an audit of all Kazakh airlines.

Tokayev declared Dec. 28 a national day of mourning and appointed Prime Minister Askar Mamin to head a commission to investigate the crash. Mamin's office said the commission will report preliminary findings by Jan. 10.

The crashed plane was built in 1996, the government said, and its most recent flight certificate was issued in May 2019. Bek Air, a low-cost carrier, made headlines in 2016 when one of its Fokkers had to land on its rear wheels after its landing gear failed to deploy fully. The same year, the airline successfully challenged aviation authorities' plans to make the International Air Transport Association operational safety audit mandatory for all local carriers on the grounds that such a move required changes to law rather than just government regulations.

According to the authorities, an inquiry should announce its first conclusions next month. But a dozen other Bek Air aircraft will be grounded in the meantime. According to the industry ministry, the low-cost airline operates nine Fokker-100 type aircraft, a medium-haul model built by the Dutch aircraft manufacturer Fokker. In March 2016, a Bek Air Fokker 100 with 116 passengers on board had to make an emergency landing at Nur-Sultan International Airport due to a landing gear problem, without causing injuries. —Agencies

Locust invasion destroys crops in northwest India



AHMEDABAD: Locusts sit in trees near Miyal village in Banaskantha district some 250km from Ahmedabad on Friday. A massive locust invasion has destroyed thousands of hectares of crops in northwest India, authorities said, with some experts terming it the worst such attack in 25 years. —AFP

AHMEDABAD: A massive locust invasion has destroyed thousands of hectares of crops in northwest India, authorities said, with some experts on Friday terming it the worst such attack in 25 years. While officials have attempted to tackle the swarm with pesticides, farmers have deployed drums to drive away the insects, with videos showing schoolgirls banging on steel plates—due to local beliefs that loud noise repels locusts.

The invasion has damaged crops in half a dozen districts in the northwestern state of Gujarat, local government official Punamchand Parmar said Thursday. More than 5,000 hectares (12,000 acres) have been devastated in one district alone, Parmar said.

"Nearly 25 percent of the locusts had been destroyed using pesticide. However, it will take another 4-5 days to exterminate the insects completely," he added. "Their flight path was initially towards Pakistan but due to change in wind direction and moisture, they landed in... north Gujarat," he said. The head of the entomology department at Gujarat's Anand Agriculture University, P K Borad, told AFP: "This is the worst locust attack witnessed in Gujarat in over two decades or so." "Such a huge swarm of locust was last seen in 1994," he added. The state's agriculture minister R C Faldu said that from Friday onwards, 100 tractors carrying pesticides would be sent to the affected villages to get rid of the insects.

But villagers were not leaving anything to chance, with many walking around the affected farms and banging drums to chase away the insects. "We have lost everything in our village," said one man. —AFP

Iraqis split on president's threat to quit

BAGHDAD: Iraqis were divided Friday by their president's threat to quit his job rather than accept a pro-Iran coalition's candidate for prime minister, with some saying it was unconstitutional but others praising his civic-mindedness.

Barham Saleh has resisted attempts by a pro-Iran coalition to put forward nominees for prime minister, including a resigned minister and a controversial governor. On Thursday, Saleh said he was "ready to resign" rather than accept a candidate already rejected by the protest movement that brought down the previous government.

Some 460 people have been killed and 25,000 injured since protesters hit the streets in unprecedented numbers in October, demanding a deep overhaul of the political system. After a relative lull, rallies resumed this week as parliament wrangled over who would succeed prime minister Adel Abdel Mahdi, who quit last month in the face of massive protests and a rising death toll.

With the country in crisis, some were hoping that the weekly sermon of influential Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani would offer a way forward. The 89-year-old is Iraq's top Shiite cleric and his opinion has long been decisive in the

country's politics. But he remained silent on the political situation Friday, further distancing himself from the ruling elite.

"Thank you Barham"

In Baghdad's Tahrir Square—the epicentre of the protest movement—a banner was unfurled overnight alongside portraits of rejected candidates for the premiership, their faces crossed out in red. "Thank you Barham for siding with the demands of the people and rejecting the candidates of corrupt parties. We are with you," it read.

But not all protesters shared this view. Saleh's resignation would "lead to chaos and give the political parties even more control over the country," said Ali Mohamed, a protesting teacher in Babylon province south of the capital. "The president needs to stay to resist these parties, he is the only barrier in place to ensure that a nationalist candidate is nominated." Further south in the protest encampment in Diwaniyah, Mohamed Mehdi said he hoped Saleh's resignation would be accepted. "That would lead to the dissolution of parliament. Then early elections could oust all these corrupt leaders," he told AFP.

"Into the unknown"

In the halls of power, reactions to Saleh's gambit were equally divided. The pro-Iran bloc that claims to be the largest in parliament—and should therefore be entitled to nominate the premier—called on lawmakers to "take legal action against the president for violating the constitution".

But the list of ex-prime minister Haider Al-Abadi, now



Baghdad: A man serves food to Iraqi protesters gathering at Baghdad's Tahrir Square as demonstrations against the political system continues for the third consecutive month across Iraq yesterday. —AFP

in opposition, called on Saleh to "reconsider his resignation" and work with all towards a "radical change in the balance of power". Abadi's list—which came third in the last elections but has since lost many of its lawmakers to the pro-Iran camp—said blocs must "abandon the mentality of treason, intimidation and domination" threatening to plunge Iraq "into the unknown". The pressure mounted by the pro-Iran camp is enormous, according to the Wataniya list of secular former premier Iyad Allawi. —AFP

International

More than 235,000 civilians flee intense bombing in NW Syria

Beleaguered city of Maaret Al-Numan left 'almost empty'

BEIRUT: Civilians on Friday packed a road leading out of a flashpoint town in northwest Syria, where two weeks of heightened regime and Russian bombardment has displaced 235,000 people. Pick-up trucks carrying mattresses, clothes and house-hold appliances ferried entire families out of southern Idlib province, most heading towards safer areas further north, said an AFP correspondent on the ground. Since mid-December, regime forces and their Russian allies have heightened bombardment on the southern edge of the final major opposition-held pocket of Syria, eight years into the country's devastating war. The latest violence in the jihadist-dominated Idlib region has killed scores of civilians, despite an August ceasefire deal and international calls for a de-escalation.

More than 235,000 people fled the area between December 12 and 25, mostly from the beleaguered city of Maaret Al-Numan which has been left "almost empty", according to the United Nations' humanitarian coordination agency OCHA. OCHA spokesman David Swanson said Friday that more than 80 per cent of those who have fled southern Idlib this month are women and children.

"I can't live in the camps," said Umm Abdo, a mother of five who recently arrived in a displacement camp in the town of Dana, north of Idlib's provincial capital. "The rain is very strong, and we need heating... clothes, and food," she said, her tired eyes showing through her veil.

Fierce battles, squalid camps

The Idlib region hosts some three million people, including many displaced by years of violence in other parts of Syria. It is dominated by the country's former Al-Qaeda affiliate, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, whose chief this week urged jihadists and allied rebels to head to the frontlines and battle "the Russian occupiers" and the regime.

Since December 19, HTS jihadists and their rebel

allies have been locked in fierce battles with regime forces around Maaret al-Numan. Damascus loyalists have seized dozens of towns and villages from jihadists in clashes that have killed hundreds of fighters on both sides. The advances have brought them to within four kilometers (two and a half miles) of Maaret Al-Numan, one of Idlib's largest urban centers. According to OCHA, ongoing battles have further amplified displacement from the area and the nearby town of Saraqeb.

"People from Saraqeb and its eastern countryside are now fleeing in anticipation of fighting directly affecting their communities next," it said.

The mass displacement could not come at a worse time, with heavy rainfall flooding squalid camps for the displaced. "Being forced to move in winter months exacerbates existing vulnerabilities, particularly of the women, children, elderly, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups," OCHA said.

Aid suspended

Since mid-December, the fighting has killed nearly 80 civilians, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor. US President Donald Trump reacted to the violence in a tweet on Thursday, saying that "Russia, Syria, and Iran are killing, or on their way to killing, thousands of innocent civilians in Idlib Province".

He added that Turkey was "working hard to stop this carnage". The escalation has forced aid groups to suspend operations in the area, exasperating already dire humanitarian conditions, OCHA said.

Idlib's residents mainly depend on critical cross-border aid, which came under threat last week after Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that would have extended such deliveries for a year. The move raised fears that vital UN-funded aid could stop entering Idlib from January unless an alternative agreement is reached.



HASAKEH: An elderly Syrian woman carries a toddler as others gather at the Washukanni camp for internally displaced persons (IDP) in the mainly Kurdish northeastern Syrian province of Hasakeh on Friday. —AFP

The Syrian regime pulled out of its last outposts in Idlib province in 2015, following fierce battles with rebels and Al-Qaeda-affiliated jihadists. The Damascus regime, which now controls 70 percent of Syria, has repeatedly vowed to take back the region. Backed by Moscow, Damascus launched a blistering offensive against Idlib in April, killing around 1,000 civilians and displacing more than 400,000 people.

Despite a ceasefire announced in August, the

bombardment has continued, prompting Turkey this week to press for a fresh ceasefire deal during talks in Moscow.

France on Tuesday called for an "immediate de-escalation", warning of deteriorating humanitarian conditions. The war in Syria has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since it began with anti-government demonstrations brutally crushed by security forces. —AFP

Algeria reviews security as Turkey readies Libya intervention

ALGIERS: Algeria's newly elected President Abdelmadjid Tebboune has chaired a rare meeting of the country's top security body to discuss contingency plans for a threatened Turkish military intervention in neighboring Libya.

The High Security Council met on Thursday and "discussed the situation in the region, particularly on the borders with Libya and Mali", the president's office said in a statement. "It decided on a battery of measures to boost the protection of our borders and national territory, and to revitalize Algeria's role on the international stage, particularly concerning these two issues."

The statement did not elaborate on the measures to be taken but said the council would meet again "periodically and whenever necessary". Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday opened the way for direct military intervention in Libya, announcing a parliamentary vote in early January on sending troops to support the UN-recognized Tripoli government against the forces of strongman Khalifa Haftar.

The same day, Libya's Government of National Accord said it may officially seek Turkish military support in the face of Haftar's months-long offensive to seize Tripoli. Turkey and its regional ally Qatar have already supplied an array of weapons to the Tripoli government, including drones, but is now threatening a sharp escalation.

In Mali and adjacent countries of the sprawling Sahel region, France has a 4,500-member force which has been fighting jihadists since 2013. Forty-one soldiers have died. Last month, 13 French soldiers were killed in a helicopter crash in the north of Mali as they hunted jihadists—the biggest single-day loss for the French military in nearly four decades. The Pentagon is looking into reducing or even withdrawing US troops from the region, including those supporting the French operation, the New York Times reported on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Libya's UN-recognized unity government in Tripoli has requested military support from Turkey, an agreement which Ankara will honor, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's top press aide said on Friday.

"Libya's government has requested Turkey's military support. As President Erdogan said, we will of course honor our agreement," Fahretin Altun tweeted. His comments come a day after Erdogan said the Turkish parliament would vote on January 8 or 9 on a motion to send troops to Libya in a bid to bolster the govern-



TRIPOLI: People attend a demonstration against eastern Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar and in support of the UN-recognized government of national accord (GNA) in the Martyrs' Square in the GNA-held capital Tripoli yesterday. —AFP

ment in Tripoli against strongman Khalifa Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army. "We're supporting the internationally recognized legitimate government in Libya. Outside powers must stop supporting illegitimate groups against the Libyan government," Altun wrote.

New reports have claimed that Russia has sent mercenaries to fight on Haftar's side—which was denied by Moscow. The United Nations has also accused the strongman's forces of recruiting fighters from Sudan. "As we support the Libyan

government, we do not want Libya to be a war zone," Altun said. "Those regional forces working to reestablish repressive regimes unaccountable to people are active in Libya. Their efforts to install client governments will not succeed."

Ankara signed a security and military cooperation deal with the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) in November. Separately, it also inked a maritime jurisdiction agreement with the GNA—which has drawn international criticism including from Greece. —AFP

Sudan, rebels agree plan to end conflict in Darfur

JUBA: The Sudanese government and nine rebel groups yesterday signed an agreement on a roadmap towards ending the bloody conflict in the Darfur region. The deal outlines different issues the parties will need to negotiate during the latest round of talks in Juba.

"We believe this is an important step," said Ahmed Mohamed, the chief negotiator on Darfur matters from the Sudan Revolutionary Front or SRF, a coalition of nine rebel groups involved in talks with the Sudanese government. "This step no doubt will help the process to achieve a lasting peace in Darfur and also it will enable the transitional process in Sudan to move smoothly without hindrances," Mohamed told AFP. Among the issues they agreed need to be tackled are the root causes of the conflict, the return of refugees and internally displaced people, power sharing and the integration of rebel forces into the national army.

The deal also states that the Sudanese government will address land issues, such as the destruction of property during the conflict. Khartoum has been negotiating with different rebel groups in the capital of South Sudan for two weeks, in the latest round of efforts to end conflicts in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan. Rebels in these areas fought bloody campaigns against marginalization by Khartoum under ousted president Omar Al-Bashir. —AFP

Election runoff set to cap turbulent year in Guinea-Bissau

BISSAU, Guinea-Bissau: Voters in Guinea-Bissau are being called out to cast their ballots in a presidential runoff today, capping a year of turmoil in the poor, coup-prone West African state.

After months of acrimony, people are being asked to choose between two former prime ministers—Domingos Simoes Pereira, from the traditional ruling PAIGC party, and opposition figure Umaro Sissoco Embaló. Embaló, a former general who wears a red-and-white Arab keffiyeh headress, is pitch-

ing himself as a unifier of the nation.

He is gambling that he can overhaul Pereira's lead by getting backing from losing candidates in the first round in November. "Umaro Sissoco Embaló has been able to rally all of the country's heavyweights behind him," said political analyst Augusto Nhaga.

A small country of 1.8 million people, Guinea-Bissau gained independence in 1974, but has suffered a string of military coups, attempted coups and political assassinations ever since.

After the latest coup in 2012, the West African regional bloc ECOWAS deployed a nearly 700-member force to try to stabilize the country.

Raucous campaign

The election campaign passed loudly and colorfully and with no violence. The two weeks before the runoff vote saw parades in the capital Bissau by supporters of rival candi-

dates, touting effigies of their champions.

Pereira, 56, a civil engineer by training, won 40.1 percent of the vote in the first round on November 24. He belongs to the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), which is historically rooted in the fight to end Portugal's colonial rule.

Embaló, 47, came second with 27.65 percent. He represents Madem, an opposition party formed by PAIGC rebels. The latest crisis erupted in 2015 when the incumbent president, Jose Mario Vaz, sacked Pereira as prime minister, a move that incensed the PAIGC.

Thereafter, Vaz was unable to get parliamentary backing for his proposed prime ministers—and parliament did not sit for nearly two years until April 2018 when Aristides Gomes was appointed "consensus" prime minister. Vaz himself contested the first round of voting, but came in a lowly fourth, with just 12.4 percent. —AFP

try to secure a visa before they can be allowed entry," Panoelo said on Friday.

American tourists—who can enter visa-free for up to 30 days—account for more than a tenth of arrivals, according to the Philippines tourism department. The senators' provision allows the US to deny entry to Philippine officials if the state department finds "credible information" on those involved in the "wrongful imprisonment" of De Lima. "We will not sit idly if they continue to interfere with our processes as a sovereign nation," Panoelo said.

De Lima, in a written statement from jail, thanked the senators for the provision, saying "impunity cannot last"—AFP

Philippines bans US senators, mulls visa for Americans

MANILA: The Philippines banned two US senators and threatened to introduce visa restrictions for Americans entering the country, the president's spokesman said Friday, as Washington pushes ahead with sanctions against Filipino officials involved in jailing a leading opposition leader.

Senators Richard Durbin and Patrick

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International

Navy SEAL pardoned by Trump called 'freaking evil' by comrades

Gallagher accused of stabbing to death an IS fighter in Iraq

WASHINGTON: A Navy SEAL platoon leader controversially pardoned of war crimes by US President Donald Trump was described as "toxic" and "freaking evil" by veterans who served with him in Iraq, The New York Times reported Friday.

Video testimony provided to war crimes investigators and published by the newspaper showed former members of Eddie Gallagher's elite commando unit accusing him of shooting at a 12-year-old and discussing the accusations that Gallagher targeted civilians. "The guy is freaking evil," special operator first class Craig Miller, one of the most experienced members of Alpha Platoon's SEAL Team 7, told the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS).

Another platoon member, identified by the Times as special operator first class Corey Scott, said: "You could tell he was perfectly okay with killing anybody that was moving." "The guy was toxic," special operator first class Joshua Vriens added.

Gallagher denies the allegations, dismissing them as smears by platoon members who could not match his performance.

Cause celebre

The sniper and medic, now 40, was originally accused of premeditated murder after allegedly stabbing to death a captured, wounded 17-year-old Islamic State fighter in Iraq in May 2017. During his 2019 trial, the case became a cause celebre in conservative media and Trump voiced support for the SEAL. The president intervened in March to have Gallagher

removed from jail and placed in a Navy hospital, where he had more freedom.

In July, Gallagher was acquitted of murder by a military jury but convicted of having posed for a picture next to the body of the IS fighter. He was demoted, and the Navy moved to remove his official SEAL pin-sometimes referred to as a Trident pin-a signal Gallagher had lost the respect of the elite group.

But Trump intervened again, ordering the pin and rank be restored. "The Navy will NOT be taking away Warfighter and Navy Seal Eddie Gallagher's Trident Pin," Trump tweeted November 21.

His comments came as multiple US news outlets reported that then-Navy Secretary Richard Spencer had threatened to resign over the affair, a claim he denied. "Contrary to popular belief, I am still here. I did not threaten to resign," the US Navy chief said in November, adding he did not consider Trump's tweet to be a formal order.

"I need a formal order to act," Spencer told reporters. On November 24, a Navy spokesman told AFP he could "confirm" the Navy had been notified the White House would ultimately not intervene in the process against Gallagher.

Spencer was fired that same day over the Gallagher dispute. Eventually, the NCIS began an inquiry and the platoon members were called to give evidence.

"My first reaction to seeing the videos was surprise and disgust that they would make up blatant lies about me, but I quickly realized that they were scared



In this file photo taken on June 21, 2019 Navy Special Operations Chief Edward Gallagher walks into military court in San Diego, California. — AFP

that the truth would come out of how cowardly they acted on deployment," Gallagher said in a statement to the Times issued by his lawyer.

Last weekend, Trump hosted Gallagher and his wife at Mar-a-Lago, the president's Florida resort, where he is spending the Christmas holidays. — AFP

Sexist slurs mar Taiwan presidential elections

TAIPEI: Taiwan has forged a reputation as Asia's most progressive democracy and it boasts a higher proportion of women in parliament than anywhere else in the region-yet misogynistic insults have littered its presidential race.

The campaign for the January 11 polls has exposed an undercurrent where female politicians face a gauntlet of personal abuse and jibes that their male counterparts rarely suffer.

The island's most prominent female politician is President Tsai Ing-wen, 63, who is seeking a second term. She has once again faced insults based on her gender, much of it focused on the fact she is not married and does not have children.

Wu Den-yih, chairman of the opposition Kuomintang party, earlier this month used a Taiwanese slang term to dub Tsai "an unlucky woman" who had brought misfortune to her people.

And her presidential opponent Han Kuo-yu, 62, invoked two characters from an ancient Chinese erotic novel to describe Tsai's rivalry with her running mate. Han's running mate Chang San-cheng also said Tsai could not understand the hearts of parents because she was "a woman who has never given birth".

In a Facebook post, Tsai hit out at the campaign rhetoric. "I find such a political culture unacceptable and we will not accept any personal attacks against women using such language," she wrote.

Wu later apologized, saying he respected women and meant to criticize Tsai's job performance.

'Sows and vases'

Taiwan's election will be closely watched because much of the campaign has centred on relations with authoritarian China which has ramped up pressure since Tsai's 2016 election. Tsai, a law professor and trade negotiator before she became a politician, is one of the few female leaders in Asia not to have hailed from a powerful political dynasty.

Separatists to swap prisoners with Kiev today

MOSCOW: Ukrainian authorities and pro-Russian separatists in the east of the country have agreed to swap several dozen prisoners today, the self-declared rebel republic of Donetsk said.

"Kiev and the Donbass (a term used to refer to rebel-held eastern Ukraine) have reached an accord on an exchange of prisoners... this Sunday December 29," Donetsk government spokeswoman Daria Morozova said in a statement. There was no immediate confirmation

from Kiev, but both sides said earlier this month they would carry out a prisoner exchange by the end of the year, following high-profile peace talks in Paris.

The swap would come three months after Ukraine carried out a long-awaited exchange with Russia of 35 prisoners each. More than 13,000 people have been killed and one million have fled their homes since pro-Russia militias in eastern Ukraine launched a bid for independence in 2014 — kicking off a conflict that deepened Russia's estrangement from the West.

At the Paris summit on December 23, the leaders of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine agreed to implement a full ceasefire and proceed with a new withdrawal of forces from conflict zones by March 2020. —AFP

She is loathed by Beijing because her party refuses to accept the idea that Taiwan is part of the so-called One-China policy which denies the island's independence.

Han, the outspoken mayor of Kaohsiung city, favors much warmer relations with China.

But it is not just Tsai on the receiving end of gender-based jibes. Chen Chu, a senior figure from Tsai's Democratic Progressive Party who was a political prisoner for six years when Taiwan was a dictatorship, has often been singled out for her appearance.

The KMT's Wu described her as "fat" and "a big sow" while Taipei's mayor Ko Wen-je, head of the new Taiwan People's Party, described her as "a fatter Han Kuo-yu".

During a failed attempt to win the KMT's nomination, Taiwan's wealthiest man and Foxconn founder Terry Gou dismissed his wife's initial opposition to his bid by saying "the harem should not meddle in politics". He later apologized for his remarks.

The DPP are not free of accusations either. A spokeswoman for KMT candidate Han complained that she was called "a vase" by Tsai's staff—a derogatory term used to describe a pretty woman that lacks substance.

Progressive island

On paper Taiwan has impressive credentials on progress towards gender equality in politics. The 2016 election that swept Tsai to power also returned a legislature where 38 percent of the seats were held by women, by far the highest proportion in Asia.

The next highest proportion is the Philippines with 29 percent while South Korea and Japan have 17 and 10 percent, respectively, according to a database compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union as of January 2019. Taiwan's progressive image got a further boost when it became the first in Asia to legalize same-sex marriages in May. But commentators say sexism and traditional views of gender still dominate—and flourish during elections.

"Taiwan has made progress in gender equality but conservative forces are still strong," Tseng Chao-yuan, from the women's rights group Awakening Foundation, told AFP. "It's disgusting that gender discriminatory comments keep recurring," she said, urging female politicians to stand up to the old-boy networks that dominate their parties. — AFP

Family could swim after Britons die in Spain pool: Mother

LONDON: The mother of two children who drowned alongside their British father in Spain has denied reports that they could not swim, suggesting instead that something was wrong with the resort's swimming pool. The tragedy took place on Christmas Eve as the family-of-five was holidaying at Club La Costa World in the southern Spanish resort of Mijas.

"The three of them knew how to swim," said Olubunmi Diya in a statement published Friday by the family's London-based church on Facebook, adding that the whole family was present when the incident happened. "The children went into the pool using the steps but found themselves dragged into the middle, which was deeper and called for help when they could not get out," she said, describing how her husband then entered the water to help them.

"I believe something was wrong with the pool that must have made swimming difficult for them at that point in time."

Gabriel Diya, 52, a Christian pastor, died alongside his nine-year-old daughter Comfort



The mother of two children who drowned alongside their British father in Spain has denied reports that they could not swim, suggesting instead that something was wrong with the resort's swimming pool.

and his 16-year-old son Praise-Emmanuel, who holds American nationality. "We are deeply shocked, saddened and struggling to come to terms with their passing," Olubunmi Diya added.

Sources close to the Spanish investigation had earlier said that a surviving sister had told police that the three did not know how to swim. Police had examined the pool's filters to see if the young girl had somehow been sucked in by the water purification system, a spokesman said.

The pool reopened on Thursday, according to footage shown on Spanish national television. In a statement, Club La Costa World said police had carried out a full investigation and given "formal permission to reopen the pool as they found no concerns relating to the pool or procedures in place".

"This was a tragic accident which has left everyone surrounding the incident in shock," it said, expressing concern for the care and support of the surviving family members and asking that their privacy be respected. —AFP

Survivors tell of France's 'dirty war' in Cameroon independence

EKITE, Cameroon: It was a "dirty war" waged by French colonial troops but it never made headlines and even today goes untold in school history books. The brutal conflict unfolded in Cameroon, which on January 1 marks its 60th anniversary of independence—the first of 17 African countries that became free from their colonial masters in 1960.

Many decades on, those who witnessed the violence recall events that shaped countless lives in the central African country yet remain unchronicled today. "My life was overturned," Odile Mbouma, 72, said in the southwestern town of Ekite. On the night of December 30, 1956, French troops arrived in the town and slaughtered dozens of people, perhaps as many as a hundred, she said.

"We were sitting under a tree when we suddenly heard the crackle of gunfire," she said. "It was everyone for themselves."

Taking to her heels, the seven-year-old found herself jumping over bodies. "They were everywhere."

The troops were looking for independence fighters—members of the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC), a nationalist movement established in 1948 that faced repression first by the French and later by Cameroonian soldiers. French authorities labelled the UPC "communist" and cracked down from 1955, driving the movement underground, though its charismatic founder Ruben Um Nyobe preached non-violence.

Buried in cement

In September 1958, Um Nyobe—nicknamed Mpodol (for "he who brings the word" in the Bassa language) — was killed by French



EKITE: Jean-Louis Kell, a UPC (The Union of the Peoples of Cameroon) militant, stands by one of the mass graves where the nationalists were buried, in Ekite. Parts of Cameroon were scarred by conflict before independence 60 years ago, but a "dirty war" waged by French colonial troops never made headlines and goes untold in school history books. —AFP

troops. "His body was dragged around and displayed so that everybody (saw the corpse) of a man who was considered immortal," said Louis Marie Mang, UPC activist in Eseké, where Um Nyobe is buried in a Protestant graveyard.

"To prevent traditional rites from being held, he was put in a block of cement and buried (without) a coffin." The conflict continued long beyond independence, for repression of the nationalists continued under Cameroon's first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, who also banned public references to the UPC and to Um Nyobe.

The violence "passed unnoticed, wiped from memories," according to Thomas Deltombe, Manuel Domergue and Jacob Tatsitsa, authors of "La guerre du Cameroun" ("Cameroon's War"), published in 2016. They estimate that between 1955 and 1964, tens of thousands of people, including civilians as well as UPC members, were killed.

In Ekite, a wreath of flowers lies on the soil of a scrubland field at the end of a dirt track.

"The Nation will remember your sacrifice," says a memorial notice.

"This is one of the mass graves where the nationalists were buried," said Jean-Louis Kell, a UPC militant. A second ditch was apparent a dozen metres (yards) away, and "a third was discovered not long ago," said Benoit Bassemel. He was seven during the French massacre and has tears in his eyes when he tells how his father was murdered.

UPC nationalists believe that the independence granted on January 1, 1960 was not what they fought for. They view the country's two post-independence presidents, Ahidjo and Paul Biya, who has been in office since 1982, as working hand-in-hand with France.

"We wanted to be free like the other countries. We no longer wanted white people to subjugate us," said 80-year-old Mathieu Njassep, in his tiny family apartment in Petit Paris, a poor district of Douala, the economic capital. In 1960, aged 21, Njassep joined the Cameroon National Liberation Army (ALNK), the UPC's armed wing. — AFP

International

India citizenship law protests rage on despite security clampdown

Hardline UP chief minister defends 'iron fist' to quell protests

MEERUT/LUCKNOW: India deployed thousands of police and shut down mobile internet services across many cities to control protests against a new citizenship law, with flash-point Friday prayers passing largely peacefully. Security was particularly tight in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, where 19 people have been killed since the protests began on Dec. 12, out of at least 25 deaths nationwide.

Authorities had feared that large crowds could gather after the weekly Muslim congregational prayers. Demonstrations were held after Friday prayers in the cities of Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Mumbai, but there were no major reports of violence as of 1200 GMT.

In Meerut, where five people were killed after violence last Friday, there were no gatherings. Nearly 3,000 police were deployed, four times more than last week, the city's police chief told Reuters.

The legislation makes it easier for minorities from India's Muslim majority neighbors - Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan - who settled before 2015 to get citizenship but does not make the same concessions for Muslims. Critics say the law - and plans for a national citizenship register - discriminate against Muslims and are an attack on the country's secular constitution by the Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The government has said no citizen will be affected and that there are no imminent plans for a register. On Friday, mobile internet services were ordered shut in many parts of Uttar Pradesh, including in the provincial capital Lucknow, the state government said.

In the national capital New Delhi, police imposed an emergency law in some parts of the city, forbidding large gatherings, news channels reported. Such prohibitions have been in place in Uttar Pradesh for more than a week. Thousands of demonstrators, waving Indian flags and holding placards rejecting the new law, protested peacefully in Bengaluru city amid a heavy police presence.

"I am here because the NRC is wrong," said Iqbal Ahmed, 42, a Muslim carpet seller and one of the protesters, referring to the register of citizens.

"This is our land and I am from here... Are we not



GUWAHATI: Rahul Gandhi, former President of Indian National Congress gestures as he speaks during a rally against India's new citizenship law in Guwahati yesterday.

Indian?" Muslims, India's second biggest community by religion, account for about 14 percent of its 1.3 billion people. Some parts of the country also saw rallies in favor of the new citizenship law but were outnumbered by demonstrations and protests against the legislation.

Meanwhile, the chief minister of India's Uttar Pradesh state has rebuffed accusations from rights groups of police abuses during protests against a new citizenship law, crediting his tough stand with restoring calm to the streets. The northern state has seen the most violent turmoil over Prime. The state's chief minister, Yogi Adityanath, a hardline Hindu priest who belongs to Modi's Hindu nationalist party, said his tough policies had ended the trouble. "Every rioter is shocked."

Every troublemaker is astonished. Looking at the strictness of the Yogi government, everyone is silent," one of Adityanath's verified official accounts on Twitter said late on Friday. "Do whatever you want to, but the damages will be paid by those who cause damages," it



GUWAHATI: Congress Party activists and supporters shout slogans during a rally against India's new citizenship law, in Guwahati yesterday. — AFP photos

added. Last week, his government said it was demanding millions of rupees from more than 200 people, threatening to confiscate their property to pay for damage during the protests.

Rights groups have decried what they say have been mass detentions and excessive force in the state, where officers have arrested more than 1,000 people. The government has said no citizen will be affected and there is no

imminent plans for a register. But a video circulating on social media is likely to compound the concerns of those worried about the plight of Muslims. It shows a senior UP police officer telling a demonstrator to "go to Pakistan if you don't want to live here". The official, Akhilesh Narayan Singh, told Reuters that some protesters had been shouting pro-Pakistan slogans. "It is in this situation I told them to go to Pakistan," he said yesterday. — Reuters

UN experts urge Pakistan to lift death sentence of scholar

GENEVA: United Nations human rights experts called on Pakistan's high court on Friday to clear liberal academic Junaid Hafeez of blasphemy charges and overturn his death sentence.

In a joint statement, they described Hafeez's condemnation by a lower court last week as a "travesty of justice" and said senior judges should acquit the former university lecturer on appeal. "We urge Pakistan's superior courts to promptly hear his appeal, overturn the death sentence and acquit him," said the independent experts who include UN investigators on freedom of religion, unlawful killings and arbitrary detention. In 2013 students at the university where Hafeez taught accused him of making blasphemous Facebook posts. Insulting Islam's Prophet Mohammad carries a mandatory death penalty in Pakistan, which is about 95 percent Muslim.

His lawyers say he was framed by students from a militant Islamist party because of his liberal and secular views. This month a US religious freedom commission placed Hafeez on its list of global victims.

Hafeez's family and lawyers released a statement saying the trial had been marked by a "wave of fear" and intimidation after Hafeez's initial defense lawyer, Rashid Rehman, was shot and killed in 2014 after agreeing to take on the case. No one has been charged with that murder. The family and lawyers said they would file an appeal against the verdict in the high court.

International law permits the death penalty only in exceptional circumstances, and requires incontrovertible evidence of intentional murder, the UN experts said. "The death sentence imposed on Mr. Hafeez has no basis in

either law or evidence, and therefore contravenes international law. Carrying out the sentence would amount to an arbitrary killing," they said.

"We are seriously concerned that blasphemy charges are still being brought against people legitimately exercising their rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and expression," they added.

Pakistan has arrested five suspected Al-Qaeda militants planning an attack on security personnel, authorities in the eastern state of Punjab said on Friday. The raid in Gujranwala city hit an important media cell and financing network for the jihadists. Punjab's counter-terrorism department said. Laptops with encrypted data, cell phones, a printing press, explosives, five Kalashnikov rifles,

ammunition and cash were found. For years militants have held sway in remote northwestern regions on the Afghan border but some have also established networks in Punjab, Pakistan's richest and most populous province. "They were planning attack on law enforcement officials in Gujranwala," the police statement added, without giving more details on the plot.

The Gujranwala group recently relocated from Karachi and was running Al-Qaeda's media operations for the Indian subcontinent and sending funds to central leadership in Afghanistan, it added. The Pakistan government says the number of militants in the country has decreased due to an army crackdown. Al-Qaeda founder Osama Bin Laden was killed in a US operation in 2011 in Pakistan. — Reuters



RAWALPINDI: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (center) stands with party leaders on his late mother Benazir Bhutto's 12th death anniversary in Rawalpindi on Friday. — AFP

Vietnam ex-minister gets life sentence in bribery case

HANOI: A court in Vietnam sentenced a former communications minister to life in prison yesterday for receiving millions of dollars in bribes, as the hardline administration presses its anti-graft drive against once-powerful figures in the communist state.

Nguyen Bac Son was charged alongside his then-deputy Truong Minh Tuan with receiving \$3.2 million in bribes to approve the 2015 purchase of a TV firm that would have lost state-run telecommunications firm Mobifone \$300 million.

The two-week trial in Hanoi for the men-once members of the powerful communist party central committee-ended Saturday, according to state-run media Tuoi Tre. Son, a minister from 2011-2016, was sentenced to life in prison while Tuan-who took over as minister until he was fired in July last year-got 14 years in prison.

"The defendants' behavior caused bad opinions in society, resulting in especially huge losses for the state," state media quoted the verdict as saying. It also "caused \$300 million in losses to state coffers," the verdict said, though the transaction was never fully completed.

Son reportedly admitted wrongdoing before the court and asked for leniency, while Tuan said he was "shameful for his mistakes", said Tuoi Tre. Prosecutors had initially proposed the death penalty for Son, but he was spared after he returned the money on Friday before the verdict's announcement.

Both men had received the money from Phan Nhat Vu, director of the loss-making TV company Audio Visual Global, who was also sentenced to three years in prison yesterday, while 11 other officials involved received jail terms between two and 23 years. Vu's brother is Vietnam's

richest man Phan Nhat Vuong, with assets totalling billions of dollars thanks to a cradle-to-grave empire that includes housing, holiday resorts, farms, schools, shopping malls and cars.

The case has captivated a public unused to seeing powerful figures publicly toppled. Since Vietnam's transition to a hardline ultra-conservative administration in 2016, the government has ramped up an anti-corruption campaign which has jailed dozens of senior officials, bankers and businessmen.

Some observers believe the drive to be politically motivated. Vietnam, one of Asia's fastest growing economies, has long been plagued by endemic corruption, with Transparency International ranking it 117 out of 180 countries on its corruption index. — AFP



HANOI: A cyclist rides past a stage being set up in front of the Hanoi Opera House to welcome the new year 2020 in Hanoi on Friday. — AFP

Nearly 2,000 evacuated as 'scary' cyclone hammers Fiji

WELLINGTON: Nearly 2,000 people took refuge in emergency shelters and one man was missing after being swept away in floodwaters as Tropical Cyclone Sarai pounded Fiji yesterday causing widespread damage.

National Disaster Management Office Director Vasiti Soko urged locals and the thousands of tourists in Fiji not to be reckless as Sarai lashed the Pacific island nation with heavy rain and destructive winds. With wind gusts strengthening to 150 kilometers (93 miles) per hour during the day, Sarai destroyed houses and crops, brought down trees, cut power and caused considerable flooding in low-lying areas.

Thousands of holidaymakers were stranded with flights to and from Fiji either cancelled or rescheduled. New Zealander Melonie Sheppard, who was holidaying on Mana Island to the west of mainland Fiji, described the situation as "scary" and said their resort was in lockdown. "We're being hammered by intense winds and horizontal rains. The resort is providing packed meals and water direct to rooms when they can," she told the New Zealand Herald. "Wind is howling and tree debris flying about, doors and windows shaking, huge waves rolling into shore. Water now leaking into some rooms-it's a bit scary at times." The Fiji government issued a statement warning of "destructive force winds with... coastal sea flooding to be expected."

The National Disaster Management Office said as of mid-morning yesterday, 1,970 people had sought emergency shelter and there had been no reports of any injuries. However, there were fears for the safety of a man swept away as he tried to cross a flooded river while another man, reported missing at sea, was rescued in his fiberglass dinghy by police. — AFP

Internet shutdowns costing mobile carriers millions of rupees in lost revenue

NEW DELHI: Indian mobile operators are losing around 24.5 million rupees (\$350,000) in revenue every hour they are forced to suspend internet services on government orders to control protests against a new citizenship law, a top lobby group said on Friday.

Countrywide protests have raged for three weeks after India's parliament passed legislation which gives minorities from neighboring Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh a path to citizenship but excludes Muslims. That, coupled with a plan for a national register of citizens, are seen by critics as anti-Muslim moves by the Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

To quell protests, government has deployed thousands of police as well intermittently ordered mobile data shutdowns at a time people have used social media such as Instagram and TikTok to wage a parallel battle online. Such internet suspensions have been criticized by internet freedom activists.

On Friday, mobile internet was ordered shut in at least 18 districts in northern Uttar Pradesh state, a telecoms industry source told Reuters. A Reuters witness received a text message from an internet service provider announcing that home broadband services on the outskirts of capital New Delhi will be unavailable for 24 hours, till the morning of Dec 28.

Indians consume an average 9.8 gigabyte of data per month on their smartphones, the highest in the world, according to Swedish telecoms gearmaker Ericsson. The country is the biggest market by users for social media firm Facebook and its messenger WhatsApp. Internet shutdowns should not be first course of action, said the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), which counts mobile carriers Bharti Airtel, Vodafone Idea and Reliance Industries' Jio Infocomm as its members.

"We've highlighted the cost of these shutdowns," COAI director general Rajan Mathews told Reuters. "According to our computation at the end of 2019, with the increase in online activities we believe the cost (of internet shutdowns) is close to 24.5 million rupees for an hour of internet shutdown."

The revenue losses will pile on to the woes of India's telecoms sector, bruised by a price war and saddled with a combined \$13 billion in overdue payments following a Supreme Court ruling in October.

Bharti, Vodafone Idea and Reliance Jio did not respond to emails seeking comment. The bans follows an unprecedented shutdown of internet and text messaging services in parts of Delhi last week, widening a communications clampdown in restive areas stretching from disputed Kashmir to the northeast.

Internet services in Indian Kashmir were suspended for over 140 days since New Delhi relegated its status to a federal administered territory from a state, making it the longest such shutdown in a democracy, according to digital rights group Access Now. — Reuters

Analysis

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Washington Watch

The importance of knowing Bethlehem

By Dr James J Zogby

I have long been troubled by the way so many believing Christians in the West have either been ignorant of or turned their backs on the plight of Palestinians, both Christian and Muslim. Right-wing Evangelicals, under the sway of heretical theology, are so blinded by their obsession with Israel that they can't see Israel's victims. Other Western Christians simply just don't know or about the people of Palestine.

I find this state of affairs to always distressing, but especially so at Christmas time, since the Christmas story we celebrate not only took place in that land, it continues to define the lives of the Palestinians who live in places like Bethlehem and Nazareth. When Western Christians think of those communities, the pictures that come to mind are the mythologized images that are the product of our movies, artists, songs, and stories. That Bethlehem is a real place with real people is lost on them. It was with this thought in mind, that several years ago I wrote a reflection on the importance of knowing the real Bethlehem.

Bethlehem has always loomed large in our imagination. For generations, the feelings evoked by this town have been captured in multiple art forms, serving to inspire both believers and non-believers with its message of hope and the joyful promise of new life.

For those who do not know the place, Bethlehem possesses a timeless quality, derived from these artistic creations. It is a place of mystery and contradictions. It is the peaceful little town that played an out-sized role in history; the birthplace of Jesus, the child born in a cave, heralded by angels, and visited by shepherds and kings. For hundreds of millions of Christians worldwide, these are the images that define Bethlehem. Sadly, in reality, all of this is but a fantasy, since the pressures of contemporary daily life in this historic community paint a remarkably different portrait.

Suffering under Israeli military occupation since 1967, Bethlehem has slowly been strangled. It has lost most of its land to settlement construction. It is hemmed in by a 30-foot-high concrete wall, stripped of its resources, and denied access to external markets. As a result, 25 percent of Bethlehem's people are unemployed, while 35 percent live below the poverty level.

Before the occupation, for example, a few thousand Palestinians in Bethlehem were employed as craftsmen known worldwide for their olive-wood and mother-of-pearl artifacts. Today, denied the ability to freely export and hurt by the instability of military rule, that industry employs only a few hundred. Similarly, Bethlehem's tourism has suffered. Israeli companies that dominate the industry bring tourists to stay in hotels in areas they control, making only day trips to Bethlehem's holy places. The crowds come to the town for a few hours, but their revenue disproportionately goes to the Israelis.

Bethlehem has lost so much land to Israeli confiscation for settlement construction that it can no longer expand. Now it can only build vertically. As a result, what is left of Bethlehem has become overcrowded, with traffic congesting its narrow streets.

Israeli leaders often complain that they must expand their settlements further so that their youth can find housing. And they insist that they must continue to build their wall, in order to protect the residents of these illegal colonies. What they do not say is that the wall is built through Palestinian-owned lands, cutting villages from their properties, and the expansion of the mammoth settlement colonies at Har Homa, Gilo, Har Gilo, Betar Ilt, Giva'ot, and more are occurring at the expense of Palestinians living in the Bethlehem region. The Israelis call these colonies "neighborhoods of Jerusalem."

This is but a crude effort to obfuscate the reality that they are all built on Bethlehem area land -illegally confiscated by Israel and then unilaterally annexed to what they call "Greater Jerusalem." As a result, Palestinians now retain only tenuous control of 13 percent of the Bethlehem region - with the Israelis still threatening to take more. In fact, the 22 Israeli settlements built in the Bethlehem region, the roads that connect them, and the wall that protects them were all built on land taken from Palestinians. And the new expansion plans for Jewish-only housing and the extension of the wall simply means that more land will be taken, leaving less for Palestinians.

Look at a map and you will see that Bethlehem is but a few miles from Jerusalem. As late as 20 years ago, standing near Manger Square, one could look out over a green space, the hill of Jabal Abul Ghnam, and see the Holy City. The trip, by car, was only 15 minutes. Today that view has been obliterated by the 30-foot wall, and that green space, where Palestinian families once picnicked, is now the site of the monstrous concrete settlement of Har Homa - home to 25,000 Israelis.

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

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



Supporters and activists of Trinamool Congress (TMC) take part in a rally against India's new citizenship law in Siliguri yesterday. — AFP

India's citizenship protests: Why now?

Mumbai-based copywriter Sarah Syed says she was long alarmed by the Hindu nationalist direction of India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi but felt powerless to stop it - until now. Like many others taking part in the current wave of protests, the final straw was Modi's new citizenship law and then the images of students being tear-gassed when they demonstrated against it. "It's not as if one didn't know that things were not right. But for many of us, politics was just too depressing to think about," said Syed, a Muslim married to a Catholic.

"Now though it feels criminal to sit out the protests and say nothing," the 27-year-old told AFP. The law, which offers fast-track citizenship to non-Muslim nationals from three neighboring countries, is the latest policy instituted by Modi's government that critics accuse of marginalizing Muslims in the Hindu-majority nation. During his nearly six years in power, Modi's party has renamed places with Islamic-origin names, rewritten history textbooks to diminish or discredit the role of Muslim leaders, and stripped the Muslim-dominated region of Kashmir of its special autonomy.

Modi has insisted the legislation will have no impact

on Indian Muslims, however his party's 2019 election pledge to conduct a nationwide survey to identify illegal immigrants has raised fears among Muslims of becoming stateless, with no fast-track naturalization option available to them.

Mumbai-based lawyer Momin Musaddique, who has been providing free legal advice to people worried about the implications of the law, said years of pent-up anxiety among Muslims have finally found an outlet in the protests rippling across the country. "People have been afraid for so long of this government's Hindu nationalist agenda that they now feel like they have nothing left to fear," he told AFP. "Now that their very survival in India is under threat, they have no option but to protest," he added.

'We have woken up'

In addition to Muslims, the demonstrations have galvanized large sections of Indian society, from secular Hindus and members of other minorities to intellectuals and opposition politicians. Historian Zoya Hasan of Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University told AFP the protests represented "the biggest challenge to the Modi govern-

ment in the last six years". Several local governments in opposition-ruled states such as Kerala and West Bengal have said they will not conduct surveys for the national citizens' register, responding to the public mood and undermining the prime minister's authority.

Although the protests began as a fight against the citizenship law, many of the demonstrators are now seeking a rollback of the government's push to remake officially secular India as a Hindu nation, said Hasan. Nevertheless, she added that the unrest was unlikely to derail Modi's Hindu nationalist campaign and risk alienating his base which propelled him to a landslide re-election victory in May. "The government may take a step back as a result of the protests but they are not going to move away from their core agenda," Hasan said.

For first-time protester Syed, participating in the demonstrations left her with "goosebumps" as she described her elation at seeing people from different communities come together. "I used to feel so helpless before, like there was nothing I could do to change the way things were in this country," she said. "The government's strategy has been all smoke and mirrors", she said. "Now we have woken up." — AFP

Little party mood in Cameroon as 60th anniversary looms

Next year will see a wave of celebrations in Africa among 17 countries that gained their independence in 1960. But in Cameroon, the first country in the jubilee line, the mood among many people is sour. The highly diverse central-western state was traditionally viewed as one of the most stable in Africa. But today, a combination of conflict, political tension and economic uncertainty are putting the country through one of its most wrenching periods since it decolonized from France on January 1, 1960.

"We're not thinking about the 60th anniversary. We just accept it," said David Fomuso, a father of three, in an impoverished district of Douala, Cameroon's oil hub. "If there hadn't been the crisis, I would be partying right now." Two years ago, Fomuso and his family fled his village in western Cameroon where the security forces are battling armed separatists campaigning for a breakaway state for the country's English-speaking minorities.

Bloodshed

More than 3,000 people have been killed and over

700,000 displaced, according to independent monitors. Conflict of a different kind is gripping Cameroon's Far North Region - the tongue of land that lies between Nigeria to the west and Chad to the east. Here, brutal attacks by Boko Haram jihadists from Nigeria have killed 2,000 people, displaced a quarter of a million others and spurred the rise of vigilante groups, according to the International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank.

"The people we met in Cameroon's Far North are living in terror," said Amnesty International's Samira Daoud. "(...) They no longer ask whether there will be further attacks but when they will take place - they feel completely abandoned by the authorities." The twin crisis has placed a stark spotlight on President Paul Biya, who at 86 is the second longest-serving ruler in Africa after Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang Nguema. The close ally of France has been in power for 37 years - the only leader known to most of the country's 25 million people, more than 60 percent of whom are aged under 25. "The people are thirsty for change," said opposition leader Maurice Kamto, the runner-up in presidential elections last year. Kamto, who alleges electoral fraud, was imprisoned this year and freed after eight months.

French ties

Of the 17 countries that mark their 60th anniversary of independence next year, 14 are former French colonies - the others are Nigeria, Somalia and Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite the passing decades, France's relationship with its former colonies is colored

for many by memories of exploitation and French backing for dictators. "People are fed up and the prime cause is France's support for despotic regimes," said Emmanuel Tehumtchoua, a historian at the University of Douala. "Whether you like it or not, people are frustrated."

French President Emmanuel Macron has vowed to overhaul the relationship. He has thrown his support behind a reform of the French-backed currency used by its former West African colonies and characterized by critics as a colonial relic. The eight countries that use the western CFA franc will no longer have to lodge reserves with the Bank of France, and France will withdraw from the currency's supervisory boards, under the change announced in Abidjan on Dec 21.

The big question is whether the six countries, including Cameroon, which use the central African variant of the franc will follow suit. Supporters of the CFA franc say the current arrangement provides stability, helps financial transfers between member countries and dampens inflation. However, critics say it limits growth policies and thus crimps economic freedom. Biya last month chaired a summit of central African leaders on the future of the CFA franc, but so far has not spelt out his position. "Relations between France and Cameroon are... deep and strong but they are moving, evolving," said Laurent Mbassi, an associate researcher in international politics at the Cameroon Institute of International Relations (IRIC). "Cameroon is moving towards its destiny with others states on the international scale," he said. "The relationship with France is not what it was 20 or 40 years ago." — AFP

Rwanda's vision for future leaves poor on the curb

Slum dwellers in Kigali are accusing city authorities of stirring their homes without paying compensation, stirring anger among poorer Rwandans who feel marginalized by a government-led push to modernize the capital. This month, the first of thousands of homes slated for demolition in Kigali's unplanned settlements were bulldozed, sparking protests from owners and tenants told to move on.

City authorities say the homes were built illegally on wetlands, or areas deemed at risk from landslides and flooding, and those evicted were being offered lodgings elsewhere. But many of Kigali's poorest no longer feel welcome in a city that has undergone a major facelift as part of President Paul Kagame's masterplan to turn Rwanda into a wealthy nation by 2050.

The capital has been the focus of a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure blitz in recent years, with futuristic convention centers, five-star hotels and modern flats altering the skyline. The city has earned a reputation among African capitals for its unusually ordered and clean streets, but the heavy-handed approach of local authorities has caused alarm. Rights groups have accused the Rwandan government of rounding up "undesirables", including street children, beggars and prostitutes, and holding them in a grim detention centres.

Critics say the poor have paid a steep price for Kigali's

transformation. But pockets of resistance have emerged as slums have been cleared to make way for modern housing complexes or green areas. In Nyarutarama, a neighborhood hosting Kigali's largest informal settlements, some residents have refused to make way for the wrecking ball, defying state orders.

"We were told to move because the land was for public benefit," said Antoinette Mushiyimana, whose home in Nyarutarama is among those marked for destruction. "We are being relocated to another small house in Busanza (a suburb in Kigali). But they are not giving me the compensation I deserve. That is why many people have refused to move," she told AFP. These slums are disparagingly called "Banyaha" - a naming roughly translating to "where I can defecate" - and border some of Kigali's most exclusive postcodes.

Left out

City authorities insist the evictions are for the good of the people. "The city informed these people that the law does not allow them to live on wetland areas. They were given letters and advice, but nothing was done," Kigali officials said in a statement. "This is even more important because of the heavy rain and floods, which might cause deaths." But some residents accused the local government of renegeing on a deal to pay for the land.

Emmanuel Bayahore said he agreed to vacate his home when city authorities valued his property at Rwf 28 million (USD\$29,500) in 2017. But when it was demolished in December, he was handed just Rwf 30,000 to find new shelter for his wife and three children. "They destroyed the house, and didn't even give me enough to pay rent for my family," he said. He vowed to take the matter to court - an avenue being explored by others who felt cheated and brushed aside in a city pushing them ever further to the



A child plays with a tyre on a street in a slum on the outskirts of Kigali on Oct 17, 2019. — AFP

margins. Kagame, who has been in power since 1994, says his "Vision 2050" for a new Rwanda will drive economic transformation for all in the tiny, landlocked country where close to 40 percent live in poverty. Few at home disagree with his plan, or the tremendous costs involved in rebranding Rwanda as a destination for foreign investment, high-end tourists and global conferences.

A shiny convention centre opened in Kigali in 2016 cost a reported \$300 million, making it one of Africa's most expensive buildings. A new \$1.3 billion international airport for Kigali is in the works. The government also paid European football clubs Arsenal FC and Paris St Germain to promote its "Visit Rwanda" tourism campaign.

But in Kigali, the rising condos and gleaming buildings have made life harder for ordinary Rwandans, driving up rents and the cost of living. Unemployment rose to 16 percent in November, official figures show, and inflation has climbed too. — AFP

Business

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settle long-running gas dispute**14** Ooredoo Kuwait concludes
2019 with success

BEIRUT: Lebanese protesters shout slogans outside a branch of BLC Bank in Beirut yesterday in protest against nationwide restrictions imposed on dollar withdrawals and transfers abroad in an attempt to conserve dwindling foreign currency reserves. —AFP

Lebanese businesses fight for survival

Central bank head hints at further slump of pound

BEIRUT: After decades of hard work, self-made Lebanese chocolatier Roger Zakhour thought he would finally be able to pass a successful business to his daughter. But then the economic crisis hit.

Instead of reaping profits this Christmas, he and his 29-year-old daughter are marking down their handmade ice cream logs. "If it continues like this, in a few months I'll be bankrupt," the 61-year-old said sitting in his small shop, surrounded by colorful stacks of hand-crafted chocolates.

In protest-hit Lebanon, a free-falling economy, price hikes and a severe dollar liquidity crunch have left local businesses struggling to stave off collapse. Zakhour started making chocolates and then ice cream in the 1990s, refining his recipes until he became a go-to for five-star hotels and well-off Lebanese.

But as the economy worsened over the autumn, high-end hotels drastically reduced their orders and walk-in customers became rare. Banks have restricted access to dollars since the end of the summer, sending prices soaring as importers struggle to secure enough hard currency to buy supplies.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's central bank governor said "nobody knows" how much more the cost of dollars could rise on the black market as a dire crisis piles pressure on a 22-

year-old currency peg.

Deep in political turmoil, Lebanon is grappling with its worst economic crisis in decades and battered confidence in its banking system. The risk of devaluation has risen in a country with one of the world's biggest foreign debt burdens.

The Lebanese pound has weakened by more than 30 percent on the parallel market, now the main source of cash. Banks have imposed tight controls, and the hard currency squeeze has driven importers to hike prices.

"We hope the country itself will improve so that the economy can improve," Central Bank Governor Riad Salameh told reporters after a meeting with parliament's finance and budget committee on Thursday. When asked how much higher the cost of dollars would rise, he said "nobody knows". He did not elaborate. A Banque du Liban (BDL) spokesperson said Salameh's comments did not indicate any change in the official pegged rate and the central bank's policy remained to preserve it. The remark "came in response to a question about the rate at exchange dealers specifically."

Salameh has ruled out a break in the peg, which fixes the pound at 1,507.5 to the dollar. He has pledged repeatedly to maintain it.

Last month, Salameh said the central bank had the ability to underpin the pound's stabil-

ity. He also said it would not go to exchange dealers to give them dollars to keep the official rate.

Street exchange dealers were offering dollars at above 2,000 Lebanese pounds in recent days. Banks, still dealing at the official rate, have blocked nearly all transfers abroad and curbed dollar withdrawals - including limits of \$200 a week.

The head of banking association has called the controls "a fence to protect the system" until things return to normal. "We're heading somewhere we never imagined we would," said Zakhour, who had just upgraded his kitchen when sales dropped off.

Support fellow citizens

In pursuit of high-quality products, Zakhour imports his ingredients, paying in euros or dollars. But with withdrawals restricted and no transfers abroad, that is no longer viable. "Now when something runs out, that's it," he said. Unprecedented protests have swept Lebanon since October 17, with people from all backgrounds demanding a complete overhaul of a political class they deem useless and corrupt.

The government stepped down on October 29, but endless political deadlock has delayed a new one being formed to tackle the urgent need for economic reforms.

Zakhour's business is just one of thousands struggling to stay afloat. Many Lebanese have been forced to close shop, and a large number have been fired or seen their salaries slashed by half, even as the cost of living increases.

Watching all this unfold, 31-year-old nursery school teacher Lea Hedary Kreidi and her family racked their brains to see how they could help. Shortly after protests started, they launched a group on Facebook called "Made in Lebanon-The Lebanese Products Group" to encourage Lebanese to buy locally produced goods. In just two months, they amassed more than 32,000 members, who post ads for locally or home-made goods, or ask for local alternatives to imported products.

'Made in Lebanon'

"We're used to going shopping and buying what our mothers used to buy. We grab what's in front of us without checking if it's made in Lebanon or not," she said, seated at home by a sparkling Christmas tree. But there are locally made options for numerous products, including detergent, shampoo, nappies, peanut butter, ketchup, and children's building blocks.

"I was surprised by how many things there were that I didn't know about," said

the mother of a baby boy. In her drive to support her fellow citizens, Kreidi now skips her usual supermarket in favour of nearby small grocers.

This Christmas, only the children in her family will be receiving presents, which will all be made in Lebanon. In Beirut, bar manager Rani Al-Rajji says he is also having to adapt-moving away from increasingly expensive imports while also remaining affordable.

"As much as I can, I'm trying to lessen the blow so our guests don't feel they've lost their purchasing power and can no longer afford to go out," said the 43-year-old, who is also an architect.

To do this, he and his co-founders are trying to increase local brands from a fifth to around a half of all bar and kitchen supplies. "We're trying to use local products for all those with an alternative made in Lebanon," he said, sitting at the bar.

And they are also attempting to cut out unnecessary packaging and marketing costs, serving wine directly from the barrel and beer from the keg.

"We can't replace everything, but we can try to give Lebanese products more life, encourage their consumption," he said. But some cash-strapped consumers say buying local is not their chief concern. —Agencies

Union boss defiant as record French strike enters fourth week

PARIS: The head of a hardline French trade union on Friday vowed to press on with a crippling strike that has cast a shadow over Christmas celebrations, with the stoppages entering a fourth week and becoming the longest-lasting such action since the 1980s. The strike against pension reforms championed by President Emmanuel Macron began on December 5 and has seen most of the Paris metro shut down ever since and only a fraction of inter-city trains running.

Now on day 23, the union stoppage is longer than the notorious 22-day strike of the winter of 1995 under late president Jacques Chirac against welfare cutbacks which forced the then government into a U-turn. The longest transport strike in France lasted for 28 days, also over

Christmas, in 1986 and early 1987. Calls by Macron and others for a holiday truce have gone unheeded.

"It's a strong movement and still supported by public opinion," said Philippe Martinez, secretary general of the CGT union as he visited picketing workers at a bus depot. He lashed out at Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, who has said he wants no confrontation with the strikers, accusing him of not being true to his word.

"The government shows how agitated it is with this kind of conception of social dialogue," said Martinez.

No end in sight

Transport in Paris remained paralyzed on Friday, a day the French capital would normally be crammed with shoppers seeking post-Christmas bargains or preparing for the New Year. There appears to be no end in sight to the current walkouts with talks between the government and unions only set to resume on January 7 and major demonstrations planned two days later.

Just two driverless metro lines worked normally Friday and five lines were completely shut down. National rail operator SNCF said six out of every 10 high-speed TGV trains were running. SNCF said in a statement that while 8.5 percent of its total employees were on strike, 38.8 percent of drivers were not working. It said just 35 percent of

scheduled TGVs would be working on New Year's Day and 50 percent on January 2.

"I feel like the government is even more cornered than it was in 1995, so we are heading towards a deadlock with the government eventually winning the conflict, but with a lot of collateral damage," said Bernard, a pensioner, as he waited for a train at Montparnasse station in Paris. Another passenger, Audrey, a saleswoman, said she was in favor of the strike. "They want their voices to be heard, and, unfortunately, there is no other way. Of course there are elections, but it's not enough."

New Year's Eve was also set to be affected with the driverless metro lines 1 and 14 the only ones working into the night, although more night buses were expected to run.

Buses have largely remained running, albeit with a much reduced service, but union activists blocked four Paris bus depots early Friday before being dispersed peacefully by Paris police, the local authorities said. The unions are demanding the government drops a plan to merge 42 existing pension schemes into a single, points-based system.

The overhaul would see workers in certain sectors-including the railways-lose early-retirement benefits. The government says the shake-up is needed make the system fairer.



PARIS: French anti-riot policemen put a fire out during a demonstration as part of a nationwide multi-sector strike against French government's pensions overhaul in Paris yesterday. —AFP

But workers object to 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. Macron is due to give his traditional New Year address on December 31 and his words will be watched closely for any sign the government is prepared to water down the reform. —AFP

Business

Recession, robots and rockets: Roaring 20s for world markets?

Generation Z, silver spenders carry consumer clout

LONDON: Helicopter cash, climate crises, smart cities and the space economy—investors have all those possibilities ahead as they enter the third decade of the 21st century. They go into the new decade with a spring in their step, after watching world stocks add over \$25 trillion in value in the past 10 years and a bond rally put \$13 trillion worth of bond yields below zero.

They also saw internet-based firms transform the way humans work, shop and relax. Now investors are positioning for the tech revolution's next 10 years. Could we see a repeat of the roaring twenties, as the 1920s were known—years of prosperity, technological innovation and such social developments as women winning the right to vote?

Possibly. But there's unease, along with all the euphoria. The current economic cycle is already the longest in US history and a recession looks inevitable in the new decade—which also will mark 100 years since the Wall Street crash of 1929. And solutions may need to be unconventional, even more so than the extraordinary policies of negative interest rates and bond-buying that eased the post-2008 global funk.

With those policies maxed out, "in the 2020s it seems inevitable that a world of helicopter money awaits," Deutsche Bank predicts. That would entail central banks or governments providing citizens with large amounts of money, as though it was being dropped from helicopters, a strategy rejected even by the unorthodox policymakers of the 2010s.

Another radical option under discussion is modern monetary theory, when governments create and spend as much money as needed, so long as inflation stays low.

"Central banks have effectively invited governments to experiment with more unconventional policies," Deutsche said. However, those policies may pile up even more global debt, already at record highs.

So what will markets do? A decade of rock-bottom interest rates didn't revive growth and inflation in developed nations, but they certainly inflated markets, as prices for bonds,

equities and real estate show. The inequality they spawned have also triggered a widespread backlash against globalization. The result is a de-globalizing world, or as Morgan Stanley puts it, "slow-balization".

The bank expects tech investments to outperform, in particular smaller internet firms in China, as protectionism hurts larger rivals. But it predicts less exciting returns—"a lower and flatter frontier compared to prior decades, and especially compared to the ten years post-GFC (global financial crisis)."

Global warming, people ageing

As market returns cool, the planet will continue to heat up. Carbon emissions, temperatures, sea levels and thus climate-induced poverty and immigration are expected to rise. That should increasingly lead asset managers to seek alternatives to pollutants, especially coal, use of which must cease in OECD nations by 2030 for the Paris Agreement to be met.

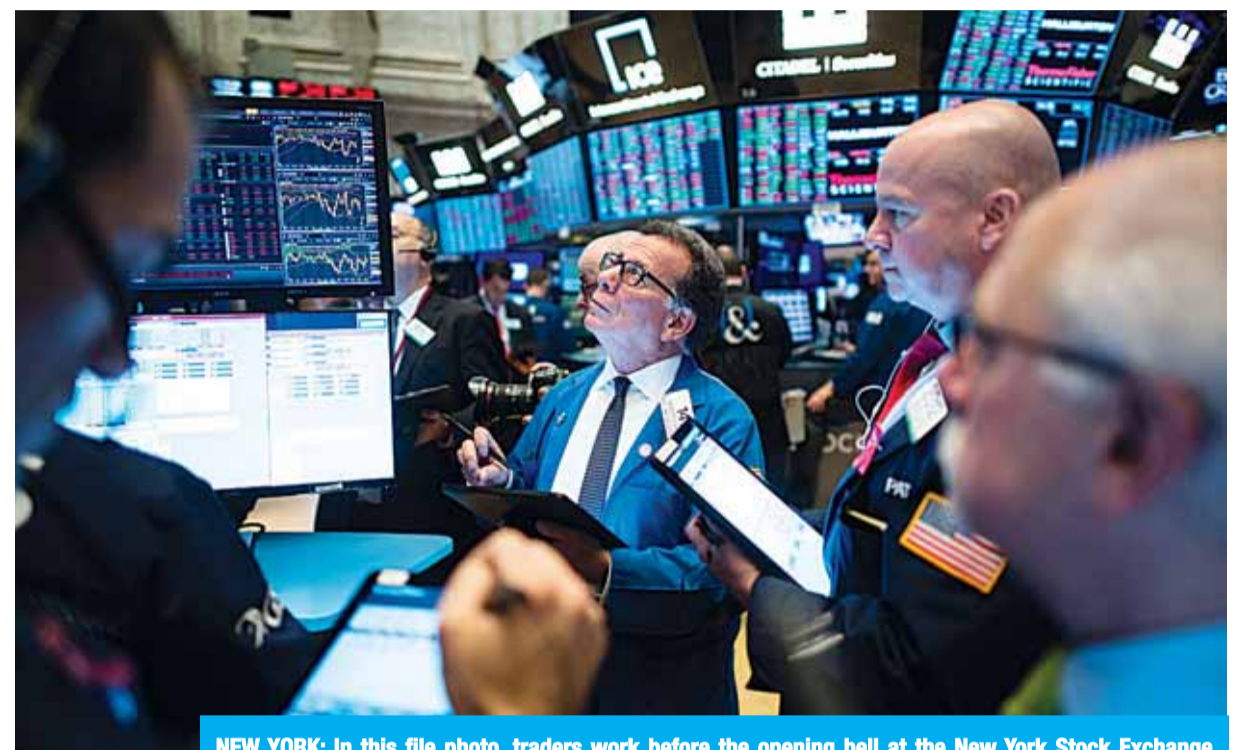
BofA expects clean energy and electric-vehicle companies to emerge as winners, estimating the clean energy market to be already worth \$300 billion. Ageing populations are another challenge, making demographics a key investment criterion. Deutsche Bank names Ireland, Rwanda, Ghana, Botswana and Laos as among the 22 nations in line for a "demographic dividend", benefiting from growing working-age populations.

It also backed sectors like e-commerce as Generation Z, those who will be in their mid-20s to early 30s by 2030, exercise growing spending power. But in some countries, affluent older spenders will still carry clout. By 2030, over 80s will represent 5.4 percent of the US population, up from 3.7 percent in 2015, driving demand for retirement homes, healthcare and long-life innovations.

"Immortality may prove the most interesting secular theme in the 2020s," BofA predicts.

Tech tipping points

A World Economic Forum survey in 2017 predicted a series of "technological tipping points" for the



NEW YORK: In this file photo, traders work before the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) on in New York City. —AFP

coming decade. They included 3D-printed cars, driverless vehicles and the first artificial-intelligence machine on a company's board. The '20s could be an era of smart cities, where big data and robotics ensure better governance, health and connectivity, UBS forecast. It expects annual spending to turn cities smart will reach \$2 trillion in 2025 and internet-connected devices will multiply more than fourfold to 46 billion.

To take advantage of these shifts, investors will focus on areas such as autonomous vehicles—automated forklift shipments will grow to 455,000 in

2030 from 4,000 next year, ABI Research said.

Finally, advances in rocket and satellite technology are opening investment access to the final frontier. The first exchange-traded fund dedicated to the space industry opened in 2019.

UBS sees "parallels with how the global internet... opened up vast opportunities at the turn of the century." It predicts the space economy will reach \$1 trillion in the next couple of decades, from \$340 billion now. The bank backs existing listed aerospace, satellite and communications companies and new space start-ups in private markets. —Reuters

Nasdaq streak of records ends after mixed session for Wall Street

NEW YORK: Wall Street had a mixed finish to a quiet week Friday, with the Dow edging to a fresh record, but the Nasdaq retreating after 10 straight all-time highs. The S&P 500 and the Dow inched to fresh record highs as hopes of an imminent US-China trade deal and an improving global economy continued to fuel a year-end rally. The benchmark index, which is about half a percentage point shy of logging its best year since 1997, has hit several records this month, on hopes of an imminent truce between the world's two largest economies.

China and the United States announced a Phase 1 deal earlier this month, but have since disclosed few concrete details. Beijing said this week it was in close contact with Washington regarding the trade pact. Wall Street's main indexes pared gains after opening at record highs, with the Nasdaq flitting between gains and losses.

The muted session in New York came after European bourses edged higher after two straight holidays, while the dollar pulled back. The Nasdaq dipped 0.2 percent but still finished above 9,000 at 9,006.62 after first topping the benchmark on Thursday. Analysts have attributed the latest run of records to upbeat investor sentiment based on a lower risk of recession in the immediate future, a mellowing of US-China trade tensions and accommodative monetary policy. Stocks have followed a nearly unbroken line upward since early October, drifting higher much of this week amid low trading volumes in the period between the Christmas and New Year's holidays.

"It's a market that's gotten used to the fact that a lot of the things that were concerning last year feel better this year," said Art Hogan, chief market strategist at

National Securities.

Still, some market watchers expect a pullback in the foreseeable future in light of the market's nearly unbroken run higher. Stocks have risen to higher-than-normal valuations as a result of the run.

Analysts say such a retreat would be natural due to technical trading factors, though it could also be sparked by an unexpected negative news event, such as a sharpening of US-China trade tensions.

European stock markets, which were open for the first time since the Christmas holiday, edged higher. London's blue chip FTSE 100 ended the day up 0.2 percent, Frankfurt's DAX 30 rose 0.3 percent and the CAC 40 in Paris edged 0.1 percent higher.

Asian stock markets closed mixed, with Hong Kong the major winner, adding 1.3 percent. Elsewhere Friday, both main oil contracts climbed on US-China trade hopes and sustained demand, while a weekly US oil inventory report showed lower stockpiles of crude. "Optimism about trade helped the outlook for global growth and with it the demand for oil while the US consumer is showing few signs of tightening their purse strings, which is positive for oil also," said Stephen Innes, chief Asia market strategist at AxiTrader. "We've had such a long run so far that it now feels a bit overstretched," said Katrina Lamb, head of investment strategy and research at MV Financial, in Bethesda, Maryland.

"These moves are expected in the absence of anything earth-shaking happening." Pointing to a resilient global economy, data on Friday showed profits at China's industrial firms grew at the fastest pace in eight months in November, but broad weakness in the country's domestic demand remains a risk for company earnings next year.

At 12:42 pm ET, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was up 53.50 points, or 0.19 percent, at 28,674.89, the S&P 500 was up 1.68 points, or 0.05 percent, at 3,241.59. The Nasdaq Composite was down 9.77 points, or 0.11 percent, at 9,012.62. Shares of Amazon Inc rose 1 percent, after having risen about 4 percent on Thursday on a Mastercard report which showed US shoppers spent more online during the holiday shopping season than in 2018. —Agencies

Ukraine farmers fear for livelihoods as president backs land sales

KALYNYVKA, Ukraine: For decades, farmer Sergiy Plakysya has been growing grain and vegetables, cultivating swathes of land that he rents from local residents in the countryside near Kiev. Now 72-year-old Plakysya, who runs a 2,500-hectare (1,010-acre) family farm with his wife, three sons and more than 100 workers, fears he could lose everything if the government lifts a ban on the sale of farmland. President Volodymyr Zelensky, who was elected this spring on promises to implement long-awaited economic reforms, wants to open up the sale of the country's fertile farmland from next year, despite fierce protests.

A bill calling for land sales to begin in October 2020 won initial backing in November from the parliament dominated by Zelensky's Servant of the People party. But its progress has stalled as opposition MPs have submitted large numbers of amendments. "Land sales are needed, but they should be (introduced) in such a way that everyone is protected," Plakysya told AFP at his farm in the village of Kalynyvka outside Kiev. Known as the "bread basket of Europe," the former Soviet country has around 32.5 million hectares of arable land, almost twice as much as France. Currently some farmland is state-owned but much is made up of small, individually-owned plots. Privatised after the breakup of the Soviet Union, these are currently illegal to sell. Western donors to Ukraine are demanding it implement reforms to spur its stalling economy.

The country is rich in fertile black soil and opening up such land for sale could boost GDP by 1.5 percent, the World Bank said last month. While the reform is expected to foster economic growth, its critics fear it will allow rich Ukrainians to create giant holdings of land that they are currently renting, while small-holders will be shut out. "The threat is that we have many oligarchs who today are cultivating 20,000 to 30,000 hectares of land. And they will snap up this land!" Plakysya lamented. Others fear a plan to allow foreigners to buy farmland at a later stage.

To appease small- and medium-sized farmers, the government has promised loans at reasonable rates, but farmers said this will not be sufficient. "I'll only be able to buy 40 to 50



Sergiy Plakysya is one of many medium-sized Ukrainian farmers who fears that allowing the sale of land will mean they will lose out to oligarchs. —AFP

hectares, no more," Plakysya said. The farmers also warned that the lack of protection for property rights and weak judicial system mean they will be vulnerable to attempts by big landlords to take over their land.

"Land should be free to sell," said another farmer, Anatoliy Kovbel, who farms on around 35 hectares in the central Dnipropetrovsk region. But he said he doubted the reform would be implemented properly amid widespread corruption. "With our corrupt police, with our corrupt courts, selling land is a crime against the people," he argued. While voicing concerns, none of the farmers interviewed by AFP said they opposed the reform in any form. But some opposition politicians are demanding that the authorities completely abandon the plan.

Rocks and tear gas

Former prime minister Yuliya Tymoshenko this month urged supporters of her populist Fatherland party to take to the streets to "stop this scenario that goes against the people." Last week, a series of thousand-strong rallies climaxed in clashes in Kiev where nationalist militants joined Tymoshenko's supporters and farmers.

Police fired teargas at protesters who hurled rocks and bricks, and 25 people were injured.

The government initially planned to allow foreigners to buy farmland from 2024, but Zelensky, under pressure from opponents, has promised a referendum on this. Last week, the president visited a village near Kiev and promised farmers further concessions. He offered to reduce the maximum amount of land that one person can buy from 200,000 to 10,000 hectares.

The latest opinion polls show that between half and two-thirds of Ukrainians oppose the reforms. —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

| | |
|-------------------|---------|
| Japanese Yen | 2.779 |
| Indian Rupees | 4.267 |
| Pakistani Rupees | 1.973 |
| Sri Lankan Rupees | 1.673 |
| Nepali Rupees | 2.665 |
| Singapore Dollar | 226.750 |
| Hongkong Dollar | 39.085 |
| Bangladesh Taka | 3.556 |
| Philippine Peso | 6.004 |
| Thai Baht | 10.122 |
| Malaysian Ringgit | 77.825 |

GCC COUNTRIES

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

ARAB COUNTRIES

| | |
|---------------------------|---------|
| Egyptian Pound - Cash | 22.350 |
| Egyptian Pound - Transfer | 16.990 |
| 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 | 32.167 |

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

| | |
|--------------------|---------|
| US Dollar Transfer | 304.300 |
| Euro | 342.490 |
| Sterling Pound | 401.370 |
| Canadian dollar | 234.350 |
| Turkish lira | 52.290 |
| Swiss Franc | 315.010 |
| US Dollar Buying | 297.000 |

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

| Rate for Transfer | Selling Rate |
|-------------------|--------------|
| US Dollar | 303.940 |
| Canadian Dollar | 231.695 |
| Sterling Pound | 396.935 |
| Euro | 338.295 |
| Swiss Frank | 301.070 |
| 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 | 1.678 |
| Indian Rupees | 4.271 |
| Pakistani Rupees | 1.690 |
| Bangladesh Taka | 3.551 |
| Philippines Peso | 5.984 |
| Cyprus pound | 18.085 |
| Japanese Yen | 3.775 |
| Syrian Pound | 1.590 |
| Nepalese Rupees | 2.662 |
| Malaysian Ringgit | 74.320 |

| | |
|-----------------------|---------|
| Chinese Yuan Renminbi | 43.805 |
| Thai Bhat | 11.060 |
| Turkish Lira | 51.605 |
| Singapore dollars | 223.191 |

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

| CURRENCY | BUY | SELL |
|--------------------|----------|-----------|
| Europe | | |
| British Pound | 0.391975 | 0.405875 |
| Czech Korune | 0.005340 | 0.014640 |
| Danish Krone | 0.041495 | 0.0646495 |
| Euro | 0.321541 | 0.333639 |
| Georgian Lari | 0.114135 | 114135 |
| Hungarian | 0.001147 | 0.001337 |
| Norwegian Krone | 0.030478 | 0.035678 |
| Romanian Leu | 0.065204 | 0.082054 |
| Russian Ruble | 0.004937 | 0.004937 |
| Slovakia | 0.009095 | 0.019095 |
| Slovenia | 0.028575 | 0.033575 |
| Swedish Krona | 0.28575 | 0.33575 |
| Swiss Franc | | |
| Australasia | | |
| Australian Dollar | 0.204672 | 0.216672 |
| New Zealand Dollar | 0.197442 | 0.206942 |
| America | | |
| Canadian Dollar | 0.227644 | 0.236644 |
| US Dollars | 0.300200 | 0.304750 |
| US Dollars Mint | 0.300700 | 0.304750 |
| Asia | | |
| Bangladesh Taka | 0.002945 | 0.003746 |

| | | |
|-------------------|----------|----------|
| Chinese Yuan | 0.042121 | 0.045621 |
| Hong Kong Dollar | 0.037099 | 0.039849 |
| Indian Rupee | 0.003582 | 0.004354 |
| Indonesian Rupiah | 0.000017 | 0.000023 |
| Japanese Yen | 0.002696 | 0.002876 |
| Korean Won | 0.002996 | 0.002876 |
| Malaysian Ringgit | 0.000252 | 0.000267 |
| Nepalese Rupee | 0.069689 | 0.075689 |
| Pakistan Rupee | 0.002624 | 0.002964 |
| Philippine Peso | 0.001324 | 0.002094 |
| Singapore Dollar | 0.005910 | 0.006210 |
| Sri Lankan Rupee | 0.219689 | 0.229689 |
| Taiwan | 0.001318 | 0.001898 |
| Thai Baht | 0.010122 | 0.013032 |
| Vietnamese Dong | 0.009755 | 0.013035 |
| | 0.00013 | 0.000013 |

Arab

| | | |
|------------------|----------|----------|
| Bahraini Dinar | 0.801015 | 0.809065 |
| Egyptian Pound | 0.018933 | 0.021674 |
| Iranian Riyal | 0.000084 | 0.000086 |
| Iraqi Dinar | 0.000199 | 0.000259 |
| Jordanian Dinar | 0.423210 | 0.432210 |
| Kuwaiti Dinar | 1.000000 | 1.000000 |
| Lebanese Pound | 0.000103 | 0.000253 |
| Moroccan Dirhams | 0.021180 | 0.045180 |
| 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 | 0.104209 | 0.112209 |
| Turkish Lira | 0.044633 | 0.054478 |
| UAE Dirhams | 0.082217 | 0.083043 |
| Yemeni Riyal | 0.000989 | 0.001069 |

Business

Gazprom paid Ukraine \$2.9bn to settle long-running gas dispute

Russia vows to complete Nord Stream 2 by end of 2020

MOSCOW: Russian energy giant Gazprom has paid \$2.9 billion to Ukraine's Naftogaz to settle a long-running dispute over transit fees for gas transported to Europe, the company said Friday.

"Gazprom carried out the payment of \$2.9 billion in accordance with the decision of the Stockholm arbitration court," a Gazprom spokeswoman told AFP. Naftogaz executive director Yuriy Vitrenko confirmed receipt of the payment in a post on Facebook.

Last year's ruling by the Stockholm court had been a major stumbling block to agreeing a new gas transit deal between Moscow and Kiev. The Russian gas giant had previously rejected the claim but President Vladimir Putin said this month Russia wanted to find a solution.

In a statement, Naftogaz said the two sides were continuing talks about "the terms of further cooperation" after the current deal expires. Last week Moscow and Kiev signed a preliminary deal on the transit of Russian gas to Europe via Ukraine, after months of difficult talks but ahead of the looming New Year deadline. Putin said earlier this month that Moscow wants to keep some gas flowing through Ukraine, despite having built several pipelines to Europe since the current deal was agreed a decade ago.

He added that Moscow had no desire to use its natural resources to strangle Ukraine into a deal against its

will—something Russia has often been accused of. "We are interested in Ukraine getting the resources, and our clients in Europe being calm, knowing that our relations with our neighbors are normal," he said.

Ukraine earns around \$3 billion per year from sending Russian gas to Europe but ties between the two countries have been shredded since Moscow annexed Crimea in 2014 and supported a separatist insurgency in the east. Transit problems for Russian gas began after the fall of the Soviet Union when an independent Ukraine won control of the pipeline infrastructure.

Several supply crises followed, with Russia using gas as a weapon against Ukraine and cutting supplies repeatedly in the early 1990s. The current contract between Russia and Ukraine was signed following the last gas crisis which ended up disrupting European supplies in 2010.

Meanwhile, Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said Friday that a controversial gas pipeline would be completed by the end of next year, adding Moscow could use its own pipe-laying vessel to skirt US sanctions. Nord Stream 2, which aims to double Russia's natural gas deliveries to Germany, was slated for completion in early 2020 with a view to being operational in mid-2020. The United States has long opposed the 9.5-billion-euro (\$10.6-billion) project and the US Senate

voted last week to slap sanctions on companies working on it. The American announcement of asset freezes and visa bans targeting companies involved in the project immediately led to Swiss pipe-laying contractor Alsea halting its work on the remaining stretches.

"Nord Stream 2 will be launched by the end of 2020," Novak told reporters Friday.

He said Russia could use its own vessel—the Academician Chersky—to finish laying the pipeline, adding it was currently stationed in the Far East. "Some time is needed for additional preparations," Novak added. An energy ministry source said the vessel would have to be outfitted with necessary equipment. Earlier this week President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed that Russia has "certain capacity" to finish the project "in the foreseeable future" but declined to provide details. The pipe-laying vessel has been operated by Gazprom Fleet, a subsidiary of gas giant Gazprom since 2016. Washington insists the pipeline would give Russia too much influence over security and economic issues in western Europe.

Germany has accused the United States of interfering in its internal affairs and an EU spokesman said the bloc was opposed "as a matter of principle to the imposition of sanctions against European companies engaged in legal activities." — AFP



This combination of pictures shows logos of Russian Energy giant Gazprom (above) and Ukraine state-run company Naftogaz. — AFP

Born to revolt: Why the French go on strike

PARIS: France, it sometimes seems, is either in the throes of a major strike or facing the looming shadow of one. Workers in the country go on strike more than most nations in Europe. The current open-ended stoppages, which began on December 5, have halted most public transport in Paris and inter-city trains.

Why do the French strike so much? The reasons, analysts say, are multiple and complex, and touch on the French republic's revolutionary origins, its educational philosophy, union traditions and even the electoral system.

"I cannot say if France is the most strike-prone country in the world but it is certainly a country... that is above the European average, and always near the top," researcher Kurt Vandaele of the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) told AFP. Into its fourth week, the transport strike against planned pension reforms is the biggest work stoppage in decades, outlasting the 22-day strike of 1995 that ultimately saw the government capitulate.

France has had a rail strike every year for 72 years since 1947, according to the state-owned SNCF railway company. And figures from the labor ministry show that from 2005 to 2017, 118 work days were lost to strike action per 1,000 private sector workers on average per year.

The analysis included strikes at state-owned transport companies SNCF, RATP and Air France, but not the public sector where workers are much likelier to down tools. Among 23 countries for which the International Labor Organization counted "days not worked per 1,000 workers due to strikes and lockouts" in 2016, France came second after Argentina. An ETUI chart of average strike days in Europe from 2010 to 2017 lists France second after Cyprus, though data for "strike-prone" Greece and Italy was not included. A comparison of OECD countries by the Hans Boeckler Foundation saw France top a list of working days lost per 1,000 employees from 2008 to 2017 — beating Denmark, Belgium, Canada, Spain, Norway, Finland, Britain, Germany and the United States, among others.

'Built on revolt'

"Yes, one can say there is a real strike culture in France"—closely tied to a long history of revolt, according to Jean Garrigues, a historian at the University of Orleans. "Modern France was built on revolt," Garrigues told AFP,



PARIS: Jerome Rodrigues, one of the leading figures of the "yellow vests" (gilets jaunes) movement, attends a demonstration of rail workers and employees of Paris' RATP public transport operator near the Gare de l'Est railway station in Paris. — AFP

pointing to the 1789 revolution that toppled the monarchy and gave rise to the first French Republic in 1792. "There is a general conviction that revolt is necessary, that violent means or at least forceful means are necessary" when you do not agree with the government, he said.

Polls show a majority still sympathize with the current strikers, despite millions of commuters having to get up earlier, walk further, and jostle for space on infrequent and overcrowded trains and buses.

"The French spirit, if there is one, is one of skepticism," Jean-Pierre Durand, a professor in labor sociology, told AFP. "Rene Descartes' 'I think, therefore I am' can easily be translated for the French as 'I question, therefore I am,'" he argued. "This means that as soon as any reform is announced, a large number of French people start questioning... where the traps are." Garrigues also pointed to France's system of direct presidential elections. "It implies a somewhat irrational attachment to one man—a near religious belief in the ability of one man to change everything," he explained.

"And necessarily, such focus on one person, on the president of the republic, leads to disappointment.

Cumulative disappointments lead to a... loss of trust, and a loss of trust leads to revolt."

'Unions unable to influence'

The right to down tools was one of the first social rights acquired by the French, in 1864. And it has been used often, perhaps most prominently in 1968, when the government raised the minimum wage after a student revolt morphed into mass protests and a wildcat strike that paralyzed the economy. In France, unlike many other countries, withholding labor is an individual civil right unrelated to whether one is a union member or not. French distrust of politics and authority also extends to unions, analysts say, which is why workers are willing to strike, sacrificing their pay, to try to ensure their voice is heard. According to ILO statistics, only eight percent of French workers—even less in the private sector—belonged to a union in 2015, the latest year for which data was available. The number is down from about 20 percent in 1970, and a third of the European Union's 23-percent average, according to the ETUI. Mass strikes, said Vandaele of the ETUI, demonstrate "that unions could not influence the reforms towards their preferences by lobbying." — AFP

German union calls New Year strike at Germanwings

FRANKFURT: A German cabin crew union on Friday called a three-day strike at Lufthansa subsidiary Germanwings, plunging passengers into turmoil over the busy end-of-year holiday as it ramps up a bitter row over pay and conditions. The UFO union said Germanwings employees would strike from 2300 GMT today until 2300 GMT on Wednesday as talks with bosses remain deadlocked.

The strike period covers New Year's Eve and the January 1 public holiday.

"We are deliberately announcing the strike early so Germanwings passengers have a chance to book flights with other airlines or make alternative travel plans," said UFO vice-chairman Daniel Flohr in a video message. The union stopped short of announcing a fresh stoppage at flagship carrier Lufthansa itself, but warned that more strike calls could follow from January 2.

Flohr said UFO took stoppages at this time of year—when many people are travelling to meet friends and family—"very seriously". But Germanwings management had "given its employees no clear options for the future," he argued. A Lufthansa spokesman had earlier condemned the union's latest strike threats, saying "this is no way to resolve the conflict". Board member Detlef Kayser said in a statement that "UFO has refused for weeks to put concrete demands in writing."

Increasingly bitter

Lufthansa and UFO have for months been locked in an increasingly bitter dispute that has triggered repeated walkouts. A 48-hour stoppage at the main Lufthansa brand led to 1,500 cancellations at German airports in November, affecting 200,000 passengers. A one-day warning strike in October prompted several dozen flight



This file photo shows an Airbus A-319 of the Germanwings airline at the airport in Duesseldorf, western Germany. — AFP

cancellations at Lufthansa subsidiaries Eurowings, Germanwings, SunExpress and Lufthansa CityLine.

As well as demanding higher wages, especially for entry-level jobs, the UFO union is seeking better benefits and easier routes into long-term contracts. Lufthansa for a long time refused to discuss the demands, claiming the union no longer had the right to represent its 22,000 cabin crew employees owing to an internal leadership struggle. The company even challenged UFO's legal status in court. But the group changed its stance during November's massive strike, agreeing to arbitration with UFO leaders and two mediators.

The UFO union said those talks "had failed". Both sides have agreed to keep details of the talks confidential but German media reported they could not even agree on which topics should be covered by the arbitration. Aside from pushing its demands for better pay, UFO is reportedly also seeking assurances that certain staff members will not face disciplinary action over the strikes.

Lufthansa said it was putting its hopes in a fresh round of talks proposed by the mediators for January, but UFO denied a new date had been agreed. — AFP

Venezuela's economic crisis a boon for traditional liquor

BOBARE, Venezuela: Venezuela's traditional cocuy liquor is making a comeback due to the country's punishing economic crisis, which has put rum, whiskey and even beer financially out of reach for many. Agave—which grows in the semi-arid mountains of Bobare and is the main ingredient in cocuy—has been used in Venezuela since before the Spanish conquest, and it is being kept alive by liquor artisans such as 84-year-old Dolores Gimenez.

He began producing cocuy at the age of seven in the eastern state of Lara, but just a few "small jars that were well hidden."

"If the police found you with cocuy, they put you in jail and smashed your distillation cylinders," he said at his still. Since those days, Gimenez—who has 25 children and 103 grandchildren—has refined the process and now provides joy to those who have seen their favorite alcoholic beverages disappear out of reach thanks to inflation that the International Monetary Fund predicts will hit 200,000 percent in 2019.

"It's three years since I touched a beer," Nelson Vargas, 66, said bitterly. His pension is barely worth the equivalent of \$3 a month—the price of just two beers. "Few people drink it. Not us poor," said Vargas, sipping cocuy as a procession of the Virgin of Guadalupe passes.

Liquor consumption fell 34 percent this year, according to London-based alcoholic beverage analysts IWSR. It also fell 37 percent in 2018. Beer consumption fell by 39 percent in 2018.

It's little surprise given that Venezuela's gross domestic product has shrunk by half since 2013.

Consumers "are migrating from traditional drinks like beer and rum to cheaper spirits like rum derivatives or aguardiente," said Carlos Salazar, president of the Chamber of Liquors in the capital Caracas, where sales are down 50 percent this year. In 1998, a minimum salary could buy 46 cases of beer, but now, you would need five such salaries to purchase just one. — AFP

Gulf Bank extends best wishes for New Year

KUWAIT: On the occasion of the New Year, and as per the approved guidelines set by the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), all Gulf Bank branches and its head office will be closed Wednesday 1 January until Saturday 4 January 2020, and will resume working on Sunday 5 January 2020.

Gulf Bank's customers will continue to be served around the clock through the dedicated Customer Contact Center, which can be reached at 1805805. Moreover, Gulf Bank's Interactive Teller Machines (ITMs) will be available during the holiday from 8 am until 11:45 pm in Jabriya, Shaab, Fahheel (Alghanim Electronics), and South Surra (Al Salam). Clients can also direct their queries through the Gulf Bank WhatsApp service on 65805805. To find out more about the latest products and services, customers can access the Bank's online portal (www.gulfbank.com) or download the Mobile Banking App (App Store/Android) to monitor accounts and conduct self-service banking transactions. Customers can also connect with Gulf Bank on its various social media channels.

Gulf Bank's management and staff take this opportunity to wish everyone a Prosperous 2020.

Sudan plans to lift fuel subsidies gradually in 2020

KHARTOUM: Sudan's transitional government plans to remove fuel subsidies gradually in 2020 and double public sector salaries to ease the impact of galloping inflation, the finance minister said on Friday. The new civilian government is trying, with the help of donors, to launch a series of economic and political reforms after veteran ruler Omar Al-Bashir was ousted in April.

Sudan has been in crisis since losing two-thirds of oil production with the secession of South Sudan in 2011. Finance Minister Ibrahim Elbadawi did not say how the budget for next year would be funded or what the government forecast was for revenue and expenditure.

He told reporters subsidies for petrol and gasoline would be gradually lifted next year while subsidies for wheat and cooking gas would be kept in place to help the poor. Subsidies are a major burden for an government finances. To alleviate the impact of inflation and poverty, the government wants to double civil service pay and raise the minimum wage to 1,000 Sudanese pounds (\$22), up from 425 pounds, he said. In October, the official rate of inflation was 58%, but anecdotal accounts suggest prices are rising more quickly.

Shortages of bread, fuel and medicine coupled with hefty price rises triggered the protests that led to Bashir's toppling. The economy has remained in turmoil since then as politicians negotiated a power-sharing deal between the military and civilians.

The government was appointed in September and has taken over for three years under the power-sharing deal. It is negotiating with the United States to get Sudan removed from a list of countries deemed sponsors of terrorism. The designation, which dates from allegations in 1993 that Bashir's Islamist government supported terrorism, makes it technically ineligible for debt relief and financing from the IMF and World Bank — further jeopardizing economic development. The US Congress needs to approve the removal.

Elbadawi did not say what Sudan expected in terms of any donor support. In November he had told Reuters the country needed up to \$5 billion for 2020. He said the 2020 budget would increase spending for education and social spending, and there would be also aid for needy families and that provinces hit by fighting and insurgencies would be allocated an extra 9.3 billion pounds. Information Minister Faisal Saleh said the budget would be finalized in two days' time at a meeting between the transitional government and the sovereign council, the top transitional body made up of military and civilians. — Reuters

Ooredoo Kuwait concludes 2019 with success

Market share increased to 2.6 million customers



KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait, the first to launch innovated digital services in Kuwait concluded a year full of successful, focusing on embracing digitalization and supporting youth in Kuwait. The highlights of Ooredoo's achievements in 2019 include an increase of 13 percent of its market share to 2.6 million customers in the first nine months of 2019. Ooredoo Kuwait also witnessed the launch of Kuwait's first digital service; ANA and the launch events of the incredible iPhone 11 and Samsung Galaxy S10 devices. 2019 also witnessed the company's organization of the Business to Digital Event in its second year in addition to enabling youth and giving back to society through the Ooredoo Volunteer Program.

Commenting on the conclusion of a successful year, Ooredoo Kuwait's Corporate Communications Senior Director Mijbil Alayoub said, "We owe this success to the loyalty and commitment of our customer base, whose belief in what Ooredoo stands for is the main drive behind our ongoing commitment to achieving excellence."

He added: "Ooredoo Kuwait is fortunate to have a passionate and dedicated team of employees with an array of expertise, and who are guided by the vision and support of Ooredoo Kuwait's CEO, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Thani, who is a forward-thinking and visionary leader believing in the vital role of embracing the newest and most advanced trends in technology, to enrich the experience of Ooredoo customers."

Visionary leadership

Over the past five years and to this day, Ooredoo Kuwait's top management has been able to achieve continuous development and steady progress, led by its ambitious CEO Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Thani who - and since assuming responsibility in June 2014 - managed with his talented team, in combination with the efforts of employees. It also goes a long way in the company's remarkable progress, and maintaining its development, innovation, and leadership position in the Kuwait market.

Continuous achievements

A number of achievements are the main reason for Ooredoo Kuwait's steady strides towards success during 2019. The year began with Ooredoo Kuwait's official re-certification with the Payment Card Industry (PCI)-Data Security Standards (DSS) 3.2.1 Compliance International Certification and ISO 27001:2013, making it the only Ooredoo OpCo and the first telecom provider in Kuwait to be certified with the latest version of the certification for the third year in a row. The company also obtained the latest ISO 9001:2015 Re-certification. Ooredoo Kuwait was the first Mobile Telecommunications Company in Kuwait to successfully complete and implement the newest International Quality Standards back in 2016, the certification audit of this international standard was conducted by Bureau Veritas Kuwait. The re-certification was successfully completed in September 2019. As a result of Ooredoo Kuwait's management and staff's professional commitment, the overall achievement and effort in maintaining and achieving such Quality Standards ensures continual improvement within the company's processes.

5G

To add to its portfolio of successes during 2019, Ooredoo Kuwait launched the 5G network commercially that supports 5th generation of cellular network technology. The 5G network is a major upgrade in Ooredoo's portfolio that offers customers superfast mobile broadband Internet to deliver incredible download speeds; bringing our mobile broadband experience to unparalleled new heights and allows customers to have ultra-low latency times meaning easier and more stable gaming and streaming. Ooredoo also made the first trial International 5G call in the region between Ooredoo Kuwait and Ooredoo Qatar, demonstrating the phenomenal capabilities of its 5G networks in Qatar and Kuwait.



The 5G commercial launch embodies the company's core values of caring, connecting, and challenging, and demonstrates its commitment to enriching people's digital lives and comes in tandem with its strategy of digital transformation and adopting future technologies. He added, "Over the years, we have worked tirelessly to deliver the best in-class services to our esteemed customers, no matter their needs. Through this, we are exercising our role as a private sector entity in the New Kuwait Vision 2035, and we aspire to deliver comprehensive telecom services with international standards in the Kuwaiti market under one roof, which comes in tandem with our digital transformation strategy."

ANA

In a testament to Ooredoo's leadership in keeping up with the competitive telecommunications sector, the company launched ANA, which makes Ooredoo the first operator to provide personalized mobile plans to enrich customers' digital lives in partnership with Matrixx Software, a Silicon Valley-based company that specializes in advanced mobile software, to digitally transform the mobile experience for mobile customers in Kuwait. 'ANA' specializes in helping mobile customers buy, manage, share and pay for digital services. Ooredoo is the first operator in the Kuwait market to launch such a service, which provides an all-digital, individually customized mobile product that gives customers complete control of their mobile plans and digital worlds, and makes it easier to buy, use and pay for Ooredoo services directly from their mobile phones.

Embracing digitalization

As for the company's app, MyOoredoo, it is still considered the most used by customers and is considered the best among ten free applications in Kuwait. Customers can also obtain the membership of Kuwait's largest rewards program, "Nojoom", which today has more than half a million subscribers. Ooredoo was also proud to announce its partnership with Kuwait Airways, which enables Nojoom members to exchange their points for free miles from Kuwait Airways' Oasis Club.

From the beginning of the year until now, Ooredoo Business has witnessed steady growth, excellence, and leadership in providing the best digital solutions and exclusive packages for B2B companies and small and medium enterprises.

Ooredoo's partnership with the world's leading smart device makers including Samsung and Huawei continues, with both celebrating the launch of the latest smart devices for its customers with competitive and premium packages. In March, the company launched the latest Samsung S10 devices, and last July, launched the first Huawei device in Kuwait running on the 5G network. Last September, the company launched iPhone 11 devices with the strongest offer in Kuwait. Ooredoo Kuwait also launched Ooredoo Carrier Billing for its customers to pay for purchases in the App Store and iCloud directly from their mobile account.

Proximity to its customers

Through its network of branches in Kuwait and its authorized distributors, Ooredoo continues to provide the best and access to all of its customers wherever they are, and in continuation of its partnership with Gait Apple Premium Reseller store at the Avenues, the company presented exclusive offers to its customers. It will continue to provide the best and expand its network of branches in the new areas of Kuwait. It also continues to provide exclusive products and services tailored to its Noulkha customers for whom the company pays special attention.

Also, since its acquisition of FastTelco, the leading internet provider in Kuwait, it has been striving to provide the best in fibre services in Kuwait. In April, the company, in cooperation with Blink, organized the largest competition for electronic games lovers in its main building, attended by thousands of participants over two days. The company also launched a ProPing package that is of interest to gaming enthusiasts in Kuwait.

Business to digital

In tandem with Ooredoo's strategy of being a leader in the market in terms of Digital Transformation, the company organized the "Business to Digital" conference in its second year which also witnessed a special event with the launch of the Kuwait App Market in its second year. The one-day event took place at the Al-Raya Hall, attended by the country's most prominent guests and attendees from the leading IoT/ICT companies such as Huawei, Hewlett Packard, Fortinet, Dell EMC, Cisco, and Ericsson. The "Business to Digital" conference discussed ICT and Security solutions and offered a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge and expertise about the latest business technologies under one roof.

The market embraced the creativity of a large number of young Kuwaiti's who have designed unique, successful applications which included the most prominent local applications such as TAPCOM, Daresni, Alhesba, Careem, Mashkor, Paydo, Collab, Sakan and Hesabi Pay.

Ooredoo signed a number of agreements during the conference with international companies such as Fortinet and Cisco. Ooredoo selected Fortinet, a global leader in broad, integrated and automated cybersecurity solutions to deliver the region's first secure SD-WAN managed service which allows Ooredoo's existing and new enterprise customers achieve accelerated connectivity, transport mode independence, and increased application performance while benefiting from tightly knit SD-WAN and advanced security features. Ooredoo Kuwait itself is deploying Fortinet's Secure SD-WAN across its retail branches and will serve as a reference for customers wishing to follow suit.

Ooredoo also announced the launch of Cisco SD-WAN Powered by Meraki. This new offer expands Ooredoo Kuwait's Cisco Meraki solutions, providing Ooredoo's customers with a smooth transition from their current wide area network (WAN) and security infrastructure to a more agile and simplified model for managing their

WAN. The new SD-WAN service enables medium and large enterprise customers who value simplicity to accelerate their digital transformation, adopt an agile cloud strategy, and respond faster to their market and customer dynamics.

Sponsorships and CSR

In line with its pioneering role in volunteer work and its annual Ramadan initiatives, Ooredoo launched in Ramadan a program full of humanitarian and charitable activities throughout the holy month "Ramadan brings us closer and good brings us together." This coincided with the launch of the Ooredoo Volunteer Program in its fifth year which succeeded in attracting a large number of young men and women over the past years. The company's efforts continued this year and was portrayed through its sponsorship of an array of events that reflected the company's strategy aimed at supporting projects, youth, sports, entertainment and others. The company sponsored many events and conferences during the year such as the market promoter and the second Gulf business leadership forum, Hana Eleven Women's Exhibition, Kuwait Financial Technology Conference and Exhibition, Flying Start Triathlon and RoadRush, Digitalizing Strategic Communication for Confronting Public Relations Crises Conference, Gulf West Marathon and the Broadway show 'Thriller'.

Awards

Ooredoo is proud to have received a number of prestigious awards during the year. Ooredoo was able to secure the award for Best Digital Service for ANA, the first operator to provide personalized mobile plans to enrich customers' digital lives in partnership with Matrixx Software, a Silicon Valley-based company that specializes in advanced mobile software, to digitally transform the mobile experience for mobile customers in Kuwait. 'ANA' specializes in helping mobile customers buy, manage, share and pay for digital services.

The company won two awards at the seventh Creative

Growth driven by digital transformation and CSR

- launch of Kuwait's first digital service; ANA
- launch events of the incredible iPhone 11 and Samsung Galaxy S10 devices
- Al-Ayoub: We owe this success to the loyalty and commitment of our customer base
- Received awards for Best Digital Service for ANA, Best Public Relations Personality of the Year for Ooredoo Kuwait's Senior Director of Corporate Communications, Mijbil Al-Ayoub and Advertising Creativity Award for Best National Day TVC, Best Voluntary Initiative Award for the Ooredoo Volunteer Program
- First trial International 5G call in the region between Ooredoo Kuwait and Ooredoo Qatar
- launched the 5G network commercially

Competition 2019 held by the Arab Media Forum in the categories of Best Public Relations Personality of the Year for Ooredoo Kuwait's Senior Director of Corporate Communications, Mijbil Al-Ayoub and Advertising Creativity Award for Best National Day TVC. The awards shed light on Ooredoo's great efforts to engage with the local community in creative and innovative ways and in areas and matters of their interest. Ooredoo Kuwait also won the award for Best Voluntary Initiative Award for the Ooredoo Volunteer Program. The award recognizes volunteer and humanitarian efforts by youth in the Arab region. The event took place at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre and was organized in partnership with the Arab Media Forum. More than 120 projects from the Arab world participated in the event, which is judged by a panel that includes a number of leaders in philanthropy in the region. A large number of projects from abroad were invited to Kuwait to showcase their projects. The sponsorship of this event comes in tandem with Ooredoo's core values of caring, connecting and challenging.

Investing internally

Aligning with the company's core values of caring, connecting, and challenging, Ooredoo held several key events around the year to connect with its staff. Events included the annual Ghabqa, a traditional Ramadan banquet where staff can meet to socialize and enjoy the Ramadan spirit, and the annual town hall meeting where executive management discuss the key achievements, challenges and goals ahead with all members of the staff to align all efforts, working towards unanimous success and efforts.

Ooredoo also held awareness campaigns for staff such as the blood donation campaign, in addition to festive Happy Thursdays at the company's head office, where staff enjoyed their lunch in the outdoors area in a picnic setup.

Ooredoo Kuwait also concluded the fifth edition of its annual football tournament "The Ooredoo Cup 2019", which was held at Dasman Bilingual School in Sharq in coordination with 'Li3ib' platform for reserving and organizing sports activities. This is the fifth year in a row where Ooredoo holds this event which aims to further engage with employees from different departments and divisions. The event aims to gather employees in a casual friendly atmosphere, outside of the office premises and working hours. This comes in alignment with Ooredoo's core values of caring, connecting and challenging, and the company's philosophy of investing in its employees who are the cornerstone of the establishment.



What's On



The Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan Dr Bakhromjan Alov hosted a reception for three-member delegation that recently visited Uzbekistan to observe the parliamentary elections and to share their views.

Korean ambassador talks of movies, trade with Kuwait

By Nawara Fattahwa

KUWAIT: Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Kuwait Dr Hong Youngki spoke with Kuwait Times on the occasion of the presentation of Korean movies at Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center. "This event is held on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Kuwait-Korean diplomatic ties this year. It is a part of many other cultural events held this year on this occasion. This is the last event of these cultural occasions," he told the Kuwait Times.

"I'm glad the Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center gave us this opportunity to present Korean movies. Korean movies are very popular now, and some (like Parasite) have won prizes at famous film festivals such



as the Cannes festival in France. The Korean film industry is developing very fast, and has high quality and universal values. It has progressed from small art films to big commercial films," he added.

Two movies are being screened at the Abdullah Al-

Salem Cultural Center. "These are Little Forrest and Extreme. The first is a drama, while the second is an action comedy. I hope that the Kuwaiti audience will enjoy these two different types of movie that show the diversity of Korean culture and movie industry. Both are new movies and were successful in Korea," stressed Hong.

Regarding bilateral trade relations, he said Kuwait is a very important trade partner with Korea. "Every year we import \$10 billion worth of oil from Kuwait. So Kuwait is our number two source for oil imports after Saudi Arabia. Also, there are many big Korean companies like Hyundai, Samsung and others working on various infrastructure projects in Kuwait. The Korean prime minister also attended the huge launch ceremony of Sheikh Jaber Causeway," he noted.

"Around 2,500 Korean citizens live in Kuwait. There are some Korean students working for Kuwait Airways, and some Korean students are learning Arabic language and culture at Kuwait University. Every year, more than 3,000 Kuwaitis visit Korea for tourism, business and medical tourism. The most popular Korean products exported to Kuwait are cosmetics, mobile phones, vehicles and others," concluded Hong.

Briefing in Embassy of Uzbekistan

On 26 December, 2020, Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the State of Kuwait Dr Bakhromjon Alov organized a briefing to announce the results of the parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan.

Ambassador noted, that on December 22, 2019, in Uzbekistan was a day of parliamentary elections. Five political parties participated at the elections - Milliy Tiklanish Democratic Party, People's Democratic Party, Movement of Entrepreneurs and Businesspeople - the Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, Social Democratic Party Adolat and the Ecological Party of Uzbekistan. 750 candidates from five parties carried on a campaign for 150 deputy seats at the parliament.

More than 10 international organizations came to Uzbekistan to observe the election process. OSCE, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Executive Committee and the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the World Association of Electoral Bodies representatives also monitored the election activity. About 800 foreign observers arrived in Uzbekistan from 52 countries, including Kuwait. Around 1,155 media persons, including the representatives of 13 foreign mass media accredited with the Election Commission for the coverage of the election process. This was a big number that shows credibility and transparency of the election process in Uzbekistan.

More than 20 million voters was registered in the elections, of which more than two million young people took part in voting for the first time. 68% registered voters participated in the elections.

For the first time the Election Commission had installed video cameras on all polling stations in order to ensure that the elections are held in a free, fair and transparent manner. Likewise biometric system also was in place in order to make sure that the election process is held in a flawless manner.

On 23 December the President of Central elections commission of Uzbekistan announced the preliminary results of the elections to the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis. According to the provisional data, deputies to the Legislative Chamber were elected in 125 out of 150 constituencies.

- Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan - 43 seats;

- Milliy Tiklanish Democratic Party - 35 seats;
- Adolat Social Democratic Party - 21 seats;
- People's Democratic Party - 18 seats;
- Ecological Party - 11 seats.

No candidate was elected in 25 constituencies, due to none of the candidates getting the majority of votes. Therefore, a run-off vote will be held on January 5, 2020 in these constituencies. According to the Electoral Code, a candidate who gets more than 50% of the total number of voters shall be deemed elected.

An election observers mission from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS), a regional organization comprising former Soviet republics, called the voting free, transparent and democratic.

Parliamentary elections in each country are an important political process. Democratic, social and economic reforms in Uzbekistan, providing under the leadership of the President Shavkat Mirziyoyev especially in recent years, are recognized internationally. That is why international organizations are very interested in this year's election.

One of the key principles is that the electoral process was conducted in a democratic, impartial and transparent manner. The electoral code and electoral legislation in Uzbekistan are in full compliance with international norms and standards. It is very important that the elections were next step in the democratic development of Uzbekistan.

At the briefing professor of Kuwait University Abdulhadi Al Ajmi, Mrs Tahani Alebaidli, lawyer, teacher of the Police Academy of Ministry Interior of State of Kuwait and Javaid Ahmad, journalist of Kuwait Times had a speech and gave information about their participation on the parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan as international observer.

At the conclusion, Ambassador noted, that the participation of the representatives of Kuwait at the elections will contribute to develop strengthen the friendly relationships between Uzbekistan and Kuwait. This year both sides celebrate 25th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. During this period, the political dialogue and parliamentary cooperation, trade, economic and cultural ties were reinforced. There are regular political consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of two countries. Next 4th round of political consultations will be held in Tashkent on April 2020.

Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Cultural Centre celebrates a century of Korean cinema

Following the recent cultural festivals hosted by Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Cultural Centre, audiences were enamored by the award-winning performances and direction showcased in the films, 'Little Forest' and 'Extreme Job'. The week-long tribute to Korean cinema marked the end of the event that witnessed several celebratory activities during July and November this year.

As part of the 100 year anniversary of Korean films, the special viewing at its xx theatre was held in the presence of H.E South Korean Ambassador to the country, Hong Youngki and among keen moviegoers. The popular 2019 South Korean drama and action comedy films gained international and national recognition for 'Best Director', 'Best Actress' and 'Top 10 Films' by leading awarding organisations.

The first and second part of the Cultural Festival included an exhibition on Korea's traditional costumes, a make-up station with Korean cosmetics and hair stations, a jewellery station followed by a preliminary musical contest to narrate the country's heritage. In collaboration with the Korean Embassy in Kuwait, traditional Korean visual artist Ms. Lee Hyan also displayed her unique works on the country's culture and significant attributes during an art exhibition entitled "The Beauty of Korea". More significantly, the event commemorated 40 years of strong and successful diplomatic ties between the Republic of Korea and the State of Kuwait.

Sheikh Abdullah Al Salem Cultural Centre is one of the many projects developed by the Amiri Diwan to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and promote critical, creative, and interpretive thinking within Kuwaiti society through world-class exhibitions and educational public programmes.



CBK partakes in Food Buzz

The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) recently took part in the two-day Food Buzz held at Al-Raya Complex outdoor court and organized by a number of ambitious Kuwaiti entrepreneurs.

CBK's presence and participation aimed at supporting talented Kuwaiti youth and contributing in creating a creative generation in terms of private sector careers. CBK also supports and adapts ambitious Kuwaiti youth ideas in various fields.

At the Food Buzz sidelines, CBK present-

ed a number of gifts for participants and had a special section in which it explained its various banking services to the visitors, the privileges of its cards including Visa Signature Card which is obtainable for free with a five year validity and reclaiming 3 per cent of their purchase in cash when using it. The Visa Signature card also gives holders free access to over 900 airport lounges around the world, up to \$500,000 travel insurance valid for 90 days on all flights and using free local and international concierge (personal assistant) service on 24/7 basis.

In addition, CBK's Card World, Master Card Platinum and pre-Paid Master Cards holding a joint logo with British Airways and grant holders Avios points on British Airways executive Club or any of the 13 airlines in the One World Alliance.



ACK to Host 2021 CDIO Asian Regional Meeting

The Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) has won a bid to host the 2021 CDIO Asian Regional Meeting in Kuwait. This is the first time a Conceive - Design - Implement - Operate (CDIO) Asian Regional Meeting will be held in a Gulf Cooperation Council country.

CDIO is an innovative educational framework for producing the next generation of engineers. The first syllabus was created in 2001, with the standards designed and the initiative formed in 2004. Developed with input from academics, industry, engineers and students, it is a holistic experiential approach to learning that links the lifecycle phases of Conceiving, Designing, Implementing and Operating a product, system, service or process.

ACK's successful bid follows a formal presentation made on behalf of ACK, by Dr. Mohammad Abdul Niby, Dean of the School of Engineering, who presented to the CDIO Asian



leaders at an official Meeting, held at the conclusion of the recent 15th International CDIO Conference at Aarhus University in Denmark.

ACK is the first institution in the Gulf to become a member of the CDIO Initiative. It has done a number of things to implement CDIO principles at the College including emphasizing internships to enable students to spend time within industries and business settings. Moreover, having graduation projects at the end of the course challenges students to link together and

showcase all their learning outcomes throughout their educational journey.

The 2021 Asian regional meeting will be attended by more than 200 participants from 12 different countries throughout the Asian region. The meeting will provide important benefits to ACK and to the higher educational sector in Kuwait as a whole as it will provide a platform for international exchange of engineering education, it will also give an opportunity for Kuwaiti institutions to increase their understanding of international per-

spectives and approaches to engineering education.

Commenting on the achievement, the President of ACK, Prof. Isam Zabalawi said: "We are very proud to be the host of the 2021 CDIO Asian Regional Meeting. At ACK we emphasize CDIO as it provides a variety of means through which learners are holistically prepared for their futures after graduation. The CDIO approach is directly in line with the primary core value of ACK 'to enable human potential within a culture of care.'"

Health & Science

NASA's trip to Mars begins in California 'clean room'

PASADENA: NASA's Mars 2020 rover will head off for the Red Planet next year. But like Voyager, Galileo and Cassini before it, the mission's epic journey began in a "clean room" in California. One of two ultra-sterile labs used for spacecraft assembly at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, on the outskirts of Los Angeles, the eggshell-white room was briefly and exceptionally opened to journalists Friday.

"We need to keep the hardware as pristine and as safe as possible until we get to Mars," said David Gruel, operations manager for Mars 2020. The Mars rover will collect samples on the planet in the search for traces of microbial life potentially dating back billions of years.

Journalists had to go through a lengthy sterilization process before entering the room "so we actually are bringing samples back from Mars, and not bringing back hair from my body or some skin from somebody else's body," explained Gruel.

Automated shoe brushes and sticky mats remove particles from shoes before guests even reach the locker room. To prevent contamination, visitors must then don a "bunny suit" — sleeves sealed with adhesive tape — along with face masks, latex gloves and even beard protectors for the more hirsute.

Finally, they pass beneath a pulsating "air shower" that blasts away the last unwanted particles. The rover itself is regularly scrubbed with isopropyl alcohol and a microfibre mop, and the lab's air is filtered 70 times per hour.

Journalists invited by NASA also had to remove foam covers from their microphones — a breeding ground for germs. Specially approved paper and pens were provided, in place of traditional writing implements which can shed



PASADENA: The Mars 2020 Spacecraft cruise stage is seen in the spacecraft assembly area clean room Friday during a media tour at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. — AFP photos



PASADENA: The Mars 2020 Rover is seen in the spacecraft assembly area clean room Friday during a media tour at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

dust and other particles. Guests are also told to refrain from wearing any makeup or perfume. Technicians working on crucial sampling equipment are often subject to even more stringent protocols.

"They can't take a shower, bathe the day they work on

the hardware," Gruel said. "They can't put any hair products into their hair to style it, they can only wear one or two types of deodorant." It is all a far cry from the early days of space exploration.

Engineers would frequently light up cigarettes while

building the Ranger rockets that paved the way for the Apollo moon missions. Costly mistakes have led to more caution. A bid to sterilize the Ranger 3 mission in 1962 accidentally fried the rocket's electronics, causing it to miss the Moon by more than 20,000 miles. — AFP

CLINIC

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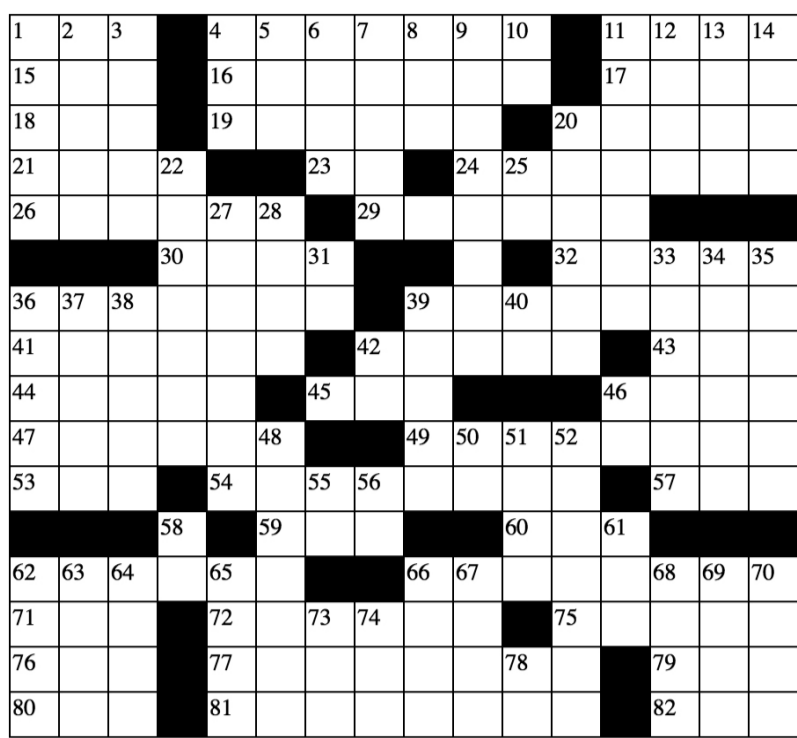
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Stars

CROSSWORD 2397



ACROSS

1. The 19th letter of the Greek alphabet.
4. A member of an Indian people formerly living along the Gulf coast of Louisiana and Texas.
11. An outer garment that has sleeves and covers the body from shoulder down.
15. An edge tool used to cut and shape wood.
16. In accordance with fixed order or procedure or principle.
17. Look at with amorous intentions.
18. Top part of an apron.
19. Someone who procures customers for whores (in England they call a pimp a ponce).
21. A small ball with a hole through the middle.
23. (Greek mythology) A maiden seduced by Zeus.
24. (superlative of 'near' or 'high') Most near.
26. Japanese mathematical physicist who proposed that nuclear forces are mediated by massive particles called mesons which are analogous to the photon in mediating electromagnetic forces (1907-1981).
29. (British) Seating in the forward part of the main level of a theater.
30. (trademark) A liquid that temporarily disables a person.
32. The hair growing on the lower part of a man's face.
36. Scottish ballet dancer and actress (born in 1926).
41. A large building at an airport where aircraft can be stored and maintained.
43. A sudden loss of consciousness resulting when the rupture or occlusion of a blood vessel leads to oxygen lack in the brain.
44. A small picture inserted within the bounds or a larger one.
45. An independent agency of the United States government responsible for collecting and coordinating intelligence and counterintelligence activities abroad in the national interest.
47. Wild sheep of northern Africa.
49. Flesh of a large-headed anglerfish of North American Atlantic waters.
53. Step on it.
54. (informal) Someone who is a detective.
57. A spacecraft that carries astronauts from the command module to the surface of the moon and back.
59. (British) A waterproof raincoat made of rubberized fabric.
60. A reproach for some lapse or misdeed.
62. Having a woven pattern.
71. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
72. An artificial language used for trade between speakers of different languages.
75. A city in north central Nigeria.
76. Flower arrangement consisting of a circular band of foliage or flowers for ornamental purposes.
77. Large arboreal boa of tropical South America.
79. To make a mistake or be incorrect.
80. An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
81. A great raja.
82. The force of workers available.

DOWN

1. Having a gray or brown streak or a pattern or a patchy coloring.
2. A farewell remark.
3. A member of a Turkic people of Uzbekistan and neighboring areas.
4. Alsatian artist and poet who was cofounder of Dadaism in Zurich.
5. A beverage made by steeping tea leaves in water.
6. God of fire.
7. An expression of approval and commendation.
8. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
9. A river in northeastern Brazil that flows generally northward to the Atlantic Ocean.
10. A colorless and odorless inert gas.
11. Swift-footed terrestrial plover-like bird of southern Asia and Africa.
12. A cruel wicked and inhuman person.
13. Voluntary contributions to aid the poor.
14. The small projection of a mammary gland.
20. The basic unit of money in Panama.
22. Harmed or injured or spoiled.
25. Angular distance above the horizon (especially of a celestial object).
27. Straggling shrub with narrow leaves and conspicuous red flowers in dense globular racemes.
28. Type genus of the Aceraceae.
31. A trivalent metallic element of the rare earth group.
33. A purplish dye obtained from orchil lichens.
34. The act of rewriting something.
35. A unit of apothecary weight equal to an eighth of an ounce or to 60 grains.
37. The capital city of Vietnam.
38. Issue or terminate (in a specified way, state, etc.).
39. American Revolutionary patriot.
40. A colorless explosive liquid that is volatile and poisonous and foul-smelling.
42. The branch of computer science that deal with writing computer programs that can solve problems creatively.
46. A radioactive transuranic element.
48. (Babylonian) Earth goddess.
50. A midwestern state in north central United States in the Great Lakes region.
51. A lawman concerned with narcotics violations.
52. A festival featuring African-American culture.
55. A state in northwestern United States on the Pacific.
56. One thousand periods per second.
58. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
61. Perennial herb of East India to Polynesia and Australia cultivated for its large edible root yielding Otaheite arrowroot starch.
63. In bed.
64. Type genus of the Majidae.
65. (trademark) A tinned luncheon meat made largely from pork.
66. French couturier whose first collection in 1947 created a style (tight bodice and narrow waist and flowing pleated skirt) that became known as the New Look (1905-1957).
67. A former copper coin of Pakistan.
68. A recurring sleep state during which rapid eye movements do not occur and dreaming does not occur.
69. A river in northern England that flows south-east through West Yorkshire.
70. Earn on some commercial or business transaction.
73. The longer of the two telegraphic signals used in Morse code.
74. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
78. A person who announces and plays popular recorded music.

Friday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Take some emotional time off today if you feel you deserve it. You're getting so wrapped up in other people's dramas that you're feeling drained when it comes to your own concerns. Calm down and relax physically and mentally. Getting too stressed about a certain issue isn't healthy. You may end up foiling the situation much more than if you left it alone. Come back to it later.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You may get more emotional than usual when it comes to work. Do your best to keep your emotional life separate from daily responsibilities. If you feel overwhelmed by a certain job to the point where you can no longer do it effectively, it may be a sign that you need to make some changes. This is a time of heightened sensitivity. Do your best to stay afloat.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

People are hesitant to deal with deep emotional issues today. They're erecting protective barriers so the things they hear, see, and feel don't hurt them. Respect these boundaries. Do your best to stay rooted in your inner sanctuary. Try to keep a positive attitude even though the prevailing mood may be somber.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You're having a difficult time getting started today. Don't get discouraged if things don't seem to be working. Your expectations may be too high, and your perfectionism is making it difficult for anyone to live up to your standards. Don't get worked up over every little detail. Perfection isn't demanded of you.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Be polite and try your best not to impose on other people today. It's important to behave civilly in all circumstances. People may feel like they've been cheated. Although you may not be the source of their discontent, you may feel the consequences. Keep other people's issues separate from yours, and don't let their discomfort seep into your world.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Don't blame everything on others today. It's important to be adult enough to take responsibility for your actions. Understand that things aren't always going to happen the way you want. Realize that sometimes you have to take the good with the bad. There's a somber mood to the day that might overwhelm your normal attitude. Try to stay focused and disciplined.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You might need to adopt a stern attitude today in order to be as effective as you'd like to be. When dealing with others, don't make assumptions for which you don't have solid backing. Other people are easily touched off, so keep things limited to the facts. Try not to stir up heavy emotions.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You may not feel like your engine is working today. For some reason, it seems like you're using the wrong fuel. Don't be surprised if it's a bit harder to get in touch with your emotional state. Your feelings are playing tricks on you. Do your best not to be thrown off balance by this energy. It gets easier from here.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You might find your emotions stifled today. You have a great deal to say, but for some reason there's a bit of hesitation when it comes to saying it. Don't be surprised if you feel anxious in such a way that makes it difficult to communicate. Much of today's talk may be filled with fluff and not much substance.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You might not feel especially motivated today. Nonetheless, whether you want to or not, it's important that you attack the mountain of tasks. Understand and respect the constraints of the ticking clock. As long as you're disciplined about accomplishing one small task at a time, you won't have a problem reducing the mountain to a small pile.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

You may be very busy today. This is a good time to get things done. There's a feeling of discipline that's helping you stay focused. Emotions are stifled, which may work to your advantage. Keep everything limited to the facts at hand, and work can proceed much more efficiently than if simple issues become big soap operas.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You're having a difficult time connecting with your emotions today. Things will run more smoothly if you don't try to force yourself to act cheerful if you aren't. Be honest about your emotions. If you're feeling restless or negative, keep it to yourself. Go for a walk, preferably near water, and indulge in a good healthy meal.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Spring

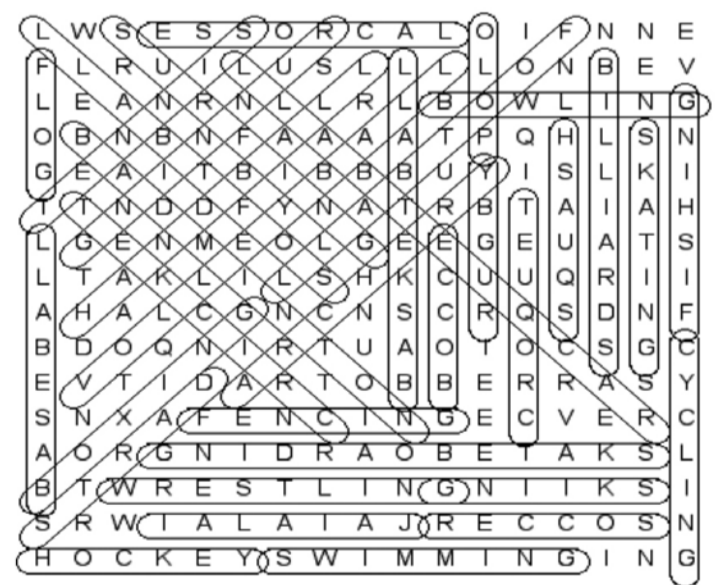
Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a message about Spring.



- | | | |
|------------|------------|-----------------|
| ALLERGIES | FROGS | RAIN |
| APRIL | GOLF | RENEWAL |
| BASEBALL | GRASS | ROBINS |
| BEES | GREEN | SEASON |
| CROCUSES | GROWTH | SNOWMELT |
| CYCLAMENS | IRISES | SOFTBALL |
| DAFFODILS | LILIES | SPRING BREAK |
| DANDELIONS | MARCH | SPRING CLEANING |
| EASTER | MAY | TULIPS |
| EQUINOX | NEW LEAVES | WARMER |
| FLOWERS | PLANTING | WET |

Friday's Solution

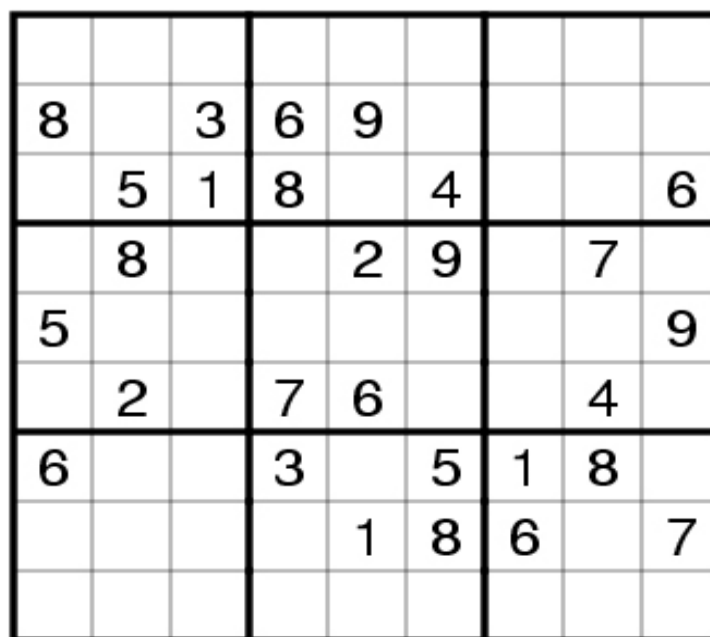
Sports



- | | | | |
|------------|----------|---------------|------------|
| ARCHERY | CROQUET | JAI ALAI | SOCCER |
| BADMINTON | CYCLING | LACROSSE | SOFTBALL |
| BASEBALL | DARTS | POLO | SQUASH |
| BASKETBALL | FENCING | RACQUETBALL | SURFING |
| BILLIARDS | FISHING | RUGBY | SWIMMING |
| BOCCE | FOOTBALL | RUNNING | TENNIS |
| BOWLING | GOLF | SKATEBOARDING | VOLLEYBALL |
| BOXING | HANDBALL | SKATING | WRESTLING |
| CRICKET | HOCKEY | SKIING | |

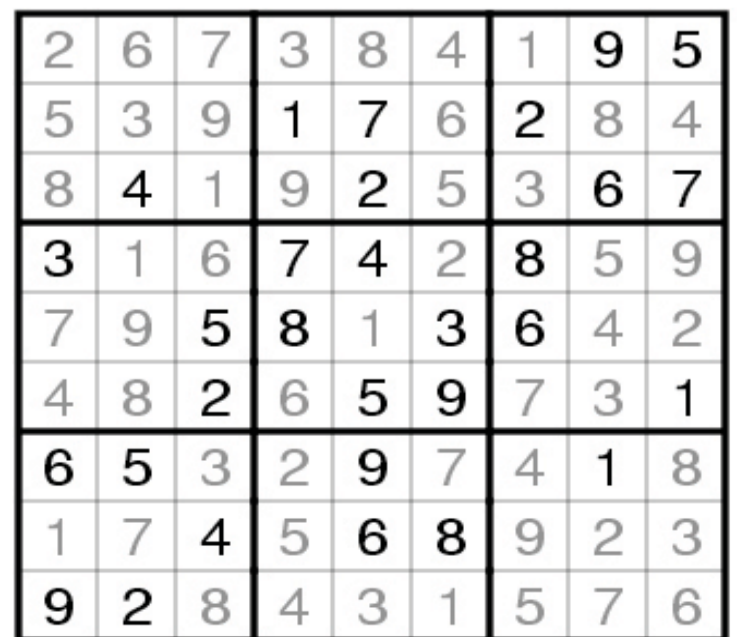
The hidden sentence is: WINNERS NEVER QUIT AND QUITTERS NEVER WIN

Daily SuDoku



medium

Friday's Solution



very hard

Lifestyle

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2019



Pictures taken on Dec 26, 2019 show a giant crane outside the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, which was partially destroyed when fire broke out beneath the roof on April 15, 2019. — AFP photos

Eight months later, Notre-Dame cathedral still broken

Eight months after a devastating fire ravaged the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris, engineers are preparing for a crucial but complicated step in the herculean restoration effort: removing a mound of scaffolding mangled in the blaze. Within weeks, they are set to embark on the most delicate operation so far in the rescue effort. They have to extract 10,000 metal pipes forged by the inferno into a giant web-like structure that must be removed for work to proceed, but without further unsettling the feeble edifice.

The scaffolding was erected for renovation work on the 13th century cathedral before a fire on April 15 tore through Notre-Dame's roof and dramatically toppled its spire. What remains of the metal platform that once encircled the spire now threatens the stone vaulted ceiling underneath, and with it the very integrity of the cathedral which, for the first time in more

than 200 years, could not host Christmas mass this year. Stabilization of the landmark cathedral is still the priority - with rebuilding only likely to start in 2021. Engineers are getting ready to take these next steps.

Squirrels

Workers have so far fastened about two-thirds of the scaffolding, using large metal girders. Only the highest parts of the scaffolding remain to be secured for removal. This will be done with the help of a giant crane - 75 m high and able to lift eight tonnes - that was installed this month on the cathedral's southern flank, overlooking the River Seine.

A second, lighter scaffolding frame is being erected on either side of the old scaffolding. This new structure will allow abseilers, dubbed squirrels by the project team, to go in and saw the melted scaffolding into

manageable parts for the crane to remove them piece by piece. The dismantling, which is expected to last several months, is meant to start in February, weather depending. An electric transformer station has been delivered to the work site by barge to provide power for the operation.

Choir

The intricately-carved wooden choir stalls, which date from the 16th century, are protected by a temporary roof. They will be disassembled for cleaning and then reinstalled.

Spire

Reconstruction of the spire and other damaged parts of the church could begin in 2021. But the spire has proved controversial, with some arguing for it to be replaced by an exact replica, and others - including French President Emmanuel Macron - arguing for a "contemporary" touch.

Bells

The eight bells in the fire-damaged northern belfry have to be removed for cleaning and remounted. The bells in the southern belfry were not touched.

Organ

The organ, which survived the blaze, will have to be removed to have its nearly 8,000 pipes painstakingly cleaned from the layer of lead dust deposited by the melting of the spire. Tests are being done on the cathedral's 26 chapels to determine if they, too, had been contaminated.

Robots

The Catholic cathedral's interior has been emptied with the help of robots. What could be saved has been itemized and stored in tents in the courtyard, which is due to reopen progressively to visitors from next month. The inventories have been com-

pleted for the nave - the long axe of the cross-shaped Gothic cathedral - and for the transepts, the two shorter arms crossing the nave. But there is still much rubble in the vaulted ceiling. From a platform that has already been erected, abseilers will shortly begin clearing the mess with special vacuum cleaners.

Timeline

Macron has set a five-year target for the restoration work to be completed. So far, some 320,000 donations and pledges totalling €922 million (over \$1 billion) have been received - ranging from a single euro offered by an American child to 200 million euros by French billionaire Bernard Arnault. Investigations into the cause of the fire are ongoing, but experts are leaning towards negligence - perhaps a discarded cigarette butt or a short circuit - rather than criminal intent. — AFP



A horse-drawn carriage passes by in a street of Old Montreal on Dec 22, 2019. — AFP photos



A coachman takes pictures of a group of tourists before a ride.

Montreal horse-drawn carriages take one last lap

To tourists they are a time-honored, charming way of seeing the sights but animal rights activists say Montreal's horse-drawn carriages are a cruel and unnecessary relic of yesteryear. A longstanding feud between the coachmen and their critics looks set to end however with the unique mode of transport set to disappear from the streets of Canada's second city by year end. "You can pet him if

you want," Nathalie Matte tells onlookers attracted to her hoofed beast with its flowing mane and tail.

In the heart of Montreal's Old Port neighborhood, a half dozen horses and carriages are lined up outside the Notre Dame basilica, waiting for riders. A group of tourists, tempted by offers of a languid and comfortable ride along cobblestone streets, and a complimentary blanket across their lap on a cold winter's day, snap pictures. The carriages this time of year are decorated with red ribbons and fir branches to mark the Christmas holidays.

"It's a unique way to see the city rather than just taking the bus or the subway," says Mujtaba Ali, 29, who is visiting with family from neighboring Ontario, as he steps off a carriage. Horses and landaus - four-wheel, convertible carriages named after the German city of their origin - are a part of Montreal's cultural heritage, says owner Luc Desparois. "They've been around as long as Montreal has existed," he told AFP.

The Quebec city was founded by European settlers in the 1600s at the site of an indigenous village inhabited as far back as 4,000 years ago - although the landau itself was invented in the 18th century. City Hall has ordered an end to the tourist rides



Horse-drawn carriages line up in front of the Notre-Dame basilica in Old Montreal.

out of concern for the horses. In 2018, the council passed a by-law banishing horse-drawn carriages, starting in 2020. The death of a horse in 2018 while pulling a carriage was the last straw for animal rights groups, and prompted mayor Valerie Plante to speak out against the carriage industry, saying it was no longer welcome in Montreal. The decision will put some 50 coachmen and their horses out of work. — AFP



A coachwoman feeds her horse while waiting for tourists.



Brazilian Nivaldo Novaes dos Santos, 27, collects cocoa fruits from the plantation at the Altamira farm in Itajupe, Bahia state, Brazil, on Dec 13, 2019. — AFP photos



Brazilian farm worker Jose Carlos, 37, shows the inside of a cocoa fruit at Altamira farm in Itajupe, Bahia state.



Brazilian Carlos Tomich, 49, shows visitors part of the cocoa production process at the Capela Velha farm, in Urucuca, Bahia state.

Brazil cocoa goes GI, boosting prices

With an attentive eye, Henrique Almeida watches a technician carefully open a hundred cocoa pods, while another worker on the plantation collects samples in bags to check whether the batch conforms to the "South Bahia" geographical indication. Like famed wines from specific regions in Europe, such as France's Champagne, the geographical indication (GI) denotes the origin and quality of the cocoa, leading to higher prices that are a boon to farmers who meet the exacting standards.

"The production of fine cocoa and the creation of the geographical indication label make it possible to have a profitable business and pull our region upwards," Almeida explained. The 63-year-old comes from a cocoa-growing family that has been farming for three generations. In 2006, he acquired the hundred-year-old Sagarana farm, 148 acres on a hillside in Coaraci, in the north-eastern Brazilian state of Bahia.

Farmers had previously been confined to the production of common cocoa, intended for the chocolate industry. But after the "witches' broom" disease in 1989 drastically reduced the productivity of Bahia's cocoa trees - which provide up to 86 percent of national output - Almeida, like other producers in southern Bahia, chose to improve the quality of his crop in order to be able to continue growing. "When I bought the farm, standard cocoa prices were low, and cocoa farmers were unmotivated, while the chocolate market was doing well," he told AFP. "I started growing fine cocoa to make my own chocolate and add value to my product."



Dry cocoa beans are tested at the Sagarana farm in Coaraci, Bahia state.

Higher value cocoa

He then established a production method that was longer and more precise than that for common cocoa. After picking and opening the pods and sorting out the quality seeds, he would put them in wooden tubs to ferment for seven to eight days, stirring them every 24 hours to allow the chocolate aroma to develop. He would then leave the beans to dry in the sun for several days, covering them in case of strong heat or rain. It has paid off: On average, GI-labeled cocoa costs between 40 to 160 percent more than common cocoa.

Fine cocoa currently makes up almost half of Almeida's production, and 40 percent of the high-quality beans comply with the specifications for the "South Bahia" GI. This label is the result of a decade of work by

Almeida and other fine cocoa producers, as well as cooperatives and researchers, after they created the South Bahia Cocoa Association (ACSB) to define the production rules. The National Institute of Industrial Property (INPI) registered the GI in 2018.

Quality rules

It is the second GI given to Brazilian cocoa, after the Linhares region in the state of Espirito Santo, which was registered in 2012, and before the Tome-Acu, which was registered at the beginning of 2019. The South Bahia registration established stricter qualitative criteria. "We didn't want a simple certification proving the historical-cultural heritage of cocoa in the region," said biologist Adriana Reis, a co-founder of the ACSB.



Brazilians Altiele Carvalho dos Santos, 32 and Gloria de Jesus Santos, 36, sort cocoa beans at the Altamira farm.

"We wanted to use it to defend the quality of this product and protect the environment and social rights, which would also let us differentiate ourselves."

In particular, for a batch of cocoa to be a GI candidate, at least 65 percent of the beans must be fully fermented, with a moisture content of less than eight percent and less than three percent of internal defects, such as mold, insects or sprouts. In order to verify compliance with the rules, farmers send samples to the Center for Cocoa Innovation (CIC), an independent laboratory founded in 2017. If the results come back positive, the ASCB technicians will run a visual test onsite and send a second sample from the same batch to the lab. The associa-

tion also monitors the agro-forestry production system, in order to protect the Atlantic forest in which the cocoa trees grow and to ensure compliance with labor codes.

Since April 2018, 25 farmers have already certified 40 tons of cocoa with the GI, 15 percent of the 300 total tonnes of cocoa produced in southern Bahia. And the amount should increase, especially since chocolate made from GI-stamped cocoa will also be able to carry the label. "In order to get more farmers interested in the GI, buyers need to pay more for this cocoa," said Reis. "This year, we created a QR code to improve product traceability, which is increasingly demanded by consumers." — AFP

Secrets of Germany's 'Alcatraz' virus island revealed

On a Baltic Sea island once used by the Nazis for biological weapon research, German scientists are developing virus vaccines that could save lives. Access to the island of Riems is highly restricted. Scientists who work there have to have disinfectant showers when entering or exiting and wear body suits. And dozens of animals, including sheep and cows, have been deliberately infected with viruses as part of the research to monitor the effects of the diseases.

"We really are the Alcatraz of viruses, a kind of prison for viruses," Franz Conraths, deputy head of the island's Friedrich Loeffler Institute, told AFP. Located south of picturesque Ruegen Island, Riems has become a global centre for the study of pathogens such as rabies, African swine fever and Ebola. Visitors have to undergo security controls and the laboratories holding the most dangerous viruses as well as the stables with the infected animals are on security level 4 - the highest in Germany. "We do everything possible to ensure they do not spread," Conraths said of the viruses on his island. "It's very important for our work."



Specialist in mosquito-borne diseases Dr Helge Kampen displays a microscope view of a mosquito on a screen at FLI.

Preparing for an outbreak

The Friedrich Loeffler Institute is the oldest centre for the study of viruses in the world. It was founded in 1910 by Loeffler, a pioneering German scientist. There is no installation like it in Europe, although there are similar facilities in Australia and Canada. The institute used to be based in a single building on the island but has now expanded and covers almost the entirety of the 1.3-km long outcrop.

After World War II, the centre found itself in communist East Germany and began to develop vaccines. In the 1970s, it was linked to the mainland by a dam. The government has invested some €300 million (\$334 million) in the institute since 2008 to upgrade the infrastructure and there are now 89 laboratories and 163 stables. "Our biggest task is working out preparations for an outbreak," said Conraths, giving the example of African swine fever which has been



A researcher looks into a microscope in the laboratory responsible for research on African swine fever at FLI.

detected in Central Europe, raising concerns among German pig farmers. "We have to expect it any day," he said.

There are between 80 and 100 large animals on the island: Alpacas, boars, cows, goats, and sheep. The researchers said that when the animals get too sick they are put down so as not to let them suffer. "We do our best to carry out our research without having to do tests on animals," said Martin Beer, head of the institute's diagnostic department. But he added that "only by infecting an animal" could researchers work out why animals get sick, how the illness develops and how the animals react. Since the tests are for vaccines that can save millions of animals, protect farmers' livelihoods and alleviate hunger, Beer said they were "justified". — AFP



The research facilities of the Friedrich Loeffler Institute (FLI), the Federal Research Institute for Animal Health, are pictured on the island of Riems, Greifswald, northern Germany, on Aug 7, 2019. — AFP photos



Alpacas held for research purposes are seen in their enclosure at FLI.

Lifestyle | Features

Pompadour and rooster cuts: Iraqi styles sculpt 'revolution'

Elvis Presley may have been the advance guard, but young Iraqis own it - protesters in Baghdad sport slicked styles and rockabilly haircuts, a testament to their unyielding rebel spirit. "The revolution has changed everything," said Qassem, nearly three months into a popular movement that seeks to unseat Iraq's highly dysfunctional political establishment. "Now, it is all so different - we are free," the young protester added under a tent where he doles out tea and biscuits to peers in Tahrir Square. "We also know how to let loose," Qassem continued, his face switching suddenly from serious to smiling. "And so I invented a new style," he



Iraqi anti-government demonstrators sporting pompadour hairstyles pose at Tahrir Square in central Baghdad on Dec 23, 2019. — AFP photos



'Why be scared?'

Exclusively male and in large part inspired by the fashionable cuts of football stars, the phenomenon is coursing through the Arab world. And it is particularly exuberant in Tahrir Square. "Here, we call it the rooster comb," explained a local journalist. For 23-year-old actor and renowned activist Omar Dabbour, "the style began two years ago". Then "it exploded with the revolution in Tahrir. The people feel increasingly free," he noted.

Dabbour himself sports an impressive, albeit more natural, style - an afro worthy of the Jackson Five, which amounts to a radical departure, in what is otherwise an ocean of hair gel. "In Tahrir Square, young people are daring - it has become normal," added Dabbour. "But in the rest of the city, it's a bit different - more conservative. There is the army, the militiamen who can bother you at checkpoints," he continued. "I don't care. Before, I had a short haircut. Now I have let it grow. Why be scared?"

Sporting yellow tinted glasses and maintaining a studious air, Karrar Riad, 20, pushed a hand through his long and deliberately disordered locks. With a black leather bracelet, he has the air of a young Johnny Depp. "Today, everything is possible. We do what we want here," he said. Here perhaps, but not in Riad's home district of Kadhimiya, which houses a key Shiite mausoleum.

Going home requires him to restore some



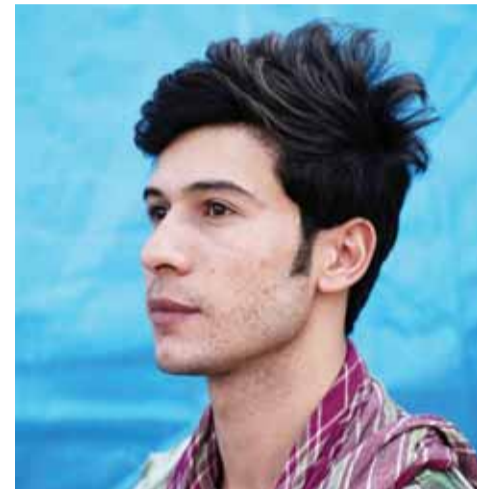
conventional order to his unruly mop. Other fashionistas don a cap to blend back in when they depart the protest hotbed. Their caution is not without reason. In 2012, at least 15 youths were stoned, beaten or shot to death in a spate of targeted attacks against people sporting the "emo" look - tight-fitting black clothes and alternative hairstyles.

Voluminous proliferation

The range of styles is wide, but it is Iraq's take on the Elvis cut that rises head and shoulders above the rest: a towering pompadour with undercut back and sides. "Adopted by celebrities, students and hipsters," the pompadour - named after a mistress of French King Louis XV - will transform you into a "sexy and trendy man", according to one website. But this style itself unfurls into a multitude of sub-styles in Iraq, from classic rockabilly to even the mohawk.

And amid the proliferation of looks, cuts are becoming ever more voluminous. "The idea is to do what you want to do," said Dabbour. And probably also to attract the throngs of young women who frequent Tahrir Square, in a commingling that is unusual in Iraq. The hairstyles on display have "roots in the 1990s, in the hairdressing salons and male beauty parlors of Sadr City," explained Zahraa Ghandour, an Iraqi documentary filmmaker.

Sadr City - a huge working-class district



chuckled, glancing upwards towards his rectangular pompadour.

Outside his tent, thousands of students and young unemployed people thronged the iconic square, railing once more against "crooked" politicians. Their enthusiasm has remained undimmed since the start of the revolt on October 1, despite clashes with security forces that have killed close to 460. One thing strikes the eye perhaps above all else - the unbridled hairstyles young men sport. High quiffs, tight fades and loads of attitude - it is quite the male beauty pageant.



of northeastern Baghdad - was marginalized under the regime of deposed dictator Saddam Hussein. "The residents wanted to mark themselves out, to protest," said Ghandour. Baroque haircuts, meanwhile, "really started around two years ago, again in Sadr city."

Zouheir Al-Atouani, a local videographer who has gained nationwide fame, spread this style by posting wedding videos in which men sport ever more sculpted looks. According to Ghandour, "in Tahrir, ever more frequented by young people from Sadr city, it's a way to rebel, to free oneself". It is also most likely a way of defying the country's all-powerful militias, and social revenge for young people who feel despised, yet now find themselves at the forefront of fashion. "They

are especially creative," smiles Ghandour. And the styles are "spread far and wide by social networks", where dandies love to showcase their ever crazier cuts. — AFP



Protesting Indians get creative



Protesters shout slogans and hold placards at demonstrations against India's new citizenship law. — AFP photos



From Netflix to Hitler, protesters are tapping pop culture and history as they vent their anger against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's new citizenship law - and with deft use of India's beloved acronyms. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) eases naturalization for persecuted religious minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, but not if they are Muslim. Critics fear it is the precursor to a National Register of Citizens (NRC) that many among India's often undocumented 200 million Muslims is aimed primarily of making them stateless.

Modi's government denies this and says the law is a humanitarian move, but it has sparked two weeks of protests that at times have been violent. At least 27 people have been killed. "NRC is Coming" reads one placard, co-opting the "Winter is Coming" slogan of the smash-hit fantasy series "Game of Thrones", with Modi's black and white mugshot in the background.

Others inspired by the same fantasy series include "Winter is coming for Modi and Shah", referring to Home Minister Amit Shah, and "Modi - you are making Cersei look good", a nod to a "Game of Thrones" villain. "Netflix and raise hell", says another, in a spin on the expression "Netflix and chill". "Stop trying to make NRC happen!" meanwhile rips off a popular line in

Lindsay Lohan movie "Mean Girls".

Anjali Singh, clutching an "Error 404, Hindu nation not found" placard, said that Modi and his government had become more aggressive in moving forward with their Hindu agenda. "So our messaging has also got more explicit and direct," Singh told AFP. Slogans like "Long Live the Revolution", a popular chant of India's independence struggle against British, echo at many demos, with a rhyming chant of "If you act like Hitler, you will die like Hitler".

Caricatures of Modi and Shah wearing Nazi uniform and posters of Hitler holding a baby-sized Modi aloft have become a staple as videos and pictures that are viral on social media, as well as of graffiti. "Everything that happens offline ends up online and we have to have a global appeal in our messaging," Kiran Malhotra, a student protester in New Delhi, explained to AFP. "Someone sitting in the US or Europe will not understand the change in India's citizenship law but comparing Modi with Hitler simplifies it," Malhotra said, her placard depicting a cartoon Modi with a swastika armband.

Many protesters are also rehashing Indian TV jingles from the 1980s to give a nostalgic touch to the protests, while others are using tambourine beats to

sing "Down with Modi" or recite the preamble of India's constitution. Other favorites include a Hindi version of US civil rights anthem "We shall overcome", as well as revolutionary Urdu poems. "The messaging has to be more explicit and direct now," Ira Sen, a protester told AFP. Her poster features independence icon Mahatma Gandhi holding his "My experiments with Truth" autobiography alongside Modi cradling what the drawing depicts as his version, "My experiments with lies".

Many people are demonstrating for the first time, drawing inspiration from protests in Hong Kong, Chile, the Arab Spring and against US President Donald Trump's travel ban on people from six Muslim-majority countries. "People power can bring change. Democracy and constitution will win, despots will be thrown out," Meenkshi Roy, an interior designer told AFP, holding a placard "Caesar will go... Rome stays".

Other placards are topical ("PM 2.0 is worse than PM2.5", a reference to a measure of pollution in India's smog-choked cities), witty ("I have seen smarter cabinets at IKEA"), or just downright provocative ("Sex" in bright red ink followed by "#noCAA #noNRC"). "There is more youthful but aggressive language in slogans and placards. Some of



the placards are downright offensive, some mocking and many other are sarcastic," Steve Rocha, an activist, told AFP. "This protest has everything - graphics, words, music, poetry and rage." — AFP

Ballooning dispute: America's giant inflatable rats under attack



A giant inflatable rat makes its way down the street in midtown New York City on Nov 26, 2019 where it will sit outside a company's office in New York. — AFP photos

New Yorkers are used to seeing rats on the street but they are not always small, furry ones. Sometimes they are inflatable and taller than giraffes. American unions use giant balloon rodents as a protest symbol, parking them outside company offices to highlight labor disputes. "It's used to display injustice,"



said union organizer Justice Favor, beside a towering air-filled rat with scabby belly, buck teeth and demon eyes.

His organization, representing laborers, set up the rat outside the Manhattan offices of a developer it accuses of paying construction workers non-union wages one recent morning. "The public stop and want to know what's going on. It's a great tool to make folks aware," the 37-year-old told AFP. Inflatable rats were first used by a union in Chicago around 30 years ago. They started becoming a familiar sight on the streets of New York in the late 1990s.

"Scabby the rat," as it has become known, has its own Twitter page and even featured in an episode of hit mob drama "The Sopranos". Not all passers-by know what the inflatables are about though, so union workers stand on the sidewalk and hand out information about each specific dispute. "I first thought it was because of all the rats on the subway. Then I read the leaflet," 38-year-old hair stylist Zarinah Ali told AFP.

Cigar-chomping fat cats

The inflatables are made by Big Sky Balloons, an Illinois-based company which proudly boasts on its web-



site to be Scabby's creator. They can reportedly cost thousands of dollars. New York unions own dozens of the balloons, which range in height from six feet (1.83 m) to 25 feet. Some look more fierce than others. They also have inflatables depicting fat cats smoking cigars while clutching bags of money, pigs in waistcoats and top hats and a cockroach.

"If we were to assemble them all on the same day it would look like Macy's parade!" union leader Mike Hellstrom told AFP, referencing New York's annual Thanksgiving day march. Hellstrom, who is credited with introducing the rats to New York, says they are hideous, looking to give "a true representation of what exploitation looks like". Management often, understandably, get irritated by the depiction and have even burst rats with a pin on occasion. The inflatables are increasingly coming under a more serious form of attack though, which threatens to exterminate them and raises arguments about freedom of expression in America.

Court battle

In 2017, President Donald Trump appointed lawyer Peter Robb as general counsel of the National Labor



Relations Board (NLRB), a federal agency created to protect workers' rights. His office has since filed cases saying the inflatables amount to illegal picketing. Earlier this year, the NLRB went to court to try to prevent a union from displaying Scabby the rat outside a supermarket on New York's Staten Island. — AFP

'Hello, Dolly!' and 'Mame' composer Herman dies at 88

Jerry Herman, the award-winning composer and lyricist behind such upbeat, crowd-pleasing musicals as "Mame" and "Hello, Dolly!" has died in Miami at the age of 88. His goddaughter Jane Dorian confirmed his Thursday death, The New York Times reported. No cause was given. "We lost one of the greats: a collaborator and friend for almost 40 years," tweeted actor Harvey Fierstein, who wrote the book for Herman's over-the-top "La Cage aux Folles," the first musical to feature gay lovers. "La Cage" and "Hello, Dolly!" both won the Tony award for best musical.

While some called his work schmaltzy, it was undeniably popular: each of those two musicals, along with "Mame," ran on Broadway for more than 1,500 consecutive performances. Herman summed up his winning for-

mula by saying he always tried to write a "simple, hummable show tune." Defying an industry trend toward darker themes, he crafted positive and life-affirming messages, with songs like "The Best of Times" and "Tap Your Troubles Away."

In all, he scored a dozen Broadway musicals over a half-century. "Hello, Dolly" was his most striking success. The original show, starring Carol Channing, won 10 of the 11 Tonys for which it was nominated. Bette Midler starred in a 2017 revival, produced by Herman, that won the Tony award for best revival of a musical. In 1964, Louis Armstrong's rendition of the title tune knocked the Beatles' "Can't Buy Me Love" from the top of the charts.

Herman, who was born in Manhattan, attended his first Broadway musical at age 15 with his parents - a showing of Irving Berlin's "Annie Get Your Gun", with toe-tapping tunes like "There's No Business Like Show Business". When he got home, Herman sat down at the piano - having taught himself to play at a summer camp in New York's Catskill region - and was able to sound out parts to six songs he had never heard before, he later told the Times. "I was truly inspired by Irving Berlin, by his simplicity, and by the fact that he was able to write in a vernacular that the entire country could grasp immediately," he said. Herman is survived by his long-time partner, Terry Marler. — AFP



Jerry Herman

Tom Hanks becomes honorary Greek citizen

Tom Hanks was awarded honorary Greek citizenship on Friday, the state Athens News Agency said, adding an official touch to a long love affair with the country. A document that confirmed the distinction was signed by Greek president Prokopis Pavlopoulos, ANA said. The 63-year-old actor and filmmaker's wife, producer Rita Wilson, is also of Greek origin on her mother's side.

There is considerable pride in Greece that Hanks, one of Hollywood's most bankable stars, has a summer house on the picturesque island of Antiparos and visits every year. Hanks has said that he feels "110 percent Greek...I'm more Greek than a Greek is" by being married to Wilson, producer of "My Big Fat Greek Wedding." — AFP

Lyon, who shocked moviegoers as young 'Lolita,' has died at 73



In this file photo taken on Oct 04, 2007, visitors look at a poster of "Lolita" by Stanley Kubrick during an exhibition organized for the reopening of the "Palazzo delle Esposizioni" in Rome. — AFP

Sue Lyon, who at age 14 played the title character in the 1962 film adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's steamy and scandalous novel "Lolita," has died at age 73. Longtime friend Phil Syracopoulos told The New York Times she died Thursday in Los Angeles. He gave no cause of death. Director Stanley Kubrick reportedly selected the young and inexperienced Lyon to play "Lolita" - a 12-year-old in Nabokov's book who enters into a relationship with a middle-aged literature professor - from among 800 aspirants.

The director described Lyon as the "perfect nymphet". The older man obsessed with the girl he calls "Lolita" was played by English actor James Mason, who was 53 when the film was shot. Lyon's role won her a 1963 Golden Globe as most promising female newcomer. But Kubrick said his battles with motion picture censors - who insisted he tone down the movie's sexual underpinnings and huge age difference - were so fierce that he would not have made the film had he known.

Lyon was 15 when the movie premiered - too young to be allowed into the theater to watch it. She was famously photographed sipping a drink at a nearby soda fountain during the premiere. One of the most iconic film posters ever shows Lyon, looking up seductively over heart-shaped sunglasses and licking a red lollipop, under the legend: "How did they ever make a movie of LOLITA?"

Lyon went on to compile several other screen and television credits, including a role in John Huston's "The Night of the Iguana" in which she played a young woman stuck in a small Mexican town who tries to seduce a disgraced Episcopal priest played by Richard Burton. But she never again achieved the fame or notoriety that "Lolita" brought her. Lyon's last acting role was in 1980 horror film "Alligator," in which she played a reporter. She was married five times; she blamed her brief marriage to convicted murderer Gary "Cotton" Adamson for severely damaging her career. Lyon is survived by a daughter, Nona. — AFP

Canada broadcaster explains missing Trump 'Home Alone 2' cameo

Canada's national public broadcaster confirmed Thursday it had cut out US President Donald Trump's cameo from the movie "Home Alone 2", but said after a social media outcry that the edit was made before he was elected. When the CBC recently aired the 1992 Christmas film, some viewers and Canadian media outlets noticed Trump's scene had been cut out and wanted to know why - especially because the US leader had said on Tuesday it was an "honor" to be involved in the movie.

"As is often the case with feature films adapted for television, 'Home Alone 2' was edited for time," said CBC spokesman Chuck Thompson. "The scene with Donald Trump was one of several that were cut from the movie as none of them were integral to the plot. These edits were done in 2014, when we first acquired the film and before Mr Trump was elected president" in 2016, Thompson said.

Many social media users accused the CBC of making a politically motivated decision, and Trump's son Donald Trump Jr tweeted that he thought the move was "pathetic". But the US president seemed to find the kerfuffle amusing, taking to Twitter on Thursday night to quip about his Canadian counterpart: "I guess Justin T doesn't much like my making him pay up on NATO or Trade!" "The movie will never be the same!" Trump lamented, before clarifying "Just kidding."

Trump appears very briefly in "Home Alone 2". Young Kevin



In this photo taken on Dec 24, 2019, US President Donald Trump makes a video call to troops stationed worldwide at the Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida. — AFP

McCallister (Macaulay Culkin), forgotten by his family, struggles to navigate the gilded hotel where he's staying for the holidays. He stops a man wearing a long black overcoat and a red tie to ask him how to get to the lobby. "Down the hall and to the left," says Donald Trump. The real estate mogul had purchased the Plaza Hotel in New York - the setting of many movie scenes, including several in "Home Alone 2" - at the start of the 1990s. — AFP

Women take charge in Hollywood's hottest 2020 movies

Female directors look set for a breakthrough year in Hollywood in 2020, according to a survey published Friday that found the four most anticipated films of the year are all helmed by women. It is a rare trend in a town which has only ever nominated five women for the best director Oscar, and whose sometimes ambivalent attitude toward misogyny was laid bare by the #MeToo movement which brought down Harvey Weinstein.

"Wonder Woman 1984", the Gal Gadot-starring sequel out in June, was selected as the year's most anticipated film by more than 2,000 moviegoers polled by Fandango website. Patty Jenkins returns to direct after the first film, based on the DC Comics' Amazonian heroine, took a

spectacular \$820 million worldwide in 2017. The next two on the list are also superhero movies.

"Black Widow", which kicks off a new phase of Marvel movies, gives Scarlett Johansson's popular recurring character her own film. Out in May, it is helmed by Cate Shortland. It is followed by Chloe Zhao's "The Eternals", which in November will introduce a host of new Marvel characters played by a star-studded ensemble cast including Angelina Jolie, Salma Hayek and Kit Harington. The new year's fourth-most anticipated film is "Mulan" from Niki Caro, the latest in Disney's string of live-action remakes of cartoon classics, out March. Another female-directed superhero movie "Birds of Prey," a spinoff from 2016's "Suicide Squad" which sees Margot Robbie return as Harley Quinn, also appears on the list, in seventh. Cathy Yan oversees the February movie. Other 2020 films piquing interest include James Bond title "No Time to Die", Pixar's otherworldly jazz animation "Soul" and "Fast & Furious 9" - the latest in the evergreen petrolhead franchise. — AFP

Classifieds

Sunday, December 29, 2019

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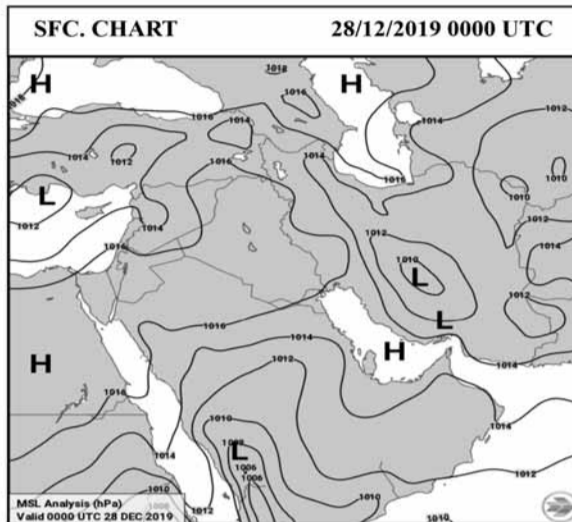
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 08 - 32 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Cold with light variable wind to light to moderate northerly wind, with speed of 08 - 35 km/h with a chance for mist forming over some areas.

| WEATHER WARNING | No Current Warnings |
|-----------------|---------------------|
|-----------------|---------------------|

| STATION | MAX. EXP. | MIN. REC. |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|
| KUWAIT CITY | 25 °C | 14 °C |
| KUWAIT AIRPORT | 24 °C | 09 °C |
| ABDALY | 24 °C | 09 °C |
| BUBYAN | 21 °C | 12 °C |
| JAHRA | 24 °C | 11 °C |
| FAILAKA ISLAND | - °C | - °C |
| SALMIYAH | 20 °C | 16 °C |
| AHMADI | 20 °C | 17 °C |
| NUWAISIB | 23 °C | 12 °C |
| WAFRA | 23 °C | 09 °C |
| SALMY | 23 °C | 08 °C |



| 4 DAYS FORECAST | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------|------------------------|--------------|-------|----------------|--------------|
| DAY | DATE | WEATHER | Temperatures | | Wind Direction | Wind Speed |
| | | | MAX. | MIN. | | |
| Sunday | 12/29 | Fair | 22 °C | 09 °C | VRB-SE | 08 - 28 km/h |
| Monday | 12/30 | Fair and Partly cloudy | 22 °C | 08 °C | SE-S | 12 - 38 km/h |
| Tuesday | 12/31 | Fair and Partly cloudy | 23 °C | 09 °C | NW | 15 - 40 km/h |
| Wednesday | 01/01 | Fair and Partly cloudy | 23 °C | 07 °C | NW-VRB | 10 - 38 km/h |

| PRAYER TIMES | |
|--------------|-------|
| Fajr | 05:16 |
| Sunrise | 06:41 |
| Zuhr | 11:49 |
| Asr | 14:39 |
| Sunset | 16:58 |
| Isha | 18:20 |

| RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| MAX. Temp. | 26 °C |
| MIN. Temp. | 10 °C |
| MAX. RH | 92 % |
| MIN. RH | 26 % |
| MAX. Wind | S 32 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 Banderkar Tawfiq Abdul Rahim holder of Indian Passport No. Z1923691 having permanent address: Mumbai, Maharashtra, India 400010 residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Given name: Tawfiq Abdul Rahim, Surname: Banderkar. (C 5699)

I Palathinkal Alavi Sainaba holder of Indian Passport No. T0708374 do hereby change my name as Palathinkal Alavi lysha residing at Palathinkal (H) Manaladi, P.O. Attoor Chirumpambal, Thrissur, Kerala. (C 5483)

I, Arsh Javed Thakur, S/O Javeed Abdulhamid Thakur and Cindrella Fernandes and holder of Indian Passport No. P0379143 issued at Kuwait on 26/06/2016, permanent R/o H. No. 269, Bebeingall, Ambaulim Quepem 403705, Goa - India hereby change my name from Arsh Javed Thakur to Arsh Thakur. Hereafter, in all future dealings and documents, I will be known by my name as Arsh Thakur. (C 5484) 29-12-2019

I, Shazeen Mahamad Shaif Alaji, (Indian Passport No. N1869413 issued in Kuwait) D/O Alaji Mahamad Shaif Kasam hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as, given name: Shazeen Mahamad Shaif, surname: Alji

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 • Parkings
 • Garden
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and Father's name Mahamad Shaif Kasam Alji for all purposes.

I, Nuwair Mahamad Shaif Alaji (Indian Passport No. T2416290 issued in Kuwait) S/O Alaji Mahamad Shaif Kasam hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as, given name: Nuwair Mahamad Shaif, surname: Alji and Father's name Mahamad Shaif Kasam Alji for all purposes. (C 5698)

I, Chalamala Venka Reddy, S/O Chalamala Narasareddy (old name) D No 7/21 C3, Gangireddypalem, Rajampet town and Mandal, YSR Kadapa Dist (A.P) have changed my name as Chalamala Venkata Krishna Reddy, S/O Chalamala Narasareddy (new name). 26-12-2019

SHARING ACCOMMODATION

Sharing accommodation for Filipino ONLY Farwaniya block 4, near Big Jamiya, available on December 25, Contact 55571873. 24-12-2019

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Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw) DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

| Arrival Flights on Sunday 29/12/2019 | | | | Departure Flights on Sunday 29/12/2019 | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------|---------------------|-------|--|------|-------------------|-------|
| Airlines | Flt | Route | Time | Airlines | Flt | Route | Time |
| IGO | 1757 | Kochi | 00:10 | AIC | 988 | Hyderabad/Chennai | 00:05 |
| AIC | 989 | Mumbai | 00:10 | JZR | 215 | Jeddah | 00:05 |
| FEG | 241 | Alexandria | 00:30 | QTR | 1093 | Doha | 00:25 |
| JZR | 254 | Amman | 00:45 | FDB | 072 | Dubai | 00:35 |
| NIA | 561 | Asyut | 00:45 | BBC | 044 | Dhaka | 00:45 |
| JZR | 734 | Cairo | 00:50 | AIC | 990 | Mumbai | 01:10 |
| THY | 772 | Istanbul | 00:50 | IGO | 1758 | Kochi | 01:10 |
| KAC | 102 | London | 00:55 | FEG | 342 | Sohag | 01:30 |
| KAC | 504 | Beirut | 00:55 | NIA | 364 | Alexandria | 01:40 |
| PGT | 858 | Istanbul | 00:55 | JZR | 119 | Dubai | 01:55 |
| ETH | 3424 | Addis Ababa/Bahrain | 01:30 | KAC | 677 | Dubai | 01:55 |
| DLH | 625 | Dammam | 01:30 | JZR | 111 | Doha | 01:55 |
| THY | 764 | Istanbul | 01:50 | PGT | 859 | Istanbul | 02:00 |
| PGT | 840 | Istanbul | 01:50 | KAC | 363 | Colombo | 02:00 |
| JZR | 722 | Alexandria | 01:55 | THY | 773 | Istanbul | 02:20 |
| IGO | 002 | LGW | 01:55 | DLH | 625 | Frankfurt | 02:30 |
| UAE | 1759 | Delhi | 01:55 | KAC | 417 | Manila | 02:30 |
| ETH | 620 | Dubai | 02:15 | PGT | 841 | Istanbul | 02:50 |
| RBG | 551 | Addis Ababa | 02:25 | ETH | 3425 | Addis Ababa | 02:55 |
| KLM | 446 | Alexandria | 02:30 | IGO | 1765 | Delhi | 02:55 |
| GFA | 211 | Bahrain | 02:30 | ETH | 621 | Addis Ababa | 03:05 |
| QTR | 1086 | Bahrain | 02:40 | RBG | 552 | Alexandria | 03:05 |
| OMA | 643 | Doha | 02:55 | UAE | 854 | Cairo | 03:40 |
| RJA | 648 | Muscat | 03:05 | KAC | 621 | Doha | 03:50 |
| PGT | 860 | Amman | 03:05 | KLM | 446 | Amsterdam | 03:55 |
| KKK | 1268 | Istanbul | 03:05 | THY | 765 | Istanbul | 04:00 |
| ETD | 305 | Istanbul | 03:05 | QTR | 1087 | Doha | 04:00 |
| MSR | 612 | Abu Dhabi | 03:15 | OMA | 644 | Muscat | 04:00 |
| KAC | 414 | Cairo | 03:15 | ETD | 306 | Abu Dhabi | 04:00 |
| LMU | 510 | Bangkok | 04:00 | MSR | 613 | Cairo | 04:15 |
| QTR | 1076 | Cairo | 04:00 | PGT | 861 | Istanbul | 04:25 |
| IGO | 1751 | Doha | 04:00 | JZR | 713 | Sohag | 04:30 |
| KAC | 418 | Dubai | 04:10 | KKK | 1269 | Istanbul | 04:35 |
| OHY | 352 | Chennai | 04:25 | JZR | 707 | Luxor | 04:40 |
| KAC | 302 | Dubai | 04:30 | LMU | 511 | Cairo | 05:00 |
| KAC | 406 | Istanbul | 04:40 | KAC | 103 | London | 05:00 |
| FDB | 069 | Mumbai | 04:45 | IGO | 1752 | Chennai | 05:10 |
| KAC | 358 | Kochi | 05:00 | QTR | 1077 | Doha | 05:30 |
| JZR | 404 | Kochi | 05:10 | OHY | 351 | Istanbul | 05:30 |
| DHX | 170 | Hyderabad | 05:10 | THY | 771 | Istanbul | 06:25 |
| KAC | 382 | Bahrain | 05:10 | JZR | 121 | Dubai | 06:35 |
| KAC | 784 | Delhi | 05:20 | JZR | 113 | Doha | 06:40 |
| THY | 770 | Jeddah | 05:20 | JZR | 001D | LGW | 06:45 |
| JZR | 112 | Bahrain | 05:25 | RJA | 649 | Amman | 06:55 |
| QTR | 8511 | Istanbul | 05:35 | FDB | 070 | Dubai | 07:05 |
| JZR | 216 | Doha | 05:45 | GFA | 212 | Bahrain | 07:15 |
| KAC | 284 | Jeddah | 05:50 | KAC | 167 | Paris | 07:35 |
| JZR | 402 | Dhaka | 05:55 | QTR | 8512 | Doha | 07:45 |
| KAC | 344 | Mumbai | 06:05 | KAC | 171 | Frankfurt | 08:00 |
| JZR | 120 | Chennai | 06:10 | IGO | 1767 | Mumbai | 08:10 |
| KAC | 544 | Dubai | 06:50 | KAC | 165 | Rome | 08:15 |
| KAC | 678 | Cairo | 07:00 | KAC | 161 | Geneva | 08:20 |
| BAW | 157 | Dubai | 07:05 | FDB | 054 | Dubai | 08:35 |
| IGO | 1766 | Dubai | 07:10 | KAC | 545 | Cairo | 08:50 |
| KAC | 204 | London | 07:15 | BAW | 156 | London | 09:00 |
| FDB | 053 | Mumbai | 07:50 | KAC | 787 | Jeddah | 09:00 |
| KAC | 622 | Doha | 08:00 | KAC | 163 | MXP | 09:00 |
| QTR | 1084 | Doha | 08:00 | JZR | 539 | KTM | 09:05 |
| UAE | 855 | Doha | 08:00 | JZR | 731 | Cairo | 09:10 |
| ETD | 301 | Doha | 08:35 | KAC | 691 | Muscat | 09:20 |
| KAC | 334 | Dubai | 08:55 | KAC | 671 | Dubai | 09:20 |
| ABY | 125 | Abu Dhabi | 09:00 | QTR | 1085 | Doha | 09:40 |
| KAC | 304 | Trivandrum | 09:05 | ABY | 126 | Doha | 09:45 |
| KAC | 384 | Sharjah | 09:30 | KAC | 101 | London | 09:45 |
| FDB | 055 | Mumbai | 09:30 | KAC | 561 | Amman | 09:45 |
| IGO | 1753 | Delhi | 09:40 | ETD | 302 | Abu Dhabi | 09:55 |
| QTR | 1070 | Dubai | 09:40 | UAE | 856 | Dubai | 10:00 |
| SVA | 512 | Ahmedabad | 09:45 | KAC | 117 | New York | 10:00 |
| JZR | 114 | Doha | 10:00 | KAC | 791 | Madinah | 10:00 |
| GFA | 213 | Riyadh | 10:20 | KAC | 613 | Bahrain | 10:05 |
| JZR | 714 | Doha | 10:40 | JZR | 301 | Istanbul | 10:05 |
| JZR | 708 | Bahrain | 10:50 | KAC | 773 | Riyadh | 10:15 |
| JZR | 122 | Sohag | 10:55 | KAC | 220 | Istanbul | 10:20 |
| QTR | 1074 | Luxor | 11:15 | FDB | 056 | Dubai | 10:35 |
| MEA | 404 | Dubai | 11:35 | KAC | 617 | Doha | 10:35 |
| GFA | 209 | Doha | 11:55 | IGO | 1754 | Ahmedabad | 10:40 |
| MSR | 610 | Jeddah | 12:05 | JZR | 211 | Jeddah | 10:40 |
| SAW | 701 | Beirut | 12:25 | JZR | 611 | Tbilisi | 10:45 |
| UAE | 871 | Bahrain | 12:30 | QTR | 1071 | Doha | 11:00 |
| AXB | 393 | Cairo | 12:50 | SVA | 513 | Riyadh | 11:00 |
| | | Dubai | 13:15 | KAC | 741 | Dammam | 11:05 |
| | | Kozhikode | 13:15 | | | | |

Russian hypersonic missiles enter service

MOSCOW: Russia's defense minister told President Vladimir Putin on Friday the first Avangard hypersonic missiles had been put into service, in a move hailed as a major coup for Moscow. Analysts say Russia is the first country to put into combat service intercontinental ballistic missiles armed with hypersonic weapons that Putin said can travel 20 times faster than the speed of sound. "The first missile regiment equipped with latest strategic missiles with the Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle entered service at 10 am Moscow time on December 27", Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu told a meeting in televised remarks. He congratulated the military on what he said was a "landmark event for the country and the armed forces."

Shoigu reported to Putin when the missiles entered service, a defense ministry official told AFP. Defence officials have earlier said that the first Avangard regiment was placed in the Orenburg region in the Urals. "This is the first intercontinental ballistic missile with the hypersonic glide vehicle in the world," Vasily Kashin, a senior research fellow at Moscow's Higher School of Economics, told AFP. "It's a major scientific achievement."

Moscow said that it showed the Avangard missiles to US arms inspectors in late November in accordance with the New START treaty, which is due to expire in 2021. The missile does not violate the treaty. Putin unveiled the new weapon during his state of the nation address in 2018, saying it would defeat all existing missile defense systems. He said at the time the missile was highly maneuverable and flew at 20 times the speed of sound.

Senior officials later said the intercontinental projectile was considerably faster. Officials said the missile during tests reached the speed of Mach 27, or roughly 33,000 km per

hour. Mach 1 is a unit of measurement equivalent to the speed of sound. In December last year, Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov claimed it was impossible to predict the missile's movements, which meant "missile defense is practically rendered obsolete". "At this speed, not a single interceptor missile can shoot it down," Borisov said at the time.

Speaking in December last year, Putin praised the successful tests of the missiles. "This is a great, wonderful gift to the country for the New Year," he gushed. Russia boasts of developing a number of "invincible" weapons that surpass existing systems and include Sarmat intercontinental missiles and Burevestnik cruise missiles. This week Putin said that Russia was no longer trying to catch up with the West on arms development. "This is a unique situation in our modern history: they are playing catch-up with us," he said.

Shoigu has said that new Russian weapons allow Moscow to ensure the country's security without starting a costly new arms race with the West. The New START, which caps the number of nuclear warheads well below Cold War limits, is the last remaining major arms control treaty between Russia and the United States. Putin has called for the speedy renewal of the treaty and complained that Washington showed no genuine interest in conducting talks on extending it. He has warned of "global catastrophe" if Washington keeps dismantling an international arms control regime.

The United States earlier this year withdrew from the Cold War-era Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, which limited missiles that could hit European cities, after saying that Moscow was in violation. Together with the INF treaty, New START was considered a centrepiece of superpower arms control. —AFP



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin visits the national defense control center to oversee the test launch of the Avangard hypersonic missile on Dec 26, 2018. — AFP

As poverty deepens, Lebanon protesters step in to help

SIDON, Lebanon: With volunteer kitchens, makeshift clinics and donation centres, Lebanon's protesters are helping their compatriots survive the worst economic crisis since the civil war by offering services many can no longer afford. "Our goal is to create a state of social solidarity among all segments of society," said Wael Kasab, a volunteer at an open-air kitchen in the southern city of Sidon. Across the country, protest encampments are bustling with volunteers trying to fill in for an absent state and cash-strapped charities that have closed their doors or reduced their activities in recent months due to deteriorating economic conditions.

Their efforts come amid warnings by the World Bank of an impending recession that may see the proportion of people living in poverty climb from a third to half the population. In Sidon's main protest camp, volunteers scoop rice and stew onto plastic plates. They register names of people in need of medical care to refer them to a clinic for free treatment. Under a plastic tent, Zeinab Najem arranges clothes on a metal rack as a group of women peruse a collection of thick winter jackets. Najem said she first started the donation centre with only 10 items of clothing, but now her tent "looks like a store". "There are many people in need," she told AFP.

A few metres away from Sidon's protest camp, charity groups have set up a kitchen that serves free meals to around 100 people per day. Sitting at a plastic table in the restaurant, Abu Ahmad eyes a tin tray filled with stuffed courgettes, salad and rice. "I cannot afford to buy my own food," said the 83-year-old. "I will be full today... but I'm scared of the coming days."

Lebanon, rocked by two months of anti-government protests and a political deadlock, faces its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war. A liquidity crunch has pushed Lebanese banks to impose capital controls on US dollar accounts, capping withdrawals at around \$1,000 a month. As a result, the value of the Lebanese pound against the dollar has dropped by around 30 percent on the unofficial market, leading prices to rise.

The faltering economy has also pushed many companies into bankruptcy, while others have laid off staff and slashed salaries. In the northern city of Tripoli, where more than 50 percent of the population lives in poverty, the effects of the crisis are stark. The volunteer kitchen in the main protest camp there serves around 2,500 meals a day to long queues of hungry people flocking from all corners of the country's second city. Stores near the encampment are empty of clients, while shop owners sit idly outside.

To help small businesses survive the crisis, a group of volunteers collected 7 million Lebanese pounds (around \$4,500 based on the official exchange rate) in donations. They used the money to buy 130 food baskets consisting of rice, sugar, lentils, flour and oil, said Sara Al-Sharif, who started the project. The food was purchased from around 30 stores in Tripoli's poorest district to help boost business, she said.

Had it not been for that initiative, grocery store owner



SIDON, Lebanon: Protesters distribute food aid in this southern city on Dec 8, 2019. — AFP

Damal Saqr, 50, said he would have closed shop. "I was on the verge of closing down... because of inflation and the (de facto) devaluation of the Lebanese pound." He said that his daily earnings do not exceed \$12, barely enough to cover the \$500 he needs every month to cover rent for his home and store. "I can't afford to buy goods for the

store anymore," he said.

In Beirut's main protest camp, volunteers dressed in neon-yellow vests pack the back of a truck with piles of donated food. Near the main central bank building in the capital, cardboard boxes and rubbish bags filled with donations line the sidewalk. — AFP

Tehran summons Kuwait envoy...

Continued from Page 1

cannot be isolated," Rear Admiral Gholamreza Tahani said on state television.

Tahani added that the drills included rescuing ships on fire or vessels under attack by pirates and shooting exercises, with both Iran's navy and its Revolutionary Guards participating. State television showed what it said was a Russian warship arriving at Chabahar port in southern Iran and said the Chinese will join shortly, calling the three countries "the new triangle of power in the sea".

"The aim of this drill is to bolster security of international maritime commerce, combatting piracy and terrorism and sharing information... and experience," the flotilla commander said. "US hosting these powers shows that our relations have reached a meaningful point and may have an international impact," he added.

Japan said Friday it would send a military vessel and two patrol planes to help protect waterways in the region, but will not join the US-led coalition. Tokyo will send a destroyer for intelligence activities along with two patrol aircraft, chief cabinet secretary and government spokesman Yoshihide Suga told reporters. The move is "Japan's own measure aimed at peace and stability in the Middle East as well as ensuring safety of Japan-related vessels," he said, noting that 90 percent of crude oil Tokyo imports were from the region.

The Japanese patrol activities will not be deployed in the Strait of Hormuz, through which much of the global oil trade passes and where the US-led coalition operates, a defense ministry spokesman told AFP. The Self-Defense Forces (SDF) will operate in the high seas in the Gulf of Oman, the northern Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden, he said.

Meanwhile, a rocket attack in Iraq killed a US civilian contractor, raising fears yesterday that violence could escalate in the protest-hit country already engulfed in its worst political crisis in decades. Washington recently promised "a decisive US response" to a growing number of unclaimed attacks on its interests in Iraq, which it blames on pro-Iran factions. US-Iran tensions have soared since Washington pulled out of a landmark nuclear agreement with Tehran last year and imposed crippling sanctions.

Baghdad - which is close to both countries - risks being caught in the middle. A barrage of 30 rockets was fired at the KI Iraqi military base in Kirkuk, an oil-rich region north of Baghdad, around 2220 GMT Friday, a US official told AFP. "One US civilian contractor was killed and several US service members and Iraqi personnel were wounded," said the US-led international coalition against the Islamic State group. A direct hit on an ammunition depot caused secondary explosions, and four more rockets were found in their tubes in a truck at the launch point, the US official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Federal security forces, Shiite militia units and IS sleeper cells all have a presence in Kirkuk province, which is claimed by both Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan Region and federal authorities. Following the attack, "an escalation is possible but it is far from certain", said Iraq expert Fanar Haddad at Singapore University's Middle East Institute. "More importantly, anyone pushing for an escalation in (Washington) DC will have to contend with (President Donald) Trump's aversion to increased military engagement in the Middle East."

The attack comes as Iraq is gripped by its biggest anti-government street protests since the US-led invasion of 2003 that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. Protesters, many of whom grew up in the post-Saddam era, have vented their anger at a government they consider inept, corrupt and beholden to neighboring Iran. Violence has claimed about 460 lives, most of them protesters, and left some 25,000 people wounded, but rallies and sit-ins have continued.

Demonstrators yesterday blocked a road to an oil field in Nasiriyah, in southern Iraq, halting production for the first time since protests started in early October. If sustained, such shut-downs could have a major impact on OPEC's second largest producer, which depends on oil exports averaging 3.6 million barrels a day. The protests forced the resignation of the Iraqi government nearly a month ago. Since then, Iran and its local allies have pushed to select the next prime minister, sparking more anger and threats by the president to quit.

The political unrest has coincided with an increase in rocket and mortar attacks against American interests in Iraq. Ten attacks since Oct 28 have left several Iraqi military personnel wounded and one dead and caused damage around the US Embassy in Baghdad's ultra-secure Green Zone. Five rockets hit Al-Asad air base on 3, just four days after US Vice President Mike Pence visited troops there. More than a dozen rockets hit the Qayyarah air base in northern Iraq in November.

In Friday's attack, a Kirkuk provincial security official told AFP, "the shots were very accurate. The attack was aimed precisely at the area where the Americans are located, near the meeting room". A US source has said pro-Iran factions in Iraq are now considered a more significant threat to American soldiers than IS, whose sweeping offensive in 2014 saw Washington deploy thousands of troops to the country.

Reflecting this concern, "a convoy of 15 American vehicles each carrying armor and weapons" recently arrived at the US embassy in Baghdad, according to an Iraqi security official. US diplomatic and military sources have told AFP of their growing frustration with the recent attacks. They say they rely on their Iraqi partners to play a "de-conflicting" role between American forces and the Hashed al-Shaabi, an umbrella organization for paramilitary groups largely made up of Iran-backed Shiite militias. That is a complicated task, as the Hashed has been ordered to integrate with the regular security forces, but many of its fighters continue to operate with a degree of independence. — Agencies

Mars 2020 rover to seek life, prepare ...

Continued from Page 1

day - approximately the same as a day on Earth. Fueled by a miniature nuclear reactor, Mars 2020 has seven-foot-long articulated arms and a drill to crack open rock samples in locations scientists identify as potentially suitable for life.

"What we're looking for is ancient microbial life - we're talking about billions of years ago on Mars, when the planet was much more Earth-like," said Wallace. Back then, the Red Planet had warm surface water, a thicker atmosphere and a magnetic force around it, he explained. "And so it was much more conducive to the types of simple single cell life that evolved here on Earth at that time," Wallace said.

Once collected, the samples will be hermetically sealed in tubes by the rover. The tubes will then be discarded on the planet's surface, where they will lie until a future mission can transport them back to Earth. "We are hoping to move fairly quickly. We'd like to see the next mission launched in 2026, which will get to Mars and pick up the samples, put them into a rocket and propel that sample into orbit around Mars," said Wallace. "The sample would then

rendezvous with an orbiter and the orbiter would bring the sample back to the Earth." Samples should reach Earth "in the course of a decade or so", he added.

To maximize its chance of unearthing traces of ancient life, Mars 2020 will land in a long dried-up delta called Jezero. The site, selected after years of scientific debate, is a crater that was once a 500-yard-deep lake. It was formerly connected to a network of rivers that flowed some 3.5 to 3.9 billion years ago. The crater measures just under 30 miles across, and experts hope it may have preserved ancient organic molecules.

The Mars 2020 mission also carries hopes for an even more ambitious target - a human mission to Mars. "I think of it, really, as the first human precursor mission to Mars," said Wallace. Equipment on board "will allow us to make oxygen" that could one day be used both for humans to breathe, and to fuel the departure from Mars "for the return trip".

The ambitions come as a new space race heats up, with Beijing increasingly vying to threaten US dominance. China on Friday launched one of the world's most powerful rockets in a major step forward for its own planned mission to Mars next year. NASA's Mars 2020 will remain active for at least one Martian year, which is around two years on Earth. But Martian rovers have frequently exceeded their intended lifespans - its predecessor Curiosity landed on Mars in 2012 and is still trundling around the planet's Mount Sharp region. — AFP

Massive bomb kills at least 78...

Continued from Page 1

"The number of the dead from the blast is still increasing, we now have 78 dead and 125 injured," the director of the private Aamin Ambulance service, Abdulkadir Abdrahaman Haji, told AFP. Police officer Ibrahim Mohamed described the explosion as "devastating".

"We have confirmed that two Turkish nationals, presumably road construction engineers are among the dead, we don't have details about whether they were passing by the area or stayed in the area," he said. Turkey's defense ministry wrote on Twitter it had sent a military plane "loaded with emergency aid equipment... in order to provide emergency aid to our Somali brothers injured in the despicable terror attack in Somalia".

Sakariye Abdulkadir, who was near the area when the car bomb detonated, said the blast "destroyed several of my car windows". "All I could see was scattered dead bodies... and some of them burned beyond recognition." Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khier appointed an emergency committee to work on providing help to those who have been wounded in the blast.

"We will seek medical assistance outside the country for those whose health situation cannot be dealt with inside the country. We are calling on the Somali public both, inside and outside the country to take part in assisting the victims, and to stand together in the

fight against Al-Shabaab", the prime minister told Radio Mogadishu.

Mogadishu's mayor Omar Mohamad Mohamed told a news conference that the exact number of dead was not yet known. "We will confirm the exact number of the number of the dead later but it is not going to be small, most of the dead were innocent university students and other civilians," he said. Witness Muhibo Ahmed said the attack was a "devastating incident because there were many people including students in buses who were passing by the area when the blast occurred".

Mogadishu is regularly hit by attacks by the Shabaab, which has fought for more than a decade to topple the Somali government. The militant group emerged from the Islamic Courts Union that once controlled central and southern Somalia and is variously estimated to number between 5,000 and 9,000 men. In 2010, the Shabaab declared their allegiance to Al-Qaeda.

The following year, its fighters fled positions they once held in the capital Mogadishu, and have since lost many strongholds. But they retain control of large rural swathes of the country and continue to wage a guerrilla war against the authorities, managing to inflict bloody death tolls in attacks at home and abroad. Two weeks ago, five people were killed when Shabaab militants attacked a Mogadishu hotel popular with politicians, army officers and diplomats in an hours-long siege.

Since 2015, there have been 13 attacks in Somalia with death tolls above 20. Eleven of these have been in Mogadishu, according to a tally of AFP figures. All of them involved car bombs. The deadliest attack in the country's history was a truck bombing in October 2017 in Mogadishu which left 512 people dead and around 295 injured. — AFP

Sports

Bergeron, Halak lift Boston Bruins over Buffalo Sabres

Ducks make most of power play, edge Golden Knights

BOSTON: Patrice Bergeron recorded his third straight two-goal game, and Jaroslav Halak made 26 saves for his third shutout of the season, as the Boston Bruins ended the Buffalo Sabres' five-game home winning streak with a 3-0 win on Friday night. Brandon Carlo added an empty-net goal, Brad Marchand had three assists and David Pastrnak recorded two helpers for the Atlantic Division-leading Bruins, who are 3-0-3 over the past six games. Bergeron's 16th and 17th goals helped Boston to a fourth consecutive victory over the Sabres, and his team improved to 10-1-1 over its past 12 visits to Buffalo. It's the first time in Bergeron's career that he's scored at least two goals in three consecutive contests. Pastrnak, meanwhile, has eight assists over the last five, while Marchand has posted 14 assists during his nine-game point streak on the road.

BLACKHAWKS 5, ISLANDERS 2

Dennis Gilbert scored his first NHL goal, and Chicago pulled away for a win over visiting New York. Dominik Kubalik, Alex DeBrincat, Jonathan Toews and Matthew Highmore also scored for Chicago, which bounced back from a 7-1 defeat against the New Jersey Devils in its previous home game. Dylan Strome and Duncan Keith had two assists apiece. Ross Johnston and Casey Cizikas scored for the Islanders, who are winless in their past three contests.

BLUES 5, JETS 4 (OT)

David Perron converted an overtime breakaway to lift visiting St. Louis past Winnipeg. Tyler Bozak scored twice, and the Blues won their seventh consecutive game. Justin Faulk and Alex Pietrangolo also scored. Jaden Schwartz earned three assists, and Jordan Binnington stopped 25 shots for St. Louis. Kyle Connor scored twice for the Jets, who lost for the fifth time in seven games. Blake Wheeler and Gabriel Bourque also scored, and Connor Hellebuyck made 30 saves.

CAPITALS 2, BLUE JACKETS 1 (OT)

T.J. Oshie scored a power-play goal 3:13 into overtime to lead Washington to a comeback win over visiting Columbus. Goalie Joonas Korpinen made the initial save on Nicklas Backstrom's shot, but Oshie — camped on the far post — potted the rebound for the winner. Carl Hagelin contributed his first goal of the season, and Washington beat Columbus for the first time in three meetings this month. Rookie Jakob Lilja tallied his first NHL goal, and rookie Ryan MacInnis collected his first career point for the Blue Jackets, who lost for the first time in six games but stretched their point streak to nine games (6-0-3).

MAPLE LEAFS 5, DEVILS 4 (OT)

William Nylander was credited with the winning goal

2:38 into overtime for Toronto, which prevailed in Newark, N.J., for its sixth consecutive victory. The deciding goal was an own goal for the Devils. Nylander's shot into the crease bounced away from goalie Mackenzie Blackwood, but New Jersey defenseman Damon Severson didn't realize how close he was to the net, and his attempt at a backhanded pass into the boards instead trickled past Blackwood. Zack Hyman, Ilya Mikheyev, Kasper Kapanen and John Tavares also scored for the Maple Leafs. Goalie Michael Hutchinson made 24 saves. Nico Hischier, Nikita Gusev, Kyle Palmieri and Jesper Bratt scored for the Devils, who have lost three of four (1-2-1). Blackwood recorded 32 saves.

KINGS 3, SHARKS 2 (OT)

Jeff Carter scored 91 seconds into overtime to cap a three-point game as Los Angeles erased a two-goal, third-period deficit to defeat host San Jose. The Sharks have lost four straight, and they have just one win in their past 11 games (1-8-2). Goaltender Jack Campbell made 22 saves for the Kings, who trailed 2-0 until Martin Frk, just promoted from the AHL on Thursday, scored twice in the third period. Erik Karlsson and Joe Thornton scored second-period goals to give the Sharks the lead. Thornton's assist on Karlsson's goal was the 1,078th of his career, leaving him one shy of Adam Oates for seventh on the NHL's all-time list.

DUCKS 4, GOLDEN KNIGHTS 3

Ryan Getzlaf took a stick to the face in the second period, and the ensuing double-minor penalty helped power Anaheim past visiting Vegas. Adam Henrique scored on an immediate two-man advantage, Cam Fowler added another power-play goal, and Max Comtois soon found the net as the Ducks scored three times in a span of 97 seconds. Devin Shore scored an insurance goal midway through the third period, and goalie John Gibson made 26 saves as the Ducks returned from a rough East Coast road trip, where they went 1-3-0, to earn the victory in their first home game in almost two weeks. Nate Schmidt scored two goals, Jonathan Marchessault added a goal, and Malcolm Subban made 14 saves for the Golden Knights, who fell for the third time in their past four contests (0-2-1).

RANGERS 5, HURRICANES 3

Mika Zibanejad scored two power-play goals, and host New York scored three times in the second period while beating Carolina for the third time in three meetings this season. Zibanejad added an assist, and Chris Kreider had a goal and also assisted on Zibanejad's first goal. Artemi Panarin scored his team-leading 21st goal for the Rangers and added two assists. Ryan Strome recorded an insurance goal, and Henrik Lundqvist made 39 saves. Lucas



CHICAGO: Patrick Kane #88 of the Chicago Blackhawks controls the puck in front of Mathew Barzal #13 of the New York Islanders at the United Center in Chicago, Illinois. The Blackhawks defeated the Islanders 5-2. — AFP

Wallmark scored in the first period, Brett Pesce tallied late in the second, and Sebastian Aho scored early in the third for the Hurricanes. Carolina lost its third straight game following a seven-game points streak (6-0-1). James Reimer finished with 19 saves.

PENGUINS 5, PREDATORS 2

Five players scored for visiting Pittsburgh, which roared out of the NHL's holiday break with a big victory over Nashville. Juuso Riihola had a goal and an assist, and Dominik Simon, Alex Galchenyuk, Teddy Blueger and Bryan Rust also scored. Penguins goaltender Tristan Jarry made 30 saves to win his fifth straight start and earn his 11th victory in his past 13 outings. Pittsburgh won its second in a row and eighth in 10 games. Craig Smith and Viktor Arvidsson scored for the Predators, who had won two straight. Pekka Rinna allowed three goals on six shots before being replaced by Jusse Saros, who made 17 saves.

WILD 6, AVALANCHE 4

Victor Rask scored the go-ahead goal midway through the third period, Mats Zuccarello and Ryan Suter also scored in the third, and Minnesota beat

Colorado in Denver. Carson Soucy, Eric Staal and Brad Hunt also had goals, Zach Parise and Kevin Fiala each had two assists, and Devan Dubnyk stopped 40 shots for the Wild. Matt Calvert had two goals, Nathan MacKinnon and Gabriel Landeskog also scored, and Pierre-Edouard Bellemare had two assists for the Avalanche. Pavel Francouz made 27 saves.

FLAMES 5, OILERS 1

Andrew Mangiapane scored 11 seconds into the game and produced the first two-assist contest of his career, leading Calgary to a win over host Edmonton in the first of five meetings between the Alberta rivals this season. Matthew Tkachuk, Sean Monahan, Elias Lindholm and Mikael Backlund also scored for Calgary, and Lindholm registered an assist. TJ Brodie notched two assists, and Flames goalie David Rittich stopped 28 shots. Connor McDavid had the lone goal for the Oilers, who lost for the fourth time in five games. Mikko Koskinen was pulled after allowing four goals on 24 shots. Mike Smith, who played two years in Calgary before moving to Edmonton in the offseason, saved six of the seven shots he faced. — Reuters

Kuwait wins five medals at Arab Air Gun Championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait's shooter Hamad Abdallah Al-Namshan won silver medal and second place of the 10m air pistol competition within the Arab Air Gun Championship being held at Al-Zaid Club shooting ranges in Sharqa, UAE after very strong competition with Saudi Arabia's Attallah Al-Enezi, who won the gold medal, while his country man Mohammad Al-Aameri won bronze.

Meanwhile the team of Hamad Al-Namshan, Ali Al-Mutairi and Saad Al-Ajmi won the silver medal, as the Saudi team won gold and Oman won bronze.

This brings the total number of medals won by Kuwait to five during their participation in the championship, as Mariam Irzouqi won the women's silver in the 10m air rifle competition while Bahrain's Sarah Al-Dousari won gold and Egypt's Shaimaa Hashad won bronze.

The mixed team silver went to Kuwait's Mariam Irzouqi and Khalid Al-Fadhly while gold to Oman and the bronze went to Egypt.



The 10m air rifle team of Mariam Irzouqi, Husa Al-Zayed and Munira Al-Anjari won the bronze medal behind Bahrain and Egypt.

Secretary General of Arab and Kuwait Shooting Federations Obaid Munahi Al-Osaimi commended the good results made during the Arab Championship, and that shows the development of Arab shooters, and pointed to the importance of Arab competition to

improve their capabilities. Al-Osaimi dedicated this achievement to HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who has been supporting the shooting sport for a long time, making shooters determined to make achievements in the name of Kuwait, he also dedicated it to HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, government and people for their continued support.

Cyclist Dlamini suffers broken arm in ticket row

CAPE TOWN: South African cyclist Nicholas Dlamini suffered a broken arm in a confrontation with park rangers on Table Mountain on Friday over whether he had dodged paying his entry fee.

His team, NTT, blamed South African National Park (SANParks) staff. "Nicolas Dlamini sustained a broken arm after being stopped by SANParks officials in the Silvermine section of Table Mountain National Park on Friday," NTT said in a statement. "There can be no justification for the level of violence meted out to him." The park authorities responded that a cyclist had suffered a broken arm but said that the rider had entered the park without paying.

When he was stopped by rangers and asked to show a ticket or permit "the situation spiralled causing the suspect to injure himself during the ordeal". Photos and videos posted on social media show a ranger pushing Dlamini against a SANParks vehicle while twisting the cyclist's arm, behind his back. In the evening, South Africa's Environment Minister Barbara Creecy tweeted that she had visited the bedside of the hospitalised athlete "and heard first hand his horrible experience." "I have instructed @SANParks to suspend all official involved and implement an independent investigation," she wrote. Dlamini, a 24 year-old, who is from Cape Town, rode for NTT in the Vuelta this year. NTT called the injury "a major setback" for the South African who planned to ride in the Tokyo Olympics next year. — AFP

Fury-Wilder rematch set for Las Vegas

LOS ANGELES: The February 22 rematch between World Boxing Council heavyweight world titleholder Deontay Wilder and Tyson Fury will take place at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, promoters announced on Friday.

Top Rank and Premier Boxing Champions said tickets for the highly anticipated bout would go on sale on Saturday, now that the venue has been confirmed. "I'm happy and I'm excited that the rematch is finally happening," said Wilder, who will make his 11th title defense.

The American is coming off a seventh-round knockout of Luis Ortiz on November 23 in Las Vegas, a victory that saw him improve to 43-0.

"I want to give the fans what they want to see. I've been doing it with my last three outings — Fury, (Dominic) Breazeale and Ortiz," he said.

"They've been spectacular events — from my ring walks, where I gather all the energy of the people, to my uniforms that I wear to help spread that energy. Then I give them what they all come for — the knockouts, and my knockouts have been amazing."

Wilder and Fury fought to a split decision draw last December in Los Angeles. Former world champion Fury was leading on the scorecards before he was knocked down by the American in the 12th round.

The big Briton beat the count, but a second knockdown helped cost him a victory. "I proved myself the first time and I'm ready to do it again," Wilder said. "It was a very controversial fight. I promise my fans that there won't be any controversy with this one. I'm going to finish it." — AFP

India's Kom beats challenger in trial for Olympics qualification

MUMBAI: India's MC Mary Kom sealed her spot for next year's Olympic qualifiers yesterday with a split decision win over fellow flyweight Nikhat Zareen, who had publicly demanded a trial against the six-times world champion in the race for Tokyo.

The 36-year-old Kom, an Olympic bronze medallist from London 2012, won 9-1 and was selected in the 51kg category in the Indian team for the Feb. 3-14 qualifying competition in Wuhan, China by the Boxing Federation of India (BFI).

The pint-sized puncher was earlier awarded an automatic spot but the 23-year-old Zareen criticised that decision and said Kom should have to go through trials. Zareen also wrote to sports minister Kiren Rijju demanding his intervention.

Kom had said she would follow the instructions from BFI, which later decided to hold the trials with the row dividing opinion in the country where Kom is hailed as 'Magnificent Mary' for her achievements.

The face of the campaign to get women's boxing into the Olympics in London, Kom won a record sixth gold medal at the World Amateur Boxing Championships last year.

The most recent gold came after a gap of eight years



Mary Kom for the trailblazing mother of three, who has also won gold medals at the Asian Games and Commonwealth Games and won her first world championship medal (silver) in 2001. — Reuters

Comanche claims Sydney-Hobart yacht race win

SYDNEY: Race favourite Comanche snatched victory in the gruelling Sydney-Hobart yacht race Saturday, edging InfoTrack in tricky conditions after a race that saw an ever-changing leaderboard.

The maxi's crew cheered and shook hands as they crossed the finish line at Hobart's Constitution Dock in 1 day, 18 hours, 30 minutes and 24 seconds. More than 150 yachts sailed from Sydney into open ocean for the 75th edition of the annual race down Australia's east coast.

Comanche had led after a slow start in Sydney, but the French-designed and US-built yacht pulled wide of the pack early in the race. That offered Hong Kong yacht Scallywag the lead temporarily, but Comanche's proved to be a wise decision as the field struggled in soft wind.

Comanche struggled for speed on the final stretch and its lead over InfoTrack narrowed to seven nautical miles toward the finish line. That meant Comanche did not come close to its winning 2017 record of 1 day 9 hours 15 minutes 24 seconds over the 628-nautical-mile course. The yacht was also the 2018 runner up.

After weeks shrouded in bushfire smoke haze that forced the cancellation of the Big Boat Challenge, an event that foreshadows the Sydney-Hobart, the race began under clear blue summer skies Thursday. — AFP

Sports

Australia sniff series victory over NZ Zealand at Boxing Day Test

Cummins routs New Zealand with five-wicket haul

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at close of play on day three of the second Test between Australia and New Zealand at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Saturday:

Australia 1st innings 467 (T. Head 114, S. Smith 85, T. Paine 79, M. Labuschagne 63; Wagner 4-38, Southee 3-103)

New Zealand 1st innings (overnight 44-2)

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| T. Latham c Paine b Cummins | 50 |
| T. Blundell c Paine b Cummins | 15 |
| K. Williamson c Paine b Pattinson | 9 |
| R. Taylor c Burns b Cummins | 4 |
| H. Nicholls lbw Cummins | 0 |
| BJ. Watling c Burns b Pattinson | 7 |
| C. de Grandhomme c Warner b Starc | 11 |
| M. Santner c Paine b Pattinson | 3 |
| T. Southee c Paine b Cummins | 10 |
| N. Wagner not out | 18 |
| T. Boult b Starc | 8 |
| Extras (lb4, b4, w2, nb3) | 13 |
| Total (all out: 54.5 overs) | 148 |

Fall of wickets: 1-23 (Blundell), 2-39 (Williamson), 3-46 (Taylor), 4-46 (Nicholls), 5-58 (Watling), 6-97 de Grandhomme, 7-112 (Latham), 8-116 (Santner), 9-124 (Southee), 10-148 (Boult)

Bowling: Starc 12.5-4-30-2, Cummins 17-5-28-5, Pattinson 15-2-34-3, Lyon 9-1-35-0, Wade 1-0-13-0

Australia 2nd innings

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| D. Warner c Blundell b Wagner | 38 |
| J. Burns c Watling b Santner | 35 |
| M. Labuschagne run out (Santner) | 19 |
| S. Smith c Southee b Wagner | 7 |
| M. Wade not out | 15 |
| T. Head not out | 12 |
| Extras (lb4, b4, w2, nb1) | 11 |
| Total (four wickets: 45 overs) | 137 |

Still to bat: Tim Paine, Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon, James Pattinson

Fall of wickets: 1-62 (Warner), 2-100 (Labuschagne), 3-110 (Burns), 4-110 (Smith)

Bowling: Boult 9-0-30-0, Southee 10-3-24-0, de Grandhomme 5-0-14-0, Wagner 13-1-39-2, Santner 8-0-22-1.

MELBOURNE: Australia marched toward a dominant series victory over New Zealand yesterday after dismissing the visitors cheaply and building a mammoth 456-run lead on day three of the Boxing Day Test.

Leading 1-0 after thrashing the Black Caps in the Perth opener, Tim Paine's Australia pushed to 137 for four in their second innings at stumps after routing the tourists for 148 in a firestorm of pace bowling at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG).

Replying to Australia's first innings 467, New Zealand were bowled out 120 runs short of forcing the hosts to bat again, but Paine sent his batsmen back out to pile on the agony. At the close, Matthew Wade was 15 not out, with Travis Head, the first innings centurion, on 12.

The equation is bleak for Kane Williamson's men, who had hoped for a result in Melbourne to keep the series alive to the third and final match in Sydney next week. No team has ever scored more than 417 runs in a fourth innings at the MCG, and none has ever chased down more than 332 to win at the venue.

Dominated by Australia's batsmen in the opening two days, New Zealand crumbled in the face of formidable fast bowling. Pat Cummins was chief tormentor, underlining his claim as the format's premier exponent with a blistering display of pace and precision.

He led Australia's bowling with 5-28 to continue a brilliant year. "I've had a pretty good run lately so I can't see it getting too much better than what the last year's been but hopefully I can maintain it at that level." 26-year-old Cummins, the year's leading wicket-taker, told reporters.

He was scarcely better than team mate James Pattinson, the fiery 29-year-old quick claiming 3-34 in his return to the side as replacement for the injured Josh Hazlewood. Only opener Tom Latham scored more than 20 runs for New Zealand, but after raising a tough half-century, he promptly gave up his wicket for 50, one of Cummins' four caught-behind victims.



MELBOURNE: New Zealand batsman Neil Wagner (L) beats home a through from the Australian fieldsman on the third day of the second cricket Test match at the MCG in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

Thousands of New Zealanders had flown across "the ditch" to watch their team's first appearance at the MCG in 32 years, many with hope of a better show than the 296-run capitulation in Perth.

Instead, they have seen another disaster unfold in the wake of Williamson's decision to send Australia in to bat after winning the toss. Adding to the gloom, their pace spearhead Trent Boult suffered a fracture in his hand when struck by a Mitchell Starc ball while batting after lunch.

Having missed Perth with a rib injury, Boult will head home after Melbourne and miss the Sydney Test. "It's

obviously gutting news for Trent and also for our group to have someone like that ruled out with his injuries," said Latham.

In a rare highlight for New Zealand, seamer Neil Wagner captured his 200th test wicket when he dismissed Steve Smith for seven, the fourth time he has scalped the master batsman in the series. But Head and Wade stood firm in the final overs to ensure Australia will return on day four with victory all but assured.

"Fair play to Australia the way they bowled," said Latham. "They were relentless and didn't really let us have anything, unfortunately." — Reuters

Burns, Sibley raise England hopes against SA

CENTURION: Rory Burns and Dom Sibley raised English hopes with a solid opening partnership after England were set a challenging 376 to win on the third day of the first Test against South Africa at SuperSport Park yesterday.

England were 121 for one wicket at the close of play, needing another 255 runs to win. The left-handed Burns and right-handed Sibley put on 92 for the first wicket before Sibley pushed back a return catch to left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj after making a patient 29.

Burns made 77 not out and saw out the day with first innings top-scorer Joe Denly, who was on 10.

It was an impressive innings by Burns, who made his runs off 117 balls and hit 11 fours. He was particularly strong on the leg side. Burns was given out leg before wicket to Kagiso Rabada with his score on six in the first over but survived on review. On 20, he was dropped by Rassie van der Dussen at first slip off Vernon Philander.

Both Van der Dussen and Philander played prominent roles with the bat earlier as South Africa's last six wickets added 200 runs.

New cap Van der Dussen (51) and nightwatchman Anrich Nortje (40) shared a fifth wicket partnership of 91, the best of the match before the Burns-Sibley stand.

Van der Dussen and Nortje were not parted until half an hour before lunch as England endured a frustrating morning, including two extended periods when captain Joe Root was off the field because of illness. Wicketkeeper Jos Buttler did not appear at all, with Jonny Bairstow taking the gloves. Van der Dussen and Nortje fell in successive overs to Jofra Archer, who claimed the third five-wicket haul of his short Test career, taking five for 102.

But Archer was expensive and one of the main offenders as England persisted with short-pitched bowling for most of the morning on a pitch where a fuller length had challenged batsmen. The runs continued to flow after Van der Dussen and Nortje were dismissed. Quinton de Kock hit 34 and Philander 46. Three of De Kock's first four scoring shots were sixes, hooked off Archer despite fielders being placed on the boundary at long leg and fine leg.

Philander ensured that South Africa took their lead comfortably beyond the 300 that Philander said on Friday night he considered "probably a safe zone".

On a cool, overcast day the pitch did not appear to be



CENTURION: England's Rory Burns (L) plays a shot delivered by South Africa's Dwaine Pretorius (R) during the third day of the first Test cricket match between South Africa and England at The SuperSport Park stadium at Centurion near Pretoria yesterday. — AFP

as difficult for batsmen as on the first two days when 24 wickets fell for 537 runs and by the close, South Africa had reason to be relieved that they had set their opponents a higher target than expected.

England batsman Joe Denly said on Friday that there were no demons in the pitch and that the key was to see off the new ball. Burns and Sibley did exactly that, seeing

off the threat of Rabada and Philander, although Rabada surprisingly only bowled three overs in his first spell before making way for Nortje.

Sibley looked less comfortable against the spin of Maharaj than against the faster bowlers. He was tied down by the spinner before trying to punch a shorter ball off the back foot and hitting back a simp. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Scores at close of play on the third day of the first Test between South Africa and England at SuperSport Park yesterday.

South Africa, first innings, 284

England, first innings, 181

South Africa, second innings (overnight 72-4)

| | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| A. Markram lbw b Anderson | 2 |
| D. Elgar c Buttler b Archer | 22 |
| Z. Hamza c Buttler b Broad | 4 |
| F. du Plessis c Curran b Archer | 20 |
| H. van der Dussen lbw b Archer | 51 |
| A. Nortje c sub (Crawley) b Archer | 40 |
| Q. de Kock c Bairstow b Stokes | 34 |
| D. Pretorius c Sibley b Stokes | 7 |
| V. Philander c Bairstow b Curran | 46 |
| K. Maharaj c Curran b Archer | 11 |
| K. Rabada not out | 16 |
| Extras (b5, lb3, nb2, w9) | 19 |

Total (61.4 overs) 272

Fall of wickets: 1-2 (Markram), 2-25 (Hamza), 3-29 (Elgar), 4-62 (Du Plessis), 5-153 (Van der Dussen), 6-170 (Nortje), 7-177 (Pretorius), 8-220 (De Kock), 9-150 (Maharaj)

Bowling: Anderson 13-1-47-1, Broad 11-2-42-1 (2w), Archer 17-1-102-5 (1nb, 2w), Curran 12.4-3-51-1 (1w), Stokes 8-1-22-2 (1nb)

England, second innings

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| R. Burns not out | 77 |
| D. Sibley c and b Maharaj | 29 |
| J. Denly not out | 10 |
| Extras (b4, lb) | 5 |
| Total (1 wkt, 41 overs) | 121 |

Fall of wickets: 1-92 (Sibley)

Bowling: Rabada 9-0-48-0, Philander 10-2-20-0, Nortje 6-1-20-0, Pretorius 6-1-12-0, Maharaj 10-3-16-1.

Shiffrin bounces back with Lienz giant slalom win

LIENZ: Mikaela Shiffrin claimed a 63rd alpine skiing World Cup win yesterday with a convincing victory in the giant slalom at Lienz, where she finished over a second ahead of her rivals. Bouncing back from a 17th place slump in Courchevel last week the defending overall champion sped nervily down the icy Schlossberg slope in Austria's East Tyrol to post the fastest time on both runs.

The 24-year-old American was a comfortable 1.36sec ahead of Italy's Marta Bassino after the two runs with Austria's home hope Katharina Liensberger in third. On the podium Shiffrin punched the air and kissed her skis before the runners up hoisted her arms in the air in a jubilant atmosphere in downtown Lienz.

"It's pretty hard to believe this right now, I know that sounds strange but it is," a joyous Shiffrin told Eurosport. "It sounds a little bit stupid to say that the last week was a tough time because I've still had already an amazing season ... it's stupid really, but I care and it was tough."

"It was amazing to ski today, really excited. I'm excit-

ed!" Shiffrin extends her lead at the top of the overall World Cup standings to 215 points ahead of Italian Federica Brignone, who sits top of the giant slalom standings despite finishing fourth yesterday.

The win for Shiffrin, who has taken the last three overall titles, moves her one ahead of retired Austrian Annemarie Moser-Proell for individual women's World Cup victories. She is closing in on men's skiing legend Marcel Hirscher's total of 67 but still has some way to go to catch compatriot Lindsey Vonn, who racked up 82 wins before hanging up her skis at the end of last season.

Meanwhile, Italy's Dominik Paris survived a late scare from unheralded Swiss Urs Kryenbuehl on Saturday to snatch a fourth straight men's World Cup downhill win on his home piste in Bormio, his second in 24 hours.

The 30-year-old battled the aches from his exertions of the previous day to lead the way in Imin 55.37sec and maintain his domination of the icy 'Stelvio', despite Kryenbuehl's late push which saw the Swiss finish just 0.08sec behind to take his first podium finish.

Defending World Cup downhill champion Beat Feuz of Switzerland had to settle for third, 0.26sec off the pace, for his fourth podium in as many races this season. "It wasn't easy after yesterday to do another perfect run," said Paris, who moves top of the overall World Cup and downhill standings after his back-to-back wins.

"I was the lucky one with the wind, it was changing a bit. "But conditions were perfect, better than yesterday, a



Mikaela Shiffrin

little bit icier and harder." Both Paris and Feuz had looked set to go 1-2 for the second consecutive day after Friday's downhill which replaced Val Gardena in the Italian Dolomites. But Kryenbuehl, wearing the bib 25, blitzed down late in sunny conditions in the Italian Alps to move between the top two. The 25-year-old Swiss had achieved the best result of his career on Friday when he finished 13th. "It's an incredible day for me," said Kryenbuehl. "It's amazing to share the podium with two such great skiers who manage to be consistent race after race." — AFP

Cricket honoured with Stokes on New Year list

LONDON: Ben Stokes and several of his England Cricket World Cup-winning team-mates were recognised in Britain's New Year Honours list announced on Friday, as two West Indies greats, Clive Lloyd and Gordon Greenidge, received knighthoods.

All-rounder Stokes was made an OBE (Officer of the Order of the British Empire) after scoring an unbeaten 84 as England's men won the World Cup for the first time by edging out New Zealand in a dramatic final at Lord's in July before his brilliant 135 not out secured a stunning one-wicket victory in the third Ashes Test against Australia at Headingley six weeks later.

For Stokes, playing in the ongoing first Test against South Africa at Centurion having recently been voted the BBC's Sports Personality of the Year, it was all a far cry from the career-threatening situation he faced before he was acquitted on a charge of affray in August 2018 after an early hours incident outside a Bristol nightclub the previous September.

Meanwhile Eoin Morgan, who captained England to World Cup glory, was named a CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire), one rank below a knighthood. Wicketkeeper Jos Buttler and England's top run-scorer in the tournament and Test skipper Joe Root were both awarded MBEs (Members of the Order of the British Empire), the level beneath an OBE.

Australian Trevor Bayliss, England's World Cup-winning coach, received an OBE while Colin Graves, the England and Wales Cricket Board chairman, was made a CBE. Morgan said: "I'm very proud to have been awarded a CBE. Winning the World Cup has been a dream come true and the honours and awards that have come since that day at Lord's really mean a lot to everyone connected with the team."

Lloyd, the forerunner of today's modern power batsmen and brilliant fielders, hit a superb century as the West Indies beat Australia in the inaugural 1975 World Cup final at Lord's. As captain, the Guyanese also played a key role in transforming the West Indies into the dominant side in Test cricket during the 1970s and 1980s.

Lloyd starred for Lancashire as well and the 75-year-old remained based in Manchester, home to the county's Old Trafford ground, long after he became a cricket official when his playing days had ended.

His knighthood means Lloyd will be officially known as 'Sir Clive'. Opening batsman Greenidge, a key figure in Lloyd's all-conquering team, has been knighted on the recommendation of the government of his native Barbados, with certain Caribbean nations conferring their own honours. Greenidge spent part of his childhood in England against whom he gave many of his best Test performances, including two hundreds at Old Trafford in 1976 and a match-winning unbeaten double century at Lord's in 1984.

He was also a Hampshire stalwart and helped the southern side win English cricket's first-class County Championship in 1973. Lloyd and Greenidge often found themselves playing against England's Alan Knott, one of the best wicketkeepers cricket has known, who received a MBE some four decades after he played the last of his 95 Tests.

Women's sport was well represented in the latest honours list, which seeks to acknowledge outstanding individuals in a wide range of fields from Britain and its former colonies that now form part of the Commonwealth. Catriona Matthew the captain of the victorious European women's Solheim Cup golf team and two-time Olympic taekwondo champion Jade Jones each received the OBE. So too did jump horseracing trainers Paul Nicholls and Nicky Henderson. Nicholls has won 11 British jumps titles, with Henderson the champion trainer on five occasions. — AFP

Sports

Bucks hand Hawks their ninth straight loss without Giannis

ATLANTA: Khris Middleton and Brook Lopez combined for 42 points, and the visiting Milwaukee Bucks defeated Atlanta 112-86 on Friday, handing the Hawks their ninth straight loss. The Bucks did not miss league MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo, who did not play because of back soreness. Veteran Ersan Ilyasova got the start in his place and equaled his season high with 18 points and grabbed a season-best 17 rebounds. Middleton scored 23 and Lopez matched his season high with 19 points. Atlanta's Allen Crabbe came off the bench to make four 3-pointers and score a season-high 20 points. The Hawks lost leading scorer Trae Young with a sprained right ankle late in the first half. He had 12 points when he got injured after stepping on another player's foot, and he was immediately helped to the locker room.

MIAMI HEAT 113 - INDIANA PACERS 112

Jimmy Butler scored a game-high 20 points, and Goran Dragic hit the go-ahead shot as host Miami defeated Indiana. There were 20 lead changes in a game that was tight throughout. Miami is now 14-1 at home this season and has won four consecutive games overall. Indiana, which went 3-0 against the Heat last season, was led by Aaron Holiday, who had 17 points and nine assists. The Heat had a 56-34 rebounding edge in the game, including 14-2 on the offensive glass. Neither team had a double-digit lead at any time in the game.

ORLANDO MAGIC 98 - PHILADELPHIA 76ERS 97

Evan Fournier scored 20 points, and Aaron Gordon added 19 points and 11 rebounds as host Orlando held on against Philadelphia. Terrence Ross chipped in 17 points off the bench, and Nikola Vucevic collected 16 points, 12 boards and seven assists for the Magic, who improved to 10-6 at home after defeating Philadelphia for the second time this season. Tobias Harris and Joel

Embiid each recorded 24 points and 11 rebounds for Philadelphia, which nearly overcame an 11-point deficit in the fourth quarter and saw its three-game winning streak end.

OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER 104 - CHARLOTTE HORNETS 102 (OT)

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 27 points and Dennis Schroder added 24 as visiting Oklahoma City won in overtime, aided by Charlotte's missed free throws. The Hornets had a chance to tie the game with 1.9 seconds to play in the extra session, but rookie forward P.J. Washington missed on a pair of foul shots. Chris Paul, who made a couple of key baskets down the stretch of regulation while playing in his home state, finished with 16 points, and Steven Adams had 14 points and 12 rebounds for Oklahoma City. Terry Rozier's 26 points paced the Hornets, while Graham ended up with 15 points and 13 assists and Washington had 14 points.

BOSTON CELTICS 129 - CLEVELAND CAVALIERS 117

Jaylen Brown matched his career high of 34 points, and Jayson Tatum scored 24 of his 30 in the first half as host Boston cruised to a victory over Cleveland. Tatum, who also made 5 of 10 from beyond the arc, sank 9 of 13 shots from the floor in the first half and finished 11 of 20 to answer a dismal 5-for-18 performance against the Raptors. Enes Kanter chipped in 14 points and nine rebounds off the bench as the Celtics collected their fifth straight win overall and seventh in a row versus Cleveland. Kevin Love scored 21 of his 30 points in the first half and made 6 of 11 3-point attempts for the Cavaliers, who had won a season-high three in a row after losing 16 of their previous 18.

GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS 105 - PHOENIX SUNS 96

D'Angelo Russell recorded 31 points and six



ATLANTA: George Hill #3 of the Milwaukee Bucks shoots the ball against the Atlanta Hawks at State Farm Arena in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

assists to help Golden State rally to a victory over Phoenix at San Francisco. Damion Lee added 16 points, eight rebounds and three steals, and Alec Burks scored 13 points off the bench as the Warriors extended their season-best winning streak to four games. Glenn Robinson III registered 12 points, and Draymond Green had 11 points, seven rebounds and

three blocked shots for the Warriors, who won just five of their first 29 games prior to the winning streak. Devin Booker scored 34 points but couldn't prevent the Suns from losing their eighth straight game. Dario Saric added 11 points and 10 rebounds, Ricky Rubio also scored 11 points, and Frank Kaminsky added 10. — Reuters

Barcelona's Suarez renews wedding vows

MALDONADO: Barcelona forward Luis Suarez and wife Sofia Balbi have renewed their wedding vows at a star-studded gathering in Uruguay attended by Lionel Messi among others.

The celebration to mark 10 years of marriage took place in a luxury tourist complex near the coastal city of Maldonado, about 130 km (80 miles) east of the capital Montevideo.

A crowd of football fans, including many wearing the Barcelona strip, gathered near the entrance as Suarez's clubmates Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba arrived along with Ballon d'Or winner Messi and his wife, Antonella Rocuzzo.

Brazilian star Neymar was also there, local media said. Uruguay striker Suarez and Balbi exchanged "rings inscribed with their respective names, made from white gold and diamonds", according to a statement.

The couple met when Suarez was 14 and started seeing each other soon afterwards. They were married in 2009 and have three children. —AFP



LA BARRA: Uruguayan Barcelona forward Luis Suarez and his wife Sofia Balbi pose during a party for the renewal of their marriage vows in La Barra, near Punta del Este, Uruguay. — AFP

Arteta aims to solve Ozil issue

LONDON: Mikel Arteta has backed Mesut Ozil to make the most of his fresh start as Arsenal's new manager prepares for his home debut against Chelsea today. Ozil has become a polarising figure at Arsenal after several seasons of lacklustre performances from the German playmaker. He was a peripheral figure under former Gunners boss Unai Emery and looked destined to leave the club in January.

The 31-year-old was left out for Freddie Ljungberg's final game as interim manager against Everton after reacting angrily to being substituted in the 3-0 loss to Manchester City. But Arteta restored Ozil to his starting line-up for his first match in charge as Arsenal salvaged a 1-1 draw at Bournemouth on Thursday.

Former City assistant coach Arteta, who was in the opposition dugout on December 15 when Ozil kicked his gloves having been replaced, has been encouraged by the mentality of the German World Cup winner since he took charge. "To be fair his attitude in training since the day that I walked in the building has been incredible, and I've seen this," Arteta said. "I said I was going to give a clean slate to everybody and it was fair as well to give it to him. "When we did the game preparation and we were watch-

ing the opponents, and where we could hurt them, we believed that he could be a key point. And we prepared the game like this, with him.

"He responded, he did what he had to do and we could have put two or three goals because of him in the net." Given his previous antics, it was notable that Ozil was substituted without protest 15 minutes from full-time at Bournemouth after Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang had cancelled out Dan Gosling's opener.

Ozil later expressed support for the methods of his new manager, finishing a tweet with the words "Let's trust the process". Now Arteta hopes his faith in Ozil is rewarded with a commanding display in the London derby against fourth placed Chelsea.

Arsenal are eight points behind Chelsea in the race to qualify for the Champions League via a top four finish. A win against Frank Lampard's side would breathe a little life into Arsenal's fading bid to return to Europe's elite club competition.

And they face Chelsea at an opportune moment after the Blues slumped to a 2-0 home defeat to Southampton on Thursday. It was the latest tepid effort from Chelsea at Stamford Bridge, leading Lampard to again question whether his players have the quality required to break down defensive opponents.

The result was even more disappointing for Lampard as it came just days after Chelsea delivered the best performance of his reign in their 2-0 win at Tottenham. — AFP

Man City's title bid in tatters after collapse at Wolves

WOLVERHAMPTON: Pep Guardiola admitted Manchester City's faint hopes of retaining the Premier League title were in tatters as they blew a two-goal lead and had Ederson sent in a dramatic 3-2 defeat at Wolves on Friday.

Guardiola's side recovered from Ederson's 12th minute dismissal to take control thanks to Raheem Sterling's double either side of half-time. But City's fatigued stars were unable to go the distance as Adama Traore's goal started a thrilling Wolves fight-back. Raul Jimenez equalised with eight minutes to go and Matt Doherty hit the winner to send Molineux wild in the 89th minute. "Always the goals can be avoided but sometimes it's tiredness. It's a lot of minutes to defend with 10 men," Guardiola said.

"No regrets, they did absolutely everything to defend a result for 80 minutes but it was difficult." Third placed City trail runaway leaders Liverpool by 14 points and, Jurgen Klopp's red-hot team have a

game in hand, making it hard to imagine the champions getting their hands on the trophy for a third successive season.

"It is a big gap for a long time. It's not a race if you think about it," Guardiola said. "I have been asked the question for a long time and it is the same answer. It's not realistic to think about the title race.

"We have to think of the next game and about winning our games." Wolves, flying high in fifth place, have contributed to City's downfall more than most and, after winning 2-0 at the Etihad Stadium in October, they celebrated a top-flight double over the Manchester club for the first time since 1960-61.

The only blemish for Wolves were the missiles thrown from the stands when City celebrated their second goal, an incident that prompted the Football Association to launch an investigation. Referee Martin Atkinson was seen passing a metal hip flask to the fourth official as an announcement over the tannoy warned "numerous instances of objects being thrown have been seen. CCTV will be used to prosecute offenders".

It was a bitter night for Guardiola, whose team have lost five league games this season after being beaten just four times in the whole of last term. City had looked closer to their best in recent wins over Arsenal and Leicester, but they could not have made a worse start at Molineux. —AFP



Mohammad Salman Al-Sabah with his coach

Mohammad Salman improves technical levels in soccer

KUWAIT: The talented Mohammad Salman Al-Sabah continues his outstanding performance and keeps on improving his technical level in football.

Mohammad Al-Sabah went through a successful experience at Juventus Academy within those born in 2009-2010, and now he took another step forward by joining Barcelona Academy, which wanted to have him for the current season due to his outstanding performance in various positions inside the playing field.

The Spanish manager Akanji, who is highly experienced in establishing the juniors foundation said the player has a bright future ahead of him and is considered an upcoming talent if he continues training regularly.

African champions Esperance flop after six-goal Qatar romp

JOHANNESBURG: CAF Champions League trophy-holders Esperance of Tunisia were held 0-0 by V Club of the Democratic Republic of Congo on Friday, 10 days after scoring six goals in the Club World Cup. The result at the Stade Olympique in Rades near Tunis was unexpected as Esperance had also won their previous two Group D matches while V Club had lost twice. A frustrating night for the defending champions culminated in star forward Hamdou Elhouni from Libya being substituted by Algerian Bilal Bensaha midway through the second half.

Elhouni scored a hat-trick last week in a 6-2 hammering of Al Sadd from host nation Qatar in a Club World Cup fifth-place play-off. Esperance are chasing a record third consecutive Champions League title this season after victories over Al Ahly of Egypt and Wydad Casablanca of Morocco in the last two finals. Ahly and TP Mazembe of the Democratic Republic of Congo (twice each), Enyimba of Nigeria and Esperance have won back-to-back Champions League competitions. While Esperance could not turn dominance into goals, second-place Raja Casablanca of Morocco closed the gap to one point in Group D with a 2-0 home win over JS Kabylie of Algeria. Esperance have seven points, Raja six, Kabylie three and V Club one halfway through the six-round mini-league schedule with the top two finishers qualifying for the quarter-finals.

Backed by a huge passionate flag-waving crowd in the 60,000-seat Stade Mohammed V in Casablanca, Raja scored twice within three minutes early in the second half. Soufiane Rahimi created the first goal for DR Congo-born Ben Malango and scored the second himself as three-time champions Raja took control.

It was the third goal for Rahimi in the Champions League this season and the first for Malango, who is in his maiden season with the Moroccan club after moving from Mazembe. Outclassed at home by Esperance on matchday one, Raja have recovered impressively with an away win over V Club preceding the victory over twice champions Kabylie.

Mazembe were another club to surrender a 100 percent group record this season after drawing 1-1 away to Primeiro Agosto of Angola at the Estadio 11 de Novembro in Luanda. However, the Congolese club based in second city Lubumbashi, remain top of Group A with seven points while Zamalek of Egypt have three, Primeiro two and Zesco United of Zambia one. Zesco host five-time champions Zamalek Saturday in Ndola and need maximum points to retain a realistic chance of reaching the quarter-finals. Former Zambia winger Rainford Kalaba put Mazembe in front on eight minutes by heading a cross past goalkeeper Tony Cabaca. Cristovao Mabalulu levelled four minutes later, smashing a loose ball into the net after Ivory Coast-born Mazembe goalkeeper Sylvain Gbohouo parried a powerful header. —AFP



Matches on TV

(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

| | |
|--|-------|
| Arsenal FC v Chelsea FC | 17:00 |
| beIN Sports HD 2 | |
| Liverpool v Wolverhampton Wanderers FC | 19:30 |
| beIN Sports | |
| Manchester City v Sheffield United FC | 21:00 |
| beIN Sports | |

25 India's Kom beats challenger in trial for Olympics qualification



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27 Barcelona's Suarez renews wedding vows



Calvert-Lewin double gives Everton 2-1 win

Brighton, Watford secure wins to avoid relegation



BRIGHTON: Brighton's Dutch midfielder Aaron Mooy (2R) scores his team's second goal during the English Premier League football match between Brighton and Bournemouth at the American Express Community Stadium in Brighton, southern England yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: Everton's renaissance under Carlo Ancelotti continued as Dominic Calvert-Lewin's double earned a 2-1 win at Newcastle, whilst Brighton and Watford secured big wins in their battle to avoid relegation.

Ancelotti's reign at Goodison Park got off to a flying start thanks Calvert-Lewin's winner against Burnley on Boxing Day and the in-form England under-21 international was the Toffees' hero once more on Tyneside.

Calvert-Lewin rewarded a bright start from the visitors and an adventurous line-up from Ancelotti as he swept home after the ball ricocheted around the Newcastle box.

The Magpies responded well to falling behind,

though, and deservedly equalised early in the second period through Fabian Schar.

However, Newcastle were level for only eight minutes as they were caught by Everton's pace on the break when Richarlison squared for Calvert-Lewin to slide in for his 10th goal of the season.

Victory takes Everton above Newcastle into the top half of the table.

Crystal Palace could have moved to within three points of the top four with victory at Southampton and took the lead at St. Mary's through James Tomkins's header. However, a terrible error from Martin Kelly undid Palace's good work as he teed up Southampton's talisman Danny Ings to level and edge the Saints four points clear of the bottom three.

China, which will host the tournament for the second time after 2004, had been one of four nations to initially bid to host the 24-team competition with South Korea, Indonesia and Thailand also submitting bids before pulling out.

Tianjin, Chongqing, Chengdu, Xi'an, Dalian, Qingdao, Xiamen and Suzhou will be the other host cities for the 18th edition of the continent's premier competition that will be held in June and July, 2023.

"The AFC Asian Cup is our flagship competition for national teams, and I am sure that the Chinese FA and the selected host cities will deliver a tournament which is in keeping with the event's world-class status," AFC president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa said in a statement.

"The AFC thanks the commitment shown by the CFA and these 10 great cities to be a part of this celebration

Brighton climbed up to 14th, five points clear of the drop zone, as Alireza Jahanbakhsh and Aaron Mooy's first goals for the club in a 2-0 win over Bournemouth.

Jahanbakhsh has struggled to make an impact on the south coast since a big money move from AZ Alkmaar at the beginning of last season.

The Iranian was moved to tears when he opened the scoring with his first Premier League goal less than three minutes into his first league start of the season. "It was a great moment for everyone in the stadium, especially Ali. He deserves it," said Brighton boss Graham Potter.

"He worked away every day with exemplary behaviour. We all wanted him to contribute and he did that today." Mooy then produced a moment of magic to

secure the points 11 minutes from time as he controlled the ball on his chest, turned inside his marker and curled the ball into the far corner.

Watford closed to within three points of safety thanks to a second home win in as many games under Nigel Pearson as the Hornets beat Aston Villa 3-0 despite playing half an hour with 10 men when Adrian Mariappa saw red.

Troy Deeney had given Watford the lead eight minutes before half-time and doubled his side's advantage from the penalty spot soon after Mariappa was shown a second yellow card.

Ismaila Sarr then rounded off a miserable afternoon for Villa, who remain in the bottom three after a fifth defeat in six league games. — AFP

Beijing, Shanghai among 10 cities to host 2023 Asian Cup

MUMBAI: Beijing and Shanghai are among 10 Chinese cities that will host the Asian Cup finals in 2023, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said yesterday.

China's desire to showcase its ability as a future World Cup host got a boost when its football association (CFA) was awarded the rights to host the quadrennial tournament at an extraordinary AFC congress in Paris in June.

of Asian football. I wish them all the very best of success in their desire to show the world that China PR can stage huge international football events."

The tournament will give China the opportunity to showcase its ability to host a major football event and comes several years after President Xi Jinping declared his desire to see the country eventually host the World Cup finals.

As a result, investment in the sport in China has skyrocketed in the six years since Xi - a well-known football fan - came to power, although the fortunes of the national team lag behind the leading nations in Asia.

China have only qualified for the World Cup once, in 2002, and have never won the Asian Cup, last reaching the final on home soil in 2004. They were eliminated in the quarter-finals of the 2019 Asian Cup by Iran in January. — Reuters



AFC Asian Cup