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Manila strongly condemns killing of maid, summons Kuwaiti envoy

Continuing incidents of violence and abuse of Filipino domestic workers slammed

Prosecution says custodial death not caused by torture

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A National Assembly panel said yesterday it will continue to investigate the death of a citizen with special needs at a police station even after the public prosecution said the man was not tortured or mistreated during his detention. The public prosecution said in its report that Ahmad Al-Dhafiri died after overdosing on pills that led to a complete failure of his main organs and eventually resulted in his death. The prosecution said it examined cameras at the police station that proved that the man was not tortured or mistreated, and the cause of the death is by overdosing on pills.

But MP Mohammad Al-Dallal, a member of a three-member committee formed by the Assembly to investigate the case, said the committee will continue its investigations.

Continued on Page 24

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) yesterday summoned the Kuwaiti ambassador in Manila to strongly condemn the killing of another Filipina domestic worker in Kuwait. On Sunday, police received a report from Sabah Hospital concerning the arrival of a deceased Filipina housemaid with bruises on various parts of her body. The maid, identified as Jeannyn Villavende, had arrived in Kuwait on May 5, 2019.

The DFA said continuing incidents of violence and abuse of Filipino domestic workers in Kuwait violates the spirit of the agreement signed in May 2018 that seeks to promote and protect their welfare. The DFA summoned the Kuwaiti ambassador to express the government's outrage over the lack of protection of domestic workers at the hands of their employers, press for complete transparency in the investigation of the case and call for the swift prosecution of the perpetrators to the fullest extent of the law.

The Philippine Embassy in Kuwait still hasn't issued any official statement on the death of Villavende, but an embassy official told Kuwait Times on the condition of anonymity that the mission is in close contact with

Kuwaiti authorities to ensure justice will be served. The official added only charge de affairs Noordin Lomondot can talk about this issue. "The moment we get all the facts and information, the charge de affairs will talk to the media," the source said.

The maid's sponsor, who had taken her to hospital, admitted during interrogations on Sunday that his wife had beaten Villavende until she fainted, adding he was shocked when he realized at the hospital that she had died. The sponsor was detained and his wife was summoned. She admitted to beating the maid but said she had not intended to kill her.

Detectives and forensic experts rushed to the sponsor's house in Sulaibikhat to examine the crime scene, where they found traces of blood that had been cleaned and evidence that Villavende had been brutally beaten. A case was filed and further investigations are still in progress.

Increasing incidents of abuse against Filipino domestic helpers, resulting in the death of some, prompted the Philippine government in 2018 to impose a deployment ban, sparking a diplomatic row between the two countries and the expulsion of the Philippine ambassador. The ban was lifted after a labor pact was signed in May last year.



Photo of Jeanalyn Villavende from her Facebook page.

US air strikes in Iraq kill 25, sparking anger

BAGHDAD: US air strikes against a pro-Iran group in Iraq killed at least 25 fighters, a paramilitary umbrella said yesterday, triggering anger in a country caught up in mounting tensions between Tehran and Washington. Sunday night's attacks saw US planes hit several bases belonging to the Hezbollah brigades, one of the most radical factions of Hashed al-Shaabi, a Tehran-backed Iraqi paramilitary coalition. The strikes "killed 25 and wounded 51, including commanders and fighters, and the toll could yet rise," said the Hashed, which holds major sway in Iraq. Victims were still being pulled from the rubble of bases near Al-Qaim, an Iraqi district bordering Syria, yesterday, it said.

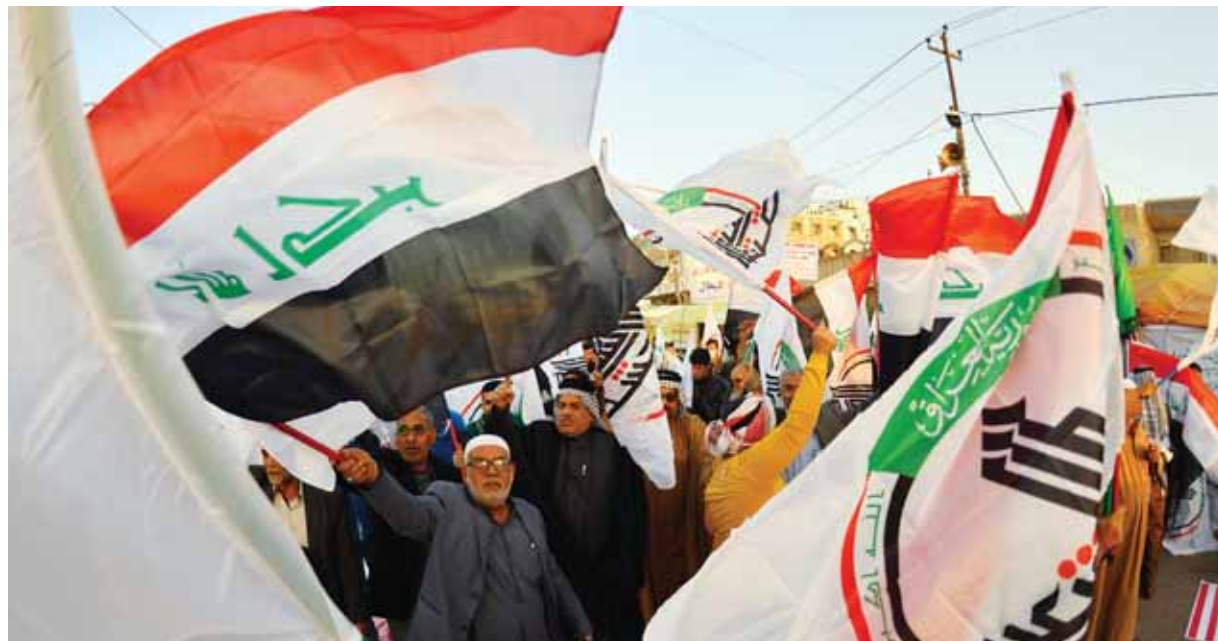
Late yesterday, Iraq's government threatened to "review" its relations with the United States. "American forces acted on their political priorities, not those of the

Iraqis,” the government, acting in a caretaker capacity following the resignation of prime minister Adel Abdel Mahdi, said in a statement. The protection of Iraq, its military bases and forces in the country “is the sole responsibility of the Iraqi security forces,” it added. Such strikes “violate the sovereignty of Iraq” and “contravene the rules of engagement of the (US-led international) coalition” present in Iraq to fight jihadists, it added.

Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said the US had "shown its firm support for terrorism and its neglect for the independence and sovereignty of countries" by carrying out the attacks. Washington, itself a key ally of Baghdad, must accept the consequences of its "illegal act", he added.

US Defense Secretary Mark Esper described the attacks - which hit three locations in Iraq and two in neighboring Syria - as "successful", and did not rule out further military action against Iran-backed militias. The strikes were in retaliation for a series of rocket attacks since late October against US interests in Iraq, including a barrage of more than 30 fired on Friday at an Iraqi base in Kirkuk, where a US civilian contractor was killed.

Continued on Page 24



NAJAF: Iraqis wave Iraqi and Hashed Al-Shaabi flags yesterday during a demonstration to denounce the previous night's attacks by US planes on several bases. — AFP

Facial recognition use at Delhi rally sparks privacy fears

MUMBAI: Police in Delhi used facial recognition software to screen crowds at a recent political rally - a first for India - raising concerns about privacy and mass surveillance amidst nationwide protests against a new citizenship law. The Automated Facial Recognition System (AFRS) software that the Delhi Police had installed to identify missing children, was used at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally on Dec 22, a police

spokesman said yesterday, without giving further details.

It was the first time the technology - which is increasingly deployed in airports, offices and cafes in India - was used to screen the crowd at a political rally, according to technology analysts. "The use of the system for profiling and surveillance at public congregations is illegal and unconstitutional. It is an act of mass surveillance," said Apar Gupta, executive director of digital advocacy group Internet Freedom Foundation.

"From building an underlying database of people from public protests to running it on crowds of people attending rallies, this directly impairs the rights of ordinary Indians from assembly, speech and political participation," he said. The Indian Express daily cited a Delhi Police spokesman as saying the police had used

Continued on Page 24

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Local

Amir receives chief, members of Islamic Heritage Society

Sheikh Sabah offers condolences over Texas, New York victims



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Chairman of the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society Tareq Al-Issa and members of the society's board. —Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Chairman of the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society Tareq Al-Issa and members of the society's board.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Chairman of the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society Tareq Al-Issa and members of the society's board. Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah attend the meeting. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received Issa and members of the society's board at Bayan Palace. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received Ambassador of Kuwait to Morocco Abdullatif Al-Yahya.

In the meantime, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent cable of condolences to US President Donald Trump over the recent shooting in Texas plus the stabbing accident that occurred in New York. In the cable, His Highness the Amir voiced Kuwait's condemnation of these horrible acts that targeted innocent people, wished mercy for those who lost

their life and swift recovery to those injured. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to President Trump.

Separately, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences to President of Bangladesh Mohammad Abdul Hamid on deaths caused by a wave of severe cold sweeping the friendly country, where people lost their lives, were hurt or became ill. His Highness the Amir wished leaders in this friendly country would cope with consequences of the harsh cold. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah addressed cables of identical content to President Abdul Hamid. —KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Ambassador of Kuwait to Morocco Abdullatif Al-Yahya.

Daily names Dr Hilal Al-Sayer 'Man of the Year'

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti daily newspaper Al-Qabas yesterday conferred its 'Man of the Year' award on Chairman of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Hilal Al-Sayer, in appreciation of his long career in human service and scientific achievements in the field of health. A former Minister of Health, Dr Sayer is regarded as a national figures who contributed in developing health services and establishing many specialized medical centers to treat some serious diseases. Sayer followed the path of volunteerism and humanitarian work early in his life. —KUNA



Dr Hilal Al-Sayer



KUWAIT: Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Algerian Ambassador to Kuwait Abdulmalik Buhduo. —KUNA

Zain sponsors 37th engineering design exhibition

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its main sponsorship of the 37th Engineering Design Exhibition and the annual College of Engineering and Petroleum's Creativity and Innovation Award. The event, organized by Kuwait University's College of Engineering and Petroleum (CEP), was held under official support from the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC) under the patronage of Speaker of the Kuwaiti National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem.

Zain took part in the event's opening ceremony, which witnessed the attendance of Deputy National Assembly Speaker Essa Al-Kandari, Minister of Public Works and Minister of Housing Affairs Dr Rana Al-Faris, Kuwait University President Dr Hussein Al-Ansari, Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan, Acting Dean of Engineering and Petroleum at Kuwait University Dr Raed Bourisli, as well as many CEP officials and faculty, parents, and exhibition participants.

Zain's support to the exhibition and annual award comes in line with its commitment towards supporting and encouraging various student activities, which falls under the company's Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy. Zain's strategy closely focuses on contributing to the development of the education sector by partnering with many academic organizations to invest in education, which the company considers an essential element of the further progress of national economy.

The 37th Engineering Design Exhibition is considered the biggest yet since the College of Engineering and Petroleum's inception in 1975. The event witnessed the participation of 107 projects from across the col-

Meanwhile, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Khaled Al-Jarallah met UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Saqer Nasser Al-Raesi, who delivered a written message from UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr Anwar Gargash. During the meeting, both sides discussed mutual relations between the two countries.

The Deputy Foreign Minister also met Islamic Solidarity Fund's President Ambassador Nasser Al-Zaabi, who delivered a written message from Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Yousef bin Ahmed Al-Othaimeen. The meetings were attended by the Assistant Deputy Foreign Minister's Office Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Dr Rana Al-Faris honors Eaman Al-Roudhan in recognition of Zain's support with the presence of Essa Al-Kandari, Dr Hussein Al-Ansari and Dr Raed Bourisli.



Eaman Al-Roudhan with Zain's team at the exhibition.

lege's departments, as well as the presence of 440 students, who showcased their final projects to visitors and sponsors. Furthermore, the Zain-sponsored annual Creativity and Innovation Award highlights the most creative and innovative projects as per the standards outlined by the College of Engineering and Petroleum.

Zain's support to the event springs from the company's core Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy. The company believes that

supporting the various educational programs and initiatives provides young people with skills and tools necessary to help them highlight and develop their potential, ultimately contributing to Kuwait's progress.

As a leading national company, Zain firmly believes in the importance of contributing to the progress of the education sector, and looks to empower and prepare the nation's youth for the important roles they will play in the further progress of the country.

Kuwait FM receives Saudi envoy

KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received yesterday Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad Al Saud, discussing with him issues pertaining to the strong historical ties and ways to bolster them. Assistant Foreign Minister Ambassador Saleh Al-Loughani and senior ministry officials attend the meeting.



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan bin Saad Al Saud. —KUNA photos



Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Saqer Nasser Al-Raesi.



Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with Islamic Solidarity Fund's President Ambassador Nasser Al-Zaabi.

Local

MPs to push for naturalizing 4,000 bedoons in 2020

Minister reviews efforts to fight human trafficking

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: A number of lawmakers intend to file a proposal in January to grant citizenship to 4,000 bedoons (stateless) in 2020, parliamentary sources said, noting that several lawmakers are currently preparing separate proposals to be consecutively filed for the same purpose - to start with at least 2,000 bedoons and exclude other non-Kuwaitis, even children of Kuwaiti women.

The sources added that all the proposals would be referred to the parliamentary defense and interior committee to be discussed with the government and merged into one proposal to be submitted to the parliament and passed by May. "The government may insist on its previous demand and request nationalizing a maximum of 4,000 including bedoons and others, and also insist on rejecting the term 'at least 4,000,'" the sources explained, noting that a number of lawmakers are currently preparing to deal with the government's repeated rejection and suggest nationalizing at least 2,000 bedoons for the time being, excluding all other non-Kuwaitis. The sources also pointed out that the parliamentary bloc believes that the government should take the issue more seriously to resolve the issue of bedoons - whose population in Kuwait exceeds 150,000 people - instead of granting citizenship to Kuwaiti women's children or others for services and then brag about granting citizenship to 4,000 people.

Meanwhile, the sources said the government will soon approve a proposal to establish a special authority presided by the interior minister to investigate citizenship-related matters, including forgery. Furthermore, the source said that once established, the new authority will start investigating claims that 300,000 Kuwaitis have other nationalities and that they managed to get Kuwaiti citizenship either by forgery or submitting false identification data. "The authority will



Ministry links systems with Arabic schools

also investigate the validity of granting citizenship to non-Kuwaiti women married to citizens despite the fact that they have no Kuwaiti children or have not been married for the minimum period specified by the law," the sources elaborated.

Human trafficking

Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and chairman of the national anti-trafficking committee Fahd Al-Afasi said that in its fourth meeting, the committee reviewed various efforts to fight

exploitation and human trafficking, as well as steps to be taken in such cases. Afasi added that the six-point policy, which fully respects related international regulations and standards, starts with identifying potential victims, investigations, litigation, providing victims with aid and protection and enabling them to return to their home countries. Further, Afasi said the committee has designed its logo and named one of its members - minister plenipotentiary and assistant foreign minister for human rights Talal Khaled Al-Mutairi as its official spokesperson.

MoE vacancies

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has decided to start interviewing candidates to appoint educational affairs managers in the three educational stages in various educational zones next week. The ministry also intends to announce all vacancies in central administrations and educational areas soon, as Minister Saud Al-Harbi insists on filling all leading positions according to regulations. In another educational concern, educational sources said MoE has completed linking its electronic systems with those of Arabic private schools, so that the certificates issued by those schools can only be issued through MoE's unified system.

The sources added that foreign private schools were excluded due to their different timings, grading system and the language used. However, MoE's IT department gave those school access to the system so



The National Assembly.

that they can input their students' data, excluding their academic results, to build a unified database of all students in Kuwait, the sources concluded.

Bridge open

The Public Authority for Roads and Transport (PART) will open the Sabah Al-Salem area bridge at the intersection of the area's road number 5 with Al-Ghoush Street today. The 570-m-long bridge with three lanes on each side is part of construction

works of contract number HT/264 to construct, execute and maintain Al-Ghoush Street from Sabah Al-Salem to the Seventh Ring Road.

Subsidized fodder

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) announced seizing 740 sacks of subsidized animal fodder offered for illegal sale, adding the three people caught selling the fodder were arrested and referred to relevant authorities.

Minister recognizes MPs' constitutional right of grilling

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs Dr Ghadeer Aseeri said yesterday that grilling is a right guaranteed by the constitution to all National Assembly MPs. Minister Aseeri confirmed her commitment to the articles of the Kuwaiti Constitution and by-laws of the National Assembly. "I am committed to the articles of the constitution and the internal regulations of the National Assembly and to the oath I performed before His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, parliament and Kuwaiti people," Aseeri said in a statement after the weekly cabinet meeting. Aseeri stressed she will complete work and reform process in the Ministry of Social Affairs and its government agencies. MP Dr Adel Al-Damkhi on Sunday submitted to Acting National Assembly Speaker Essa Al-Kandari a motion to grill Minister of Social Affairs



Dr Ghadeer Aseeri

Dr Aseeri of a single topic, charging Dr Aseeri with disrupting cooperation among authorities and dishonoring her oath. The motion is set to be included in agenda of the parliamentary session on January 7, 2020. — KUNA

Impounded vehicles released during holiday

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The interior ministry's relations and security information department announced the lifting of the block to pay fines to release impounded vehicles continues in the Capital governorate during the New

Year break from 8 am to 2 pm, and from 2 pm to 6 pm. The traffic department said that starting from Dec 29, impounded vehicles were being released until Sunday, Jan 5 after paying all fines at the violations departments to process the vehicles' release.

Palestine committee praises Kuwait's stances

AMMAN: The Palestine Committee in the Jordanian Parliament praised Kuwait's stances towards the Palestinian cause, as committee members expressed thanks and appreciation for Kuwait efforts in this regard. This came during a recent meeting between Kuwait's Ambassador to Jordan and its non-resident Ambassador to Palestine Aziz Al-Daihani with members of the Palestine Committee in the Jordanian Parliament. Chairman of Palestine Committee of the Jordanian Parliament Yahya Al-Saud said during the meeting members of the committee praised Kuwait efforts especially during its non-permanent membership in the Security Council, which lasted for two years. Saud also expressed hope that the Arab countries would follow Kuwait steps by launching a diplomatic mission in Palestine, which will strengthen stand of Palestinian people.

In the meantime, Ambassador Daihani expressed in a statement after the meeting his pride in Kuwait's stances in international and regional forums regarding

the Palestinian issue. Kuwait has a historical role towards the Palestinian case in international and regional forums, as he stressed positions of Kuwait and Jordan towards the Palestinian issue and affirming the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, he said. Ambassador Daihani also expressed pride of Kuwait's stances regarding the Palestinian issue during its two years non-permanent membership in the Security Council.

Meanwhile, Kuwait coordinated with the Palestinians on the draft resolution on securing international protection for the Palestinian people in coordination with the Palestinian delegation, which put forward the idea of protecting the Palestinians from the Israeli occupation forces. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, issued at the end of last October an Amiri decree appointing Daihani, a non-resident ambassador of Kuwait to Palestine. On December 22, Daihani presented his credentials to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas as the first ambassador of Kuwait to Palestine. — KUNA

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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A picture taken at dawn on the beach near Kuwait Towers. — Photo by Mohammad Al-Otaibi (KUNA)

Kuwait fund assisted many development projects in 2019

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KUWAIT: The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) continued in 2019 its funding of development projects in many countries around the world. The following is a list of major contributions KFAED made during the year:

January 15: KFAED signed a KD 6 million (\$20 million) for the financing of a road project in Belize.

January 21: KFAED signed a loan agreement with the People's Republic of China worth KD 9 million (\$30.6 million) to finance the expansion of the Guiyang 11 People's Hospital.

January 28: KFAED signed a loan agreement with the republic of Benin worth KD 5 million (\$17 million) to finance water supply project.

January 31: KFAED signed KD 7 million (\$23 million) loan agreement with Togo to finance a water supply project for Kara City and the surrounding areas.

February 11: KFAED signed an agreement with Jordan to provide a grant worth \$6 million to meet the educational needs of Syrian refugees in the country.

February 12: KFAED signed a loan agreement with Iraq worth KD 25 million (\$85 million) to support the affected areas in Iraq.

February 19: KFAED signed a loan agreement with Burkina Faso worth KD 4.5 million (\$15.3 million) to finance Tougan-Ouahigouya Road Project.

February 19: KFAED signed a loan agreement with Bosnia-Herzegovina worth KD 11.6 million (about \$39.44 million) to fund a road construction project.

February 21: KFAED provided Nigeria with KD 4 million loan (\$13.6 million) to fund a road project.

March 13: KFAED signed a loan agreement with Liberia worth KD 6 million (\$20.4 million) to finance the Konia and Voinjama road project.

March 16: KFAED signed a \$6 million grant agreement with Lebanon on behalf of Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences to contribute to the of establishing three schools in Zahle, Aarida, and Hadath.

March 16: KFAED signed another grant agreement with Lebanon worth \$2 million to contribute to the treatment of Syrian children refugees with cancer.

March 27: KFAED signed a loan agreement with Chad worth KD 3 million (\$9 million) to finance a road project.

March 31: KFAED signed a loan agreement with the Republic of Suriname worth KD 5 million (\$17 million) to assist in financing the Expansion of Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution Networks Project.

June 2: KFAED signed a \$2 million donation agreement with Al-Hussain cancer center for treatment of Syrian refugees.

September 19: KFAED signed a \$3 million donation agreement with UNICEF to provide clean water for people in Gaza Strip.

November 10: KFAED signed a loan agreement with Mauritania worth KD 10 million (about \$33 million), to fund a 140 km long road construction.

November 17: KFAED signed a loan agreement with Sierra Leone worth KD 5 million, to fund a project on developing marine environment.

November 24: KFAED signed a loan agreement with Egypt worth KD 25 million to fund a road construction project in Sinai.

November 27: KFAED signed a loan agreement with Uzbekistan worth KD 9 million to fund a project on infrastructure for houses in rural areas.

December 5: Kuwait Fund signed KD 29.5 million (\$100 million) loan agreement with Bahrain to finance an electricity grid project. — KUNA



Grants made to help Syrian refugees

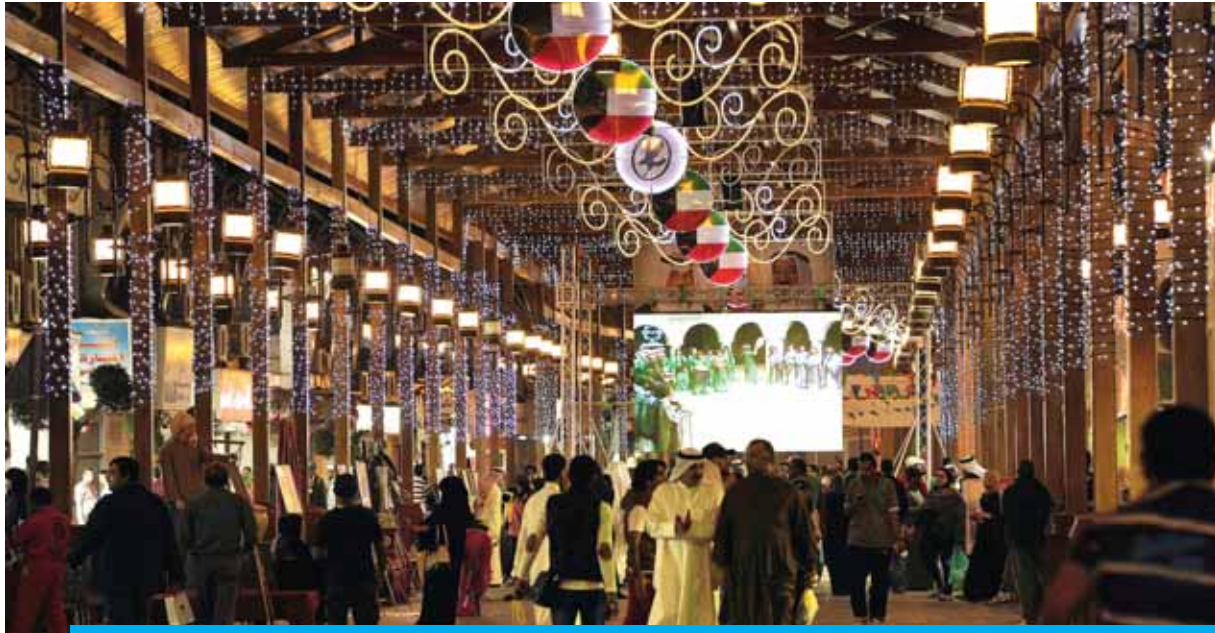


KUWAIT: This June 2, 2019 file photo shows officials signing an agreement through which KFAED donated \$2 million to Al-Hussain cancer center for treatment of Syrian refugees. — KUNA

Local

Souq Al-Mubarakiya, popular place to spend New Year holiday in Kuwait

Market characterized by heritage of the past and modernity of the present



KUWAIT: People walk inside Souq Al-Mubarakiya in this file photo.



The Sheikh Mubarak kiosk.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Souq Al-Mubarakiya in Kuwait City is one of the oldest markets in Kuwait. It was the center of trade before the discovery of oil. People from all around the world have Souq Mubarakiya among their top places to visit while in Kuwait, where people can spend hours strolling around and discovering heritage items such as antiques, perfumes like musk and oud, and traditional clothing. Kuwait Times toured Souq Mubarakiya and asked people and vendors how they will spend New Year's Eve.

Abdullah Jarrar, marketing manager at a perfume shop, told Kuwait Times that the Mubarakiya atmosphere is different from other parts of Kuwait. "People from Kuwait and outside Kuwait always come to

Mubarakiya to experience the traditional vibes of Kuwait. For tourists and newcomers who want to feel the real culture of Kuwait - Souk Mubarakiya is the place to be," he said.

Hamada Sultan, a worker at a restaurant in Mubarakiya, noted that the place is always crowded during the New Year holiday, as families from Kuwait and Gulf countries come to enjoy a traditional meal with their families and friends and enjoy shopping later. "During the new year, the restaurants in Mubarkiya cannot stop working. Most people who come here are families. Last year, the police were out in force to avoid any kind of trouble in the market, as some young men annoy families with their bad behaviors and harassment," he said.

Hamad Al-Qaseer, a 34-year-old visitor from

Bahrain, said the Mubarakiya market is characterized by the heritage of the past and the modernity of the present. This is why Hamad and his family like to come to this market, where you can find everything. "This place is the best destination for everyone, as you can find a wide range of cheap items - cosmetics, clothes, snacks, toys, etc. I love coming here in the winter. It's a very nice old market; very well maintained as an old-style bazaar. You need hours to walk around. You can find many products that might not be available in big malls, along with many restaurants that serve seafood and other traditional dishes. In addition, there's a children's playground for our children to play. Also, they have moneychangers here, which are a better option for tourists," said Qaseer.

Mustafa Aboryan, 26, said: "I am in Kuwait for

over two years now, and some of the best and most reasonably-priced food is here in the souq. In the New Year, there will be decorations and celebrations that I enjoyed last year. This place has so much to offer - lots of traditional Kuwaiti dishes are available, along with traditional dresses, gold and much more. The best advice to give to visitors is to bargain, bargain and bargain, and get local currency to buy stuff."

For Shinas Puthen, 29, Mubarakiya is the heartbeat of Kuwait. "The new year is the best day to celebrate in Mubarakiya," he said. "I go there with my friends to enjoy Indian food and sightseeing. People should be aware that the area has some free museums - the Sheikh Mubarak kiosk and the first Islamic pharmacy in Kuwait - that are worth a visit."



Hulya Duzbicer



Mohamed Abdullah Masoud



Ahmad Essam Fathy



Tamlyn Mouton

People share new hope for the New Year

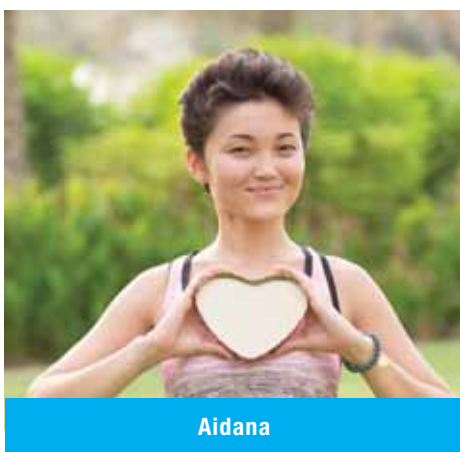
By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: As we have started counting down to a new year in our life, Kuwait Times asked people to share their wishes for the New Year 2020.

Hulya Duzbicer, 27-year-old Turkish architect, said: "New year, new hopes. I think before making new year resolutions, you should appreciate the value of the beauty you have. You should not compare yourself to others and don't listen to people when they say that you cannot do it - everything starts with a dream. The meaning of Hulya is a dream, not a nightmare."

She added "My wishes for the new year are peace, health, happiness, journeys and meeting new people. The list goes on. It would be great if, for example, we had snowy weather in Kuwait or maybe we can go to Sivas, one of the coldest and most beautiful cities in Turkey to see a wonderful snowy view. All I have to say is welcome 2020."

Mohamed Abdullah Masoud, 23, a Palestinian civil engineer, hopes that growing older does not make him lose more hair. "Hair does not get replaced once fallen. My wish is to get my hair back and hopefully

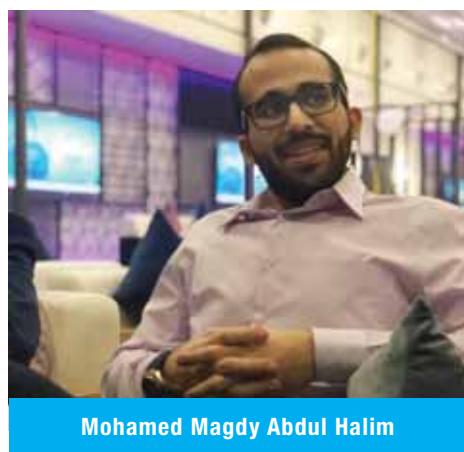


Aidana

prevent hair loss to avoid going bald." Masoud also wished to get married in 2020 and obtain his master's degree soon.

As for Aidana, 28-year-old, Kyrgyz yoga instructor, her new year's wish is to travel to Mysore in India. As this southern Indian city is famous for its modern yoga practice, Aidana hopes to travel there to practice the Ashtanga Yoga method at the Ashtanga Yoga Institute (KPYI).

Ahmad Essam Fathy, 25, an Egyptian lawyer, told Kuwait Times that he hopes to have his own business, improve his English



Mohamed Magdy Abdul Halim

skills and visit Lebanon to find his soul mate. Tamlyn Mouton, 29, a South African coach, said that her wish for 2020 is to spend her 30th birthday with her family in South Africa.

Mohamed Magdy Abdul Halim, 23, a Jordanian engineer, hopes to improve himself and become a better version of himself. "I wish to travel all around the world. Also, to repay my family and friends for the warmth they have shown me. The new year is a blank book - be wise how to write your new story."

KNPC commissions clean diesel production unit

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) said yesterday it has begun producing ultra-low sulfur diesel (ULSD) at Mina Al-Ahmadi refinery amid the state oil-refining firm's environmental fuel plans. A new unit, commissioned at the refinery according to internationally-adopted standards, has an output capacity of 45,000 barrels a day of ULSD, Executive Vice President and spokesman Abdullah Al-Ajmi said in a statement. The company believes that the unit is one of the most important under the environmental fuel project due to the commodity's high profitability and the superior quality of the output, estimated at ten parts per million. The move will enable KNPC to keep up with the growing demand for diesel, said the vice president, with several more environmental fuel projects in the pipeline at both Mina Al-Ahmadi and Mina Abdullah refineries. In September, KNPC said it had launched Mina Abdullah's first diesel production unit, which has a capacity of 73,000 barrels a day. The company plans to widen the scope of its environmental fuel production at its two refineries to reach a capacity of 800,000 barrels a day. —KUNA

Kuwait's oil exports to Japan down

TOKYO: Kuwait's crude oil exports to Japan in November slid 8.5 percent from a year earlier to 7.84 million barrels, or 261,000 barrels per day (bpd), for the first decline in three months, government data showed. As Japan's third-biggest oil provider, Kuwait supplied 8.9 percent of the Asian nation's total crude imports, the Japanese Natural Resources and Energy Agency said in a preliminary report. Japan's overall imports of crude oil fell 5.7 percent year-on-year to 2.9 million bpd, shrinking for the fourth straight month. Shipments from the Middle East accounted for 89.1 percent of the total, up 3.4 percentage points from the year before. Saudi Arabia came back to Japan's No.1 oil supplier, although imports from the kingdom declined 2.7 percent from a year earlier to 1.12 million bpd, followed by the United Arab Emirates with 903,000 bpd, up 2.2 percent. Qatar ranked fourth with 203,000 bpd and Russia fifth with 171,000 bpd, respectively. Resource-poor Japan is the world's-third biggest oil consumer after China and the US, relying on imports for virtually all of its oil, gas and coal. — KUNA

Kuwait fund gave \$20 billion aid since inception

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) has funded since its establishment in 1961 up to 986 projects worth \$20 billion for 107 States. KFAED's Director General Abdulwahab Al-Bader said in a press release marking the fund's 58th anniversary, which falls today, that it has continued supporting development in developing countries and aiding those in need, as the first development establishment in the Arab world in the 1950s. At the time, Kuwait was the sole developing State that decided to help other nations of identical status through easy loans, various forms of assistance and grants. Up to 107 States benefited from KFAED's assistance over the past years, he said indicating that the fund either offered aid, supervised and funded projects of priority for these States. He indicated at persisting major challenges facing development in current times, thus there must be coordinated and greater efforts to relieve countries in need for help.

KFAED's aims at funding ventures that contribute to attaining sustainable development objectives, thus paving the way for contributing to tackle other issues such as poverty, food security, gender equality and climatic changes. Since 1987, the fund has been financing itself, making some profits and financial returns from activities and loans. Part of these proceeds are used to support some State departments, he said, noting that in 2002 an agreement was worked out to buy bonds of the Kuwait Credit Bank at a value of KD 500 million (\$1.6 billion), with a two percent annual return. It funded some 986 projects in developing countries in 57 years, at a value of KD 6.4 billion (\$20 billion), he affirmed. KFAED was established on December 31, 1961, to aid nations and communities in need and back up the State foreign policy.

Enhancing development

Engineering Consultant at KFAED Dr Mohammed Sadeqi stressed the importance of supporting developing and friendly countries in enhancing their development capabilities. This came in a speech Dr Sadeqi made yesterday during a conference entitled 'Energy ... investment prospects and opportunities for growth', organized by Al-Ahram Press Foundation in Cairo, Egypt under the auspices of the Egyptian Prime Minister Dr Mostafa Madbouly. Sadeqi pointed out that the electric power sector in all its forms is a focal point in the development process and plays a central role in achieving economic, social and environmental goals and represents an urgent and basic need that societies need to provide at a cost to improve the living situation.

Although energy is considered the basic element for infrastructure develop-

ment, statistics indicate that more than 1.6 billion people, or about 20 percent of the world's population, do not have access to electrical services, he added. He noted that the inequality between countries and societies in the level of the degree of development is the main cause of poverty, disease outbreaks, instability and chaos, adding that approximately one billion people in industrialized countries consume about 60 percent of the total energy supply, while more than 6.5 billion people in developing countries consume about 40 percent.

Energy demand

Regarding the productive capacities of global electric energy, Sadeqi said that 2018 statistics indicate that the demand for electric energy services has grown in recent years, bringing global consumption to about 26.615 billion kilowatt hours, which is produced mainly depending on fossil fuels such as coal, gas, and petroleum derivatives. He also affirmed that in the Arab countries, annual production in 2018 reached about 1550 billion kilowatt-hours, or about 6 percent of global production, "coming from the stations of the large part of it, its reliability is low because it is old and operates with low efficiencies."

Maintaining the needs of growth in demand and the sustainability of services requires adding new production units amounting to about 40.5 thousand megawatts for the next five years with an annual required investment of about 35 billion dollars annually, he added. He pointed out that KFAED's vision through providing soft financing to the energy sector in the countries with which it works aims to develop the electrical energy system in it so that it has the institutional efficiency and technological progress and is able to meet the energy demand at competitive prices and environmental sustainability.

Sadeqi stressed that KFAED's contributions focus on financing priority projects with the beneficiary country, which studies prove to be technically sound and economically feasible, and that they serve as development solutions that depend on encouraging a productive economy that creates jobs and improving the quality of life. He stated that the total size of the Fund's contributions in financing projects in the electricity sector until the end of 2018 amounted to about \$5,284.5 billion over 164 projects distributed among the branches of the electricity sector. On the cooperation between KFAED and Egypt, he said that the fund is an essential partner for Egypt, as it is the most benefiting from its contributions, which amounted to about \$3.6 billion at the end of 2018. — KUNA



Churchgoers kill
gunman who shot two
during Texas service

Bangladesh halts breast milk scheme after Islamist backlash



IDLIB, Syria: An aerial photograph shows children playing near tents sheltering Syrians who fled ongoing battles in the southern and eastern countryside of the Idlib province, surrounded by mud caused by heavy rain, in a camp for displaced people near Sarmada near the border with Turkey in the northern part of the province on Sunday. —AFP

Displaced Syrians find shelter in Idlib mosque

Women and children try hard to live in harsh winter conditions in Idlib

IDLIB, Syria: Almost 50 displaced civilians forced to flee their homes in Syria from on-going regime and Russian attacks have found refuge in an Idlib mosque.

“I live in the mosque with my five children. They gave us money, a stove and a sponge to go to bed,” Fatma Ahmedi said. The civilians from 49 families are given food and bedding by the Turkish Red Crescent humanitarian agency. “We have taken refuge in Allah’s house, we stay there and they try to meet our every need,” Reyhan Ahey said.

Idlib falls within a de-escalation zone laid out in a deal between Turkey and Russia in late 2018.

The Syrian regime and its allies, however, have consistently broken the terms of the cease-fire, launching frequent attacks inside the zone.

The de-escalation zone is currently home

to some four million civilians, including hundreds of thousands displaced in recent years by regime forces throughout the war-weary country.

“This is the southern part of Atme Camp in Idlib countryside and it is Dec. 26. We are having a great difficulty that the history ever witnessed. Everything is covered in mud. People are trying to open the closed roads with their own means. We need help from the NGOs here. For instance, yesterday there was a pregnant woman, who was about to give birth. But the rescue team could not reach her. How can you make such a woman walk for kilometers? The roads are terrible.”

“We are here at this camp just for an hour, and you can see the situation. People living here have to face these difficulties every moment. It is raining, and the roads

are closed. Vehicles carrying water, bread, fruits and vegetables cannot move on. If there is an urgent case, people have to be carried in arms, as ambulances cannot reach them on roads. This is only the beginning of winter, and if it continues like this, people at this camp will have much greater difficulties. I call on the volunteers and aid organizations to help people here.”

In the wake of heavy rains, thousands of Syrian civilians staying at camps along the Turkish-Syrian border are awaiting humanitarian aid, locals told Anadolu Agency. Tents, houses, and roads were badly affected by heavy rains in the Atme camps region, according to recent video footage.

“This is the southern part of Atme Camp in Idlib countryside and it is Dec. 26. We are having a great difficulty that the history ever witnessed. Everything is covered in

mud. People are trying to open the closed roads with their own means,” one local said.

“We need help from the NGOs here. For instance, yesterday there was a pregnant woman, who was about to give birth. But the rescue team could not reach her. How can you make such a woman walk for kilometers? The roads are terrible.”

Another local shot a video of the environment as he told about the situation at the camp. “We are here at this camp just for an hour, and you can see the situation. People living here have to face these difficulties every moment. It is raining, and the roads are closed. Vehicles carrying water, bread, fruits and vegetables cannot move on. If there is an urgent case, people have to be carried in arms, as ambulances cannot reach them on roads,” he said, adding: “This is only the beginning of winter, and if it

continues like this, people at this camp will have much greater difficulties. I call on the volunteers and aid organizations to help people here.”

In September 2018, Turkey and Russia agreed to turn Idlib into a de-escalation zone in which acts of aggression are expressly prohibited. Since then, more than 1,300 civilians have been killed in attacks by the regime and Russian forces in the de-escalation zone as the cease-fire continues to be violated.

Over a million Syrians have moved near the Turkish border due to the intense attacks in 2019. According to the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, the Idlib province is home to around 3 million civilians, 75 percent of them women and children. —Reuters

Iran-backed forces in Iraq under focus after US strikes

BAGHDAD: US air strikes in Iraq and Syria against the Iran-backed Kataib Hezbollah militia group have brought a threat of reprisal. These are the most powerful such paramilitary groups in Iraq.

KATAIB HEZBOLLAH

Formed in 2003 after the US-led invasion, the secretive Kataib Hezbollah (Battalions of the Party Of God) is one of the smallest Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, with an estimated 5,000 members. But it is considered one of the most dangerous. During the recent war against Islamic State, Kataib received battlefield training from Lebanon’s Hezbollah.

Kataib has long targeted US forces and was one of the earliest groups to dispatch fighters to Syria to support President Bashar al-Assad in the civil war. In 2009, Washington declared Kataib Hezbollah a foreign terrorist organization, saying it threatened stability in Iraq, one of the most important US allies in the Arab world. The group’s founder Jamal Jaafar Ibrahim, known by his nom de guerre Abu Mahdi Al-Mohandes, has warned of a strong response against US forces following Sunday’s attacks on several bases that killed at least 25 people. Muhandes is an adviser to Qassem Soleimani, commander of Iran’s Qods Force – an arm of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that gives material support to groups like Hezbollah, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

The United States has declared the former lawmaker a terrorist. In 2007, a Kuwaiti court sentenced him to death in absentia for his involvement in the 1983 US and French embassy bombings in Kuwait. Mohandes also oversees Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), an umbrella grouping of paramilitary groups mostly consisting of Iran-backed Shi’ite militias that was formally integrated into Iraq’s armed forces.

BADR ORGANISATION

Badr leader Hadi Al-Amiri is widely seen as Tehran’s man in Iraq. He fought on Iran’s side in its 1980-1988 war with Iraq.



BAGHDAD: Iraqi men looks at a Christmas tree made of national flags during ongoing anti-government demonstrations at Tahrir square in the capital Baghdad yesterday.—AFP

Amiri, a Farsi speaker, spent more than two decades fighting Saddam Hussein from exile in Iran. Badr, established in 1982, was named after a key seventh century battle during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It was the backbone of the volunteer forces fighting Islamic State. Badr was known for brutal tactics during Iraq’s civil war but has tried to soften its image. Since 2014, Badr has transformed itself into a leading force in Iraqi politics, an important ally for Iran which has extended its reach to parliament. Like some other groups, Badr gets its inspiration from Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Badr has also sent thousands of fighters to Syria.

ASAIB AHL AL-HAQ

“League of the Righteous” is one of Iraq’s most notorious

militia groups. Formed in 2006 by its leader Qais Al-Khazali, the sectarian force has launched numerous operations against American and Iraqi forces.

Critics say Asaib is still violent despite announcing it was ready to lay down arms in 2012 and join the political process. In 2007, Khazali was arrested by American forces for his alleged role in an attack on a government compound in Karbala in the Shi’ite heartland of southern Iraq, which left five American soldiers dead.

He is now one of the most feared and respected Shi’ite militia leaders in Iraq, and one of Iran’s most important allies in the country. He was among the thousands of militia fighters, armed and wearing green camouflage military fatigues, who flocked to northern Iraq to battle Islamic State. —Reuters

Merkel, Erdogan and Putin discuss solution for Libya

BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel discussed efforts to reach a diplomatic solution for the Libyan conflict in separate phone calls with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, whose government intends to send troops to Libya, a government spokesman said yesterday.

Turkey’s foreign minister has warned that the Libyan conflict risks sliding into chaos and becoming the next Syria, as he sought to speed up domestic legislation to allow Ankara to send troops to the North African country. Last week, Erdogan announced his government’s decision to seek parliamentary consent to send troops to Libya, at the request of Tripoli. The troops would help to defend Libya’s UN-backed Government of National Accord against General Khalifa Haftar’s forces, which get military support from Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. A German foreign ministry spokesman in Berlin said Germany was following the reports about Turkey’s military plans in Libya with “great concern”. He urged all involved parties to exercise maximum restraint, respect an international embargo for arms exports to Libya and step up efforts for a diplomatic solution.

“A further exchange was agreed to strengthen diplomatic efforts,” the government spokesman said, adding that Merkel also discussed the developments in Syria with Erdogan and Putin during the phone calls, which took place on Sunday.

Germany has offered to host an international peace conference on Libya that the United Nations is planning. The conference could take place in Berlin after a planned meeting between Erdogan and Putin in January. —Reuters

International

Turkey arrests 94 Islamic State suspects ahead of New Year

Opposition says it opposes Libya troop deployment bill

ISTANBUL: Turkish police detained 94 people suspected of ties to Islamic State in nationwide raids yesterday ahead of New Year celebrations, police and state media said, two months after the group's leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi was killed.

Police have rounded up jihadist militants in late December in the last two years, since New Year's Day in 2017 when a gunman killed 39 people in an Istanbul nightclub in an attack claimed by the militant group. Counter-terror police carried out the operations in the central provinces of Ankara, Kayseri and Adana, and Batman in the southeast, state-owned Anadolu news agency reported. Istanbul police said it also made arrests.

At 5 am (0200 GMT) in Batman, some 400 police officers detained 22 people in simultaneous raids on various addresses, seizing weapons, ammunition and documents, Anadolu said. It said 30 Iraqis, two Syrians and one Moroccan were detained in Ankara. Nine Iraqi citizens who had operated in Syria and Iraq were detained in Kayseri, while four Syrian and two Iraqi citizens were detained in Adana, it added.

Istanbul police said 20 Turks and four foreign nationals were captured in separate raids aimed to prevent potential attacks by the group ahead of New Year's. US President Donald Trump announced on Oct. 27 that Islamic State leader Baghdadi had been killed in a raid by US special forces in northwest Syria, near the Turkish border. Two days later, Turkish police detained dozens of Islamic State suspects believed to have been plotting attacks targeting celebrations of Turkey's Republic Day celebrations.

The government has said it will have repatriated most of its Islamic State detainees to their home countries by the end of the year. Ankara had accused its European allies of being too slow to take back their

citizens who travelled to the Middle East to join Islamic State.

Turkey's NATO allies have been worried that its October offensive into northeastern Syria against the Kurdish YPG militia could lead to Islamic State suspects and their families escaping from the prisons and camps run by the YPG.

Turkey's main opposition party said yesterday it opposes a bill to allow a troop deployment to Libya, arguing such a move would exacerbate the country's conflict and cause it to spread across the region.

Last week, President Tayyip Erdogan said his government would seek parliamentary consent to deploy troops to Libya after Fayez Al-Serraj's Government of National Accord (GNA) requested support. The GNA is fending off an offensive by Khalifa Haftar's forces in the east of the North African country.

Speaking after talks with Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on the bill, Unal Cevikoz, deputy chairman for the Republican People's Party (CHP), said his party opposed such a move.

"We believe diplomacy should be prioritized, rather than being a party to a proxy war. What is being done is making preparations to worsen the current situation, and we conveyed to the minister that this is not right," Cevikoz said. "Sending troops there in this case will expand the effects of the conflicts in the region and cause them to spread... We view the bill negatively," he added.

The CHP has previously supported parliamentary bills to send troops into northern Syria, where Turkey has carried out three cross-border operations in three years. However, it has said it did not approve of Turkish military actions beyond its frontier. Cavusoglu subsequently met the opposition Iyi Party leader to discuss the troop deployment bill. Erdogan has said the bill will



ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (left) welcomes Moldovan President Igor Dodon at the Presidential Complex in Ankara, Turkey yesterday. —AFP

be presented to parliament in early January. Last month, Turkey signed two separate accords with the GNA, one on security and military cooperation and another on maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean. Ankara has also sent military supplies to the GNA despite a United Nations embargo,

according to a UN report seen by Reuters last month.

Haftar's forces have received support from Russia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan. Erdogan has called Haftar illegitimate and said Ankara would continue to support the GNA in any way it can. —Reuters

Cyprus court finds British teen guilty of false rape claim

PARALIMNI, Cyprus: A court in Cyprus yesterday found a British teenager guilty of falsely claiming she was gang-raped by a group of Israeli tourists in a case that prompted allegations of police mistreatment. The 19-year-old was convicted of "public mischief", which carries a sentence of up to one year in prison and a fine of around 1,700 euros. Sentencing was adjourned until January 7.

The defendant, who pleaded not guilty, alleged that 12 Israelis raped her on July 17 at a hotel in Ayia Napa. But the Israelis, aged 15 to 18, were released without charge the same month after the woman was arrested on suspicion of "making a false statement about an imaginary crime". "The statements you have given were false," the judge told the woman at the Famagusta District Court in Paralimni in southeast Cyprus in remarks translated by an interpreter.

She appeared frustrated by the delay to the sentencing, telling her lawyer: "He already made his decision! I thought we were asking for a fine."

'Many violations'

The defense said it would lodge an appeal with the Supreme Court. "We believe there have been many violations in the procedure and the rights of fair trial have been violated," the woman's lawyer, Nicoletta Charalambidou, said. Rights groups argued the teenager has suffered humiliation and been mistreated by the police and media.

They have called for an investigation into police handling of the case and criticized the way rape cases and victims are treated in Cyprus. More than a dozen women from an association for the protection of women attended court wearing white scarves with an image of lips sewn shut printed on them.

As the defendant was led from the court with her face blindfolded to shield her identity 20 protesters chanted: "We are with you" and "We believe you". "The way the case of this young lady was handled by the police and Cyprus government was wrong," said one of the demonstrators, Maria Mappouridou.

Another protester, Helena Gonata, said "everyone will find a reason not to believe her. That's the case with rape—no one will believe you." "We're trying to encourage women to talk. Many women are afraid to come forward." The woman's lawyers had claimed she was pressured into signing a retraction written by a detective. But the judge said during the trial that police had acted



PARALIMNI: A British teenager (center) accused of falsely claiming she was raped by Israeli tourists, covers her face as she arrives for her trial at the Famagusta District Court in Paralimni in eastern Cyprus, yesterday. The Briton who had alleged 12 Israeli tourists gang raped her on July 17, at a hotel in the eastern resort of Ayia Napa, has been found guilty of lying by a Cypriot court in Paralimni, her sentencing adjourned until January 7. —AFP

properly at all times, with no pressure exerted to change the woman's mind about her initial rape claim.

The defendant had said police were "hostile and negative" and asked her to sign a statement she had not seen. British legal aid group Justice Abroad, which is supporting the woman, said the defence would take the case to the European Court of Human Rights if

necessary.

"Despite the setback today, the teenager who has spent over a month in prison and six months where she has been unable to leave Cyprus is determined for justice to be done in her case as well as to help change the culture towards victims of sexual offences in Cyprus," Justice Abroad's Michael Polak said in a statement. —AFP

France, Egypt urge 'restraint' to avoid Libya escalation

PARIS: France and Egypt called yesterday for the "greatest restraint" by Libyan and international authorities to avoid

escalating the conflict in Libya, a statement from President Emmanuel Macron's office said.

Macron held talks late Sunday with his Egyptian counterpart Abdel Fattah el-Sisi when both agreed that warring Libyan powers need to negotiate a political solution under UN auspices.

The statement comes after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed readiness this month to send troops to Libya if requested by the country's Government of National Accord (GNA). The GNA is backed by the UN, but the addition of Turkish troops could further inflame tensions in a country torn by the devastating campaign of strongman Khalifa Haftar and his self-styled Libyan National Army.

More than 140,000 Libyans have fled their homes since April when Haftar's forces launched an assault on Tripoli.

UN-sponsored talks on the conflict are set for January in Berlin to try to end the fighting, sparked by the NATO-backed uprising that toppled dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. Neighboring countries like Egypt have been on high alert since then, not least against the potential for rival regional powers to exploit the turmoil. Macron and Sisi also criticized a recent deal between Turkey and Libya over maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean, calling it "against the rules of maritime law". Critics say the deal, part of a security and military cooperation accord with the GNA, would greatly extend Ankara's territorial claims. —AFP

Death toll in Somalia bombing climbs to 81

MOGADISHU: The death toll from a massive car bomb in the Somali capital has risen to 81, a government spokesman said yesterday, as rescue workers pursued their search for the missing.

The bombing Saturday at a busy intersection in Mogadishu was the country's deadliest attack in two years. No one has claimed responsibility, though President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed blamed Islamist group Al-Shabaab, which has regularly carried out car bombings and other attacks as part of its decade-long bid to topple the internationally-backed government.

"The overall number of the dead stands at 81 currently. Two more people died from their injuries," Ismail Muktar, a spokesman for Somalia's information

ministry, told AFP yesterday. One of the new fatalities was among the injured who had been evacuated to Turkey via a Turkish military plane on Sunday, Muktar said. Muktar said the death toll could climb further as rescue operations entered a third day. Around two dozen people were listed as missing after the attack, but 12 have been located—five of them dead—and the rest remain unaccounted for, he said.

Some 125 people were injured in Saturday's blast, a caseload that has overwhelmed health facilities in Mogadishu. At least 16 of those killed were students from the capital's private Banadir University, who had been travelling on a bus when the car bomb detonated.

The attack was the biggest to hit Somalia since a truck exploded in 2017 near a fuel tanker in Mogadishu, creating a fireball that killed over 500 people. Al-Shabaab was blamed for that strike too, though it never formally claimed responsibility—as it often does not do when there is a large amount of civilian casualties. The United States military said Sunday it had killed four "terrorists" in three airstrikes targeting Al-Shabaab. US Africa Command (AFRICOM) said



MOGADISHU: Nurses help a wounded child, that was wounded in the December 28, 2019 car bomb explosion in Mogadishu, before being evacuated to Turkey for medical treatment, at the Adan Adde International airport in Mogadishu on Sunday. —AFP

two militants were killed and two vehicles destroyed in Qunyo Barrow, while two more militants were killed in Caliyow Barrow.

The US regularly carries out airstrikes

in Somalia, though the frequency of such operations has risen sharply this year. In an April statement AFRICOM said it had killed more than 800 people in 110 strikes in Somalia since April 2017. —AFP

Sudan sentences to death 27 agents for killing protester

OMDURMAN, Sudan: A Sudanese court yesterday sentenced 27 intelligence agents to death for torturing and killing a protester early this year, an AFP correspondent said. It is the first time members of the security forces have been condemned to death in relation to the killing of protesters whose movement toppled veteran autocrat Omar Al-Bashir.

The defendants were found guilty of torturing to death Ahmed Al-Kheir Awadh at an intelligence services facility and sentenced to be hanged, judge Sadok Albdeldrahman said. The teacher was beaten and tortured to death after he was arrested in late January by intelligence operatives in Kassala state in eastern Sudan, the judge said. Dozens of protesters from the capital's teachers' association gathered in front of the court in Khartoum's twin city of Omdurman, carrying pictures of Awadh.

Defense lawyers have two weeks to lodge an appeal against the death sentences. Sudanese first took to the streets just over a year ago, to protest against high bread prices, but the demonstrations soon turned into demands for Bashir to step down. The president was deposed in April by the military, but huge protests continued, culminating in a compromise that saw a joint military-civilian transitional council formed in August.

At least 177 people were killed in repression of the months-long protests, according to rights group Amnesty International, while a doctors' committee close to the protest movement put the toll at over 250. Many of those killed were the victims of a June 3 massacre outside army headquarters in Khartoum, perpetrated by men in military fatigues. —AFP

Israel deducts more Palestinian money over prisoner pay

JERUSALEM: Israel said Sunday it would withhold millions more dollars worth of tax money it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, saying the amount equals payment made to families of Palestinian attackers.

Palestinian official media denounced the move as a "new theft," but the Israeli defence ministry called it a "freeze". "The security cabinet voted in favor of Defence Minister Naftali Bennett's request to freeze 150 million shekels in taxes paid to the Palestinian Authority (PA) (around \$43 million)," the defense ministry said in a statement. Israel collects around \$190 million a month in customs duties levied on goods destined for Palestinian markets that transit through Israeli ports, and then it transfers the money to the PA.

In February, Israel began withholding around \$10 million a month, saying the amount corresponded to that which the PA paid to families of Palestinians jailed for attacks against Israelis. Sunday's move will also include the families of Palestinians killed during anti-Israeli attacks. Israel says payments to those who have carried out attacks against Israelis create financial incentives to encourage further violence. —AFP

International

Churchgoers kill gunman who shot two during Texas service

Two parishioners succumb to gunman's attack

HOUSTON: Worshippers in the US state of Texas shot dead a gunman who opened fire during a livestreamed Sunday service, ending an attack that killed two parishioners, authorities said.

The latest US shooting at a house of worship took place in the suburban Fort Worth community of White Settlement on Sunday morning when the gunman entered West Freeway Church of Christ, officials said. "A couple of members of the church returned fire, striking the suspect who died at the scene," White Settlement Police Chief J.P. Bevering told reporters.

He praised the "heroic actions of those parishioners" for ending the threat, although he said one of the suspect's victims died at a local hospital.

A second parishioner later died, authorities told reporters at an evening news conference.

The FBI said it was working to find a motive for the attack. "Places of worship are meant to be sacred, and I am grateful for the church members who acted quickly to take down the shooter and help prevent further loss of life," Texas Governor Greg Abbott said in a statement.

"Our hearts go out to the victims and families of those killed in the evil act of violence that occurred at the West Freeway Church of Christ," he added. The church regularly posts its services online and a video of the attack was livestreamed on their website. Guns kill about 36,000 people a year in the United States—one of the most heavily armed countries in the world—through suicides, homicides, police-involved shootings and accidents.

The country has lived through a sharp rise in mass shootings in recent years, alarming the public and trig-



WHITE SETTLEMENT: Melanie Davis speaks to the media after a gunman opened fire during morning service at West Freeway Church of Christ on Sunday.

gering new debate on how to control this epidemic of violence. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has said he will only bring a gun bill to the floor if it has presidential backing, but President Donald Trump has given no clear preference. In November 2017 a gunman shot dead 26 worshippers during a service at a Baptist church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, outside San Antonio.

Almost a year later, in October 2018, an anti-Semitic shooter killed 11 people at a Pittsburgh synagogue. — AFP



WHITE SETTLEMENT, TX: Law enforcement and the media work outside the West Freeway Church of Christ after a shooting took place during services on Sunday. — AFP photos

Pompeo to meet Zelenskiy on Friday

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in Kiev on Friday, just weeks after US President Donald Trump was impeached over abuse of power involving his handling of Ukraine. The visit is part of a trip that includes several former Soviet republics, the US State Department said.

As well as holding talks with Zelinskiy, Pompeo will also meet Ukraine's foreign and defense ministers to reaffirm US support for the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the State Department said. Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in 2014 and since then Russian-backed rebels have been waging an insurgency in eastern Ukraine.

It was not clear if Trump's impeachment would figure as a talking point. The Democratic-led US House of Representatives impeached him on Dec. 18 for abuse of power and obstruction of Congress charges stemming from his effort to get Ukraine to investigate political rival Joe Biden, a leading contender in the 2020 Democratic presidential race. The House inquiry into the matter concluded that Trump withheld military aid from Ukraine in order to influence Kiev, sending the matter to the US Senate for trial. Trump has denied any wrongdoing. In Kiev, Pompeo will also discuss human rights, investment climate, and the government's reform agenda, the State Department said.

He will also visit Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Cyprus on a trip from Friday through to next Tuesday. — Reuters

Germany takes N- plant offline, final six to close over two years

DUESSELDORF: Germany will take another step towards completing its withdrawal from nuclear power when EnBW pulls the plug on the Philippsburg 2 power station on New Year's Eve, leaving half a dozen plants still to close over the next two years. The government decided to shut down the 17 reactors in operation at the time of Japan's Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, when a tsunami flooded the coastal facility and knocked out its backup generators.

Fukushima, the worst nuclear disaster since a reactor blew up at Chernobyl in Soviet-era Ukraine in 1986, forced the evacuation of 154,000 people from surrounding areas contaminated with radiation.

"Every nuclear power station that is turned off is a success for the decades-long struggle against dangerous atomic energy," said Olaf Brandt, head of the German Federation for the Environment and Nature Conservation (BUND). Regional power company EnBW yesterday said that Philippsburg 2, located near the southwestern city of Karlsruhe, would be taken off the grid at 7pm (1800 GMT). The shutdown will take only a few hours to complete. In 2020 Philippsburg 2's two cooling towers will be knocked down, kicking off demolition work that will take 10 to 15 years to complete.

Neighboring Philippsburg 1, taken offline in 2011, is already being dismantled. Total costs for the exercise are estimated by EnBW at 7.5 billion euros (\$8.4 billion) and will be covered by reserves built up by the power utility. Critics of Germany's energy strategy say that phasing out nuclear power leaves it excessively reliant on nuclear or coal-fired power imported from neighboring countries to cover shortfalls in environmentally friendly wind and solar power.

Industry association BDEW estimates that nuclear reactors accounted for about 12 percent of German power generation in 2019, down from 30 percent in 2000. Over the same period, the share of power from renewable sources has risen to 40 percent. — Reuters

Kim urges 'positive and offensive' security measures ahead of deadline

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called for "positive and offensive measures" to ensure the country's security before a year-end deadline he has set for denuclearization talks with the United States, state media KCNA said yesterday.

Kim convened a weekend meeting of top Workers' Party officials to discuss policy matters amid rising tension over his deadline for Washington to soften its stance in stalled negotiations aimed at dismantling Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs. At a Sunday session, Kim suggested action in the areas of foreign affairs, the munitions industry and armed forces, stressing the need to take "positive and offensive measures for fully ensuring the sovereignty and security of the country," KCNA said, without elaborating.

The meeting was the largest plenary session of the party's 7th Central Committee since its first gathering in 2013 under Kim, according to Seoul's Unification Ministry handling inter-Korean affairs.

The key policymaking organ drew several hundred attendees, state television showed yesterday. The committee also met in 2018 and in April but on a much smaller scale. "By 'positive and offensive measures,' they might mean highly provocative action against the United States

and also South Korea," said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean studies in Seoul.

KCNA said the meeting was still under way. It was the first time the gathering had lasted more than one day since Kim took power in late 2011, ministry spokesman Lee Sang-min told a regular briefing.

The United States was watching the end-of-year meeting closely and hoped North Korea would choose peace over confrontation, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said yesterday. "We still maintain our view that we can find a path forward to convince the leadership in North Korea that their best course of action is to create a better opportunity for their people by getting rid of their nuclear weapons," Pompeo told Fox News.

North Korea has urged Washington to offer a new approach to resume negotiations, warning that it may take an unspecified "new path" if the United States fails to meet its expectations.

U.S. military commanders said the move could include the testing of a long-range missile, which North Korea has suspended since 2017, along with nuclear warhead tests. Washington would be "extraordinarily disappointed" if North Korea tests a long-range or nuclear missile, White House national security adviser Robert O'Brien said on Sunday, vowing to take appropriate action as a leading military and economic power. The United States had opened channels of communication with North Korea and hoped Kim would follow through on denuclearization commitments he made at summits with U.S. President Donald Trump, O'Brien said.

A video released by the US Air Force and reviewed by Reuters on Monday showed a simulation of an Aegis destroyer spotting what appeared to be a North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile being fired towards the Pacific over the skies of Japan, prompting the launch of

ground interceptor missiles. The 65-second clip was dated September and released on Dec 2 on the website of the US Defense Visual Information Distribution Service. A South Korean military source said while it was largely a regular promotional video, its release coincided with heightened tensions amid a recent series of North Korean weapons tests and a war of words between Pyongyang and Washington.

North Korea's economy seemed to be another key item on the agenda for the second-day session, Yang said, with the economy hit by international sanctions over its weapons programs.

KCNA said Kim discussed state management and economic issues in line with his campaign to build an "independent economy." Kim "presented the tasks for urgently correcting the grave situation of the major industrial sectors of the national economy," KCNA said. — Reuters



SEOUL: People watch a television news program showing the latest pictures of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, at a railway station in Seoul yesterday. — AFP

Asia's first LGBT-focused streaming service tackles taboos

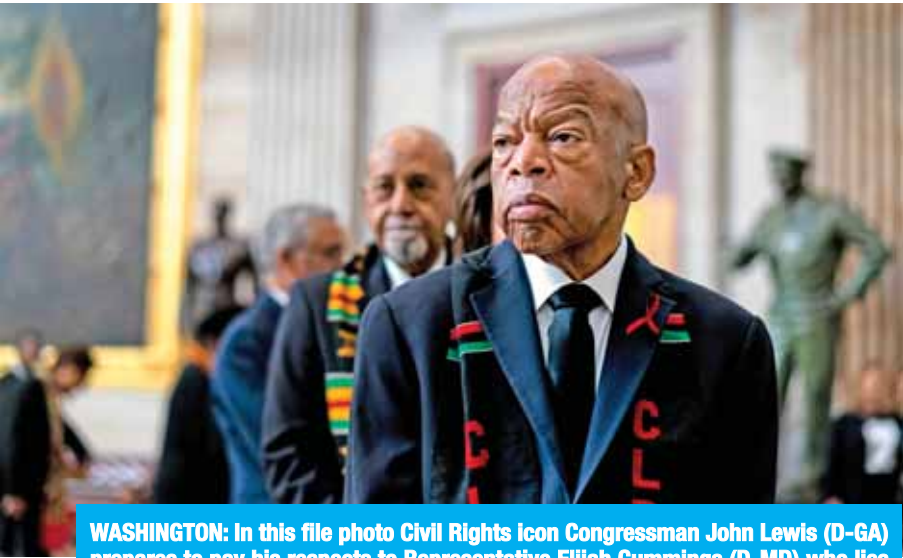
SINGAPORE: A rom-com about a lesbian flight attendant and a romance in a gay spa are among the shows featured on Asia's first LGBT-focused streaming service, which is pushing boundaries in an often highly conservative region. GagaOOLala brings more than 1,000 feature films, shorts, web series, and documentaries to people across Asia, where censorship and traditional attitudes mean there has been little in the way of gay content in the mainstream media.

After launching in 2017 in Taiwan, a beacon for gay rights since becoming the first place in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage, it has expanded to 21 territories including several that still criminalize homosexuality.

"One of the main impetuses for me to create GagaOOLala, (is) to kind of dispel a lot of the myths and misconceptions that a lot of people might have about LGBT people," said Jay Lin, a prominent LGBT rights activist in Taiwan who founded the platform. "We're not all living really tragic lives—we're entrepreneurs, we're fathers," the 46-year-old, who is raising twin boys with his partner in Taipei, said. With about 280,000 members, made up mainly of gay people but also including a significant number of straight women, its success comes as some progress is made on LGBT rights in parts of the region. As well as Taiwan's move to legalize same-sex unions in May, India's Supreme Court last year struck down a colonial-era ban on gay sex.

Dire rights situation

But the gay rights situation remains dire in other countries where the platform operates—making its presence in those markets all the more important,



WASHINGTON: In this file photo Civil Rights icon Congressman John Lewis (D-GA) prepares to pay his respects to Representative Elijah Cummings (D-MD) who lies in state within Statuary Hall during a memorial ceremony on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC on October 24, 2019. — AFP

US civil rights icon John Lewis announces cancer diagnosis

WASHINGTON: Civil rights icon and US House Representative John Lewis announced on Sunday he had been diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer. The diagnosis followed a "routine medical visit," Lewis, a 79-year-old Democrat who has repeatedly sparred with President Donald Trump, said in a statement, adding that he would seek treatment while continuing to represent his Georgia district.

"I have been in some kind of fight-for freedom, equality, basic human rights—for nearly my entire life. I have never faced a fight quite like the one I have now," he said. Known for his decades of work in the civil rights movement, Lewis marched with slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr at the August 1963 rally in Washington at which King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech. "I have decided to do what I know to do

and do what I have always done: I am going to fight it and keep fighting for the Beloved Community," Lewis said.

He added he will miss a few votes while he undergoes treatment. "But with God's grace I will be back on the front lines soon." The son of sharecroppers, Lewis also took part in the Freedom Rides—challenges to segregated facilities at bus terminals in the South. On March 7, 1965, he led a march in Selma, Alabama that ended in an attack by state troopers on the protesters that later became known as "Bloody Sunday."

He joined Congress in 1987, representing a district that includes parts of Georgia's state capital and largest city, Atlanta. Lewis was among a group of Democratic lawmakers to skip Trump's inauguration in January 2017, saying he saw his election as illegitimate.

In response, the president-elect tweeted that Lewis should "spend more time on fixing and helping his district, which is in horrible shape and falling apart (not to mention crime infested)," a remark drawing widespread criticism. Prominent Democrats showed their support for Lewis following his announcement, with former president Barack Obama tweeting, "If there's one thing I love about (Lewis), it's his incomparable will to fight. — AFP

International

Bangladesh halts breast milk scheme after Islamist backlash

Religious leaders claim plan could lead to breaches of sharia law

DHAKA: A Bangladesh hospital has suspended plans to give donated breast milk to babies after a backlash by Muslim clerics who said the scheme violated Islamic law. The program aimed to feed up to 500 orphans and infants of working mothers in the Muslim-majority country, which has high rates of child malnutrition and stunted growth.

Bangladesh's top Islamic leadership has not yet made a ruling on the milk bank, but it was halted after critics said the plan could lead to breaches of sharia law if two babies drank milk from the same mother and later married. "Their entire marriage and lineage would become illegal," said Gazi Ataur Rahman, a spokesman of the influential Islami Andolan Bangladesh political party.

Another Islamist, Ahmed Abdul Kaiyum, said Sharia law did not allow for milk banks. "It would go against Islam," he said, suggesting that the authorities should have discussed this "very sensitive issue" beforehand with clerics.

Strict safeguards

Prominent Islamic cleric Fariduiddin Masoud struck a conciliatory note, however, saying authorities should find out if and how Muslim majority nations such as Pakistan,

Iran, Iraq and Malaysia have set up human milk banks. "We should see how they have solved the issue. We should sit together to find a solution," he said.

The milk bank in Dhaka was slated to start this month, but project co-ordinator Mojibur Rahman said it had been delayed indefinitely because of the "widespread criticism". He added that the hospital had set up strict safeguards for the scheme. "We collect and preserve milk separately and rigorously record (donor) identities," he told AFP yesterday, a day after the milk bank's suspension was announced.

Top child specialists had backed the milk bank, saying it was needed to help save child lives as well as aid their growth. "Human milk banks are essential for orphans and critically ill children, especially to save the lives of the babies who are being treated at the hospital's intensive care unit and whose mothers are not available," said Mahbulul Haque, a top doctor at Dhaka's main children's hospital.

"Milk banks are established in major hospitals in the West. We should set up more such banks in all our top hospitals for children," he said. Some 90 percent of Bangladesh's 168 million people are Muslim. — AFP



DHAKA: A Bangladeshi mother helping to weigh her newborn baby who is suffering various physical problems. — AFP

China jails scientist who gene-edited babies

BEIJING: A Chinese court yesterday sentenced the scientist who claimed to be behind the world's first gene-edited babies to three years in prison for illegal medical practice, state media reported.

He Jiankui, who shocked the scientific community last year by announcing the birth of twin girls whose genes had allegedly been altered to confer immunity to HIV, was also fined three million yuan (\$430,000), Xinhua news agency said. He, who was educated at Stanford University, was sentenced by a court in Shenzhen for "illegally carrying out the human embryo gene-editing intended for reproduction", Xinhua said. Two of his fellow researchers were also sentenced. Zhang Renli was handed a two-year jail term and fined one million yuan while Qin Jinzhou was given 18 months, suspended for two years, and fined 500,000 yuan.

The trio had not obtained qualifications to work as doctors and had knowingly violated China's regulations and ethical principles, according to the court verdict, Xinhua said. They had acted "in the pursuit of personal fame and gain" and seriously "disrupted medical order", it said. The researchers had forged ethical review materials and recruited couples where the husband was HIV positive for their gene-editing experiments.

The trial was held behind closed doors as the case related to "personal privacy", Xinhua said. He's gene-editing experiments resulted in two pregnancies: the twin girls and third baby which had not previously been confirmed, it said. He announced in November last year that the world's first gene-edited babies—the twins—had been born that



HONG KONG: This file photo taken on Saturday shows Chinese scientist He Jiankui taking part in a question and answer session after speaking at the Second International Summit on Human Genome Editing in Hong Kong. — AFP

month after he altered their DNA to prevent them from contracting HIV by deleting a certain gene under a technique known as CRISPR. Days later, He, a former associate professor at the Southern University of Science and Technology in Shenzhen, told a biomedical conference in Hong Kong he was "proud" of his gene-editing work.

'Not safe'

The claim shocked scientists worldwide, raising questions about bioethics and putting a spotlight on China's lax oversight of scientific research. "That technology is not safe," said Kiran Musunuru, a genetics professor at the University of Pennsylvania, explaining that the CRISPR molecular "scissors" often cut next to the targeted gene, causing unexpected mutations.

"It's very easy to do if you don't care about the consequences," Musunuru said. Amid the outcry, He was placed under police investigation, the government ordered a halt

to his research work and he was fired by his Chinese university. While He's actions "went well beyond what was ethically acceptable", the lack of transparency while his case was ongoing was also concerning, said Julian Hitchcock, a lawyer at Bristows LLP, which specializes in human gene editing.

"News of the court's treatment of He Jiankui and his associates therefore appears to be something of a relief," Hitchcock said in a statement, while calling for China to publish the full details of the judgment.

Gene-editing for reproductive purposes is illegal in most countries. China's health ministry issued regulations in 2003 prohibiting gene-editing of human embryos, though the procedure is allowed for "non-reproductive purposes". He's gene editing meant to immunize the twins against HIV may have failed in its purpose and created unintended mutations, scientists said earlier this month after the original research was published for the first time.

He claimed a medical breakthrough that could "control the HIV epidemic", but it was not clear whether he had even been successful in immunizing the babies against the virus because the team did not reproduce the gene mutation that confers this resistance, scientists told the MIT Technology Review.

While the team targeted the right gene, they did not replicate the "Delta 32" variation required, instead creating novel edits whose effects are not clear. Moreover, CRISPR remains an imperfect tool because it can lead to unwanted or "off-target" edits, making its use in humans hugely controversial. In 2015, a UN bioethics committee called for a stop to human embryo gene editing for fears it could be used to modify the human race. But a year later Britain granted scientists permission to edit embryo DNA in research on the causes of infertility and miscarriages. And in 2017, a US science advisory committee said such modification should be allowed in future to eliminate disease. In November this year the World Health Organization said it would create a global registry to track research into human genetic manipulation following the backlash to He's announcement. — AFP

Bushfires reach Melbourne as heatwave fans Australia blazes

MELBOURNE: Around 100,000 people were urged to flee five Melbourne suburbs yesterday evening as Australia's spiraling bushfire crisis killed a volunteer firefighter battling a separate blaze in the countryside. Authorities in the country's second-biggest city downgraded an earlier bushfire emergency warning but said residents should steer clear of the blaze, which has burned through 40 hectares (nearly 100 acres) of grassland.

In Bundoora—just 16 kilometers (10 miles) north of the city center and home to two major Australian university campuses—the fire's spread toward houses had been halted for now but it was yet to be brought under control, said Victoria Emergency. Local media showed images of water bombers flying over neighborhoods, and families hosing down their homes in the hope of halting the fire's spread.

A volunteer firefighter died in New South Wales state and two others suffered burns while working on a blaze more than five hours south-west of Sydney, the Rural Fire Service said. "It's believed that the truck rolled when hit by extreme winds," the agency said in a tweet. Ten others, including two volunteer firefighters, have been killed so far this fire season. The crisis has focused attention on climate change—which scientists say is creating a longer and more intense bushfire season—and sparked street protests calling for immediate action to tackle global warming.

While conservative Prime Minister Scott Morrison belatedly acknowledged a link between the fires and climate change, he has continued his staunch support of Australia's lucrative coal mining industry and ruled out further action to reduce emissions. The blazes have also destroyed more than 1,000 homes and scorched more than three million hectares (7.4 million acres) — an area bigger than Belgium.

A heatwave sweeping the country yesterday fuelled the latest destruction in Australia's devastating summer fire season, which has been turbocharged by a prolonged drought and climate change.

Conditions worsened on Friday with high winds and temperatures soaring across the country—reaching 47 degrees Celsius (117 Fahrenheit) in Western Australia and topping 40 degrees in every region—including the usually temperate island of Tasmania. More than a dozen blazes are also raging in Victoria's East Gippsland countryside, where authorities said "quite a number" of the 30,000 tourists visiting the usually picturesque region had heeded calls to evacuate.

Some of the fires were burning so intensely that hundreds of firefighters were pulled back beyond a front estimated to stretch 1,000 kilometers (600 miles). It was deemed "unsafe" for them to remain in bushland areas, Gippsland fire incident controller Ben Rankin said, describing the situation as "very intense".

'Too late to leave'

Authorities had warned tourists enjoying Australia's summer holidays in East Gippsland that the fires would cut off the last major road still open. Victoria Emergency Management commissioner Andrew Crisp said residents and holiday makers still in the area faced being stranded as it was now "too late to leave", with his agency warning it was "not possible" to provide aid to all visitors in the area.

Neighbouring South Australia is also experiencing "catastrophic" fire conditions. The Country Fire Service's Brenton Eden said it would be a "very dangerous" day for people in the state, with "dry" thunderstorms—which produce thunder and lightning but no rain—already sparking a number of fires, including an emergency-level blaze on Kangaroo Island.

"Winds are gusting and unfortunately this is a dry lightning front that is going to move rapidly across South Australia," he told national broadcaster ABC. Conditions were also expected to deteriorate in worst-hit New South Wales, where 100 fires were burning yesterday morning including more than 40 uncontained. Sydney and other major cities have been shrouded in toxic bushfire smoke haze for weeks, forcing children to play indoors and causing professional sporting events to be cancelled. The capital Canberra has cancelled its New Year's Eve fireworks display due to a total fire ban in the Australia Capital Territory, while several regional towns have also followed suit. A petition to cancel Sydney's famous New Year's Eve fireworks and use the money to fight bushfires ringing the city has topped 270,000 signatures, but officials say the show will go on. — AFP

2 more arrested in Gabon anti-graft sweep

LIBREVILLE, Gabon: Two senior officials, including a former minister, have been detained in an ongoing anti-graft operation in Gabon, a source close to the investigation said yesterday. Justin Ndongangoye, a former transport minister and lawmaker, "was arrested on Thursday after trying to flee to Congo and is currently in custody," the source said.

Alexis Ndouna, a former senior figure in the ruling party, was extradited on Saturday to Gabon from neighboring Congo, where he had been detained. Ndouna is "under investigation for embezzlement of public funds and also for a case of (alleged) rape of a minor," the source said.

Ndouna was picked up in the capital of the Republic of Congo, also called Congo-Brazzaville, under an international arrest warrant, issued in October, for alleged sex with a 14-year-old schoolgirl. Both Ndongangoye and Ndouna

are close associates of President Ali Bongo's former chief of state, Brice Laccruche Alihanga—the central figure in an anti-graft crackdown codenamed Scorpion.

Around a dozen people are now in custody, including three former ministers and a former presidential spokesman. Laccruche was arrested on December 3 along with two other figures deemed to be his friends—Tony Ondo Mba, the former energy minister, and Noel Mboumba, former oil minister.

Laccruche, appointed chief of staff in 2017, gained a reputation as a power broker in the central African state after Bongo suffered a stroke in October last year. Bongo returned to the country after several months abroad for treatment. Laccruche was dismissed as chief of staff in early November after Bongo stepped up his public appearances in a sign of improving health.

Bongo, 60, has also appointed his son, Nouredin Bongo Valentin, 28, to a supporting role—"general coordinator of presidential affairs". The oil-rich state has been governed by Bongo since 2009. He was elected president after the death of his father, Omar Bongo Ondimba, who came to power in 1967. The country has long had a reputation for corruption and inequality. — AFP



MAZAR-I-SHARIF: German troops display a military vehicle at the NATO military base Camp Marmal on the outskirts of Mazar-i-Sharif. At least seven Afghan soldiers were killed when the Taliban attacked their base on December 24, the latest brazen assault in Afghanistan's north, where local and international forces are bracing for violent months ahead. — AFP

Taliban deny ceasefire plans in Afghanistan

KABUL: The Taliban yesterday denied agreeing to any ceasefire in Afghanistan after rumors swirled of a potential deal that would see a reduction in fighting after more than 18 years of war. The statement from the insurgents comes as local and international forces brace for another bloody winter amid renewed US-Taliban talks, after President Donald Trump called off the negotiations earlier this year over insurgent attacks.

"In the past few days, some media have been releasing untrue reports about a ceasefire... The fact is that, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has no ceasefire plans," the Taliban said.

The US and the Afghan government in Kabul have long called for a ceasefire with the Taliban, including during the year of negotiations between Washington and the Taliban that were abruptly called off by Trump in September. However, the militants have repeatedly stated that any potential truce will only be ironed out after American troops withdraw from the country.

The US-Taliban talks, held mainly in

Doha, were aimed at allowing Washington to begin withdrawing troops in return for various security guarantees. They were on the brink of a deal when Trump abandoned the effort in September, citing Taliban violence. Negotiations have since restarted in Doha, but were earlier this month put on a "pause". Trump is looking to slash the troop presence in Afghanistan, potentially even before a deal between Washington and the Taliban is cemented.

Meanwhile deadly bouts of fighting continue, with tens of thousands of Afghan security forces killed since they inherited combat operations from NATO at the end of 2014. Every day Afghans also continue to bear the brunt of the bloody conflict. Last week the UN said the country had passed a grim milestone this year, with more than 100,000 Afghan civilians killed or wounded over the past decade.

A UN tally found that last year was the deadliest on record, with at least 3,804 civilian deaths caused by the war—including 927 children. Afghanistan is also struggling with an ongoing political dispute after officials announced preliminary results in the latest presidential elections that put President Ashraf Ghani on track to secure a second term. Elections authorities have yet to declare the results as final after receiving more than 16,000 complaints about the polls, with the ultimate tally expected in the coming weeks. — AFP

2019 was hottest year on record for Russia

MOSCOW: This year was the hottest ever registered in Russia, the country's weather chief said yesterday, as climate change pushes global temperatures to record highs.

"This year in Russia was the hottest for the entire period of instrumental observations," the head of the Gidrometsentr weather service, Roman Vilfand, told Russian news agencies. He said Moscow's average temperature for 2019 had hit 7.6-7.7 degrees Celsius (45.7-45.9 degrees Fahrenheit), beating the previous record by 0.3 degrees. Vilfand said January will continue to be warmer than usual in almost all regions of Russia. Weather records have been kept since 1879 in Moscow and since 1891 in Russia as a whole.

Global warming has sent temperatures rising around the world, with the United Nations saying earlier this month that 2019 was on course to be one of the three hottest years on record. Known for its cold winters, Moscow has seen its warmest December in a century this year. While some flurries fell yesterday, the Russian capital—normally blanketed with snow by mid-December—has seen a largely snowless and cloudy last month of the year.

The city's ski resorts were closed and spring buds were beginning to show on trees—three or more months too early.

The capital usually puts on huge winter celebrations during the national holidays over the first eight days of January and this year is resorting to unusual measures like dumping artificial snow in central Moscow. Muscovites ridiculed city hall last week when piles of snow appeared out of nowhere on central Tverskaya avenue, and officials explained they were constructing a snowboarding hill from snow gathered at the capital's ice skating rinks. — AFP

Analysis

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SMAC in the DARQ: Five trends shaping tech in 2020

In 2020, will the wow factor return to consumer hardware? Will blockchain and 5G punch into the mainstream? Or will the world unify against Big Tech's tax-avoiding practices? AFP looks at five themes shaping the world of technology, after a year in which debate intensified over the industry's exploitation of its customers' privacy.

5G's unfulfilled promise

Super-fast fifth-generation network speeds are meant to revolutionize communications along with areas like urban transport. But so far, 5G has failed to meet expectations due to the lagging build of infrastructure in many places. Apple has yet to launch a compatible phone, unlike rivals including Samsung. The rollout should quicken next year as more countries install base stations and networking equipment – although US President Donald Trump's war on Chinese sector leader Huawei remains a wild card. As smartphone sales plateau around the world, manufacturers have been focusing more on ancillary services. "You have to sell the entire experience, the entire ecosystem," Dominique Bindeles, senior analyst for home and tech with London-based research firm Euromonitor International, told AFP. Highlighting Apple's success in payments and peripheral devices such as AirPods, Bindeles predicted that smart earphones, along with speakers and at-home devices connected on the "internet of things", would be among the more dynamic sectors in 2020.

Digital assistants such as Alexa and Siri may start talking to each other, after Amazon, Apple and Google this month formed an alliance with other industry players to develop a common standard for smart home devices. Another trend could be consolidation in TV streaming, after Apple and Disney joined Netflix, Amazon Video and some national broadcasters in a crowded subscription market.

Leap into the quantum dark

For the industry at large, business consultancy Accenture this year coined the acronym DARQ to denote four major trends: distributed ledger technology (such as blockchain), artificial intelligence (AI), extended reality and quantum computing. Unbreakable blockchain networks of computers have already been generating virtual currencies in the form of bitcoin and its ilk, bypassing the need for a regulator like a government or central bank.

Facebook wants to make the tech respectable through its "Libra" project, but has hit political opposition around the world, and several financial partners have pulled out. Unwilling to let private enterprise dictate terms, China and other nations are building their own digital payments systems, which could see fruition next year. However, blockchain networks devour huge amounts of energy, and concerns will mount about their environmental impact as debate intensifies more broadly about tech's contribution to climate change.

The price of privacy

Most companies are now actively engaged across the spectrum of another tech acronym, SMAC: Social, mobile, analytics and cloud. For consumers, SMAC is felt in how we communicate with friends and how we search and shop. That is accentuating fears about privacy, after a series of data leaks at Facebook first laid bare how much of our online lives are exploited by companies and political parties. "People are becoming more conscious of sharing data but also in the same moment, the Nest cameras and smart speakers are flying off the shelves," said Bindeles. "There's a huge divide. People have been learning to trade privacy for convenience. It's just another currency." Amnesty International, in a hard-hitting study last month into Facebook and Google, said that tradeoff amounts to a "Faustian bargain" which imperils our human rights.

Tech wars

To Beijing's anger, Washington alleges that Huawei and another telecoms group, ZTE, are little more than shell fronts for Chinese spy chiefs. Ni Lexiong, professor at the Shanghai National Defense Strategy Institute, said US sanctions depriving those firms of access to US components would only encourage China to stand on its own feet. "In the end, once China has formed its own industrial chain in the field of artificial intelligence, the United States will also lose a large market," he said. Samm Sacks, an expert on China's digital economy at the Washington think tank New America, said the tech standoff could harm progress in areas such as precision medicine and AI-based diagnoses. The two countries have cooperated in research, "and severing that could have global consequences", she warned.

Taxing times

The US presidential election next November will likely prove another flashpoint over disinformation peddled on social media. Democratic hopeful Elizabeth Warren wants Amazon, Facebook and Google to be broken up on anti-trust grounds. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development is meanwhile due by June 2020 to present a "unified approach" for richer countries to levy a digital tax on Internet giants. Some like France have gone ahead with their own tax, igniting another front in Trump's multifaceted trade wars as the US threatens tariffs on a range of French goods. — AFP

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan delivers a speech next to the first Turkish-made electric cars by TOGG company during a launch ceremony in the Gebze district of Kocaeli. Production facilities were announced to be completed in 2021 and the first car to be produced in 2022. Turkey has mobilized 750 million Turkish liras (over \$126 million) to fund innovation and regional development, according to the country's industry and technology minister. — AFP

10 tech and privacy hot spots for 2020

From whether governments should use facial recognition for surveillance to what data internet giants should be allowed to collect, 2019 was marked by a heated global debate around privacy and technology. The Thomson Reuters Foundation asked 10 privacy experts what issues will shape the conversation in 2020:

1. CALIFORNIA DIGITAL PRIVACY LAW - Cindy Cohn, executive director, Electronic Frontier Foundation: "A California law giving consumers more control over their personal information, like the right to know what data businesses have collected about them, to delete it and to opt-out of its sale comes into effect on Jan. 1, 2020. The legislation could have a ripple effect across the United States, or lead to the passage of a federal law. This could be good news, if a federal law was to mandate some basic privacy guarantees that states could improve on - or bad news, if it was to instead block stronger state laws."

2. DIGITAL STRIP SEARCHES - Silkie Carlo, director, Big Brother Watch: "From where we have been to who we have spoken to, our phones contain mountains of data that is increasingly sought after by police during investigations. So-called "digital strip searches", where crime victims are asked to hand over their phones, are becoming common place all around the world. In Britain, victims of rape are now routinely required to give police full downloads of their phones, and police can keep the data for 100 years. It's no coincidence that almost 50 percent of victims are dropping their cases. There's no law in the UK around this and it's likely we'll see a showdown between police, data regulators and privacy advocates in 2020."

3. FACIAL RECOGNITION - Jameson Spivack, policy associate, center on privacy & technology, Georgetown Law Centre: "In 2019, face recognition technology became an integral part of the public debate about privacy, as people realized just how much of a risk this technology poses to civil rights and liberties. Public officials have responded, with bans and proposed regulation at all levels of government. These conversations will come to a head in 2020. In the US this could mean new federal, state, or local policies around how law enforcement is allowed to use (or not use) face recognition; rules for companies developing the technology; and/or increased

enforcement action from entities like the Federal Trade Commission or state attorneys general."

4. BEHAVIOURAL ADVERTISING - Karolina Iwanska, lawyer, Panoptikon Foundation: "A wave of complaints against the use of personal information to target advertising online have been filed with data authorities across the European Union over the past two years. The Irish data protection authority - which is a lead authority for Google - started an investigation into the company's advertising business and the British ICO has published a damning report on the ad-tech industry. 2020 should bring much needed decisions in these cases, potentially leading to fines and further restrictions on companies' use of people's data."

5. EU BUDGET - Edin Omanovic, advocacy director, Privacy International: "Next year, the EU will decide its budget for the years 2021-2028. How it will spend what is likely to be in excess of 1 trillion euro (\$1.10 trillion) will have a transformative impact not just on its residents, but around the world. For the first time, it will spend more on migration control than on developing Africa, often involving some sort of surveillance, which could pose huge threats to privacy and other human rights."

6. AI TECHNOLOGIES - Diego Naranjo, head of policy, European Digital Rights: "A 2019 report on facial recognition by the EU's rights agency represented a crucial step in the debate that we as societies need to have prior to deploying such technologies, which affect privacy, data protection, and other rights. We could end up implementing practices in Europe which horrify us when they are implemented elsewhere, for example in China. This conversation, as well as examining the impact of other technologies, like the potential discriminatory impact of "AI-based lie detectors" on vulnerable groups, such as migrants, will be an important part of the debate in 2020."

7. ALGORITHMS' DECISION MAKING - Sandra Wachter, professor, Oxford Internet Institute: "The EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) currently focus on things like transparency, consent and notification of data collection, but not on how we are evaluated after data is collected. This means users have few rights to challenge or contest how they are assessed by algorithms pro-

cessing their information, which is worrisome since our digital identity steers our paths in lives and impacts our opportunities. In 2020, the EU's data watchdog will publish several recommendations on how to improve data rights. This is a great opportunity to give guidance to transform the GDPR, introducing more controls over how algorithms evaluate us."

8. TARGETED POLITICAL ADS - Matthew Rice, Scotland director, Open Rights Group: "Personal data is becoming ever more central in the operations of political campaigns, as parties buy up commercial data sets in an attempt to derive the voters' opinions and decide whether to target them online and how. This practice stretches the limits of data protection laws and strains trust in democratic systems. With the US presidential elections taking place in 2020 expect to see a huge amount of attention paid on what personal data parties are using and how they are using it."

9. BIOMETRICS TECHNOLOGIES - Carly Kind, director, Ada Lovelace Institute: "In 2020 biometrics technologies are likely to come under the serious scrutiny of regulators in Europe (and possibly beyond). We're approaching a tipping point in public concern about the increasing ubiquity of facial recognition. In China 84 percent of people surveyed want the opportunity to review or delete facial data collected about them. EU authorities have promised facial recognition regulation will be forthcoming in 2020. It is critical that it looks beyond facial recognition to the entire gambit of AI-enabled biometric technologies that will be rolled out in the years to come."

10. IRELAND'S DATA AUTHORITY - Paul-Olivier Dehaye, co-founder, Persondata.io: "In 2020, Ireland is likely to come under increased pressure from other European countries to take a stronger stance on data protection after years of lax enforcement. Thanks to the EU's harmonization mechanisms, the Irish data authority could be compelled to adjust to the stricter parameters used by its EU counterparts when deciding on the growing number of privacy complaints filed by EU citizens. As Ireland hosts the European headquarters of US technology firms like Facebook and Google, this would have far-reaching consequences across the bloc." — Reuters

From tattoos to Xmas cake, 7 unique ways into life after slavery

With awareness over modern-day slavery mounting in 2019, more efforts are being taken to help people rescued from extreme exploitation, from using bikes, to cakes to hair-dressing, and stop them from returning into a life of servitude. An estimated 40 million people globally are trapped in various forms of slavery, with governments and businesses developing more policies to address its causes and effects and varying organizations trying to help those abused.

As we enter a new decade, the Thomson Reuters Foundation highlights 7 unique initiatives helping survivors of slavery to break the cycle and rediscover their place in the world:

1. In the United States, Survivors Ink helps victims of sex trafficking who have been tattooed for the purpose of identification with a brand, serial number, or a pimp's name. The grassroots project helps people take back ownership of their bodies and lives with artists tattooing over these markers.

2. India's Beti Zindabad Bakery is run by a team of survivors, producing breads and sweets year round for the small town of Kansabel in central-eastern India. As year-end approaches, their workload skyrockets due to a large Christian population in Chhattisgarh state and demand for Christmas cake.

3. At Outland Denim in Cambodia, survivors make jeans with a message. The boutique factory went viral when Meghan Markle was photographed wearing a pair of the jeans into which seamstresses stitch their personal stories in a pocket.

4. Kranti works with women and girls in Mumbai's red light district by helping to assess their talent and desires. One sex worker's daughter learned to play drums, won a scholarship to the United States, and is now home teaching music to the next generation.

5. Bagel Beigl is a gourmet sandwich shop in downtown Belgrade in Serbia that has been employing survivors to make and deliver their creations for 12 years, while pumping profits back into the fight against trafficking in Eastern Europe.

6. The Kate Korpi Salon in central Phnom Penh is the go-to place for Cambodia's A-list ahead where the stylists - who go through a rigorous two-year apprenticeship - arrive via charities that work with young men and women with dark pasts.

7. Bikes in Bamboo in northern Chiang Mai on the Thai border with Myanmar aims to disrupt the flow of migrants into exploitation by employing them to make bikes from bamboo and hemp resin for export around the world. The first orders are set to go out at the start of 2020. — Reuters

From sausage rolls to hairy female scientists: 10 2019 offbeat stories

From hit songs about sausage rolls to the world's first odor map, here are 10 of the more offbeat news stories from 2019:

1. Sausage rolls hit No. 1 again in UK Christmas charts

British YouTuber LadBaby scored his second consecutive No. 1 Christmas hit, this time with a version of "I Love Rock & Roll" again focused on the popular UK pastry. The song, raising money to feed people in need, was packed with meaty puns sung by Mark Hoyle aka LadBaby and his wife Roxanne and the chorus: "I love sausage rolls, so put another one in the oven, baby". Last year he hit No. 1 with "We Built This City (on sausage rolls)".

2. Manners might be environmentally rude

With more than 64 million unnecessary "thank you" emails per day, Britons significantly boost the country's carbon output, according to a recent study. If each person sent one less, Britain could reduce its output by 16,433 tons.

3. The first map of the world's stinky areas

Tested in Barcelona, the D-Noses project allows residents to report unpleasant smells through the free OdourCollect app. Its aim is to help residents pressure politicians to address odour nuisance which, according to experts, can cause a number of ailments including headaches, stress and respiratory problems.

4. Hairy female scientists

Dr. Ellen Currano, an associate professor of paleobotany at the University of Wyoming in the United States, got fed up with being overlooked as a female scientist despite doing the same, muddy, field work. She founded the "The Bearded Lady Project: Challenging the Face of Science", with a website, two documentary films, and a travelling exhibit featuring portraits of about 100 female paleontologists

with stuck-on facial hair sharing stories about equal pay and field work opportunities.

5. Women reclaim their space

British student Laila Laurel designed an anti-"manspreading" chair, shaped with a wedge that narrows towards the front, forces the user to keep their knees together and stops them from invading the space of a person sitting next to them.

6. Nice house in that selfie - shame it's not yours

In an era when few can afford to buy the actual lifestyle, Instagrammers are using expensive London properties as the backdrop to social media posts. With thousands flocking to Notting Hill - one of London's priciest postcodes - some owners get annoyed, while others let the mostly young people following the trend to pretend to live a life they can't afford.

7. Women put on spin on England soccer anthem

When England's famous soccer anthem was re-written for the country's female football team ahead of the women's World Cup, "three Lions" become "three Lionesses" in the new lyrics with a roll-call of stars from the England women's team.

8. Houston, we have a problem

The first all-female spacewalk in March - Women's History Month - was supposed to mark a giant leap for womankind but had to be cancelled when NASA realized it only had one small spacesuit and two sized small female astronauts, Anne McClain and Christina Koch. The mission was accomplished seven months later in October.

9. Pokemon Go Slow

Pokemon Go, the augmented-reality game, was lauded by Spanish retirees who say it keeps them mentally and physically healthy. The residents of the town of Badalona, north of Barcelona, have joined a European initiative to improve the health and quality of life of older citizens by searching for "Pikachus" and "Weedles" and mixing with other people.

10. "Oi Trump"

An art student had a clear message for Donald Trump as he flew into Britain in June on a state visit. Ollie Nancarrow, 18, spent a weekend mowing "climate change is real" in giant letters and a massive polar bear into grass underneath the US President's flight path into London. Nancarrow also wrote "Oi Trump" and mowed a penis into another field. — Reuters

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12 Emerging-market assets gain as trade outlook improves; ruble up



13 BoE chief Carney asks corporates to act faster on climate change



14 German Bund yield rises to 7-month high as stellar year draws to a close



BANGKOK: A general view of the Thonburi Rail Yard on the western side of Bangkok yesterday. Thailand is set to end 2019 at the weakest pace of growth in five years and little to cheer about next year, as Southeast Asia's second-largest economy faces headwinds from global trade tensions. —AFP

Thai economy ends gloomy year, no cheer for 2020

Exports to remain weak, baht currency to outperform

BANGKOK: Thailand is set to end 2019 at the weakest pace of growth in five years and little to cheer about next year, as Southeast Asia's second-largest economy faces headwinds from global trade tensions, a surging baht and rising political risks. The export-reliant country has been sharply hit by the Sino-US trade conflict. Exports may fall 3.3 percent in 2019 before rising just 0.5 percent in 2020, according to the Bank of Thailand (BOT).

A strong Thai Baht, which has gained 8.3 percent against the dollar in 2019 and is Asia's top-performing currency, has added to the pressure on exports. Analysts say it could also hit tourism.

Thailand's growth has lagged peers for years, and the central bank, after several downgrades, predicts it will be just 2.5 percent this

year, the weakest pace since 2014 when the army seized power in a coup, and forecasts it would be 2.8 percent in 2020.

Some analysts are even more pessimistic. "We see growth of just 2.4 percent this year and 2.5 percent next year," said Somprawin Manprasert, chief economist of Bank of Ayudhya. "The economy is still in a slowdown," he said, adding that poor exports are now hurting domestic activity.

Charnon Boonnuch, an economist at Nomura in Singapore, said he only expected a sluggish economic recovery in 2020. Thailand is a regional production and export base for global carmakers, but car shipments fell 6 percent in the first 11 months of 2019, prompting some factories to cut work hours, said Surapong Paisitpattanapong, spokesman of the Federation of Thai Industries' auto division.

"A profit from making one car is no more than 5 percent, but our baht has gained 7 percent-8 percent. So the more they export, the more they suffer losses," he said.

In a bid to fight currency strength, the BOT imposed various steps and cut its key rate twice in 2019 to a record low of 1.25 percent, but the baht remains firm, driven by the large current account surplus.

The central bank has said that more measures are possible, adding that market intervention may be difficult as Thailand risks being added to a US watchlist of currency manipulators. The government has been trying to lift growth by infusing more funds, including a \$10 billion stimulus package, but with little impact. There was also a four-month delay in the 2020 budget to February due to a delay in cabinet formation, after an election in

March voted former junta leader Prayuth Chan-ocha back to office as prime minister with a slim majority in parliament.

Political uncertainty is rising after thousands of people recently joined the biggest protest since Prayuth's 2014 coup, following a move by authorities to ban a party that has rallied opposition to the government. In January, a court will rule on the dissolution of the Future Forward Party, which could again spark protests.

"The economy should be better next year, albeit not much, if there is no fresh political chaos," said Sanan Angubolkul, vice chairman of the Board of Trade of Thailand.

Visit Limluecha, vice chairman of the Thai National Shippers' Council, said there are no positive signs for the economy yet. "I see no light at the end of the tunnel." —Reuters

Cabin crew could prolong walkout at Germanwings



BERLIN: An empty Eurowings check-in counter is seen yesterday at Tegel airport in Berlin, as the cabin crew at Lufthansa subsidiary Germanwings began a planned three-day strike. —AFP

FRANKFURT: Cabin crew at Lufthansa subsidiary Germanwings began a planned three-day strike yesterday with their union warning the industrial dispute could last longer. Daniel Flohr, deputy head of air stewards' union UFO, told public broadcaster ZDF "we could prolong it at short notice", failing concessions from bosses, although "we don't want that". A live list on the carrier's website showed 182 flights between major German cities like Berlin, Cologne, Hamburg and Munich were slashed as UFO called members off the job. Some connections to neighboring Austria and Switzerland, including Zurich and Vienna, were also cut.

Set to be folded into Eurowings over the long term, Germanwings operates flights on behalf of the larger Lufthansa subsidiary. Around 15 percent of Eurowings flights over the three-day period were affected by the walkout, a company spokesman told AFP.

The situation at major airports was "calm" with "no queues," he said, as many passengers had been able to book on trains or other Lufthansa group airlines. "People were well informed" about the strike, the spokesman added. "We hope things stay this stable." Frankfurt airport-Germany's largest-also said on its website yesterday was a "normal day" with "occasional short waits at security checks". —AFP

Euro stocks lower, Wall St retreats on year-end profit-taking

LONDON: European stock markets were lower yesterday following a mixed performance across Asia as investors wind down and take profits at the end of year. In mid-afternoon, London's benchmark FTSE 100 index was down 0.6 percent compared with the close on Friday. In the euro-zone, Frankfurt's DAX 30 shed 0.7 percent and the Paris CAC 40 lost 0.5 percent.

US stocks sagged yesterday, retreating from record highs on the second-to-last trading day of what has been a banner year for Wall Street. In light holiday trade, investors were cheered by reporting that a top Chinese trade official was due to travel to Washington to sign a partial trade

agreement, de-escalating the two nations' bitter trade conflict.

Ten minutes into the day's trading session, the benchmark Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 0.3 percent at 28,549.23. Meanwhile, the broader S&P 500 was down 0.4 percent at 3,228.54, and the Nasdaq had lost 0.6 percent at 8,955.39. The small declines did not undo strong rally of recent weeks. The S&P 500 has closed at records in nine of the last 11 trading sessions. Analyst Patrick O'Hare of Briefing.com said the S&P had risen 4.2 percent in the last five weeks, "a terrific turn in a terrific quarter (+8.8 percent) that is ending a terrific year."

"With such a terrific move, there is a burgeoning sense that the stock market is going to endure a stretch soon that is less terrific as that big run invites some selling/rebalancing efforts," he wrote. The South China Morning Post reported yesterday that Chinese Vice Premier Liu He was due to travel to Washington this week to sign the "Phase 1" deal announced this month. Neither side had publicly confirmed the news, however. Advance data from the Commerce Department also showed a

November dip in the soaring US deficit in goods trade, pointing to further easing in the US trade gap, which could support GDP growth in the fourth quarter.

"Investors appear to be growing a tad apprehensive about chasing the record-setting US equity market... into year-end," said AxiTrader market strategist, Stephen Innes. OANDA analyst Edward Moya described trading as "light" but said that "expectations remain in place for US stocks to continue march higher" at the start of 2020.

The US Federal Reserve "has clearly signaled they will not be tightening anytime soon, the US consumer continues to impress, and as fears of both a complete collapse with global trade talks and Brexit have abated," he said. Analysts attribute the successive series of US 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. Elsewhere, oil prices climbed on continued demand, largely unmoved by comments from OPEC last week that the cartel would discuss ending production curbs next year. —Agencies

Business

BoE chief Carney asks corporates to act faster on climate change

‘80% of coal assets will be stranded and up to half of developed oil reserves’

LONDON: Bank of England head Mark Carney, soon to become UN special envoy on climate action and finance, urged companies yesterday to move faster on helping to cut carbon emissions.

In an interview with BBC radio's Today program guest-edited by Swedish teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg, Carney said the world of business needed to step up action, including on the disclosure of climate risk from their operations. "A question for every company, every financial institution is: what's your plan? We now have \$120 trillion of balance sheets of banks and asset managers wanting this type of disclosure."

Carney, due to become the United Nations' special envoy for climate change next year when he steps down from the bank, told BBC radio that global warming could render the assets of many financial companies worthless. Carney cited pension fund analysis that showed the policies of companies pointed to global warming of 3.7 to 3.8 degrees Celsius, compared with the 1.5-degree target outlined in the Paris Agreement on climate change. But he stated that such action is "not moving fast enough".

Asked whether pension funds should divest from fossil fuels even if the returns are currently attractive, Carney said: "Well, that hasn't been the case, but they could make that argument. They need to make the argument, to be clear about why is that going to be the case if a substantial proportion of those assets are going to be worthless."

Carney noted that "up to 80 percent of coal assets will be stranded (and) up to half of developed oil reserves" if current climate targets are to be met. Shell's gas and new energies director Maarten Wetselaar, acknowledged the need for "urgent action" on climate change by companies.

But he said regulators and customers needed to play their part, too. "We see this very much as a transition where we need to replace the consumption of fossil fuels with a consumption of low-carbon products and as that consumption goes down then obviously the production of it will go down as well," Wetselaar told BBC radio.

One of Carney's last tasks as Bank of England governor before he steps down early next year has been to put in place systems that would eventually lead to British banks being stress-tested for risks posed by climate change. The 2015 Paris agreement saw nations commit to limiting glob-

al warming to two degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels as a way of curbing the worst impacts of global warming. A safer cap of 1.5C was included as a goal for nations to work towards.

"As a consequence, the climate will stabilize at the much higher level," Carney said the financial sector had made a lot of progress in disclosing the risks to their assets from climate change, but he warned that progress was not fast enough. He called on political leaders to effect change today and avoid selective information and spin.

"To deliver, there needs to be shared understanding about what's necessary, it is reasonable for there to be debates at the margin about where does the role of the state stop and what's the role of markets," Carney said.

He said there would need to be a mix of public investment and change driven by financial markets because of their power to reflect judgments about the future value of assets in a world affected by climate change. Earlier this month, the BoE said Britain's top banks and insurers should be tested together for the first time in 2021 to quantify the potential financial damage from climate change on their businesses. — Agencies



LONDON: Financial services have been too slow to cut investment in fossil fuels, a delay that could lead to a sharp increase in global temperatures, Bank of England Governor Mark Carney said in an interview broadcast yesterday.

US, China biggest WTO winners: Study

FRANKFURT: Membership of the World Trade Organization has benefitted the US and China more than any other nations, a study published yesterday found, as the two powers seek to defuse a months-long trade conflict. The Bertelsmann Foundation research showed WTO membership has boosted the US's gross domestic product by \$87 billion in the 25 years since the country joined.

China, which became a member only in 2001, gained \$86 billion, while Germany added \$66 billion.

"Even if no organization is perfect, anyone who believes they can rely on a system of bilateral trade agreements instead of the WTO risks enormous losses of prosperity in international trade," said Bertelsmann trade expert Christian Bluth. With 164 member countries, the WTO will celebrate

a rocky 25th anniversary on January 1, 2020. Washington refuses to name new judges to its appellate body, blocking arbitration of trade disputes.

Washington and Beijing have nonetheless struck a truce in their tit-for-tat tariff war, hoping to sign a preliminary trade deal in January. Around the world, Bertelsmann found WTO members gained on average 4.5 percent of GDP from membership.

The total increase reached \$855 billion or one percent of global output, the study showed. And around the world, WTO members' exports increased an average of 14 percent between 1980 and 2016, while non-members' exports fell almost six percent. So far, "nations with strong exports and production are the main beneficiaries" of WTO membership, the Bertelsmann Foundation said in a statement, pointing to countries such as South Korea and Mexico as further winners.

European countries with smaller manufacturing sectors have not been able to make such large gains from WTO membership. France's output was boosted by \$25 billion, while Britain's added \$22 billion—both well below the average increase



MONTEVIDEO: A boy stands on the stairs at Ramirez beach, with the headquarters of the Mercosur trade bloc behind, as the sun sets in Montevideo on Sunday. — AFP

of 4.5 percent of GDP. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen has said she planned to meet US

President Donald Trump "at the beginning of 2020", with trade one of the major issues on the table. — AFP

Oxygen bar to fake rain: 10 ways India tried to beat its 'airpocalypse'

NEW DELHI: From an oxygen bar to artificial rain, a number of initiatives and ideas were floated in 2019 to battle India's pollution crisis. India is home to 15 of the 20 most polluted cities in the world, with New Delhi named as the capital with the dirtiest air, according to IQ AirVisual, a Swiss-based group that gathers air-quality data globally, and Greenpeace.

Large swathes of north India, including Delhi - a metropolis of about 20 million - are covered under a thick blanket of toxic air at the onset of winter. Vehicle and industrial emissions, dust from building sites, smoke from the burning of rubbish and burning of crop fields contribute to what is locally dubbed as the "airpocalypse". Here are some ways authorities, engineers and companies tried to help Indians breathe easy:

1. Delhi's oxygen bar

Delhi residents gasping for fresh air could head to Oxy Pure, a bar that offers 15 minutes of "oxygen enriched air" for about \$7 in seven different flavors ranging from lavender and lemongrass to cinnamon and spearmint. But it may be a costly affair in a country where the average person spends \$1.80 a day, according to research by Goldman Sachs and news website IndiaSpend.

2. Fresh air in a can

When pollution in Delhi is "hazardous" levels, Indians could go online and order themselves cans of fresh air. Several compa-



NEW DELHI: A woman walks along a road amid smog and foggy conditions on a cold morning in New Delhi on Sunday. — AFP

nies, like Vitality Air in Canada and Indian brand Pure Himalayan Air, sell "pure air" in 10-litre cans for anywhere between 550 rupees and 5,400 rupees (\$75). Estimates suggest that the average adult inhales and exhales about 8 litres of air per minute.

3. Wearable air purifier

For those who did not want to be cooped up inside on smoggy days, a wearable air purifier called AirTamer was the answer. The 50 gram gadget, which can be worn as a necklace, emits negative ions that push pollutants away. It sells for nearly 10,000 rupees in Delhi, a city described as a "gas chamber" by its own chief minister and where doctors say the air is as bad as smoking up to 20 cigarettes a day.

4. Anti-smog gun

Delhi residents craving clear skies could turn to an anti-smog gun, which ejects fine

droplets of water at high speeds to flush out air pollutants. Shaped like a hair dryer and mounted on a flatbed truck, the cannon can blast up to 100 liters of water per minute and get rid of 95% of tiny particulate matter. Critics, however, called it a quick-fix solution that could do little to combat the noxious air.

5. Odd-even car scheme

New Delhi's authorities restricted the use of private cars for two weeks in November with the so-called "odd-even" system - allowing cars on alternate days, depending on whether their license plate ended in an odd or even number. The scheme helped little, prompting environmentalists to call for urgent action to combat air pollution.

6. Artificial rain

Authorities in the Indian capital consid-

ered cloud seeding developed by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in an effort to trigger rainfall and bring pollution levels down. But the plan was stalled as there were no planes or the technical support available to spray the seeds.

7. Roadside air purifiers

Dozens of giant air purifiers were installed at busy intersections of Delhi to combat roadside dust and vehicular pollution. India's top court in November ordered the federal and Delhi governments to install "smog towers" like those in China that can act as pollution vacuum cleaners.

Environmentalists, however, termed them as "band-aid fixes" that did not bring down small particulate matter that can penetrate the lungs and enter the blood system.

8. Purifiers at Taj Mahal

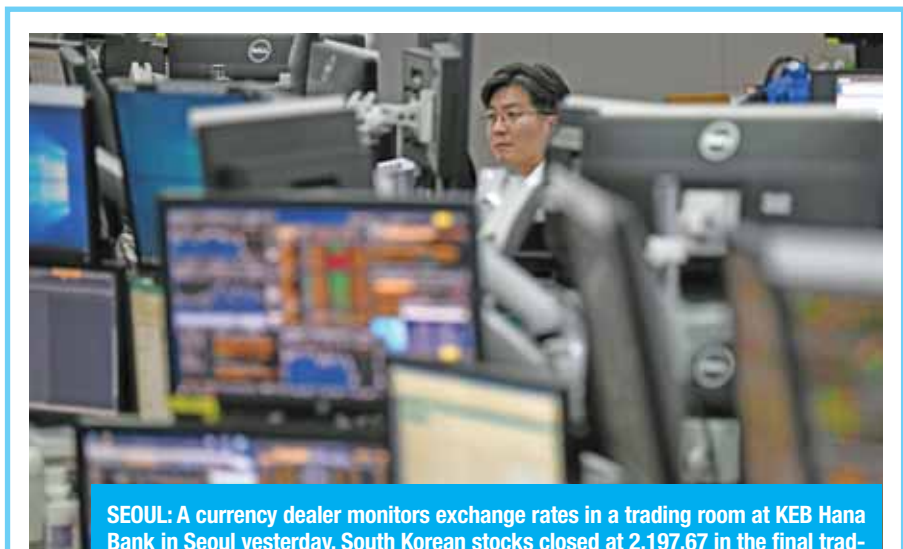
Two mobile air purifiers were fitted at the iconic Taj Mahal in November as a toxic haze shrouded the 17th century mausoleum, whose white marble is turning yellow and green weathering filthy air in the world's eighth-most polluted city of Agra.

9. Bus stop shelters

Providing a small breather for commuters, several bus stops in Delhi were curtained with thick plastic sheets, creating a what local media called a "fresh air chamber". But many said it was gimmicky as people had to step out within minutes and expose themselves to smog.

10. Ink from pollution

Chakr Innovations, started by IIT engineers, capitalized on fumes from smoke-belching back-up diesel generators by turning the soot into ink and paint. The technology can capture 90% of dangerous pollutants. The company has installed more than 50 such devices in government firms and offices as well as real estate developers. — Reuters



SEOUL: A currency dealer monitors exchange rates in a trading room at KEB Hana Bank in Seoul yesterday. South Korean stocks closed at 2,197.67 in the final trading session of 2019 yesterday. — AFP

China's blue-chips end at 8-month high on hopes of lower financing costs

SHANGHAI: China's blue-chip index closed at an eight-month high yesterday, as the country's central bank planned to switch benchmark for floating-rate loans to lower funding costs, while investors cheered signs of economic resilience following a Sino-US trade truce.

The blue-chip CSI300 index rose 1.5 percent to 4,081.63, its highest closing level since April 19, while the Shanghai Composite Index ended up 1.2 percent at 3,040.02. China's central bank said on Saturday it will use the loan prime rate (LPR) as a new benchmark for pricing existing floating-rate loans, in a step that analysts say could help lower borrowing costs and underpin economic growth.

"The purpose of the step is to make

interest rates more market-driven and help lower financing costs," said Wen Bin, an economist at Minsheng Bank in Beijing. Overall, it's a favorable news for the equities market, though the impact on bond market could be quite limited, Huatai Securities said in a report.

Signs of recovery in the economy also added to optimism for the moment. China's factory activity likely expanded again in December on stronger external demand and an infrastructure push at home, but the pace of growth is set to ease as markets await more certainty on a US-China trade truce, a Reuters poll showed. The poll followed data showing profits at China's industrial firms grew at the fastest pace in eight months in November. — Reuters

North Korea's Kim warns of 'grave' economic challenge

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has warned top ruling party officials of the "grave situation" facing the nuclear-armed state's economy and called for urgent corrective measures.

His comments, reported yesterday by state media, came on the second day of a key party meeting held ahead of a year-end deadline for Washington to shift its stance on stalled nuclear talks with Pyongyang. Kim, who chaired the meeting, said the time had come to bring about a "decisive turn" in the North's economic development. He presented the assembled officials with "tasks for urgently correcting the grave situation of the major industrial sectors of the national economy," the official KCNA news agency reported. The North does not publish economic statistics of its own, leaving outside estimates as the only available figures for its financial performance.

In July, the South Korean central bank estimated that the North's sanctions-hit economy had shrunk by 4.1 percent in 2018 — the largest contractions since the devastating famine of the 1990s.

Talks on denuclearizing the Korean peninsula have been largely deadlocked since a second summit between Kim and US President Donald Trump collapsed in Hanoi at the start of this year over what the North was willing to give in return for sanctions relief. China and Russia — the North's biggest economic partners—have proposed the easing of UN sanctions imposed over the North's nuclear weapons program, and Pyongyang has given Washington until the end of the year to offer fresh concessions. The KCNA report indicated the plenary session of the party leadership was headed into a third day yesterday—marking the first time since 1990 that it has lasted more than two days. "Pyongyang's decision to host the plenary event for multiple days illustrates how gravely it views internal and external situations," said Cheong Seong-chang, a senior researcher at the private Sejong Institute. — AFP

Liberia opposition vows to defy govt with mass protest

MONROVIA: The Liberian opposition yesterday vowed to go ahead with a mass anti-government protest planned for yesterday as the impoverished country grapples with a deep economic crisis.

The government has said it would not allow the protest in the capital Monrovia, saying it would defer all requests for permits to stage demonstrations and rallies until January 30. But Henry Costa, chairman of youth activists called the Council of Patriots (COP) who helped footballer-turned-president George Weah come to power, said the protest would still take place. "This is to inform the international community, the Liberian people and the government, that this assembly will be peaceful, and we don't intend for it to be confrontational," he told reporters.

In a previous demonstration on June 7, "we had the most peaceful protest ever in the history of Liberia. We presented our grievances to the government, we waited several months, and there was no response," he added. "We have decided to come back and send another message to the world, which we know will not be ignored this time."

Costa said he expected tens of thousands of people to take part in the demonstration.

Tensions have risen in recent weeks in the run-up to the protest, with the government accusing the opposition of calling for the "unconstitutional eviction" of Weah, who took office in January 2018 and is under growing pressure over his handling of the crisis. On Friday, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the UN's office in West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) issued a joint statement exhorting "all parties to work towards calling off this imminent protest in the general interest of Liberia and the sub-region."

Still traumatized by back-to-back civil wars and the 2014-2016 Ebola crisis, Liberia is struggling to revive its failing economy. Inflation is rampant, according to the World Bank, and civil servants regularly go unpaid. ECOWAS and UNOWAS said in their joint statement Friday that while they recognized citizens' right of assembly, they "reminded all stakeholders of their responsibility to maintain peace, security and stability of Liberia... and cautioned against any form of violence". — AFP

Business

German Bund yield rises to 7-month high as stellar year draws to a close

Yield set for biggest annual fall since 2014

LONDON: Germany's 10-year bond yield rose to a seven-month high yesterday, as optimism over US-China trade relations and the global growth outlook put bond markets on the back foot as the end of a stunning year drew to a close. Bond yields, which move in the opposite direction to the price, have risen since September as worries surrounding US-China trade tensions and Brexit ebbed, while data suggested the worst may be over for the world economy.

Analysts say bonds are unlikely to see the same steep yield falls in 2020 as they have in 2019 when trade tensions, recession fears and central bank easing drove demand for fixed income.

Indeed, Germany's 10-year bond yield rose as high as -0.186 percent yesterday. Most 10-year euro zone bond yields were 6-7 bps higher on the day, with moves exacerbated by holiday-thinned trade.

Euro zone bond markets are closed tomorrow for New Year's Eve. German, Dutch, and French yields are poised for their biggest annual declines in five years, having tumbled 42-60 bps. US Treasury yields are also set for their biggest annual yield falls since 2014. "The idea is the main bearish force for bonds is an improving growth outlook that tends to drive some rotation from fixed income to riskier markets," said John Normand, head of Cross-Asset Fundamental Strategy at J.P. Morgan, adding there were two big anchors for bonds markets.

"One is the negative cash rate environment in Europe and Japan, which is not going to change and related to that is the very dovish Fed environment ... The other

anchor is the scarcity created by very large central bank balance sheets and the persistence of QE (quantitative easing) in Europe."

The Federal Reserve has cut rates three times this year. The European Central Bank lowered its deposit rate in September and announced the return of asset purchases. China's central bank at the weekend announced a measure that would help lower borrowing costs and boost economic growth. Some analysts argue that with the US/China trade conflict far from over, demand for safe-haven bonds will remain. Year-end 2020 forecasts for German bond yields vary, highlighting the breadth of views on the economic outlook.

"Bond markets do not appear classically good value to me, but then I said that 12 months ago," said Chris Bailey, European Strategist at Raymond James. "There is much to think about in terms of fixed income markets in 2020. It could be a big/influential year and certainly decade - will there be a regime shift versus the world since 1982?"

Some analysts were bearish on Italian bonds, one of the few markets to offer investors positive yields this year. More than half of the euro zone government bond market remains in negative-yield territory.

Italian 10-year bond yields have tumbled 137 bps this year to 1.40 percent, while Greek yields have slid almost 290 bps. "We see Italian BTPs underperforming versus the German Bund and Spanish Bonos as euro zone economic stagnation continues in spite of US positivity through Q1," said Henry Occleston, a rates strategist at Mizhuo. —Reuters



Gulf Bank announces winners of Al-Danah weekly draw

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its weekly draw on 29th December 2019 announcing the names of the winners for the week of 22 - 26 December 2019. The weekly draw consists of five winners who receive KD 1,000 each, every week.

The winners this week are:

Fakhryah Mahmoud Mandani Haider
Ahmed Abduljalil Abdulrazzaq Al-Awadi
Alaa Abdulateef Ibrahim Alduhaim
Mohammed Khalifah Mohammed Almulla
Mohammad Sadeq Mohammad Jaffar Haidar Al-Rasheid

Gulf Bank's final Al-Danah draw for KD 1,000,000, will be held on 16 January 2020, where the Al-Danah millionaire will be announced at a live event. Gulf Bank encourages customers to increase their chances of winning with Al-Danah by depositing more into their Gulf Bank accounts using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services.

Al-Danah offers a number of unique services to customers, including the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card, which allows account holders to deposit money into their accounts at their convenience. Account holders can also calculate their chances of winning the draws through the 'Al-Danah Chances' calculator available on the Gulf Bank website and app. Furthermore, loyal Al-Danah customers are rewarded with loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances accumulated from the previous year, which are added to the customer's chances the following year. Therefore, the total chances earned by Al-Danah customers in 2018, have been added to their 2019 chances, and the same process will take place in 2020, and so on. Terms and conditions apply.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of KD 200 to open an account and the same amount should be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to their account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the weekly draw within two days. To take part in the Al-Danah 2020 upcoming quarterly and yearly draws, customers must meet the required hold period for each draw.

AUB continues serving customers during New Year

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) announced that it will offer various electronic banking services to customers during the New Year's holiday, as the Bank will close all its branches, including the branches at the Avenues and Boulevard malls, during this holiday from Wednesday the 1st of January to Saturday the 4th of January 2020. Branches will resume operations on Sunday, the 5th of January.

The Bank noted that customers can conduct their banking transactions through its electronic channels, including AUB Mobile Application and through the website www.ahliunited.com.kw, the bank's social media accounts, as well as the 24/7 Hayakom telebanking service on 1812000 for all requirements, inquiries and services. Customers can also conduct all their banking transactions through ATMs conveniently located across Kuwait.

On the occasion of the New Year, Ahli United Bank congratulates and extends its warmest greetings and wishes to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as well as all citizens and residents of Kuwait.

NBK welcomes customers at its airport branches during holiday

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) remains at the service of customers throughout the New Year holiday, giving them access to various services provided at its branches across Kuwait.

NBK's Airport branches at T1 and T4 terminals will continue to receive customers around the clock, seven days a week during the holidays, providing all various banking services available at other branches. The branch also exclusively carries Multi-Currency ATMs to allow travelers to withdraw from six currencies that are the Kuwaiti dinar, US dollar, euro, British pound sterling, UAE dirham, and Saudi riyal. The ATMs are conveniently located between the departure gates and the arrival area.

Warba Bank announces Al-Sunbula draw winners

KUWAIT: Warba Bank, "the Best investment Bank" and "Best Corporate Bank" in Kuwait, held its weekly Sunbula draw number 49. The draws announced the five lucky winners in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and bank officials.

The bank proudly announced the weekly draw number 49, for 5 lucky winners of the KD 1,000 prize: Awatef Mohammad Ali AlAjmi, Saad Awadh Suwaidan AlOtaibi, Ahmad Faisal Yousef AbuQamaz, Moudhi Khairallah Fahhad AlSawagh AlAzmi and Sulaiman Enaizan Saleh AlRashidi.

Al-Sunbula both account and fixed deposits are the perfect choices for customers who wish to save money and achieve steady returns while at the same time have the opportunity to win cash prizes throughout the year. In line with the bank's mission to develop and differentiate its offerings, Warba Bank has enhanced its Sunbula campaign for 2019 with more cash and prizes reaching more than KD 1 million. Warba

Customers can also continue benefiting from all our added-value service through the Online and Mobile banking services to manage their accounts and finances via NBK Online Banking or NBK Mobile Banking available for all smartphones. NBK's call center will also be available to customers round the clock. Ghadeer Al-Awadi, NBK's Head of Branches, said: "NBK's advanced ATMs are ready to serve the increasing number of transactions during the holidays, as our ATMs are equipped with the latest technologies to ensure it provides safety and security to our customers' transactions."

Al-Awadi reaffirmed the Bank's commitment to serving customers through a well-established network across Kuwait and always remaining the first choice for customers thanks to its proximity to them.

Al-Awadi added: "We monitor our ATMs and ensure they are filled whenever they drop below the limit, especially in locations where our customers tend to withdraw the most such as shopping malls, markets and leisure parks. Filling these machines is not only done with cash, but also with enough paper for customers who want to check for their account information."

In addition to the branch, NBK has made available its toll-free numbers for travelers to connect with the

Bank while traveling. Providing convenience and reliability when travelling, NBK continues to offer its customers a wide range of exclusive services for their specific needs when they travel. These services accompany customers from the moment they get on their flight and until they land safely in Kuwait. NBK also protects customers from theft, fraud and other situations they may face while traveling.

NBK continues to offer its customers a wide range of exclusive services and offers to satisfy the needs of customers. NBK has the widest banking presence with over 140 branches across four continents in 15 countries in cities that comprise Geneva, London, New York, Paris, Shanghai and Singapore and regionally in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and UAE.



Ghadeer Al-Awadi

4:55	SWISS	LX 967	Zurich	A09	A09
5:00	vueling	VY 1883	Barcelona	C62-63	C69
5:05	airBaltic	BT 202	Tallinn	C52-54	C43
5:10	AIRFRANCE	AF 1235	Paris CDG	A10	A10
5:20	SAS	SK 2680	Stockholm ARN	A06	A06
5:25	Eurowings	EW 009	Cologne/Bonn	D75-89	D74
5:30	Eurowings	EW 8044	Düsseldorf	D75-89 cancelled	
5:35	easyJet	EZY8124	London LGW	C40-50	C84
5:35	airBaltic	BT 216	Vilnius	C55-57	C38
5:40	Eurowings	EW 8004	Stuttgart	D75-89 cancelled	
5:45	SWISS	LX 969	Zurich	A08	A08
5:45	Lufthansa	LH 193	Frankfurt	B24-31	A02
5:45	Germanwings	4U 3576	Moscow DME	B26-28	B24

BERLIN: A screen displays two cancelled Eurowings flights yesterday at Tegel airport in Berlin, as the cabin crew at Lufthansa subsidiary Germanwings began a planned three-day strike.—AFP

US eyes customs deal with Mexico

MEXICO CITY: The United States is looking at ways to cooperate with Mexico on customs along their border to curb flows of illicit arms, drugs and money, the US ambassador to Mexico said. Speaking after what he called a fruitful meeting with Mexico's finance ministry, Ambassador Christopher Landau said that US Attorney

General William Barr would visit Mexico next month to discuss cooperation. "What we want to do on the border is see if we can combine our customs so that, together, we can control what comes into Mexico and also what leaves Mexico and enters the United States," Landau told reporters.

The goal is to eliminate "contraband on both sides, the drugs on one side, and the arms and money on the other," he said. Barr visited Mexico in early December to discuss issues including security, arms trafficking and money laundering with President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and other top officials. —Reuters

Burgan Bank's New Year working hours

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday that it will be officially closed during the New Year's Holiday and will resume business on Sunday (5th of January) 2020.

However, to accommodate Burgan Bank customers, the Airport Branch will resume normal working hours during the holidays, starting Wednesday 1st and Thursday 2nd of January 2020. Also, Khairan Branch will commence operations on Friday 3rd of January 2020. For more information on any products or services, customers are required to contact Burgan Bank's call center 1804080 during the holiday. Burgan Bank would like to take this opportunity and extend its best wishes and greetings in the celebration of the New Year.

The Bank has continuously improved its performance over the years through an expanded revenue structure, diversified funding sources, and a strong capital base. The adoption of state-of-the-art services and technology has positioned it as a trendsetter in the domestic market and within the MENA region. Burgan Bank's brand has been created on a foundation of real values - of trust, commitment, excellence and progression, to remind us of the high standards to which we aspire. 'People come first' is the foundation on which its products and services are developed.

What's On



Ahli Capital Investment Company supports Farah Specialist Center for the Care and Rehabilitation of the Elderly

Ahli Capital Investment Company, the investment arm of Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently organised a visit to the Farah Specialist Center for the Care and Rehabilitation of the Elderly, located in Shuwaikh. The visit is testament to Ahli Capital's commitment to spearheading initiatives focused on driving greater social cohesion through fostering community ties with the elderly and those in need of specialist care.

During the visit, Ahli Capital staff members engaged with the elderly, distributing gifts, and sharing stories and experiences, further strengthening generational ties. Ahli Capital believes strongly in creating tangible values for the community in which it operates. True to this ethos, Ahli Capital sponsored the revamping of the Center's garden. Additions include the provision of wheelchair access and the planting of trees and shrubs, creating a welcoming and relaxing environment for the residents of the centre and their families to enjoy.

Ahli Capital is committed to contributing to sustainable development of the Kuwaiti society and a key part of this commitment is realised through the creation of equal opportunities for individuals, and being a responsible member of the community.



Australian students visit ACK as part of cultural exchange program



As a part of the Ministry of Information (MoI) program for cultural exchange, six Australian university Master's and PHD students visited Kuwait for three weeks. During their tour, visiting students were taken to the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) for a day to learn about its offerings and get introduced to its facilities closely.

Australian Ambassador to Kuwait Jonathan Gilbert joined Prof. Isam Zabalawi President of ACK along with members of ACK's management to welcome the students to ACK. The students were graduates of both the Australian National University and the University of

Canberra. Students were Matthew Longworth, Riyadh Aldaqa, John Norling, Mitchell Launder, Ms Jaid Hayron, and Ms Hellen Sellers. The purpose of the program was to introduce the students to the developments in the country, and to foster the bond and understanding between Kuwait and Australia.

The students were familiarized with the College's offerings and teaching disciplines. Afterwards they were given a tour of the campus and were shown what facilities the College has to offer.

Commenting on the success of the visit, H.E. Gilbert said: "Thank you ACK for recent-

ly hosting a group of six Australian students from the Australian National University and the University of Canberra. I received extremely positive feedback on their tour of the campus, interaction with the students and ACK's educational philosophy and goals. Grateful to Kuwait's Embassy in Canberra and the Ministry of Information for undertaking this initiative to bring the six students to Kuwait and to show them firsthand the warm and longstanding relationship between our two countries, especially in regard to education. I look forward to further exchanges of Kuwaiti and Australian students in the future."

Farewell to Dr Ambalavanan, Mrs Ambalavanan and Sundarasan

Kuwait Turumurai & Pradosa group friends hosted a farewell party in honor of their group senior members Dr Ambalavanan, Mrs Priya Ambalavanan and Sundarasan. Dr Ambalavanan is working in Sabah hospital and Sundarasan who is working for Alghanim Group.

They spent their lives in Kuwait for more than two decades. The party was held in Abu Halifa. They were praised by all for their loyal services and contribution. Friends presented them with mementos and wished them for good health, peace and prosperity in all their future endeavors. Later they expressed their gratitude for acknowledging and honoring them.



MESPAAK organizes family picnic

MES College Ponnani Alumni Association Kuwait Chapter (MESPAAK) organized a family picnic. The picnic held at Riggae Garden was a delight for children and adults alike. On December 20th, the association's senior member K. Hamza inaugurated the event. Association President Lukman K.K, Vice President Aseena Yousuf, General Secretary Anas Mohammed, Treasurer Mukesh V.P, and Jaseena Lukman coordinated the picnic.

MES Ponnani College students, who had been studying in different years, got together with their families. A variety of entertainments were organized for the picnic, the old college life was reborn there. Ashraf U, Sathar, Usman Madthil, Nandan Vengalil, Abubakar Siddique, Yousuf, Shibil Ali, Abdul Nasser, Basheer, Shamsu, Swarga Sunil, Femina, Jamsheera, Shameer, Thasneem, Faiz Raghu, Altaf Usman and Lateef led the programs.



Christmastide program 2019-2020 Holy Family Cathedral

December 31st 2019 Tuesday (Morning) - Normal Masses
06.30 a.m. Holy Mass in English (Cathedral)
07.00 a.m. Holy Mass in English (Cathedral)

December 31st 2019 Tuesday New Year's Eve - Masses
05.30 p.m. Malayalam (Latin) Holy Mass
06.00 p.m. French Holy Mass
06.30 p.m. Malankara Holy Mass
07.00 p.m. Tagalog Holy Mass
08.00 p.m. Korean Holy Mass
08.30 p.m. Solemn Pontifical Holy Mass
10.30 p.m. Konkani Holy Mass
10.30 p.m. New Catechumenal Holy Mass
10.30 p.m. Coptic Arabic Holy Mass
11.45 p.m. Syro-Malabar Holy Mass
10.00 p.m. Maronite Holy Mass

January 1st 2020 Wednesday New Year's Day Holy Masses
07.00 a.m. English Holy Mass
08.30 a.m. English Holy Mass
10.30 a.m. English Holy Mass
12.00 Noon Maronite Holy Mass
02.00 p.m. Tagalog Holy Mass
03.15 p.m. Konkani Holy Mass
04.00 p.m. Tamil Holy Mass
04.30 p.m. Konkani Holy Mass
04.30 p.m. Bengali Holy Mass
05.30 p.m. English Holy Mass
05.45 p.m. Sinhala Holy Mass
06.30 p.m. English Holy Mass
07.45 p.m. Malayalam (Latin) Holy Mass
06.00 p.m. Spanish Holy Mass
Salmiya Basement
08.00 p.m. Arabic Latin Holy Mass
Salmiya Basement.



Health & Science

2019: The year gene therapy came of age

WASHINGTON: In the summer, a mother in Nashville with a seemingly incurable genetic disorder finally found an end to her suffering — by editing her genome. Victoria Gray's recovery from sickle cell disease, which had caused her painful seizures, came in a year of breakthroughs in one of the hottest areas of medical research — gene therapy.

"I have hoped for a cure since I was about 11," the 34-year-old told AFP in an email. "Since I received the new cells, I have been able to enjoy more time with my family without worrying about pain or an out-of-the-blue emergency."

Over several weeks, Gray's blood was drawn so doctors could get to the cause of her illness — stem cells from her bone marrow that were making deformed red blood cells. The stem cells were sent to a Scottish laboratory, where their DNA was modified using Crispr/Cas9 — pronounced "Crisper" — a new tool informally known as molecular "scissors."

The genetically edited cells were transfused back into Gray's veins and bone marrow. A month later, she was producing normal blood cells. Medics warn that caution is necessary but, theoretically, she has been cured. "This is one patient. This is early results. We need to see how it works out in other patients," said her doctor, Haydar Frangoul, at the Sarah Cannon Research Institute in Nashville. "But these results are really exciting."

In Germany, a 19-year-old woman was treated with a similar method for a different blood disease, beta thalassemia. She had previously needed 16 blood transfusions per year. Nine months later, she is completely free of that burden. For decades, the DNA of living organisms such as corn and salmon has been modified.

But Crispr, invented in 2012, made gene editing more widely accessible. It is much simpler than preceding technology, cheaper and easy to use in small labs. The technique has given new impetus to the perennial debate over the wisdom of humanity manipulating life itself.

"It's all developing very quickly," said French geneticist Emmanuelle Charpentier, one of Crispr's inventors and the

cofounder of Crispr Therapeutics, the biotech company conducting the clinical trials involving Gray and the German patient.

Cures

Crispr is the latest breakthrough in a year of great strides in gene therapy, a medical adventure started three decades ago, when the first TV telethons were raising money for children with muscular dystrophy.

Scientists practicing the technique insert a normal gene into cells containing a defective gene. It does the work the original could not — such as making normal red blood cells, in Victoria's case, or making tumor-killing super white blood cells for a cancer patient. Crispr goes even further: instead of adding a gene, the tool edits the genome itself.

After decades of research and clinical trials on a genetic fix to genetic disorders, 2019 saw a historic milestone: approval to bring to market the first gene therapies for a neuromuscular disease in the US and a blood disease in the European Union. They join several other gene therapies — bringing the total to eight — approved in recent years to treat certain cancers and an inherited blindness.

Serge Braun, the scientific director of the French Muscular Dystrophy Association, sees 2019 as a turning point that will lead to a medical revolution. "Twenty-five, 30 years, that's the time it had to take," he told AFP from Paris. "It took a generation for gene therapy to become a reality. Now, it's only going to go faster." Just outside Washington, at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), researchers are also celebrating a "breakthrough period."

"We have hit an inflection point," said Carrie Wolinetz, NIH's associate director for science policy. These therapies are exorbitantly expensive, however, costing up to \$2 million — meaning patients face grueling negotiations with their insurance companies. They also involve a complex regimen of procedures that are only available in wealthy countries. Gray spent months in hospital getting blood

drawn, undergoing chemotherapy, having edited stem cells reintroduced via transfusion — and fighting a general infection. "You cannot do this in a community hospital close to home," said her doctor. However, the number of approved gene therapies will increase to about 40 by 2022, according to MIT researchers. They will mostly target cancers and diseases that affect muscles, the eyes and the nervous system.

Bioterrorism

Another problem with Crispr is that its relative simplicity has triggered the imaginations of rogue practitioners who don't necessarily share the medical ethics of Western medicine. Last year in China, scientist He Jiankui triggered an international scandal — and his excommunication from the scientific community — when he used Crispr to create what he called the first gene-edited humans.

The biophysicist said he had altered the DNA of human embryos that became twin girls Lulu and Nana. His goal was to create a mutation that would prevent the girls from contracting HIV, even though there was no specific reason to put them through the process.

"That technology is not safe," said Kiran Musunuru, a genetics professor at the University of Pennsylvania, explaining that the Crispr "scissors" often cut next to the targeted gene, causing unexpected mutations. "It's very easy to do if you don't care about the consequences," Musunuru added. Despite the ethical pitfalls, restraint seems mainly to have prevailed so far. The community is keeping a close eye on Russia, where biologist Denis Rebrikov has said he wants to use Crispr to help deaf parents have children without the disability.

There is also the temptation to genetically edit entire animal species — malaria-causing mosquitoes in Burkina Faso or mice hosting ticks that carry Lyme disease in the US. The researchers in charge of those projects are advancing carefully, however, fully aware of the unpredictability of chain reactions on the ecosystem.



NASHVILLE: This handout file image released on November 29, 2019 shows Victoria Gray on a hospital bed at the Sarah Cannon Research Institute in Nashville, Tennessee, where she was treated by a Crispr-enabled gene therapy for sickle cell disease. — AFP

Charpentier doesn't believe in the more dystopian scenarios predicted for gene therapy, including American "biohackers" injecting themselves with Crispr technology bought online. "Not everyone is a biologist or scientist," she said. And the possibility of military hijacking to create soldier-killing viruses or bacteria that would ravage enemies' crops? Charpentier thinks that technology generally tends to be used for the better. "I am a bacteriologist - we have been talking about bioterrorism for years," she said. "Nothing has ever happened." — AFP

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- ◆ Hernia repair
- ◆ Surgery for reflux disease
- ◆ Minor surgeries (lipoma, sebaceous cyst, ingrowing nail)
- ◆ Hemorrhoids, fistula & anal fissure surgeries
- ◆ Breast surgeries
- ◆ Thyroid & adrenal surgeries
- ◆ Cholecystectomy & laparoscopic appendectomy
- ◆ Liver, pancreas & bile ducts surgeries

http://www.international-clinic.com Tel: 1886677

Scope of Clinical Practice:

- ◆ General & Laparoscopic Surgery
- ◆ Single-Port Surgery
- ◆ Treatment of Colo - Rectal Diseases, including Colorectal Cancer
- ◆ Surgical Treatment of Inflammatory Bowel Abscess
- ◆ Treatment of Perianal Fistula & Complex Perianal Fistula (complications)
- ◆ VAAFT Procedure (Treatment of Fistula through Fistuloscope)
- ◆ Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- ◆ Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- ◆ Stomach Balloon insertion & removal
- ◆ Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
- ◆ Gallstones & Abdominal Hernias Surgery
- ◆ Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
- ◆ Laparoscopic mini bypass
- ◆ Transanal minimally invasive surgery

Academic Certificates, Trainings & Fellowships:

- ◆ American Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of American College of Surgery
- ◆ Canadian Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
- ◆ American Board of Colo - Rectal Surgery
- ◆ American Board of Surgical Critical Care

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

مسشفى دار الشفاء
Dar Al Shifa Hospital
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DR. FAHAD AL-MUKHAIZEEM
Consultant Pediatrician

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

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

DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laparoscopic and Bariatric Surgery

Academic Certificates - Training

- ◆ Kuwait Board of General Surgery.
- ◆ (IFSO) member .
- ◆ Faculty member of (BEST).
- ◆ Member of Kuwait Surgical Association.

Scope of clinical Practice.

- ◆ Bariatric surgeries.
- ◆ Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- ◆ Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- ◆ G.I. surgeries.
- ◆ Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- ◆ Anal surgeries.

email: wbuhaimed@gmail.com Tel.: 965 22269411/ Mob.: 965 99212228
Jabriya, 4th Ring Road, Block 1A Floor 9 - Clover Center Mazaya Building

CROSSWORD 2399

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ACROSS

1. A very small circular shape.
4. Having lost freshness or brilliance of color.
12. Serving as an essential component.
15. A strong emotion.
16. A severe recurring vascular headache.
17. (Old Testament) Adam's wife in Judeo-Christian mythology.
18. The network in the reticular formation that serves an alerting or arousal function.
19. Provide with choice or abundant food or drink.
20. Swedish chemist remembered for his invention of dynamite and for the bequest that created the Nobel prizes (1833-1896).
21. A book of the New Testament.
23. An amino acid that is found in the central nervous system.
25. Alsatian artist and poet who was cofounder of Dadaism in Zurich.
26. Two surfaces meeting at an angle different from 90 degrees.
28. African tree having an exceedingly thick trunk and fruit that resembles a gourd and has an edible pulp called monkey bread.
31. A state in midwestern United States.
32. Cheap showy jewelry or ornament or clothing.
35. A bag used for carrying money and small personal items or accessories (especially by women).
42. Very sad.
44. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
46. A gradual decline (in size or strength or power or number).
47. Infections of the skin or nails caused by fungi and appearing as itching circular patches.
48. Leather with a napped surface.
50. Cooking utensil consisting of a wide metal vessel.
51. (Babylonian) God of wisdom and agriculture and patron of scribes and schools.
53. A city of northern Poland near the mouth of the Vistula River on a gulf of the Baltic Sea.
55. (Babylonian) A demigod or first man.
59. A metallic element having four allotropic forms.
61. A soft white precious univalent metallic element having the highest electrical and thermal conductivity of any metal.
62. A change from one state to the opposite state.
66. Hungarian choreographer who developed Labanotation (1879-1958).
70. A crown-like jewelled headdress worn by women on formal occasions.
71. Sour or bitter in taste.
74. Sudden and unexpected death of an apparently healthy infant during sleep.
75. A fraudulent business scheme.
77. In the Roman calendar.
78. God of love and erotic desire.
79. A deep bow.
80. A small cake leavened with yeast.

DOWN

1. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron

- (1902-1984).
2. Any of various herbaceous plants of the genus Atriplex that thrive in deserts and salt marshes.
3. Protective outer layer of seeds of flowering plants.
4. The rate at which heat is produced by an individual in a resting state.
5. Owning or owed feudal allegiance and service.
6. Moth having nonfunctional mouthparts as adults.
7. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
8. West Indian tree having racemes of fragrant white flowers and yielding a durable timber and resinous juice.
9. Step on it.
10. Half the width of an em.
11. The brightest star in Cygnus.
12. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
13. At any time.
14. A sharp high-pitched cry (especially by a dog).
22. A tiny or scarcely detectable amount.
24. Alternative names for the body of a human being.
27. Genus of South and Central American heath-like evergreen shrubs.
29. Wild sheep of northern Africa.
30. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
33. One of the three sections of the hipbone.
34. A member of a Turkic people of Uzbekistan and neighboring areas.
36. An elaborate song for solo voice.
37. Wife of Balder.
38. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
39. Talks a great deal about uninteresting topics.
40. A state in the eastern United States.
41. An administrator in charge of a division of a university or college.
43. A Nilotic language.
45. A desert in southern Israel.
49. One related on the mother's side.
52. A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment.
54. Two items of the same kind.
56. Basic principles of the cosmos.
57. A genus of orb-weaving spiders including common garden spiders and barn spiders.
58. City in northern Austria on the Danube.
60. An indehiscent fruit derived from a single ovary having one or many seeds within a fleshy wall or pericarp.
63. The main city of ancient Phoenicia.
64. A unit of dry measure used in Egypt.
65. The sacred city of Lamaism.
67. A signal transmitted along a narrow path.
68. A soft gray ductile metallic element used in alloys.
69. Shout loudly and without restraint.
72. Extinct flightless bird of New Zealand.
73. A unit of pressure.
76. A state in midwestern United States.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

There may be a rather confusing element to the day for you, Aries, in which you feel tempted to act but not all the pieces seem to be in place. It could be hard to make a decision about things since the facts seem to be quite clouded. You're better off spending this day enjoying your friends or your favorite hobby rather than trying to make any major life decisions or commitments.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Normally you tend to be a very spiritually oriented person, Aries, but today you might find metaphysical concepts of all kinds rather baffling. Whether these are ideas you've embraced for a long time or new ones you've just discovered, you may find nagging little doubts creeping in, temporarily causing your faith to waver. This is a healthy development, however. A little doubt now and then can weed out concepts that don't work for you and reaffirm your belief in others.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Outside responsibilities might temporarily interfere with your love life, Gemini. You may feel a strong desire to get together with a love partner early in the evening, but circumstances may necessitate your working odd hours. This can be frustrating, as you've been looking forward to this for a long time, but you could meet your friend later in the evening. Don't be afraid to ask. Most people understand when situations like this crop up.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Today you're likely to find your routine too boring for words, Cancer, and may have a sudden powerful urge to cut loose and play some serious hooky. Still, you may feel the pull of obligation. This conflicted feeling should pass. If it persists beyond today, however, you might need to reevaluate certain areas of your life. There are lots of opportunities out there, and life is too short to be stuck in a situation that doesn't allow you to grow.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You could be feeling especially sensual and passionate today, Leo, and you'll want to get together with a love interest. However, other responsibilities could get in your way. This could provide you with the perfect excuse to sink into gloom, but don't fall into this trap. Get whatever business you're facing handled and out of the way. Or perhaps you can arrange to finish it tomorrow. Then set up that hot date!



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You may feel a bit of disappointment today, Virgo. You might tend to view whatever snags you've hit on the path to accomplishing your goals as personal failures, and if you let it, this idea could persist with you throughout the day. Try to remain objective, and don't lose sight of the big picture. You haven't even lost a battle - at worst, it's a minor conflict! Chances are that if you continue working hard you'll still win the war!



Libra (September 23-October 22)

A rather disheartening phone call could come to you today, Libra. This might bring news of a setback in one of your projects that is only temporary but nonetheless frustrating. You'll probably have to deal with some trivial little details you'd rather not bother with, and this could take up too much valuable time. Hang in there - you're still doing well! Don't let your frustrations get the best of you.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

After the rush of energy over the past few days, Scorpio, today you may feel a powerful letdown. Not every day can be filled with adventure and excitement. For now, you just need to take care of the routine matters that are a byproduct of life on Earth. However, keep in mind that there are many week-ends coming up, and with the right kind of planning you can get excitement back into your life.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

A goal that you've been trying to reach may be temporarily stalled, Sagittarius, and you could be tempted to slip into despair, wondering if it will ever really happen. Remember that the keyword for today is "temporary." Whatever obstacles are in your way will eventually be overcome and your goal should be to continue to advance in the direction you want. In the meantime, take care of your chores. They may be boring, but they're necessary!



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Today you might realize that you need to make a certain purchase, Capricorn. Perhaps your home or car requires some important repairs, or maybe some new equipment is necessary for your work. This could prove rather disheartening, as it might involve spending money that you'd rather use for something more exciting. Think of the trouble this expenditure should save you, however, and you'll see the value of it all.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

The weight of too many responsibilities, perhaps involving family, a job, or group affiliation, could be very much on your mind today, Aquarius. You may feel like Atlas, carrying the world on your shoulders! You're tired. Perhaps you need to reevaluate your commitments - your innate kindness may have caused you to make too many. Fulfill the ones you have, but think twice before making any new ones. You're important too, after all.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You may have your ups and downs today, Pisces. You could get at least one phone call of the "good news, bad news" variety, and this could have your moods swinging back and forth like a pendulum. Try to stay centered. Take the good news as encouragement, and as for the bad news, try to consider it objectively and figure out ways to turn it to your advantage. There's always a way. Hang in there!

Wordsearch Puzzle

Summer

Find and circle all of the summer words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell an additional summer item.

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

ANTS
AUGUST
BARBECUE
BASEBALL
BEACH
BEES
BICYCLE
BLUE SKY
BOATING
BREEZE
CAMPING

FISHING
FLIES
FLOWERS
GARDENING
GOLF
GREEN GRASS
HAT
HIKING
HOLIDAYS
HOT
ICE CREAM

JULY
JUNE
MOSQUITOES
NO SCHOOL
PICNIC
ROLLER BLADES
SANDALS
SKATEBOARD
SOCCER
SOLSTICE
SPRINKLERS

SUNBURN
SUNGLASSES
SUNSCREEN
SUNSHINE
SUNTAN
SWEAT
SWIMMING
U V RAYS
WASPS
WATER FIGHTS
WATERMELON

Yesterday's Solution

St. Patrick's Day

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

BEER
BELFAST
BISHOP
CABBAGE
CELEBRATION
CELTIC CROSS
CHRISTIAN
CLOVER
CORK
CORNEBEEF

DANCING
DUBLIN
EVENTS
FEAST DAY
FESTIVAL
GREEN
GUINNESS
HERITAGE
HISTORY
HOLIDAY

HOLY DAY
IRELAND
IRISH
LEPRECHAUN
LIMERICK
MARCH
MISSIONARY
MUSIC
PARADE
PATRON SAINT

POTATOES
SEVENTEENTH
SHAMROCK
SNAKES
SODA BREAD
TRADITION
YEARLY

The hidden message is: SAINT PATRICK LIVED IN THE FIFTH CENTURY

Daily SuDoku

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				5	2	4	8	

hard

Yesterday's Solution

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

very hard

Lifestyle

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2019



This picture shows thousands of lanterns lit inside the Olympic Stadium in Amsterdam during the fourth edition of the lantern campaign by Dutch KWF Fight against cancer on Sunday. — AFP

Michelin restaurant bible faces ruling in French chef's protest

A mistaken verdict or a legitimate critique? A French court will rule today if the authoritative Michelin restaurant guide must hand over its secret reasonings for stripping a chef of his third Michelin star, just a year after the coveted award was won. Marc Veyrat launched the unprecedented lawsuit after his Maison des Bois restaurant in the French Alps lost the third star - the top ranking - in January 2019.

It was a shock demotion after Veyrat's remarkable comeback, nine years after he was forced to stop cooking because of a skiing accident, and three years after his restaurant was destroyed in a fire. The showman chef, known for his ubiquitous black Savoyard hat as much as his "botanical" creations from local herbs and produce, claimed "incompetent" inspectors were out to get him - not least by claiming his use of English Cheddar cheese in a soufflé.

At a stormy meeting in March with the guidebook's new director Gwendal Poullennec, named just a few months before the 2019 listings, the chef was told a scallop's texture was "cottony" - Veyrat says it was in fact a dish of local fish. "I have a lot of respect for Michelin in France... but they

made a mistake in my case, and they need to recognize it," Veyrat told AFP recently.

After failing to be removed from the guides for good, he wants to see Michelin forced to reveal the proof that inspectors ate at his restaurant and the written notes of their tastings. Veyrat, 69, also wants a symbolic one euro (\$1.12) in damages for a depression that followed the verdict. If Veyrat wins the case, and forces Michelin to hand over its judging notes, it could upend the world of fine dining, potentially setting a precedent for other disgruntled chefs. "I really don't need them," Veyrat said, saying business is up seven percent over the past year. "Even between Christmas and New Year's Day, we're fully booked. We've never been this busy," he added. "At this rate, I wish they'd take away all my stars!"

'Narcissistic diva'

Michelin's lawyers have denounced the lawsuit as an abuse of the legal system by a "narcissistic diva" and are demanding 30,000 euros in damages and compensation. "It's a question of respecting the freedom of criticism and opinion in our country," Michelin's lawyer Richard Malka told AFP

last week. "This freedom cannot disappear just because of the susceptibility of some public figure or another who can legitimately be criticized," he said. At a November court hearing, Malka argued that Michelin guides are for clients, "and are not owned by chefs."

If the judges rule in Veyrat's favor, he said, "which critic - food, literary, cinema or other - will still dare to write without seeing his hand tremble?" That claim was rejected by Veyrat's lawyer Emmanuel Ravanas, who said the chef has long since grown accustomed to being judged severely over his pricey creations. "We're not here to forbid criticism, we want to check that criteria exist and that they have been applied correctly," he told the court. "You don't have the right to write what ever you want using the excuse of freedom of expression," he said.

The self-taught Veyrat has spent most of his life cooking in his home village of Manigod 1,600 m up the Alps near Annecy. Just days before the November hearing, Veyrat was named one of the 10 immortals of haute cuisine by the rival French Gault & Millau guide, alongside legends like Alain Ducasse and Guy Savoy. — AFP



In this file photo taken on Feb 05, 2018, French chef Marc Veyrat holds a Michelin guide after being awarded the maximum three Michelin stars, during the Michelin guide award ceremony at La Seine Musicale in Boulogne-Billancourt near Paris. — AFP

'Star Wars' stays aloft to again top N America box office

"Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" stayed on a strong glide path in North American theaters, taking in an estimated \$73.6 million for the three-day weekend, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. The Disney film, marketed as a grand finale of the nine-film "Skywalker Saga," has had mixed reviews and was down considerably from last weekend's lofty \$177.4 million opening.

But it has compiled a strong domestic total of \$364.5 million. It again maintained a big lead over the No. 2 film, Sony's "Jumanji: The Next Level," an action sequel starring Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and Kevin Hart, which had \$34.4 million in North American ticket sales for the Friday-through-Sunday period. In third for the second straight week was Disney's "Frozen II," at \$17 million. The animated musical film has Broadway star Idina Menzel voicing Queen Elsa in her latest adventures.

Louisa May Alcott's classic novel "Little Women"

has been brought to the screen many times - no fewer than seven, by Variety's count-but the new version from director Greta Gerwig has drawn strong reviews and netted \$16.2 million to place fourth in its debut this weekend. The film stars Saoirse Ronan, Florence Pugh, Timothee Chalamet, Emma Watson and Laura Dern, in the story of the joys and struggles of four sisters during the US Civil War.

In fifth was new Fox/Disney release "Spies in Disguise," at \$13.4 million. The animated children's film features the voices of Will Smith and Tom Holland. Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "Knives Out" (\$9.9 million)
- "Uncut Gems" (\$9.4 million)
- "Bombshell" (\$4.8 million)
- "Cats" (\$4.8 million)
- "Richard Jewell" (\$3 million) — AFP



In this photo taken on Dec 18, 2019 British actors Daisy Ridley and John Boyega pose on the red carpet upon arrival for the European film premiere of Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker in London. — AFP

The 2010s in entertainment:

Binge TV, Disney, music moguls



In this file photo taken on Nov 17, 2019, US actor Josh Gad (third left), US actor Idina Menzel (center) and US actor Jonathan Groff (third right) pose with people dressed as characters from the film on the red carpet as they arrive to attend the European premiere of "Frozen 2" in London. — AFP photos

Every year brings an avalanche of lists about pop culture - best films, best books, best albums. Attempting to define a decade in the world of entertainment is, at best, daunting. But hey, we are going to give it a try. Here are some of the key trends that emerged in the 2010s in television, film and music, from the explosion of scripted series to a new generation of divas whose empires transcend the concert stage.

Everything is available, all the time. Careers can be made - or can unravel - on these platforms. Buying CDs? So last decade.

YouTube has a paramount place in the new entertainment landscape. For Generation Z, the post-millennials, it is the place to go to discover the hottest new talent. The evolution of Internet technology has allowed for streaming en masse - impossible a decade ago. The seismic changes also have revolutionized the video game industry, with multiplayer games such as Fortnite exploding thanks to streaming capabilities, and helped boost e-sports.

Users have largely abandoned their desktops and television sets - smartphones and tablets are now what many people use to listen to music, watch films or read the news. As the United States slowly unfurls its 5G network, users should have even less reason to leave the couch - and their phones.

Peak TV: A binge-fest

Once upon a time, there was appointment TV: Shows like "Seinfeld" that US viewers watched at the same time so they could discuss it the next day. If you lived abroad, you had to wait. Now, more and more people are cutting the cord, and DVRs are on the way out. The streaming boom, and the gradual shift away from traditional networks and broadcast schedules, means that television has finally gone global. Out: The agonizing week-long wait for a new episode. In: Binge-watching your favorite shows when Netflix, Hulu, Amazon and others dump an entire series in one go.

The competition between old-school networks, cable channels and online giants to land top talent - and big budgets - yielded a decade of hits, and hundreds of new shows a year. "Game of Thrones," which began in 2011 and wrapped up earlier this year, was perhaps the cultural touchstone of the decade. The blood-spattered, sex-fueled saga of the battle for the Iron Throne captivated the masses, raked in



In this file photo taken on Dec 9, 2017 Taylor Swift performs at the Z100's iHeartRadio Jingle Ball 2017 at Madison Square Garden in New York.

awards and spawned an industry of set tours, merchandise and conventions.

But if fantasy epics are not your thing, there was TV for everyone in the 2010s: drama fans craved the edgy darkness of "Breaking Bad" and the dystopian terror of "The Handmaid's Tale". On the comedy side, viewers loved the zany, diverse "Modern Family, the madcap politics of "Veep" and the technicolor sass of "The Marvelous Mrs Maisel."

All hail Disney

While Walt Disney Pictures was little more than a twinkle in a struggling animator's eye, Golden Age Hollywood was famously ruled by the "Big Five" studios. Look at box office figures today, and it might as well be the Big One. Nearly one in three domestic movie theater dollars this year have gone straight into the deep pockets of Disney, which has sailed past a staggering \$10 billion globally for 2019.

The landmark, set even before "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" hit theaters at year's end, breaks the previous annual record of \$7.6 billion posted in 2016 by... Disney. This has happened in part because CEO Bob Iger has spent the past decade on a multibillion-dollar buying spree that reads like an overexcited child's wildest daydream.

After acquiring Marvel in 2009 and sending its superheroes out to raid box offices for the next decade, he added Lucasfilm (read: "Star Wars") in 2012, and Fox this year - the addition of its "X-Men" and James Cameron's "Avatar" sequels means the Mouse House's world domination is only likely to grow. On top of that, Disney has raided its own back catalog for a series of nostalgic and highly lucrative "live-action" remakes, from "The Jungle Book" to "Aladdin". And Disney even found time to create a rare original phenomenon - the unstoppable "Frozen" films. For Paul Degarabedian, a senior



In this file photo taken on Feb 12, 2017, Singer Beyonce poses with her Grammy trophies in the press room during the 59th Annual Grammy music Awards in Los Angeles.

Generation streaming

At the start of 2010, music platform Spotify had less than one million subscribers, Netflix had a little over 12 million, and streaming services were more of a curiosity than anything else. Ten years on, Spotify has 248 million users and Netflix has more than 158 million. Streaming is the new normal: The worlds of television, film and music have been transformed by the emer-



In this file photo taken on Dec 2, 2019, Barbadian singer Rihanna poses on the red carpet upon arrival at The Fashion Awards 2019 in London.

media analyst at Comscore, it has been a "truly astonishing decade for the company."

Strides in diversity

The runaway success of "Old Town Road" - a country-rap mash-up by a gay black teenager from Atlanta now known globally as Lil Nas X - capped a decade that saw strides for diversity across the entertainment industry. The record-breaking earworm made waves in the typically white world of country music, as South Korea's K-Pop captivated the globe - and topped the charts. The 2012 smash hit "Gangnam Style" fueled a global "horse dance" craze - the ubiquitous cultural moment of that year.

Latin America's booming reggaeton and trap



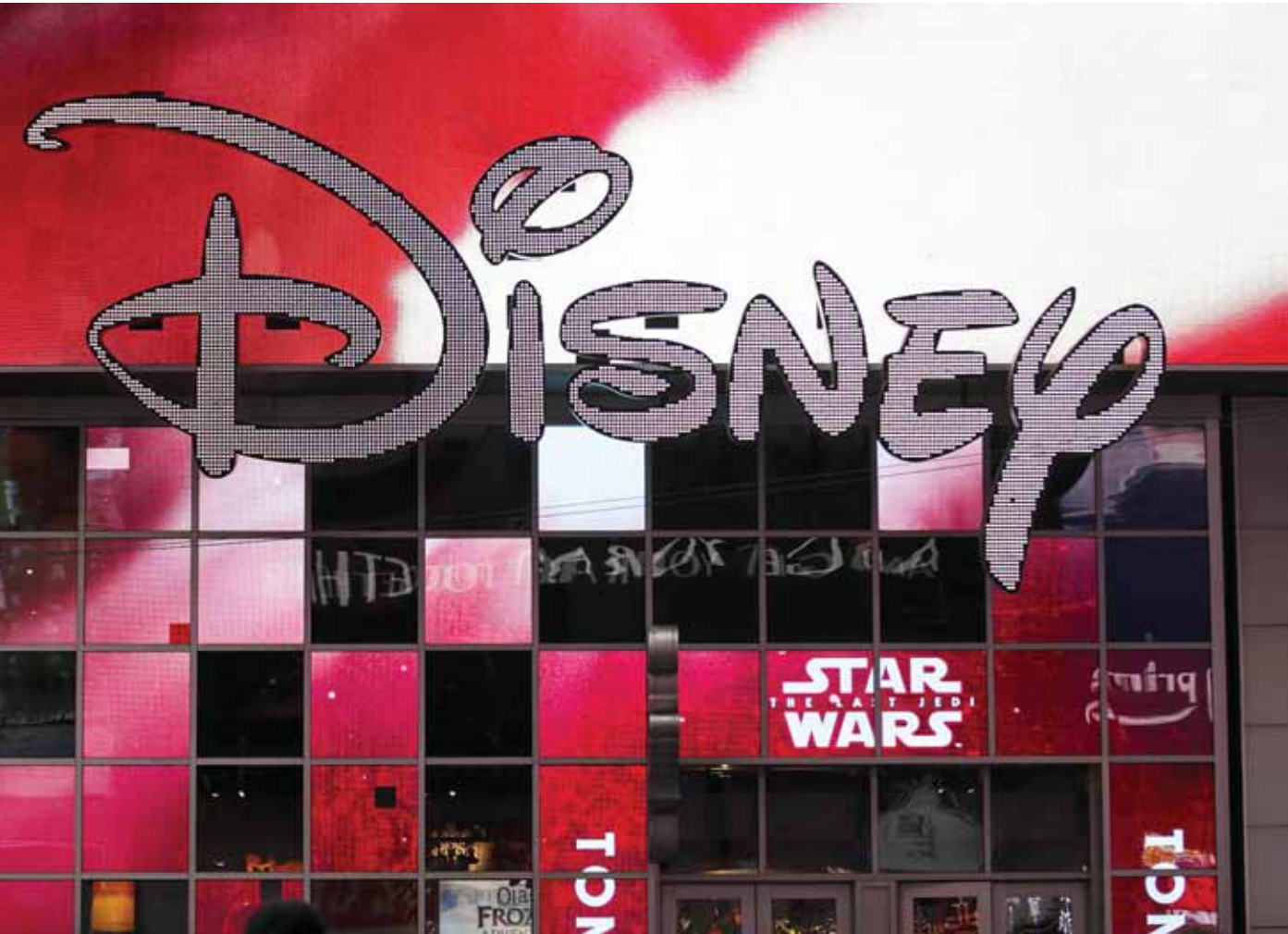
In this file photo taken on April 3, 2019, a giant Iron Throne is on display ahead of the "Game of Thrones" eighth and final season at Radio City Music Hall in New York City.

Lifestyle | Decade in Review

Tuesday, December 31, 2019



In this file photo taken on June 23, 2019, Lil Nas X performs onstage during the 2019 BET awards at Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles.



In this file photo taken on Dec 14, 2017, the Disney logo is displayed outside the Disney Store in Times Square in New York City.



In this file photo taken on April 23, 2018, actor Robert Downey Jr arrives for the World Premiere of the film 'Avengers: Infinity War' in Hollywood, California.



In this file photo taken on March 4, 2018, actor Chadwick Boseman arrives for the 90th Annual Academy Awards in Hollywood.

genres also made a splash in the 2010s - megahit "Despacito" (2017) remains the top-viewed clip on YouTube with more than 6.5 billion views. In television, Amazon's pioneering show "Transparent" forever changed how transgender people are portrayed on screen, while in film, Marvel's groundbreaking superhero blockbuster "Black Panther" reinvented the genre with its mainly black cast.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which doles out the Oscars, moved to diversify its membership and voting body, in the wake of the none-too-flattering #OscarsTooWhite movement. The Recording Academy saw its Grammy nominees slate grow increasingly more diverse and took steps to highlight female artists - it too suffered from criticism

that the gala was too white and too male.

The new music moguls

In the world of pop music, it's not enough anymore to have a booming, multi-octave range like Mariah Carey - you also need to run a fashion house, sell cosmetics or direct a feature film. Beyonce is the diva of the decade, taking Coachella by storm, starring in a reboot of "The Lion King," blazing across concert stages with husband Jay-Z - and performing twice at the Super Bowl in the 2010s.

But she also runs her own activewear brand, Ivy Park, which has been relaunched in collaboration with Adidas. Her music album-film "Lemonade" earned widespread acclaim. She directed a documentary about her show-stopping Coachella set. "The more I mature, the



This combination of file pictures created on Dec 11, 2019 shows an illustration photo taken on April 19, 2018 of the logo of online streaming music service Spotify displayed on a tablet screen in Paris, a Netflix logo on June 28, 2019 in Santa Monica, California, and a photo taken on Sept 28, 2011 of the Amazon logo seen on a podium during a press conference in New York.

more I understand my value," she said in a Q&A published this month by Elle magazine. "My true win is creating art and a legacy that will live far beyond me."

This is the new model for a generation of music superstars. Rihanna has consistently topped the charts, but the 31-year-old Barbados native also has made a fortune from her makeup and lingerie lines. This year, she launched a luxury fashion label with French powerhouse LVMH. Songstress Taylor Swift has swept up 10 Grammy awards since 2010 with chart-topping albums like "Speak Now" and "1989." She

released multiple perfumes, has an array of product endorsement deals and battled her former label for control of her master recordings.

Lady Gaga went on tour with Tony Bennett to sing jazz standards, starred in "American Horror Story," launched vegan makeup line Haus Laboratories and wowed audiences with "A Star Is Born," winning an Oscar for best original song. All of the above have estimated net worths of more than \$300 million. All hail the new Renaissance women of music. — AFP



In this file photo taken on July 27, 2019, Richard Tyler Blevins (on screen), aka Ninja, speaks to the crowd at the start of the 2019 Fortnite World Cup Finals - Round Two at Arthur Ashe Stadium, in New York City.

With purifiers and lawsuits, Pakistanis fight back against smog



In this picture taken on Dec 6, 2019, a man rides his donkey cart amid heavy smog conditions in Lahore. — AFP photos

For the past few months Hasan Zaidi's phone has been ringing nonstop with calls from desperate residents in Pakistan hoping to get their hands on his newly invented air purifier as smog blankets the country. "Some days, I had so many calls that I couldn't answer," says Zaidi during a recent interview with AFP in his workshop. Tired of choking on putrid air, Zaidi spent six months perfecting his homemade device as he looked for a low-cost solution to battle the increasingly toxic scourge overwhelming Pakistan.

During this winter alone the 31-year-old engineer has already sold some 500 units, which are priced at just 16,000 Pakistani rupees (\$103), but admits to refusing hundreds of orders in recent weeks due to lack of manpower and resources. In cash-strapped Pakistan Zaidi's "Indoor Forest" purifiers are cheaper than imported models, which typically cost about two to five times more. "Now it is less of a luxury and more of a necessity," explains Sadia Khan, whose company Autosoft Dynamics recently acquired a dozen of Zaidi's purifiers so his 180 employees can "breathe safely".

135,000 deaths

In the past five years, air pollution has worsened in Pakistan, as a mixture of low-grade diesel fumes, smoke from seasonal crop burn off, and colder winter temperatures coalesce into stagnant clouds of smog. In 2015, 135,000 Pakistanis died due to poor air quality, according to a study published in the scientific journal The Lancet. Pollution tends to be at its worst in the country's eastern province of Punjab during winter, particularly in the 12-million strong city of Lahore near the border with India.

In November schools were closed for several days across the province with the level of PM2.5 - tiny particles that get into the bloodstream and



Sadia Khan, co-founder of the Autosoft Dynamics company, gives an interview to AFP at her office in Lahore.

vital organs - repeatedly exceeding 200 micrograms per cubic meter of air. The World Health Organization's recommended safe daily maximum is a measurement of 25. Pakistan is ranked one of the worst countries in the world for air quality and Lahore consistently ranked in the top 10 most smog-hit cities, according to the pollution monitoring site AirVisual.

But Tanveer Waraich, director general of the Punjab's environmental agency, dismisses those figures, saying pollution readings cited by monitors and activists are not from "authentic machines". "To say that Pakistan and Lahore are among the top polluted cities... this statement is not based on facts," he says, but concedes the country's air quality is largely unacceptable. Public awareness about the issue is growing due to increased activism on social media about the dangers of pollution and the dire challenges climate change is bringing to Pakistan.

Yann Boquillon, who co-founded AirVisual,



Tanveer Waraich, director general of Punjab's environmental agency, gives an interview to AFP at his office in Lahore.

said subscribers to the site from Pakistan have increased tenfold this year. "In Pakistan, there was a problem but no one knew about it. Pakistanis are (now) mobilising," Boquillon says.

'Gas chamber'

With officials slow to act, ordinary Pakistanis have increasingly taken measures into their own hands. In 2016, Abid Omar launched the website PakistanAirQuality (PAQ) dedicated to compiling data about air pollution in the country and publishing its findings. According to PAQ, Lahore only experienced "10 hours" of good quality air based on WHO standards during the first eleven months of 2019. Conversely, air quality in the city oscillated between "bad" and "hazardous" for a total of 223 days so far this year. The smog "has made our lives miserable," laments a pedestrian in Lahore buying a mask.

Pressure on officials is building. Ahmad Rafay Alam, one of the few environmental lawyers in Pakistan, filed a suit against the Punjab provincial government on behalf of his daughter and two other teenagers in November, saying officials having underreported the problem. Outside of activism and lawsuits, others are trying to minimize their exposure to the harmful toxins in the air.

"Last year, it was just bizarre how everybody seemed not concerned," says Ayza Omar, director of interiorsource.pk, a site offering high-quality face masks and other anti-smog products. "This year, it has been crazy. We were sold out within the first two months," she adds, saying they sold thousands of masks this year compared to dozens last year.

In an attempt to improve the situation in Lahore, a group of environmentalists are planning to unveil an eight-metre-high air purifier in attempt to remove harmful particles from the air. Maryam Saeed, one of the designers, says of the device: "It will help to ease the problem, but it won't change the whole picture." — AFP



This picture taken on Dec 6, 2019 shows heavy smog conditions around Badshahi Mosque in Lahore.



Commuters make their way along a street amid heavy smog conditions in Lahore.



Ahmad Rafay Alam, one of few environmental lawyers in Pakistan, gives an interview to AFP at his office in Lahore.



Zaidi checks the air quality next to his new air purifier device at the office of one of his customers in Lahore.



A vendor (in red) sells masks amid heavy smog conditions in Lahore.



In this picture taken on Dec 6, 2019, inventor Hasan Zaidi checks the air quality next to his new air purifier device at the office of a customer in Lahore.



A worker makes an air purifier device at inventor Hasan Zaidi's workshop.



A shopkeeper sits next to air purifiers for sale at his shop in Lahore.

Classifieds

Tuesday, December 31, 2019



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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair and Clouds will increase gradually with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 08 - 35 km/h .

BY NIGHT: Cold with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 12 - 35 km/h with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

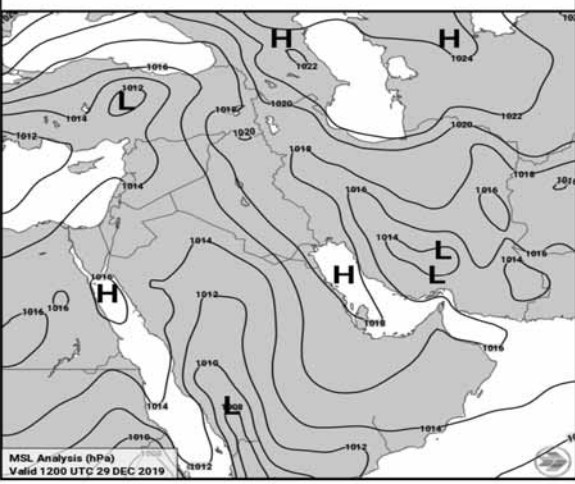
WEATHER WARNING

No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	21 °C	15 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	22 °C	09 °C
ABDALY	24 °C	07 °C
BUBYAN	16 °C	12 °C
JAHRA	21 °C	10 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	- °C	- °C
SALMIYAH	19 °C	16 °C
AHMADI	19 °C	17 °C
NUWAISIB	22 °C	11 °C
WAFRA	22 °C	08 °C
SALMY	22 °C	11 °C

SFC. CHART

30/12/2019 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Tuesday	12/31	Fair and Partly cloudy to cloudy	21 °C	10 °C	VRB-NW	10 - 38 km/h
Wednesday	01/01	Fair and Partly cloudy to cloudy	19 °C	08 °C	NW	12 - 38 km/h
Thursday	01/02	Fair and Partly cloudy	19 °C	07 °C	VRB-NE	06 - 26 km/h
Friday	01/03	Fair and and some scattered clouds will appear	20 °C	07 °C	VRB	08 - 22 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:17
Sunrise	06:42
Zuhr	11:50
Asr	14:40
Sunset	16:58
Isha	18:21

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	21 °C
MIN. Temp.	08 °C
MAX. RH	91 %
MIN. RH	33 %
MAX. Wind	E 21 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

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

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

CHANGE OF NAME

Old name - Shahid Abdul Kadir Ansari, new name - Shahid Abdul Qadeer Ansari. I, Shahid Abdul Kadir Ansari (Indian Passport No. Z5183824 issued in Kuwait) S/O Abdul Kadir Ansari hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as, given name: Shahid Abdul Qadeer, Surname: Ansari and father's name: Abdul Qadeer for all purposes. (C 5700) 30-12-2019

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 Chirumparambil, Thrissur, Kerala. (C 5483)

I, Arsh Javed Thakur, S/O Jaweed 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

EMERGENCY 112

Automated enquiry about the CivilID card is

1889988



Flight Schedule

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

DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Tuesday 31/12/2019

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10
AIC	989	Mumbai	00:10
JZR	716	Sohag	00:35
JZR	254	Amman	00:45
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55
KAC	102	London	01:25
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30
RJA	642	Amman	01:40
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:55
IGO	1759	Delhi	01:55
UAE	853	Dubai	02:15
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55
PGT	860	Istanbul	03:05
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15
KAC	414	Bangkok	04:00
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10
KAC	418	Manila	04:25
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30
KAC	302	Mumbai	04:40
FDB	702	Asyut	04:50
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00
KAC	358	Kochi	05:10
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:20
KAC	382	Delhi	05:20
THY	770	Istanbul	05:25
GEL	500	Baku	05:30
JZR	112	Doha	05:35
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:35
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	05:45
JZR	216	Jeddah	05:50
UAE	873	Dubai	05:50
KAC	106	London	06:00
KAC	332	Trivandrum	06:05
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05
FEJ	341	Sohag	06:05
KAC	362	Colombo	06:30
KAC	544	Cairo	07:00
JZR	120	Dubai	07:00
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05
BAW	157	London	07:05
IGO	1766	Mumbai	07:10
KAC	5514	BRU	07:30
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50
JZR	212D	Jeddah	08:00
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00
KAC	354	Bengaluru	08:10
KAC	622	Doha	08:30
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35
THY	6376	ISL	08:35
JZR	102	Bahrain	08:55
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05
KAC	304	Mumbai	09:30
KAC	384	Delhi	09:30
IRA	675	Lar	09:40
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40
QTR	1070	Doha	09:45
JZR	410	Delhi	10:00
NIA	361	Alexandria	10:00
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40
AXB	789	CNN/Bahrain	10:40
JZR	714	Sohag	10:50
JZR	122	Dubai	11:15
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05
MSR	610	Cairo	12:25
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:15
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35
KAC	614	Bahrain	13:50

Departure Flights on Tuesday 31/12/2019

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
AIC	976	Goa/Chennai	00:05
MSC	406	Sohag	00:15
QTR	1093	Doha	00:25
FDB	072	Dubai	00:35
JZR	409	Delhi	00:50
AIC	990	Mumbai	01:10
IGO	1758	Kochi	01:10
JZR	111	Doha	01:55
PGT	859	Istanbul	02:00
KAC	285	Dhaka	02:00
JZR	119	Dubai	02:05
KAC	677	Dubai	02:10
JZR	211D	Jeddah	02:10
THY	773	Istanbul	02:20
DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:30
KAC	417	Manila	02:30
IGO	1765	Delhi	02:55
ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
UAE	854	Dubai	03:40
KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:55
OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
QTR	1087	Doha	04:00
ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:00
MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
KAC	621	Doha	04:20
PGT	861	Istanbul	04:25
JZR	713	Sohag	04:30
LMU	511	Cairo	05:00
IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10
QTR	1077	Doha	05:30
OHY	351	Istanbul	05:30
JZR	101	Bahrain	05:50
THY	771	Istanbul	06:25
JZR	121	Dubai	06:35
RJA	643	Amman	06:55
FDB	070	Dubai	07:05
FEJ	442	Asyut	07:05
GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
UAE	874	Dubai	07:15
KAC	167	Paris	07:35
KAC	171	Frankfurt	08:00
IGO	1767	Mumbai	08:10
KAC	165	Rome	08:15
FDB	054	Dubai	08:35
JZR	001	LGW	08:40
KAC	787	Jeddah	09:00
KAC	163	Beirut	09:00
BAW	156	London	09:00
KAC	157	Istanbul	09:10
JZR	731	Cairo	09:10
KAC	691	Muscat	09:20
QTR	1085	Doha	09:30
KAC	545	Cairo	09:30
KAC	601	Baku	09:30
KAC	671	Dubai	09:35
ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
KAC	101	London	09:45
KAC	561	Amman	09:55
ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	09:55
JZR	151	Mashhad	10:00
UAE	856	Dubai	10:00
KAC	117	New York	10:00
KAC	613	Bahrain	10:05
JZR	301	Istanbul	10:05
KAC	773	Riyadh	10:15
KAC	155	Istanbul	10:20
FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
KAC	617	Doha	10:35
THY	6376	Dubai/ISL	10:40
IGO	1754	Ahmedabad	10:40
IRA	674	Lar	10:40
JZR	211	Jeddah	10:40
JZR	211D	Jeddah	10:40
NIA	362	Alexandria	10:50
QTR	1071	Doha	11:00
SVA	513	Riyadh	11:00
KAC	741	Dammam	11:20
GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
JZR	221	Riyadh	12:00
JZR	213	Jeddah	12:00
KAC	515	Tehran	12:10

Arrival Flights on Tuesday 31/12/2019

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
MEA	405	Beirut	12:55
QTR	1075	Doha	13:00
JZR	115	Doha	13:00
GFA	210	Bahrain	13:05
MSR	611	Cairo	13:25
SAW	702	Damascus	13:30
KAC	781	Jeddah	13:30
JZR	123	Dubai	13:40
KAC	541	Cairo	13:45
UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
AXB	394	Kozhikode	14:15
QTR	1079	Doha	15:00
KNE	382	Taif	15:00
FDB	060	Dubai	15:10
GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
UAE	878	Dubai	15:40
KAC	775	Riyadh	15:45
KAC	673	Dubai	15:50
SVA	501	Jeddah	16:00
KNE	530	Jeddah	16:00
KAC	563	Amman	16:00
ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
KAC	743	Dammam	16:20
KAC	283	Dhaka	16:25
KAC	785	Jeddah	16:30
OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
ABY	128	Sharjah	16:35
KAC	615	Bahrain	16:45
JZR	103	Bahrain	16:50
ZAV	4132	Baghdad	17:00
KAC	619	Doha	17:35
FEJ	242	Alexandria	17:35
KAC	357	Kochi	17:35
UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
FDB	052	Dubai	17:45
KAC	331	Trivandrum	17:55
KAC	343	Chennai	18:00
QTR	1073	Doha	18:00
JZR	733	Cairo	18:10
SVA	511	Riyadh	18:20
GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
KAC	301	Mumbai	18:35
JZR	127	Dubai	18:35
KAC	403	Hyderabad	18:40
KAC	381	Delhi	18:45
JZR	721	Alexandria	18:55
SYR	342	Damascus	18:55
JZR	253	Amman	19:20
FDB	064	Dubai	19:20
UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
QTR	1081	Doha	19:55
FEJ	342	Sohag	19:55
ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05
RBG	556	Alexandria	20:05
JZR	653	OSS	20:05
RJA	641	Amman	20:10
GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
NIA	162	Cairo	20:30
KAC	353	Bengaluru	20:35
JZR	501	Lahore	20:40
FDB	058	Dubai	20:45
KNE	232	Riyadh	20:50
JZR	401	Mumbai	20:55
QTR	1091	Doha	21:00
OMA	648	Muscat	21:20
DLH	624	Dammam	21:45
DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
QTR	1089	Doha	21:55
KAC	205	Islamabad	22:15
MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:25
ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
ICV	6752	Hong Kong	22:35
KLM	445	Bahrain	22:50
UAE	860	Dubai	22:55
ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
RBG	214	Sohag	23:10
KAC	383	Delhi	23:20
KAC	411	Bangkok	23:25
QTR	1083	Doha	23:25
KAC	543	Cairo	23:30
KAC	795	Madinah	23



A photograph taken at sunset on Sunday shows Mont Saint-Michel in northwestern France. — AFP

I wouldn't have wasted my time on Trump, says Greta

Thunberg's father says activism makes her happy

LONDON: Teenage climate change activist Greta Thunberg said yesterday that talking to US President Donald Trump at a United Nations summit on global warming would have been a waste of time since he would not have paid any attention. In an interview with BBC radio's Today program, for which she was the guest editor yesterday, Greta also said she regarded personal attacks on her as funny and that she hoped to go back to having a normal life.

A video of the 16-year-old Swedish campaigner giving Trump what media described as a "death stare" at a UN climate summit in New York in September went viral on social media. Trump has questioned climate science and is pulling the United States out of the 2015 Paris Agreement on global warming. Asked what she would have said to the president if they had spoken, Greta said: "Honestly, I don't think I would have said anything because obviously he's not listening to scientists and experts, so why would he listen to me? So I



Greta Thunberg

probably wouldn't have said anything, I wouldn't have wasted my time."

This month Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro called Greta "a brat". Trump has said on Twitter she needs to work on her anger management problem. "Those attacks are just funny because they obviously don't mean anything," she said. "I guess of course it means something - they are terrified of young people bringing change which they don't want - but that is just proof that we are actually doing something and that they see

us as some kind of threat." Greta came to world attention when she began a grassroots campaign aged 15 by skipping school every Friday to demonstrate outside the Swedish parliament. The protests have inspired millions of young people to take action against climate change.

Greta, who was named Time Magazine's Person of the Year for 2019, said becoming an activist had helped rescue her from the depression she had previously been suffering. She also spoke in yesterday's BBC program with veteran British broadcaster David Attenborough, telling him how his nature documentaries had inspired her. "You have aroused the world," the 93-year-old Attenborough told Thunberg in reply, adding that she had achieved things "that many of us who have been working on the issue for 20 years have failed to do".

Her father Svante Thunberg, also interviewed for the BBC program, said she had dealt very well with "the fake news, all the things that people try to fabricate about her,

the hate that that generates" while in the global media limelight. "Quite frankly, I don't know how she does it, but she laughs most of the time. She finds it hilarious," he said.

The teenager rejoined activists outside the Swedish parliament this month after four months of overseas trips to attend climate conferences in New York and Madrid. "I hope I won't have to sit outside the Swedish parliament for long. I hope I don't have to be a climate activist anymore," she said yesterday, adding she was looking forward to returning to school in August. "I just want to be just as everyone else. I want to educate myself and be just like a normal teenager."

Meanwhile, Greta's father Svante Thunberg thinks his daughter is happier being an activist but admitted in an interview he at first had reservations about her taking up the struggle. The 50-year-old actor-turned-producer told the BBC he and Greta's mother - opera singer Malena Ernman - originally objected to their daughter's decision to become a climate activist.

"Obviously we thought it was a bad idea, putting herself out there with all the hate on social media," he said.

Instantly recognizable with long braids and impish looks, Greta has become the face of youth concerns over climate change, inspiring millions and being invited to address the United Nations climate summit. Greta's family realized just how much the existential threat of climate change weighed on her when she became depressed at age 11. She stopped eating, started missing school and even stopped talking.

Despite his initial apprehension Svante Thunberg - who has accompanied Greta on two sail trips over the Atlantic - also said he thought it was clear his daughter was much happier since taking up activism. "She changed and she could do things that she could never have done before," he said. Diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, Greta used to be able to eat only in her own home and "didn't speak to a single person". She is now "an ordinary child", her father added. — Agencies

US air strikes in Iraq kill 25...

Continued from Page 1

The office of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who is highly revered by Iraq's Shiite majority, denounced the attacks. "The authorities must prevent Iraq being used as a place for the settling of accounts," it said in reference to growing tensions between the United States and Iran. These tensions have soared since Washington pulled out of a multilateral nuclear agreement with Tehran last year and imposed crippling sanctions. Iraqi leaders fear their country could become a battleground between Tehran and Washington, in a context where they are also grappling with huge street protests against corruption and Iran's political influence.

The protest movement forced prime minister Abdel Mahdi to resign last month and it has rejected Iran's favored successor - a position shared by President Barham Saleh. Yesterday, demonstrators in the Shiite-dominated southern cities of Basra and Najaf torched US flags and chanted anti-American slogans, with similar scenes reported in Kirkuk north of Baghdad. US sources say pro-Iran armed factions now pose a greater threat than the Islamic State group, whose rise

saw the US freshly deploy troops on Iraqi soil.

But significant elements of the Iraqi political class view the 5,200 US troops in the country as a "threat", with Sunday night's strikes reviving calls for them to leave the country. Abdel Mahdi's military spokesman decried "a violation of Iraqi sovereignty", while the Hezbollah brigades are demanding the "withdrawal of the American enemy". Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah - which is separate from the targeted faction - called the attacks a "flagrant violation of Iraq's sovereignty and security" and noted that Hashed had been a key player in the battle against IS.

Another powerful pro-Iran group, Assaib Ahl al-Haq - whose leaders were recently hit with US sanctions - also called for Americans to withdraw from Iraq. "The American military presence has become a burden for the Iraqi state and a source of threat against our forces. It is therefore imperative for all of us to do everything to expel them by all legitimate means," it said.

Parliament's deputy speaker, part of influential Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr's bloc, called on the Iraqi state to "take all necessary measures" in the face of the US attacks. The Badr organisation, another key pro-Iran group, took a similar line. Several lawmakers have castigated afresh an agreement permitting American soldiers to deploy in the country, arguing the strikes amount to a violation that renders the pact obsolete. Since Oct 28, at least 11 attacks have targeted Iraqi military bases where US soldiers or diplomats are deployed. — AFP

ter. The amendments call for clearly stating in the Assembly's internal charter the duties of the Assembly's public funds protection committee and also amend the functions of the public funds protection law issued in 1993.

It states that part of the duties of the committee is to study a report presented by the Audit Bureau to the Assembly about Kuwait's public investments. The annual report normally includes financial violations and comments and follows up the government's implementation of the recommendations made by the bureau. The amendment requires all bodies that invest more than KD 100,000 in public funds inside or outside the country to submit a report within three months after the fiscal year ends to the concerned ministers, who in turn will send these reports to the Audit Bureau.

MP Riyadh Al-Adasani sent a letter yesterday to National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem calling to send the case of a former lawmaker who admitted receiving money from the government to the anti-corruption authority for investigations.

Hundreds of flights delayed as fog engulfs north India

NEW DELHI: Dense fog and hazardous air pollution blanketed northern India and disrupted hundreds of flights yesterday, as harsh winter weather sent temperatures plunging to near-record lows. New Delhi and surrounding parts of the country are regularly shrouded by haze that hits each winter due to build-up of vehicle fumes, industrial emissions and smoke from agricultural fires.

But thick cloud cover caused by the current cold snap has reduced visibility even further, with authorities blaming the weather for delaying more than 500 flights at the capital's airport. Six people were killed in the nearby city of Noida when their car veered off the road in the fog and crashed into a canal.

India's weather bureau said Delhi was on course to record its coldest December day since 1901, with a minimum temperature of 2.6 degrees Celsius early yesterday. In the northeastern state of Assam, zoo authorities put heaters in enclosures to protect tigers from the



AMRITSAR: People do exercise amid dense fog at a garden yesterday. — AFP

bracing conditions. "The animals are not used to this and we are taking special measures to keep the animals, particularly the old ones, warm," Tejas Mariswamy of Assam zoo said. — AFP

Facial recognition use at Delhi rally...

Continued from Page 1

the technology "based on credible intelligence inputs about possible disruptions".

"Delhi Police assures that best industry standard checks and balances against any potential misuse of data are in place. Racial or religious profiling is never a relevant parameter while building these datasets," the spokesman was cited as saying. Worldwide, the rise of cloud computing and artificial intelligence technologies have popularized the use of facial recognition for a range of applications from tracking criminals to catching truant students.

In India, facial recognition technology was installed in several airports this year, and the government plans to roll out a nationwide system, likely to be the world's biggest, to stop criminals and find missing children. Use of the technology at the political rally comes amidst

nationwide protests against a new citizenship law, in which at least 25 people have been killed.

Pictures of police holding video cameras at some protests have sparked concerns that images of protesters are being added to the facial recognition database. Indian authorities have said the technology is needed to bolster a severely under-policed country. But "its use has strayed from finding missing children to being deployed in peaceful public gatherings" with a complete lack of any oversight or accountability, said Gupta.

India's Supreme Court, in a landmark ruling in 2017 on the national biometric identity card program Aadhaar, said individual privacy is a fundamental right. Yet the ruling has not checked the rollout of facial recognition technology, Gupta said. Technology site Comparitech ranked Delhi among the world's most surveilled cities in a report this year. The Personal Data Protection Bill, introduced in parliament this month, empowers the government to ask a company to provide anonymized personal data and other non-personal data, for delivering welfare services and for policies. — Reuters

Prosecution says custodial death not...

Continued from Page 1

He said the panel will invite the family of the deceased or their lawyer to listen to their account of the case and will also demand a copy of the investigation carried out by an independent committee set up by the interior minister. Dallal added that the committee will investigate the procedures adopted during the arrest, detention and interrogation of Dhafiri to see if they were in line with the Kuwaiti constitution and human rights.

Opposition MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri yesterday submitted a draft law proposing amendments to the public funds protection law and the Assembly's internal char-

Sports

49ers clinch NFC West crown in thriller over Seahawks

Patriots stunned by Dolphins, Eagles win East

SEATTLE: Raheem Mostert rushed for two second-half touchdowns and San Francisco made a late defensive stand to claim the NFC West crown and No. 1 seed in the NFC playoffs with a 26-21 win over host Seattle on Sunday night, the final game of the NFL's regular season. The Seahawks got a first down inside the San Francisco 1-yard line with 23 seconds remaining, but after quarterback Russell Wilson spiked the ball, Seattle took a delay of game to make it second-and-goal from the 5. After a pair of incomplete passes, tight end Jacob Hollister was stopped inches short of the goal line on a fourth-down reception with nine seconds remaining.

Officials reviewed the play for several minutes before announcing that Hollister indeed had been downed just before the ball crossed the goal line. Linebacker Dre Greenlaw made the division-saving play. The 49ers (13-3) will get a bye in next weekend's wild-card round while the Seahawks (11-5) get the No. 5 seed and will play at No. 4 seed Philadelphia (9-7) on Sunday afternoon in the final game of wild-card weekend. Marshawn Lynch came out of retirement and scored a touchdown for the injury-riddled Seahawks, who would've won the NFC West title with a victory and sent the 49ers to the wild-card round.

EAGLES 34, GIANTS 17

Boston Scott rushed for three touchdowns, quarterback Carson Wentz threw for another and Philadelphia clinched its third straight playoff berth by beating New York in East Rutherford, NJ. The Eagles won their fourth in a row, finished 9-7 and won the NFC East, drawing the Seahawks in next week's wild-card round. Scott became the first Eagles running back to rush for three touchdowns in one game since 2011. Wentz completed 23 of 40 passes for 289 yards. Saquon Barkley rushed for one touchdown, and rookie quarterback Daniel Jones threw for one, but the Giants were swept by the Eagles and fell to 4-12.

PACKERS 23, LIONS 20

Mason Crosby kicked a 33-yard field goal as time expired to give Green Bay a crucial win in Detroit on Sunday. The winning boot allowed the Packers (13-3) to clinch a first-round bye for the NFC playoffs, finishing as the No. 2 seed. The Lions (3-12-1) lost their ninth straight game despite holding a 17-3 halftime lead. Green Bay never led in the game until the end. Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers overcame a miserable first half to finish 27-of-55 passing for 323 yards, two touchdowns and one interception. Aaron Jones rushed for 100 yards and Davante Adams caught seven passes for 93 yards.

SAINTS 42, PANTHERS 10

Drew Brees threw three touchdown passes as New Orleans geared up for the postseason by smashing host Carolina the regular-season finale at Bank of America Stadium. New Orleans is one of three NFC teams to finish the regular season 13-3, but because of tiebreakers the Saints will play in next weekend's wild-card round while San Francisco (No. 1) and Green Bay (No. 2) earned the conference's top two seeds and with them first-round byes. New Orleans will host No. 6 seed Minnesota next Sunday.

Brees finished the game 19 of 30 for 253 yards and did not throw an interception, while the Panthers (5-11) lost their eighth game in a row as they finished in last place in the NFC South. They were 0-4 under interim coach Perry Fewell since the firing of coach Ron Rivera.

DOLPHINS 27, PATRIOTS 24

Ryan Fitzpatrick tossed a 5-yard touchdown pass to tight end Mike Gesicki with 24 seconds left as Miami upset host New England in Foxborough, Mass. The Patriots (12-4), who started the season 8-0, could have clinched a first-round playoff bye with the win. Their loss, combined with Kansas City's win over the Los Angeles Chargers, dropped the Pats to the No. 3 seed and means New England must host the Tennessee Titans in the wild-card round while the

Chiefs get the bye. Miami (5-11), which started this season 0-7, won at New England for the first time since 2008. Fitzpatrick completed 28 of 41 passes for 320 yards and one touchdown, with no interceptions. Wide receiver DeVante Parker had eight catches for 137 yards.

JAGUARS 38, COLTS 20

Gardner Minshew threw three touchdown passes, two in the second half, as Jacksonville closed a disappointing season with a strong final game, defeating visiting Indianapolis. Jacksonville (6-10) won for only the second time in its last eight games, avenging an earlier 20-point loss to AFC South rival Indianapolis by scoring the game's final 25 points.

The Colts (7-9), who didn't score in the second half, lost five of their last six games. They fell to 2-6 in road games.

BRONCOS 16, RAIDERS 15

Rookie Drew Lock threw a touchdown pass and host Denver denied a two-point conversion attempt with seven seconds remaining to defeat Oakland in the season finale for both teams. The loss brought an official end to the Raiders' tenure in Oakland as they prepare to move to Las Vegas for next season. Though they finished with a 7-9 record, the Raiders began the day with a long-shot chance to claim the last AFC wild-card spot.

Lock completed 17 of 28 for 177 yards and improved to 4-1 as a starter. Oakland's Derek Carr completed 29 of 46 for 391 yards and a 3-yard touchdown to Hunter Renfrow with seven seconds left. The Raiders went for two points, but Carr's pass to Renfrow was incomplete and the Broncos (7-9) recovered the ensuing onside kick.

CHIEFS 31, CHARGERS 21

Running back Damien Williams rushed for 124 yards and two touchdowns on just 12 carries as the Chiefs won their sixth straight, downing Los Angeles at Kansas City, Mo. The Chiefs (12-4), who also relied on 174 yards passing from quarterback Patrick Mahomes, head to the AFC playoffs with a first-round bye as the No. 2 seed thanks to the Dolphins' upset of the Patriots. The Chiefs are 1-5 in the wild-card round since 1994.

On three of just five touches by the Chiefs in the third quarter, Mahomes threw an interception that the Chargers (5-11) converted into a touchdown. Mecole Hardman returned a kickoff 104 yards for a touchdown, and Williams scored on an 84-yard rush.

RAVENS 28, STEELERS 10

Justin Tucker kicked four field goals and Baltimore set an NFL record for most rushing yards in a season in defeating the visiting Pittsburgh, helping to eliminate the Steelers in the process. The Steelers (8-8) could have gotten into the playoffs with a victory and a Tennessee loss at Houston, but neither of those happened as they managed just 168 yards of total offense on a rainy day. Gus Edwards gained 130 yards on 21 carries for the Ravens (14-2), who won their 12th game in a row and set a franchise record for most regular-season victories despite sitting seven starters, including quarterback and MVP favorite Lamar Jackson. They also rushed for 223 yards to give them 3,296 for the season, breaking the record of 3,165 set by the 1978 New England Patriots.

TITANS 35, TEXANS 14

Derrick Henry rushed for 211 yards and clinched the NFL's regular-season rushing title as Tennessee secured a playoff berth with a win over host Houston. Henry's last carry, a 53-yard touchdown run with 2:54 left in the game, enabled him to pass Cleveland's Nick Chubb for the top spot among NFL rushers with 1,540 yards. He also scored on 3- and 1-yard runs in the second half as sixth-seeded Tennessee (9-7) earned a trip to AFC East champion New England next weekend for their wild-card game.

The Texans (10-6), locked into the No. 4 seed in the playoffs, sat out several key players, but were in



SEATTLE: Emmanuel Sanders #17 of the San Francisco 49ers catches a pass from Jimmy Garoppolo despite heavy coverage by Tre Flowers #21 of the Seattle Seahawks during the second quarter of the game at CenturyLink Field in Seattle, Washington. — AFP photos

the game for three quarters thanks to a good performance by backup quarterback A.J. McCarron. He hit on 21 of 36 passes for 225 yards and rushed for a 1-yard touchdown late in the third quarter. Houston will host No. 5 seed Buffalo next Saturday in the first game of the wild-card round.

BEARS 21, VIKINGS 19

Eddy Pineiro drilled a 22-yard field goal with 10 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter to lift Chicago past Minnesota in Minneapolis, as the Vikings rested many starters having locked up the No. 6 seed in Week 16.

Pineiro, who made field-goal attempts of 26, 33 and 34 yards in the first half, was given his fourth opportunity after Mitchell Trubisky connected with Riley Ridley on a 32-yard reception on a fourth-and-9 play earlier in the drive for the Bears (8-8). Among the players the Vikings (10-6) sat were quarterback Kirk Cousins, running backs Dalvin Cook and rookie Alexander Mattison, wide receivers Stefan Diggs and Adam Thielen, and linebackers Eric Kendricks and Anthony Barr. Chicago snapped a two-game skid and swept the Vikings for the second straight season.

JETS 13, BILLS 6

Sam Darnold threw for 199 yards and the game's only touchdown, leading New York over playoff-bound Buffalo Bills in a rainy Orchard Park, N.Y.

The Jets finish their season 7-9. The Bills (10-6), who had the No. 5 seed locked up coming into the game, will play in next week's AFC wild-card round against the No. 4 seed Houston Texans. Buffalo backup quarterback Matt Barkley finished 18-for-35 for 232 yards and two interceptions in place of Josh Allen, who started the game but played just two possessions. The Bills rested a slew of their starters.

COWBOYS 47, REDSKINS 16

Dak Prescott completed 23 of 33 passes for 303 yards and four touchdowns, three of which went to Michael Gallup, and Dallas rolled to a win over visiting Washington. However, Dallas (8-8) missed the postseason for the seventh time in the past 10 years. The Cowboys needed to win, and for the Philadelphia Eagles to lose, to win the NFC East, but the Eagles beat the New York Giants to take the division title. Ezekiel Elliott tallied two touchdowns, one rushing and one receiving, as the Cowboys posted their highest point total of the season. Elliott finished with 122 rushing yards,

while Gallup had five catches for 98 yards.

FALCONS 28, BUCCANEERS 22 (OT)

Deion Jones returned a Jameis Winston interception 27 yards for the game-winning touchdown on the first play of overtime to give Atlanta Falcons the win in Tampa, Fla. Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan finished 30 of 51 for 301 yards and one touchdown, while kicker Youngbue Koo made all five field goal attempts for the Falcons (7-9). Matt Gay was 0-for-3 on field goals for Tampa Bay, missing from 49, 44 and 34 yards. Atlanta opened the scoring with a trick play. Offensive lineman Ty Sambrailo checked in as an eligible receiver, and the Buccaneers (7-9) did not adjust correctly, as Ryan found Sambrailo for a 35-yard touchdown up the seam. It was the longest touchdown reception by an offensive lineman since at least 1950.

BENGALS 33, BROWNS 23

Joe Mixon rushed for 162 yards and two touchdowns and Andy Dalton passed for 190 yards and a score to lift host Cincinnati past Cleveland, as the Browns finished yet another season with double-digit losses. Cincinnati (2-14), which secured the top pick in the 2020 NFL Draft a week earlier, finished in fourth place in the AFC North for the second straight season but avoided the first one-victory season in franchise history. The Bengals also finished 2-14 in 2002. Cleveland (6-10) placed third in the division for the second straight season while finishing with double-digit losses for the 10th time in 12 seasons. Baker Mayfield did become the first Cleveland signal-caller to start all 16 games behind center in 18 years, however.

RAMS 31, CARDINALS 24

Jared Goff passed for 319 yards and three touchdowns as Los Angeles bid farewell to the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum for a second time in its history with a win over visiting Arizona. In a battle of teams already eliminated from playoff consideration, Tyler Higbee and Robert Woods caught fourth-quarter touchdown passes for the Rams (9-7), while Cooper Kupp also had a TD reception. Malcolm Brown had a rushing touchdown for Los Angeles. Tyler Murray passed for 325 yards and two touchdowns as Arizona (5-10-1) saw its two-game winning streak come to an end. Murray participated in the final game of his rookie season despite a right hamstring injury that limited his mobility. — Reuters



DENVER: Derek Carrier #85 of the Oakland Raiders is tackled by Todd Davis #51 of the Denver Broncos in the fourth quarter at Empower Field at Mile High in Denver, Colorado.



JACKSONVILLE: Devine Ozigbo #33 of the Jacksonville Jaguars runs for yardage against the Indianapolis Colts during the fourth quarter of a game at TIAA Bank Field in Jacksonville, Florida.

Sports

Blackhawks stage late rally, jolt Blue Jackets in shootout

Hughes scores in overtime to lift Devils past Senators

COLUMBUS: Dylan Strome and Erik Gustafsson each scored in the third period as the visiting Chicago Blackhawks rallied from a two-goal deficit on Sunday to record a 3-2 shootout win over the Columbus Blue Jackets, who have earned a point in 10 straight contests. Chicago halved its deficit on a goal from Strome at 7:33 into the third period. The Blackhawks tied the game on their fourth power-play chance of the game, courtesy of Gustafsson's blast with 2:02 left in regulation. Robin Lehner made 31 saves while captain Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane scored in the shootout as Chicago won for the fourth time in five games. Columbus thought it had won in overtime, but defenseman Zach Werenski's shot that was initially called a goal as time expired was washed out following review.

PANTHERS 6, CANADIENS 5

Jonathan Huberdeau scored two goals and added two assists to lead host Florida over Montreal in Sunrise, Fla. Panthers captain Aleksander Barkov posted two goals and one assist. Panthers second-line winger Noel Acciari added his eighth goal in his past six games. Panthers defenseman Mike Matheson also scored on a shot that was nearly deflected out front by Huberdeau for what would've been the first hat trick of his career. Montreal got goals from Tomas Tatar, Jeff Petry, Max Domi, Jesperi Kotkaniemi and Shea Weber.

FLYERS 2, DUCKS 1 (OT)

Kevin Hayes scored a goal with 67 seconds remaining in overtime to lift visiting Philadelphia past Anaheim. After scoreless second and third periods, Hayes found himself on a breakaway with a shootout fast approaching and was able to beat Ducks goaltender John Gibson for his 12th goal of the season off a long pass from Jakub Voracek. Flyers goalie Brian Elliott made 27 saves in the victory, while Gibson made 33 saves for the Ducks.

STARS 4, COYOTES 2

Roope Hintz's late tiebreaking goal was one of four Dallas tallies in the third period during a come-from-behind victory over host Arizona in Glendale. A night after an overtime shootout win at home over Colorado, Dallas scored the game's final four goals Sunday for its second straight win. Jamie Benn had a goal and an assist, Alexander Radulov scored his 11th of the season

and Mattias Janmark scored an empty-net goal for the Stars. Arizona, once the Pacific Division leader, has lost three straight games in regulation for the first time this season. Conor Garland scored a goal and assisted on another, and Taylor Hall scored his first goal at Gila River Arena for his new team.

DEVILS 4, SENATORS 3 (OT)

Rookie Jack Hughes scored on a breakaway 54 seconds into overtime as visiting New Jersey edged Ottawa. Kyle Palmieri's clearing pass hit Hughes in stride near center ice. Hughes, the top pick in the 2019 NHL Draft, easily eluded the Senators' Jean-Gabriel Pageau and shuffled the puck before beating Craig Anderson for his first career NHL overtime goal. Nico Hischier, Nikita Gusev and Miles Wood also scored for the Devils, who have collected points in five of their last seven games (4-2-1). Goalie Mackenzie Blackwood made 20 saves.

BLUES 4, JETS 1

Jaden Schwartz scored twice as host St. Louis beat Winnipeg for its eighth consecutive victory. Ryan O'Reilly and Robert Thomas also scored, and Jordan Binnington made 25 saves for the Blues, who are 10-1-1 against the Central Division this season. Nicholas Shore scored, and Connor Hellebuyck stopped 24 of 27 shots for the Jets, who have lost six of their last eight games.

ISLANDERS 3, WILD 1

Ryan Pulock and Matt Martin scored the tying and go-ahead goals in a span of 97 seconds early in the third period to help visiting New York snap a three-game losing streak with a win over Minnesota in St. Paul. Tom Kuhnhackl added an insurance goal with 2:31 left for the Islanders, who were outscored 14-9 during their skid. Goalie Semyon Varlamov made 25 saves as New York won in regulation for the first time since a 3-1 victory over the Florida Panthers on Dec 12. Ryan Donato scored in the first period for the Wild, who saw their two-game winning streak end. Goalie Devan Dubnyk recorded 25 saves.

BRUINS 3, SABRES 2

Jake DeBrusk scored two power-play goals over an 18-second span in the third period, and Tuukka Rask finished with 24 saves to lead Boston past visiting



GLENDAL: Phil Kessel #81 of the Arizona Coyotes skates with the puck during the first period of the NHL game against the Dallas Stars at Gila River Arena in Glendale, Arizona. — AFP

Buffalo. David Pastrnak scored his league-leading 29th goal and also had an assist for the Bruins, who improved their NHL-best home record to 14-1-8. Steven Kampfer added two assists as Boston swept a post-Christmas home-and-home with the Sabres. Rasmus Ristolainen had a goal and an assist, and Curtis Lazar also scored a goal for Buffalo, which lost for the fifth time in six games. Linus Ullmark had 19 saves.

LIGHTNING 2, RED WINGS 1

Brayden Point scored a power-play goal early in the third period and Tampa Bay posted a narrow victory over visiting Detroit. Ondrej Palat had the other goal for the Lightning, who have won three straight. Curtis McElhinney made 19 saves as Tampa Bay won the first

of four meetings with Detroit this season. Robby Fabbri scored the only goal for the reeling Red Wings, who have lost six straight. They also dropped a one-goal decision to Florida on Saturday. Jonathan Bernier kept Detroit in it until the final buzzer, stopping 37 shots.

CANUCKS 5, FLAMES 2

Tyler Myers and Tanner Pearson both scored twice and added an assist to lead visiting Vancouver to a convincing win over Calgary. The Canucks increased their winning streak to five games. Goaltender Thatcher Demko made 23 saves, while Jake Virtanen collected one goal and one assist for the Canucks, who moved ahead of the Flames and into third place in the Pacific Division standings. — Reuters

Exeter edge fiery Saracens in grudge match

LONDON: Exeter Chiefs took revenge on arch-rivals Saracens in their first meeting since the salary-cap scandal broke with a 14-7 victory to move top of the English Premiership despite a late red card for Harry Williams as tempers flared at Sandy Park.

Converted tries by Nic White and Jacques Vermeulen scored in each half swept the Chiefs to a victory against opponents who have been docked 35 points and fined £5.4 million (\$7 million) for exceeding the league's £7 million ceiling for wages.

Exeter had more reason than any other Premiership club to feel aggrieved after losing the two most recent Premiership finals to Mark McCall's men, prompting their owner Tony Rowe to call for them to be stripped of their titles and threaten legal action.

For all the Chiefs' anger, an ugly match failed to ignite until the 77th minute when a ferocious brawl broke out on the sideline.

It was sparked by White sitting on Duncan Taylor and in a flash large numbers of players locked horns, including the substituted Williams who joined in from the Exeter dug out.

Once peace had been restored, referee Wayne Barnes declared the tighthead prop's behaviour "not acceptable" and showed him a straight red card. Williams even invited England team-mate Mako Vunipola to continue the fight in front of a record Sandy Park crowd of 13,593 before Barnes intervened to issue marching orders to a player who was also sin-binned earlier in the game.

Up until that point the grudge match had lacked fireworks, the closest to a flashpoint being a simultaneous dressing down delivered by Barnes to both captains for protesting against decisions he had made.

White went over after just five minutes to hand Exeter the perfect start and Joe Simmonds added the extras. The hosts second try was not pretty but the swarm of forwards that battered away from close range eventually made their mark as Vermeulen forced his way over.

A dramatic final 10 minutes set pulses racing as the rivals came to blows, but Saracens did not get on the board until a last-gasp penalty try at least salvaged a losing bonus point.

However, the English and European champions remain rooted to the foot of the table and left with a fight just to guarantee survival.

At the other end of the table, Exeter edged ahead of Northampton by a point at the top of the standings. — AFP

Six world titles but domestic honours elusive for Hamilton

LONDON: Lewis Hamilton's absence from Britain's New Year's honours list has angered his Formula One fans and triggered fresh debate about the sport's status and whether the six-times world champion is sufficiently appreciated at home.

The Briton this year became the second most successful F1 driver of all time, and is poised to overtake Germany's seven-times champion and Ferrari great Michael Schumacher in the record books. The 34-year-old Mercedes driver has come from an under-privileged multi-racial background to become an all-time great but team boss Toto Wolff has long felt the Briton deserves greater recognition from his compatriots.

December will not have made the Austrian think any differently. World Cup-winning cricketer Ben Stokes was 2019 BBC Sports Personality of the Year, after Tour de France winning cyclist Geraint Thomas in 2018, and

also won the Sports Journalists' Association Awards.

Hamilton, who won the BBC award in 2014, was European Sportsperson of the Year — beating tennis number one Rafael Nadal and Austrian Alpine skier Marcel Hirscher in a vote of 27 of the continent's news agencies.

England's cricketers also led the sporting honours list, with World Cup captain Eoin Morgan made CBE and Stokes OBE — a higher award than the MBE Hamilton received in 2008. Double Olympic judo gold medallist Jade Jones, now OBE, also ranks higher than Hamilton.

Those who question Formula One's credentials as a sport, given the role of the car in making the star, or its carbon footprint, might have no problem with that.

Hamilton's Monaco residency, and his tax arrangements, also crop up frequently as likely negative factors in social media debate about him. "I fear motorsport is regarded as a privileged sport. It may even be considered an anti-social sport by many," commented 1996 world champion Damon Hill, who has an OBE, on Twitter. "That said, I think they are wrong and missing the contribution @LewisHamilton and the sport has made for GB Plc globally over many years."

Most of the 10 teams are based in Britain, and the country's race at Silverstone is the best attended of any on the calendar, but Formula One's audience is mainly on pay TV.

While Britain has produced more F1 champions than



Lewis Hamilton

any other country, only triple title holder Jackie Stewart has been knighted — nearly 30 years after retirement.

Stirling Moss, the nation's only other racing knight, had to wait until he was 70.

Hamilton's fans can point to a lack of consistency with Wimbledon tennis champion Andy Murray, Olympic athlete Mo Farah, Tour de France winner Bradley Wiggins and cricketer Alastair Cook all knighted while still active. Hamilton may be less concerned, however. "I don't really like to think too much about it," he said in November. "Just the fact that people have mentioned it, it's already an honour, but it's not been something that I've been chasing in my life." — Reuters

India end boycott threat, to compete in Birmingham 2022

NEW DELHI: India will participate in the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham reversing earlier plans to boycott the event over the absence of shooting as a medal sport, the country's Olympic association and the Games organisers announced yesterday.

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) had threatened to boycott the Games after shooting — which supplied 16 of their 66 medals at the 2018 Gold Coast Games — was dropped from the Birmingham programme as it is an optional sport for host cities.

India finished third in last year's medals table but in the absence of shooting, they could slip to anywhere between fifth and eighth place in 2022, according to IOA estimates. Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) president Louise Martin and chief executive David Grevenberg met IOA officials in New Delhi last month and returned home convinced India would not take such a drastic step.

The IOA, after its annual general meeting, not only confirmed India's Birmingham participation but also revealed plans to bid for the 2026 or the 2030 edition of the Games. "The house together reviewed and decided on governance matters and other agendas, including the decision to participate in the #Birmingham2022 #CommonwealthGames," the IOA tweeted.

"In the AGM, the house also decided on India's bid to host the 2026/2030 #CommonwealthGames and reviewed the progress in India's offer to host the 2023 IOC Session," it said in another tweet.

India hosted the Commonwealth Games in 2010. Martin welcomed the development, which would be a big relief for the CGF. "The CGF and the entire Commonwealth Sport Movement are delighted India has confirmed their intent to participate at the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games..." she said in a statement.

"Following a useful and constructive CGF visit to India in November, we felt confident and reassured that the athletes and sports community of India places huge value and importance on the Commonwealth Games.

"Finally, we are delighted that India have expressed an ambition to host another Commonwealth Games in the future." — Reuters

Lyon shoots down Warne call to take a rest for Sydney

MELBOURNE: Australia's Nathan Lyon yesterday shot down a suggestion from Shane Warne that he take a rest for the Sydney Test against New Zealand this week so leg-spinner Mitchell Swepson can make his debut.

Tim Paine's team have already won the three-match series against the Black Caps after crushing them by 247 runs in Melbourne on Sunday, following their comprehensive win in Perth. Cricket great Warne has championed Swepson and over the weekend flagged the idea of axing Lyon if selectors opt for one spinner in Sydney.

"Just giving Mitchell Swepson a taste of it, giving him a chance, I reckon it will pay dividends in the long run," Warne said. But Lyon, who took four wickets on Sunday to wrap up late New Zealand second innings resistance, said there was no way he would be standing aside. "Did Warne ever want a rest and give Stuart MacGill a go?" he asked, noting the lack of opportunity given to Warne's leg-spin rival at the height of their careers.

"I won't be resting. I haven't met any Australian cricketers that would like to be rested. "It's that hard playing Test cricket, but it's that rewarding as well so every opportunity you get to play cricket for Australia it means the world to us.

"So I can't imagine Mitch Starc, Pat (Cummins) or Patto (James Pattinson) putting his hand up to say I need a rest." Queensland's Swepson has been added to Australia's squad



Nathan Lyon

for Sydney, where conditions often assist slow bowlers, and was taking tips from Warne in Melbourne.

There is a chance that Australia will play two specialist spinners in the third Test, with the call to be made after Paine and selectors look at the pitch. Swepson, who has taken 12 wickets from six Sheffield Shield games at 26.58, was a member of Australia's Test squad for tours of India and Bangladesh in 2017 but has yet to make his debut. Lyon said if both of them played, he would be more than happy. "Mitch has been bowling brilliantly for Queensland," he said. "He's a great fella to start off with, but he gives it a rip and that's what I really love to see." — AFP

Sports

Aguero, De Bruyne class sees tired Manchester City past Sheffield United

Fatigue seemed to get the better of City in first half

MANCHESTER: Manchester City shrugged off a tight turnaround from defeat at Wolves to beat Sheffield United 2-0 on Sunday thanks to second-half strikes from Sergio Aguero and Kevin de Bruyne. City boss Pep Guardiola had lambasted the scheduling that saw the English champions kick off less than 48 hours after playing the majority of Friday's 3-2 defeat at Molineux with 10 men.

Fatigue seemed to get the better of City in the first half as the Blades enjoyed the better of the chances and had a Lys Mousset goal ruled out after a VAR review for offside. However, the greater individual quality at Guardiola's disposal decided the game as De Bruyne teed up Aguero to smash into the roof of the net seven minutes after the break.

De Bruyne then rounded off another excellent display by scoring the second himself with a fine finish eight minutes from time to inflict United's first defeat away from home for nearly a year and bring City back to within 14 points of runaway Premier League leaders Liverpool.

"Today I understood why Sheffield United are in the place they're in the table," said Guardiola. "In the first half we had problems, we changed some things and the second half was much, much better."

Despite claiming that the crowded Christmas scheduling showed the Premier League and broadcasters "don't care" about player welfare, Guardiola made just three changes to the side that started against Wolves.

City's sluggish start should have been punished by the visitors with Mousset particularly wasteful. The Frenchman spurned a glorious early chance to put

United ahead when he got on the end of a floated Callum Robinson cross but headed wide.

United thought they had claimed the lead on 29 minutes when Mousset raced onto a long ball from John Fleck and fired home. City were furious because they thought Aguero had been fouled in the build-up but, while their complaints were brushed aside by referee Chris Kavanagh, VAR came to their aid by ruling Mousset was marginally offside.

"If the Mousset goal was not offside, it would have been very difficult for us," added Guardiola. "In the second half we put more players closer to Sergio, and we passed the ball with more quality."

It was a let-off for City but they were caught out by a long ball again soon after as Oliver Norwood picked out Mousset, who was onside this time but could only shoot into the side-netting with just Claudio Bravo to beat.

"You always know when you come to the grounds like Manchester City you have to take your opportunities, and unfortunately we didn't," said Blades boss Chris Wilder. "The first goal is the game-changer. We were in the game and then we had to open up to try to get back into it and a world-class player finishes us off in the last ten minutes."

The lack of a clinical finisher has been the only thing holding back Wilder's men, who sit eighth in the table, on their already impressive return to the Premier League and they got a lesson in taking their chances from City's all-time record scorer soon after the break.

De Bruyne picked out Aguero with a fine through ball and the Argentine blasted high past Henderson



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Belgian midfielder Kevin De Bruyne (C) strikes a free kick but misses the target during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Sheffield United at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England. — AFP

from a narrow angle. Riyad Mahrez then teed up De Bruyne to wrap up the points in the closing minutes as

the Belgian finished powerfully after taking a nice touch inside the area. — AFP

Roma in talks with US businessman to buy Italian club

MILAN: Serie A club Roma yesterday confirmed negotiations with US billionaire Dan Friedkin to buy the Italian club.

"The Friedkin Group are in negotiations related to a potential transaction involving NEEP Roma Holding Spa and its subsidiaries - including AS Roma," the club said in a statement early yesterday. It follows reports that the 54-year-old Texas-based businessman will imminently take over as majority shareholder from fellow American James Pallotta in a deal worth up to 780 million euros (\$872 million).

"AS Roma informs that no definitive agreements concerning a transfer ... have been formalised to date and that any potential transaction with The

Friedkin Group remains subject to a successful completion of a legal due diligence upon the AS Roma Group," the statement continued.

According to several media reports, a preliminary agreement has been reached with Friedkin to take over from a US consortium led by Pallotta, who bought two-thirds of Roma's shares in 2012.

Since then Pallotta, 61, has been pushing for the construction of a new stadium in Rome, but it remains at a planning stage.

US-based Pallotta remains unpopular among club fans for his rare appearances in Italy and his handling of club legends Francesco Totti and Daniele De Rossi who were both pushed out of the club.

Friedkin is the chief executive of Friedkin Group, the owner of Gulf States Toyota, an independent vehicle distributor in the US. Passionate about cinema, he has also produced several films.

Friedkin's son Ryan could move to the Italian capital to manage the club, according to Italian news agency AGI.

Pallotta, chairman of Boston-based hedge fund Raptor Capital Management, may keep a minority stake in the club, according to reports.

Three-time Italian league champions Roma, who have not won Serie A since 2001, are currently fourth in the Italian league, just behind city rivals Lazio.

Their last silverware was the Italian Cup in 2008.



Dan Friedkin

They reached the Champions League semi-finals in 2018, but did not qualify for the European competition this season. — AFP

Premier League talking points

MANCHESTER: The following are three talking points from the weekend's Premier League action:

VAR NEEDS MORE THAN TINKERING

Wolverhampton Wanderers equalised just before halftime against Liverpool at Anfield on Sunday to set-up a thrilling 45 minute battle for the three points. But in a room more than 200 miles away, Pedro Neto's goal, celebrated with wild joy by the player, was ruled out for a barely visible offside. Crystal Palace, Brighton & Hove Albion, Norwich City and Sheffield United all had goals ruled out for the slimmest of margins. "It's not football anymore" sang the Sheffield fans at Manchester City, along with a shorter, less kind, verdict on VAR which united both sets of supporters. The system is, as Pep Guardiola surmised "a big mess". Those who believed that the 'progress' of technology would remove the controversy from the game have been shown to be off the mark.

Instead it is the decisions made in the room by Heathrow airport that are the controversy. The handball law has had to be changed for the VAR-era and now there are calls for the offside law to be changed as well.

There is merit in the suggestion, by former Liverpool manager Graeme Souness on Sky Sports, for the offside law to be changed so that an attacker is deemed onside if any part of his body is onside.

But welcome though that reform would be, with VAR we would still be debating the millimetres, just from a different measuring point. The obvious answer is to scrap VAR and return to the fair and honest assessment of a referee and his

assistants on the field. But too many in the game have predetermined that VAR has to be a success.

Perhaps the best fans can hope for is that the use of VAR is drastically limited and one way for that to happen is to follow cricket, tennis and American football and introduce a limited two 'challenges' per team with the referees verdict backed when it is too close to call.

HAALAND DEAL FAILURE IS A BLOW FOR UNITED

It was no secret that Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was very keen to bring in highly-rated 19-year-old Norwegian compatriot Erling Haaland in the January window.

Instead the striker moved from Salzburg to Borussia Dortmund with media reports suggesting United had been unable to structure the deal with Haaland's agent Mino Raiola.

United are showing promise under Solskjaer but if they want to start competing for the top prizes again then they need to start getting their recruitment right.

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH...

It's rarely a foreign manager with no track record in England that clubs turn to pull them out of trouble.

After struggling Watford turned to Nigel Pearson, they have won two, drawn two and lost just once and clawed themselves off the bottom of the table.

Now West Ham United have turned back to David Moyes following the dismissal of Manuel Pellegrini. The Hammers fans are reported to be uninspired but what really matters is that their team, a point off the drop-zone, pick up enough points to stay in the top flight. — Reuters



Danny Ings

In-form Ings feeling the love as Saints continue to improve

LONDON: Southampton striker Danny Ings said he is enjoying football again as his goals in recent weeks and manager Ralph Hasenhuetl's tactical changes have Saints looking up the Premier League table rather than down.

Ings scored the equaliser against Crystal Palace on Saturday for his eighth goal in as many starts to take his overall tally for the campaign to 14, as Southampton climbed to 15th with 22 points from 20 games.

The 27-year-old, who played only 14 games in three years at Liverpool due to a number of injuries, is on course for his best season since returning to his boyhood club in 2018.

"It's a mixture of things. I'm here and enjoying my football again. I feel absolutely loved by the fans and my team. So all that helps," Ings told the club's website <https://www.southamptonfc.com/news/2019-12-29/reaction-danny-ings-southampton-fc-vs-crystal-palace-pl-19-20>.

"I thought we've been great the last three games... we've come a long way and that's the level we need to be at." Southampton were faced with a potentially tough relegation battle after dropping to 19th last month

but have four wins and two draws in the last eight games heading into Wednesday's meeting at home with Tottenham Hotspur.

A major part of their resurgence is down to Hasenhuetl's decision to switch to a back four, abandoning the 3-5-2 and 3-4-3 formations which failed to click. "We're a much more competitive team at the moment," the Austrian coach told the British media.

Southampton were humiliated 9-0 at home by Leicester City in October and lost their next two games before Hasenhuetl tweaked the system to earn a 2-2 draw at Arsenal.

They have since beaten Watford and Norwich City before losing by narrow margins to Newcastle United and West Ham United, but bounced back to overcome Aston Villa and Chelsea before the draw against Palace.

"We've found a way that works and it's not a coincidence that we're continuously taking points and we're able to force problems for every opponent," Hasenhuetl added. "The level is now clear, the benchmark is clear. We'll not lean back. We'll go forward and try to extend our performances." — Reuters

Croat coach Cacic makes winning CAF Cup debut with Pyramids

JOHANNESBURG: Croat Ante Cacic made a winning start at the weekend as coach of Pyramids, who beat fellow Egyptian club Al Masry 2-1 to take control of a CAF Confederation Cup group. Mohamed el Gabbas scored the winner seven minutes from time against his former team after Burkinaabe Saidou Simpre had cancelled the lead Ghanaian John Antwi gave Pyramids.

Winning the top-of-the-table Group A clash in Mediterranean city Alexandra lifted African debutants Pyramids to nine points from three matches. Masry have six points after surrendering a six-match winning streak and Enugu Rangers of Nigeria and Nouadhibou of Mauritania one each following a 0-0 draw in Nouakchott.

If expensively assembled Pyramids beat Masry again on January 12 in Cairo they will clinch a quarter-finals place in the African equivalent of the Europa League. Cacic, whose CV includes managing Croatia for two years from 2015, was hired last week after two domestic league losses cost Frenchman Sebastian Desabre his job.

"This is a new experience for me with some risks, but I decided to take it," said the 66-year-old Croat before the Masry match. He inherits a star-stacked squad bankrolled by Emirati Salem al Shamsi that is dominated by Egyptians, but also includes players from Burkina Faso, Ghana, Tunisia and Uganda.

Pyramids are the team to beat in the Confederation Cup this season as they aim to succeed another Egyptian club, Zamalek, as trophy-holders. Cairo-based Al Ahly, whose 19 titles makes them the most successful club in CAF competitions, have also won the Confederation Cup.

The biggest threats to Pyramids could come from the other group leaders, Renaissance Berkane and Hassania Agadir of Morocco and Horoya of Guinea. Berkane, penalty shootout losers to Zamalek in the last final, walloped Daring Club Motema Pembe of the Democratic Republic of Congo 3-0 to build a three-point Group B advantage. Former French Ligue 1 forward Alain Traore scored the first goal and created the second for Zaid Krouch before Hamdi Laachir completed the rout.

"We were surprised by their speed," admitted Pembe coach Isaac Ngata. "Berkane were much better than us."

A Morlaye Sylla goal earned Horoya a 1-0 victory over Djoliba in Conakry and gave them a three-point Group C lead over the Malians. Despite the setback, Djoliba remain best placed to fill the other quarter-finals slot after Bidvest Wits of South Africa could only draw 0-0 against Al Nasr of Libya in Soweto.

After slamming eight goals past Songo of Mozambique in a two-leg qualifier for the mini-league stage, Wits have failed to score in three matches. A spate of injuries forced Hassania Agadir to make the permitted three substitutions within 28 minutes of the kick-off as they drew 1-1 with San Pedro of the Ivory Coast in Abidjan. When a fourth Moroccan was injured in the closing minutes, his team had to finish the match with 10 men.

Youssef al Falhi gave Agadir a first-half lead and Roland Zan Bi equalised nine minutes from time before wasting a chance to snatch victory for the home side. — AFP

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49ers clinch NFC West crown in thriller over Seahawks



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Lyon shoots down Warne call to take a rest for Sydney



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Aguero, De Bruyne class sees tired Manchester City past Sheffield United



Davis, Lakers top Doncic, Mavs



LOS ANGELES: Avery Bradley #11 of the Los Angeles Lakers drives to the basket during the game against the Dallas Mavericks at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Anthony Davis had 23 points and nine rebounds as the host Los Angeles Lakers defeated the Dallas Mavericks 108-95 on Sunday night at Staples Center. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 19 points, converting 5 of 9 shots and 4 of 5 3-pointers, off the bench for the Lakers, while Dwight Howard scored all 15 of his points in the first half. On the eve of his 35th birthday, LeBron James finished with 13 points and 13 assists. Luka Doncic, who entered the contest as the NBA's third-leading scorer at 29.1 points per game, had 19 points on 5-of-14 shooting to go with seven assists. He was 0 for 6 on 3-pointers. Delon Wright added 14 points off the bench, while Kristaps Porzingis managed 11 points on 4-of-10 shooting. The Mavericks got a scare in the second quarter when Doncic crashed to the floor after being fouled by Howard on a drive to the bucket. He left the game with 2:02 remaining in the quarter but returned for the second half.

Moyes confident he will make West Ham beg him to stay

LONDON: David Moyes said he would perform so well in his second spell as West Ham manager that the owners would have no option but to renew his contract when it comes to an end. The 56-year-old Scotsman, whose reputation took a battering during a deeply unsuccessful spell as Manchester United boss in 2013-14, signed an 18 month contract with the Premier League strugglers on Sunday.

Moyes was let go by co-owners David Gold and David Sullivan after the 2017-18 season despite leading the club to survival and a 13th-place finish. He was

THUNDER 98, RAPTORS 97

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander matched his career best with 32 points — including the go-ahead jumper with 36 seconds remaining — as visiting Oklahoma City edged Toronto. Chris Paul scored 20 of his 25 points in the second half as the Thunder won their fifth straight game in Toronto and sixth in their last seven contests overall. Paul added 11 rebounds and eight assists in the victory. Kyle Lowry and Fred VanVleet each scored 20 points for the Raptors. Patrick McCaw added 13 points, and Serge Ibaka had 12 points to go along with 14 rebounds.

GRIZZLIES 117, HORNETS 104

Dillon Brooks scored 20 points and Memphis found numerous sources of offense to defeat visiting Charlotte. Brandon Clarke tallied 18 points, Jonas

replaced by Manuel Pellegrini, whose tenure came to an end on Saturday following the 2-1 home defeat by high-flying Leicester City which left the Hammers fourth from bottom just a point above Aston Villa.

Moyes, who established his reputation with Everton before the demoralising spell at United, said he was not bitter about being let go in 2018. "No, because things were done correctly — I wasn't taken on and I was told that," he said yesterday at a press conference ahead of Wednesday's home game with fellow strugglers Bournemouth.

"I was disappointed, I've said that, but I've got another chance to go again. "I think it says a lot about the owners, they thought the job I did was good enough to give me another opportunity.

"This time I'm going to make it so there's no choice but to renew. "There's a clause in there and I'm going to make it impossible to ignore that, that's my plan."

Moyes, who also had unsuccessful spells at Spanish side Real Sociedad and Sunderland, said he had not hesitated when he received a phone call from the own-

Valanciunas had 16, Grayson Allen matched a season-high mark with 15 points and Jaren Jackson Jr. supplied 14 points and 12 rebounds for the Grizzlies. Memphis shot 17-for-17 on free throws. The sour-shooting Hornets have lost five games in a row. Malik Monk led Charlotte with 18 points off the bench, while PJ Washington and Devonte' Graham both chipped in with 16.

PELICANS 127, ROCKETS 112

Brandon Ingram and Lonzo Ball scored 27 points each as host New Orleans defeated short-handed Houston. Jrue Holiday and E'Twaun Moore added 25 each and Derrick Favors had 12 points and 16 rebounds as the Pelicans won for the fifth time in six games. They outscored the Rockets 41-19 in the fourth quarter. The Rockets played without James Harden and Russell Westbrook. Coach Mike D'Antoni said Harden, averag-

ing a league-best 38.3 points, could have played but was held out to rest a sprained toe and a sore knee. Westbrook was inactive on the back end of a back-to-back after host Houston beat New Jersey 108-98 on Saturday.

NUGGETS 120, KINGS 115

Rookie Michael Porter Jr. had a season-high 19 points in his first career start, Will Barton also had 19 points, and host Denver handed Sacramento its seventh straight loss. Jerami Grant scored 18, Nikola Jokic had 17, Mason Plumlee had 15 off the bench, and Jamal Murray had 13 points and seven assists for Denver, which played without guard Gary Harris (left shin contusion) and forward Paul Millsap (left knee contusion). Nemanja Bjelica had 27 points, Buddy Hield scored 20, De'Aaron Fox added 18 points and 13 assists, and Richaun Holmes also scored 18 for the Kings. — Reuters

ers. "It was very simple when they called me," he said.

"They asked me do I want to come back and I said 'I can't wait'. "We didn't talk about the past, we were just talking about the team now, what we have to do and the position we're in." Moyes return has not been universally welcomed by West Ham fans but he said he was the right fit for the job.

"What anybody's getting is a very experienced Premier League manager. I think there's arguably only two or three more experienced around, and I win," he said. "There's a lot of new modern things in football but recently I think you've seen signs of things going back a bit.

"We do want to keep possession but perhaps possession is not now seen, even maybe by yourselves (in the media), as the key to winning games. "The fans want to see more attacking football, action and excitement.

"The biggest thing I want to see from my team is for the supporters to be excited — I would love that to be the case." —AFP



David Moyes