

Friday Times

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Local

Runaway girls



Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

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In the past few weeks, reports of teenage girls fleeing from Gulf countries and demanding political asylum abroad attracted the world's attention. It has become a matter of discussion, criticism and a little sympathy. I think this issue must be studied seriously, as it has very negative social and media consequences. Revealing the reason behind their flight explicitly and clearly is necessary, even if their number is small and does not constitute a phenomenon yet.

I believe that before criticizing foreign countries that accepted the young girls as part of their international human rights standards and respecting human choices for leading their lives, the most important question is why did these young women choose to run away, and what was the pressure they faced that led them to flee?

I am a mother and a citizen of this region. I believe there is an important issue that Gulf families nowadays must recognize and comply with. We are living in a new and different era. We are no longer in the Fifties or the Eighties. Parents must stop thinking, planning and sometimes executing plans for their children's lives, especially when it comes to study or marriage, as well as other matters that may seem insignificant and not debatable for the families, but are certainly important to children today.

One of these, for example, is forcing girls to wear headscarves (hijab) or forcing them to marry relatives or where to work and what to study. The problem here is that children and young adults have their own ideas and access to social media and the full range of possibilities of what life can be. They may show obedience to the family, but it may be out of fear or respect and not consent or conviction. Families may think that by doing so, they are protecting their children and securing their future, but this has nothing to do with protection.

The ties between children and social media today is strong. We were once closed communities but the digital era and social media have opened a large space, including young people who carry smart devices in their pockets from a young age with access to different topics every day on social media and from so-called celebrities. They read international news about art, crimes, killings and wars. I think that all these factors affect their ideas and create questions and comparison between their lives and what they see online.

We as adult members of society are grumbling about our lives and impose this on the lives of our young people until they are afraid of the future and hate the present. Thus, we transfer these feelings unconsciously to our children, leading them to look for a better place in the world for what they think is better for their future.

I believe that the family plays a role and is the main reason for the decisions of children, whether negative or positive.

Any family that considers itself a guardian of its children, even if they are married and have kids, is making a mistake. No one can protect anyone from the future or the problems of life because overprotection of an individual is harmful. Love and understanding is the basis of any social relationship and accepting differences in desires and choices is the only way to resolve any family dispute.

I have noticed that most runaways are girls and not boys. This means that there is pressure on girls. In Arab societies, the preference for males is still evident. Also, verbal abuse and violence towards girls has very negative consequences and is way too common. There are other key elements that must be considered, related to the educational and moral discourse that needs radical development and more attention to little kids. My personal opinion is that it is possible to resolve simple problems with a lot of understanding, love and acceptance of differences.



KUWAIT: A flag hoisting ceremony was held yesterday at the Flag Square in Kuwait City as part of Kuwait's national celebrations. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and other state officials attended the event.— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Amir lauds Zain Group's national celebrations gesture



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent yesterday cables of thanks to Chairman of the Board of Directors of Zain Group Ahmed Al-Tahous and Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi. In the cables, His Highness the Amir thanked Zain group for naming its network 'Sabah Al-Kuwait' marking the 13th anniversary of His Highness the Amir's reign. His Highness also praised the vision of the Zain Group in the fields of communications, wishing the group more progress and success. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. — KUNA



Zain Group Vice Chairman and Group CEO Bader Al-Kharafi



Zain Group Chairman Ahmed Al-Tahous

Zain participates in World Arabic Language Day event



KUWAIT: KGOC Chief Executive Officer Abdunasser Al-Fulaij with Zain's team at the event.

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, participated in a cultural event organized by the Kuwait Gulf Oil Company (KGOC) at the Avenues mall on the occasion of the World Arabic Language Day celebrated on December 18 of every year. The event witnessed the attendance of KGOC Chief Executive Officer Abdunasser Al-Fulaij and Head of Linguistic Creativity Center Hamza Al-Khaiyat.

Zain's support to the event came in line with its keenness to support the various cultural initiatives and activities, especially those that aim at preserving and encouraging the use of the Arabic language on both the regional and interna-

tional levels between all age groups, in particular school children. The event came on the occasion of the international celebrations of the World Arabic Language Day set by the United Nations on the 18th of December of each year.

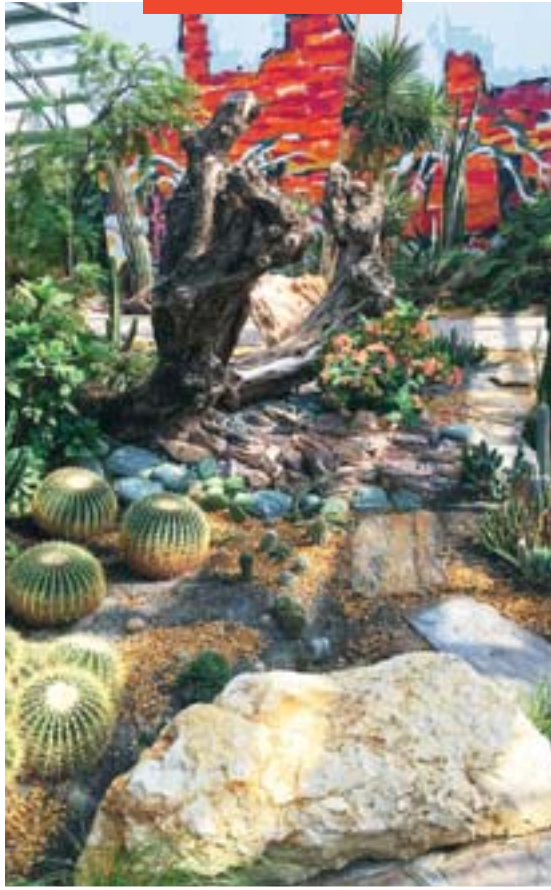
The event featured a number of activities that aimed at developing and enriching the various linguistic skills of children, including reading short stories in Arabic, reading Arabic novels, Arabic calligraphy sessions, and more. Zain supported the initiative by sending SMS messages to raise awareness of this cause as well as distributing gifts to the children.

Zain's support to this event highlights its commitment

towards its social responsibility. The company, being a leading national institution, is keen on enriching the cultural aspect within the community through communicating with all segments of the society. By sponsoring such events, Zain showcases the leading role it plays in contributing to the further progress of cultural and social areas.

Zain further reaffirms its commitment to supporting any entity that offers the proper educational environment for the next generation as per the highest international standards. The company will spare no efforts in offering its support to such initiatives and programs that serve the community and contribute to the further progress of the country.

Photo Feature

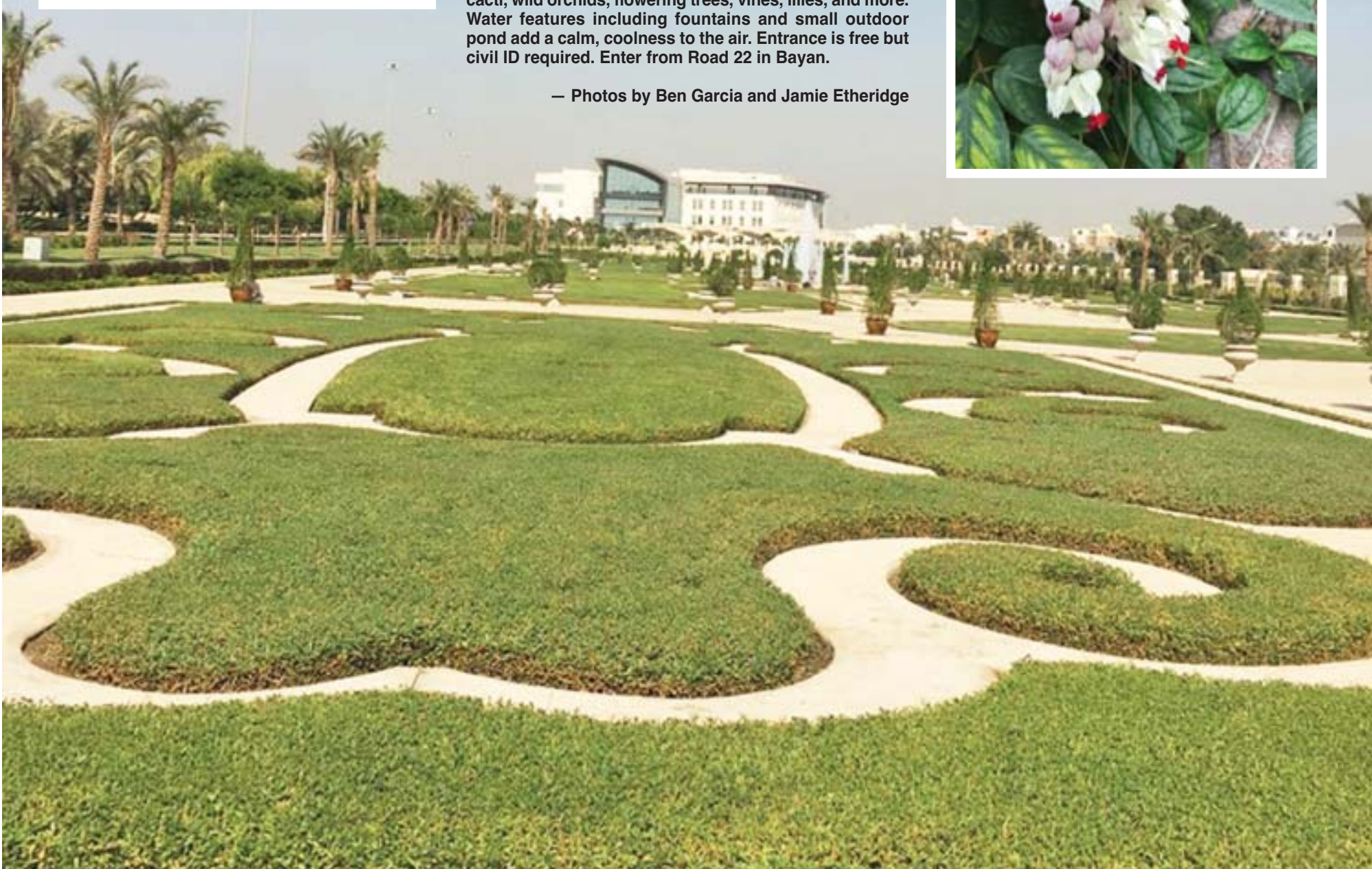


Kuwait's *lush garden*

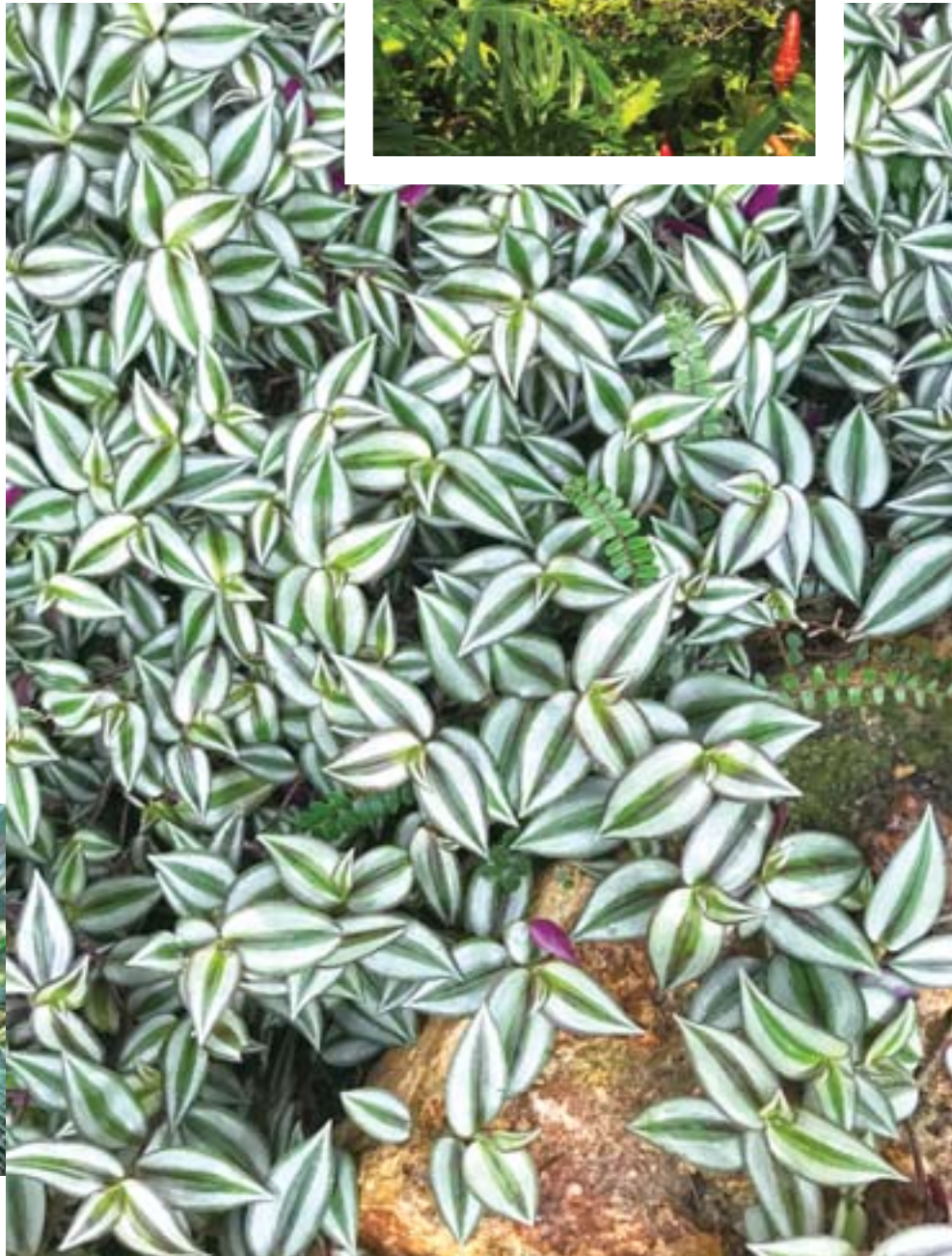
Bayan Botanical Garden celebrates the beauty of green spaces

The Bayan Botanical Garden, located in the Bayan Palace Grounds, is a lush, verdant space that celebrates the diversity of the earth's biosphere. Open to the public on Thursdays from 9am-1pm, the greenhouses include a wide array of native and foreign plants and foliage including palm and banana trees, cacti, wild orchids, flowering trees, vines, lilies, and more. Water features including fountains and small outdoor pond add a calm, coolness to the air. Entrance is free but civil ID required. Enter from Road 22 in Bayan.

— Photos by Ben Garcia and Jamie Etheridge



Local



Local

A day in the life of an expat university student in Kuwait



Heba Tareq



Heba Tareq with her parents

By Ben Garcia

What is it like to be an expat university student in Kuwait? Heba Tareq shared her experiences with Kuwait Times of her almost four years at the American University of the Middle East (AUM). She is now 21 and a graduate student from the IT department, pursuing a bachelor's degree in Information System Technology. She expects to complete her degree by May. When she first joined AUM, she found only two Bangladeshi students were enrolled at the university, which is dominated by Arab and Kuwaiti students. Her father came to Kuwait in 1981, joined a company called Blue Sea, and rose through the ranks to head its operations.

Born in Kuwait on Dec 28, 1997, Heba graduated from Al-Rashid Indian School. She

was asked by her parents if she was ready to leave Kuwait for college abroad, but Heba said she would love to study in a place close to her parents, her only brother and her friends. "At first, I planned to join another university in Salmiya, but due to financial considerations and because it didn't offer a scholarship, I opted for my second choice, AUM. I haven't regretted it though because they have excellent academic staff for learners like me, plus an excellent campus," she said.

Heba was happy that she was eventually admitted at AUM with a scholarship. Her father only pays half the tuition as she is considered among the top achievers. "I am studying hard for my future and I face challenges every day," she said. "I have to maintain an A1 plus average at the university, otherwise I will lose the scholarship and my father will have to pay tuition fees in full.

Thank God I survived and will graduate in IT in mid-May. It was a really challenging and fulfilling university life at AUM," she noted.

In the last four years, Heba has been traveling from Salwa to Egaila, where her university campus is located. She wakes up at 5 am, showers for about 45 minutes and hits the highway (Road 30) by 6 am. "In my first and second years, I was traveling by bus, but now I drive. So it's a lesser headache. It takes around 20-35 minutes to get to my school," she said.

And yes, she's not skipping breakfast as she has time before her classes start at 8 am. Heba prefers to spend breaks in the library, or if she has more time, at the school gym. "I go either to the gym or the library. During exam time, I stay at the library sometimes up till eight in the evening. If I go home, I will only sleep. Plus I do not want to spend most of my

spare time stuck in traffic," she said.

Heba spoke about the challenges she faced at high school and university. "I think it's more intensive now compared to high school life; I am being prepared for a new level and real life situations outside the campus. It is very challenging, as I have to preserve my scholarship. I am aware of the consequences, so the pressure is quite heavy, especially the endless projects and assignments - till now they are bogging me down," she laughed.

As a daughter of expatriate parents, Heba prefers to stay and work in Kuwait given the chance to be able to contribute to the economic development and progress of the country, and eventually that of Bangladesh or the Philippines. Her mother is a Filipina from Pangasinan and her father is from the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka. "I love my parents and my only brother," she concluded.



AUM's library.



The American University of the Middle East's campus.

1st



Kuwait Times
Established 1961

The First Daily in the Arabian Gulf



Local

Minister Bushehri sues MP Muwaizri over 'forged information' claims

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works and State Minister of Housing Jenan Bushehri said yesterday that she has referred a case against MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri to the public prosecution for investigation. The issue was raised by Muwaizri two days ago when he claimed that the minister had provided false and forged information in an answer to a question by MP about housing contracts.

Muwaizri said that the answer implicated him saying that he was responsible for the contracts when he was housing minister in 2012. The lawmaker accused the minister of providing false information and warned to

hold her accountable for what she did. She however said yesterday that she referred the whole issue to the public prosecution for investigation. There was no immediate response by Muwaizri on the minister's action.

In another issue, opposition MP Riyadh Al-Adasani said yesterday he has received information that some local banks have informed authorities about inflated accounts for a number of lawmakers and called for action. Adasani said that those banks have informed the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) of the Finance Ministry and the State Security police of the inflated deposits of some MPs, but he gave no further details including the names of allegedly implicated MPs.

The lawmaker called on authorities, especially the ministers of finance and interior to take the issue to court without delay and threatened that if no action was taken he will file to grill the ministers, especially the finance minister under whom the FIU comes.

A similar deposits scandal was exposed in about a decade ago in which it was alleged that 13 MPs had received political bribes worth over KD 50 million to alter their voting in the national assembly. The case was briefly investigated by the public prosecution which shelved the case for lack of legislation and urged the national assembly to issue the necessary laws. Although the national assembly launched its own investigation



Minister Jenan Bushehri



MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri

into that scandal, no action has been taken and some of the implicated MPs are still serving as members of parliament. Yesterday's national assembly

session was adjourned hardly two hours after opening because of a lack of quorum. MPs virtually discussed no issues during the brief session.

Employees demand equality in access control

By Meshaal Al-Enezi and A Saleh

KUWAIT: A court yesterday adjourned a case filed by a number of government employees demanding cancellation of the biometric access control system unless their superiors were also obliged to use it. The employees argued that imposing the system only on employees, while giving exceptions to their superiors, constitutes a sort of 'unconstitutional discrimination' amongst public servants.

Work timings

Kuwait Municipality Director Ahmad Al-Manfohi recently instructed municipal-

ity branch managers to make sure that all inspectors were fully committed to their official work timings, said official sources, adding that Manfouhi also asked for lists of the inspectors' names and evaluation of their performance. The sources added that many complaints had been made about municipality inspectors' alleged 'abusive measures' on inspecting various facilities. Furthermore, the source explained that inspectors are not liable to file any citations outside their jurisdiction, should file the citation on site, and are not entitled to withdraw civil IDs or summon violators to the department.

Supporting families

Minister of Social Affairs Saad Al-Kharraz said that the ministry was currently studying the possibility of allowing family products to be displayed for sale at co-operative societies in a bid to encourage, motivate and support those families in a similar way in which the ministry supports small and medium enterprise (SME) entrepreneurs. Kharraz added that families' products would probably be put on display at various co-ops by Ramadan, noting that the ministry would continue paying social aid to those families until their projects start earning them enough profits.

Extra health insurance for dependent visa canceled

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior's Assistant Undersecretary for Residency Affairs Major General Talal Maarafi recently ordered the cancellation of extra health insurance fees paid when issuing or renewing visas for dependents other than wives and children, said informed sources.

According to regulations that were in effect since 2017, expats applying to issue or renew residency visas for their parents, siblings or mothers in law according to article 22 had to annually pay KD 50 for health insurance and KD 200 at the concerned residency affairs department, in addition to purchasing a health insurance policy to cover medical treatment in private hospitals for prices varying between KD 160 and KD 250.

According to Maarafi's recent instructions, applicants would now only be required to pay KD 50 for health insurance plus the KD 200 annual fee at the concerned residency affairs department, without having to purchase any extra health insurances. "This will open the door for expats who had already purchased insurances at various insurance companies over the past two years to file lawsuits in order to refund what they paid," the sources elaborated. — Al-Anbaa

Driver, maid deny abusing 'hyperactive' child

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The criminal investigation department said that the juveniles protection department investigated a video circulated on social media and showing an Asian driver abusing a child. The department managed to identify and summon the driver, the maid seen in the video accompanying him and the child's parent, said security sources.

The sources added that both the driver and the maid said that they were only trying to contain the child's hyperactivity inside the vehicle for his own and their safety while driving, which was seconded by the parent who refrained from taking any legal actions towards the driver and the maid. Further, the Interior Ministry's relation and security media department accordingly urges all drivers not to allow children below 10 years of age to sit in the front passenger's seats.

Separately, the relation and security media department announced that in response to another social media video showing a reckless driver in Salwa, police patrols

rushed to the area and managed to locate and arrest the driver and impound the vehicle he used.

Food shipment confiscated

The imported food department at the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition recently confiscated a spices' shipment arriving from the Philippines at Shuwaikh Port, which included chicken stock and natural and artificial flavors, said informed sources. According to ministerial resolution number 581 issued on August 30, 2017, there is a ban on importing chicken from the Philippines. The sources added that the shipment also lacked 'Halal' slaughtering certificates and was accordingly confiscated and destroyed.

Inspection campaign

Kuwait Fire Service Directorate's (KFSD) prevention sector teams yesterday launched an inspection campaign on buildings higher than 150 meters to make sure that all safety conditions were observed



Kuwait Fire Service Directorate officials inspect a building yesterday.

there. In this regard, KFSD's deputy director for prevention affairs Major General Khaled Abdullah Fahad said that KFSD is keen on making sure that such buildings match fire prevention and safety conditions. "We started by inspecting Al-Raya Tower, which is 300 meters high, and Crystal Tower, which is 250 meters high," Fahad added, noting that the campaign would periodically continue showing utmost cooperation with various companies and owners to accomplish the state's development projects swiftly and make sure they are safe.



KUWAIT: Public Authority for Food and Nutrition officials stand next to food confiscated from a shipment that arrived from the Philippines at Shuwaikh Port.

Arab diplomats meet in Jordan to coordinate policy

DEAD SEA, Jordan: Top diplomats from Saudi Arabia and its allies wrapped up two days of talks in Jordan's Dead Sea resort yesterday on coordinating policy on the multiple conflicts gripping the region. The closed-door meetings were a "consultation between brothers and friends," Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said in a terse statement shortly after they ended.

They were a forum "to exchange views on our regional issues and ways of cooperation to overcome regional crises," he said, without providing any details. On Wednesday, when the six ministers held six hours of talks, Jordan's King Abdullah II highlighted the "importance of coordination on the various issues and crises facing the region."

The talks, which also involved the foreign ministers of Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, came just two weeks before a planned US-Polish conference on the Middle East. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said the conference will look at "making sure Iran is not a destabilizing influence," although a senior IS official has insisted it is "not an anti-Iran meeting."

The Dead Sea meeting also came amid debate over the return of Syria to the Arab League, which suspended Damascus's membership in November 2011 as President Bashar al-Assad has emerged victorious from nearly eight years of deadly conflict. Several Arab

states, including Lebanon and Tunisia, have called for Syria's return. In December, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir made the first visit to Damascus by an Arab leader since 2011, and the UAE reopened its embassy.

Common goal

The Jordanian Foreign Ministry said that the Arab ministerial consultative meeting was intended to weigh and address the regional situation. It tackled regional crises and looked into the common goal of ensuring Arab security and stability, the ministry's spokesman Sufian Al-Qudah said in a statement following the meeting at the shores of the Dead Sea. Commending the Arab gathering as 'favorable and constructive', the spokesman said it created extended dialogue with an open agenda to respond to common challenges and foster pan-Arab cooperation and coordination.

Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah attended the meeting of Arab foreign ministers. Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi of Jordan, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir of Saudi Arabia, Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan of UAE, Foreign Minister Khaled bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa of Bahrain and Foreign Minister of Egypt Sameh Shoukry attended the meeting.



DEAD SEA, Jordan: (From left) The foreign ministers of Egypt Sameh Shoukry, Saudi Arabia Adel Al-Jubeir, the UAE Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Jordan Ayman Safadi, Bahrain Khaled bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa and Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, pose for a picture during the Arab foreign ministers meeting to discuss regional issues yesterday in the Hussein bin Talal convention Centre in the Dead Sea. — AFP

During the event, the Arab ministers underlined the need to tackle how to address the regional problems, and to better serve the interests and issues of the Arab world. The Kuwaiti delegation included Acting Assistant Foreign Minister

for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ambassador Saleh Al-Loughani, several officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan Azeez Al-Daihani. — Agencies

Kuwait key supporter for Libya: Libyan FM

VIENNA: Libyan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Siala said yesterday that Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is an important world leader who wisely steers Kuwait's foreign policies, which includes a supportive stance towards Libya and its people. In an interview, Siala highly appreciated Kuwait's support of Libya's plans to achieve security and stability.

A Libyan delegation visited Kuwait last December, during which the Head of the Presidential Council of the Libyan Government of National Accord, Fayez Al-Sarraj, met with His Highness the Amir and a number of senior officials in the country, he indicated. During that meetings, they discussed the situation in Libya and the efforts aimed at achieving security and stability as well as latest developments in the region in addition to ways to strengthen solidarity and unity of the Arabs to face the challenges, he said.

On his visit to Austria, the Libyan minister stressed that he was counting on Austria's assistance to his country, which has provided a lot of support in many fields, especially in the health and industrial fields, pointing to a common desire to develop bilateral relations in the future. Moreover, during his second visit to Vienna, Siala said he held a meeting with Austrian Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl, discussing ways to develop relations between the two countries, especially in the fields of oil and gas and the exchange of experiences in the management of health facilities in Libya.— KUNA

Kuwait, Jordan speakers discuss bilateral ties



KUWAIT: Parliament Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and his Jordanian counterpart Faisal Al-Fayez during a tour at the National Assembly yesterday.— KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem held yesterday official discussions with his visiting Jordanian counterpart Faisal Al-Fayez. During the meeting, the two

sides discussed ways of boosting bilateral ties between the brotherly countries in all fields, especially the parliamentary one. They also addressed issues of common concerns and the latest regional and

international developments. After the meeting, Speaker Ghanem held a lunch banquet in honor of the visiting Jordanian delegation. Several senior officials attended the meeting.— KUNA



Displaced Syrian kids sift through trash to buy bread

Francis in Arabia, the Muslim-friendly pope

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RIYADH: A handout picture provided by the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) on Jan 28, 2019 shows Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (right) speaking to King Salman during a ceremony at the Ritz Carlton hotel. —AFP

Saudi Arabia ends anti-graft campaign

More than \$106bn recovered through 87 settlements, eight refused

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has ended a sweeping crackdown on corruption ordered by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman that it said had recovered more than \$106 billion through settlements with scores of senior princes, ministers and top businessmen. A royal court said in a statement on Wednesday authorities had summoned 381 people, some as witnesses, under the campaign launched in Nov 2017, but it provided no names. It said 87 people confessed to charges against them and reached settlements that included the forfeiture of real estate, companies, cash and other assets.

The campaign ended as abruptly as it began, despite speculation in the business community that a new round of arrests was imminent. The public prosecutor refused to settle the cases of 56 people due to existing criminal charges against them. Eight more who declined settlement offers stand accused of corruption, the court said. Detainees who were not indicted were freed, but it was unclear when travel bans, bank freezes and electronic monitoring of at least some of those re-

leased earlier would end.

For the first three months of the campaign, many members of the kingdom's economic and political elite were held in Riyadh's Ritz-Carlton Hotel, with some later moved to a prison. Some detainees were reportedly tortured, which the authorities have denied. Critics called it a shake-down and power play by Prince Mohammed. It unsettled some foreign investors that he is courting to diversify the economy away from oil.

The October killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents inside the kingdom's Istanbul consulate tarnished the crown prince's reputation in the West and intensified criticism of Riyadh's human rights record and its role in the Yemen war. Prince Mohammed has defended the anti-corruption campaign as "shock therapy" as he tries to overhaul the economy. His social reforms, including the easing of restrictions such as bans on cinemas and women driving, have been accompanied by a crackdown on dissent, including the arrests of dozens of clerics, women's rights activists and intellectuals.

Karen Young, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, said it was hard to say if the campaign had been successful. "The good news is that the government seems to be signalling that it wants to move on," she said. "On Saudi foreign policy and domestic politics, particularly towards citizen activists, there is still deep apprehension in the West."

Ali Shihabi, head of the Arabia Foundation in Washington which regularly supports Saudi policy, said the end of the campaign reflected a government attempt to address international criticism of a lack of due process and transparency. "Now critics will bemoan lack of names and details on each case but we must remember that individuals themselves have no desire to be named," he said.

The figures released on Wednesday were little different from those the government announced in its last update, exactly one year earlier. It is unclear how much of the money it says was recovered has actually reached state coffers. Only a month ago, the finance minister told Reuters the authorities had collected some \$13 billion from

settlements in 2018 and expected a similar amount this year.

The initial sweep netted cousins of Prince Mohammed, such as billionaire investor Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, National Guard minister Prince Miteb bin Abdullah and former Riyadh governor Prince Turki bin Abdullah. Miteb was freed within weeks after agreeing to pay more than \$1 billion to settle corruption allegations against him, a Saudi official said at the time. Two months later, Alwaleed settled after reaching what he called "a confirmed understanding between me and the government". Turki has not been heard from.

Also detained were senior officials, including ousted economy minister Adel Fakiel, who is believed to be in detention, and former chief of the royal court, Khalid Al-Tuwajiri. Top businessmen were held alongside them. Waleed Al-Ibrahim and Saleh Kamel were released early on, while others including Amr Dabbagh and Mohammed Hussein Al-Amoudi only got out this month. The fate of Bakr bin Laden, released temporarily last week, remains unclear. — Reuters

International

Displaced Syrian kids sift through trash to buy bread

6.5 million people unable to meet food needs in Syria

KAFR LUSIN, Syria: Outside a camp for the displaced in northwest Syria, 15-year-old Sabaa Al-Jassim hacked away at a mountain of trash hoping to find scraps to sell for food. Using a hooked metal rod, he stabbed at acrid household waste in the village of Kafr Lusin, looking for plastic to trade for a few dollars to feed his 11-member family. "I go to the dump to support my family," said the teenager, dressed in a dark jumper and rubber boots. "I collect two bags of plastic a day so we can buy bread," said Sabaa, who hasn't been in school for most of Syria's almost eight-year civil war.

With a sick father, an overwhelmed mother and a wounded older brother, he and three of his younger siblings are left to fend for the family's survival. Of the three million people who live in the surrounding jihadist-ruled bastion of Idlib, around half have been displaced from other parts of the war-torn country. Many depend on aid, but at the informal camp of some 50 families in Kafr Lusin, the man in charge said food baskets are few and far between. At the dump nearby, dozens of women and children gathered around a garbage truck as it slowly tipped out its stinking contents. With a rod, a veiled woman sifted through the fresh round of trash - empty aluminium cans, food scraps and sullied nappies.

'We would starve'

With his 12-year-old sister Bahriya and nine-

year-old brother Rajeh by his side, Sabaa filled up a sack. Together with a fourth sibling, he said, they usually manage to make around 1,000 Syrian pounds (around \$2) a day. With it, "we buy bread, potatoes, vegetables, and tomatoes", he said, but there's never enough for meat. "Most people here do this."

Around them, most of the children walked around in rubber boots, and the luckiest also wore at least one thick glove. Others ploughed away with their bare hands. Woolly dark grey sheep nuzzled through the detritus, in search of something to eat. Back in the family tent, Sabaa's 17-year-old brother lay under a warm blanket, his wounded leg held in place by a shiny metal rod.

A stove warmed the tent made up of a patchwork of torn sacks, its chimney jutting out of the canvas and stretching towards the sky. Sabaa's father Jassim said he hates sending off his children to work, but his family has no other way to support itself. "When my children set off to the dump, I feel small and defeated." But "if they didn't, we would starve", said the 53-year-old from the central province of Hama. The UN's World Food Program says around 6.5 million people are unable to meet their food needs in Syria, most of them internally displaced by the war. The conflict has killed 360,000 people and led millions to flee their homes since starting with the brutal repression on anti-government protests in 2011.



BAB AL-HAWA, Syria: A displaced Syrian girl sits in a trash heap collecting with her bare hands empty cans at a landfill outside a camp in Kafr Lusin near the border with Turkey in Idlib province on Jan 29, 2019. — AFP

Jassim said he cannot help his children because he is weak after a heart operation. "If I wanted to walk 50 metres, my legs couldn't carry me," said the bearded father, wearing a

red-and-white scarf on his head. As for his wife, she has a disabled son to look after and has to make meagre supplies stretch to feed and do laundry for nearly a dozen people. — AFP

In former IS bastion, displaced Syrians clamor to go home

HAJIN, Syria: In the former jihadist bastion of Hajin in eastern Syria, 50-year-old Khaled Abed shouts at the top of his lungs amid the rubble, asking why he can't go home. The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) expelled the Islamic State group from the town last month, but it has since forbidden anyone from returning to its town center. "I want to go home. Why can't I?" Abed bellows in the street near what was once the town market but has become a cordoned off military area. "Our sons are the ones who liberated" this town, says the father of four SDF fighters, wearing a checkered red-and-white scarf on his head. "Why won't they allow us back? By God, it's outrageous."

Backed by air strikes of the US-led coalition, the SDF is still battling the last militants south of Hajin. Abed fled Hajin last year while it was still under IS rule, seeking refuge in a camp for the displaced in SDF-held territory. He returned in recent days to find his family's five homes destroyed, but wants access to rebuild them. The SDF has allowed people to return to others parts of the town, but not in its devastated center. "No civilians allowed," they repeat all day long, to anybody trying to enter. The main road is closed, but two trucks carrying people and their belongings drive down a side road towards an adjacent neighborhood. Abu Khaled, an SDF field commander in charge of the area, tells AFP the road needs to be checked for ordnance before it can reopen. IS has often planted landmines before retreating, causing casualties among advancing SDF troops and returning civilians.

'We'll send in sheep'

But these warnings do not deter residents like Abed. "We'll



HAJIN, Syria: Civilians return to this city in Syria's eastern Deir Ezzor province on Jan 27, 2019. — AFP

clear the mines ourselves," he says, still shouting. "We've become experts. They tried all sorts of weapons on us... Just let us go home!" Sixty-year-old shepherd Aswad Al-Aysh is also defiant. "No problem, we'll get our sheep and make them walk in front of us," he quips, to show if there are mines. His brother Abed Al-Ibrahim, who fled town with him a year ago, says the town's people need to return to their land. "Where else are we supposed to go?" he asks quietly.

Hajin was once a bustling IS hub, but today food is hard to come by, and the town's water and electricity networks have been ravaged in the fighting. At the town's entrance, a young boy sells cigarette packs displayed on a broken table, while a man next to him peddles cans of fuel. An armored vehicle pulls up, and an SDF fighter swings open its door to distribute small bottles of water, and children come running. After receiving his share, a young boy pleads for more. "Give me another one for Granny," he says. On the banks of the Euphrates, trucks pump up water from the river before distributing it in the area. — AFP

Bashir: WhatsApp, Facebook don't replace presidents

KHARTOUM: Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir yesterday mocked his opponents' use of social media to mobilize protesters against his three-decade rule, saying that Facebook and WhatsApp can't replace presidents. Organizers of the anti-government protests that have rocked Sudan for weeks, have made routine use of social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter to get out the crowds. "Changing the government or presidents cannot be done through WhatsApp or Facebook," Bashir told a televised rally attended by hundreds of loyalists in the eastern town of Kassala. "It can be done only through elections. It's only the people who decide who will be the president," he said.

Activists have extensively documented the protests which erupted on Dec 19 and have flooded social media with footage of clashes with security forces. The demonstrations have been spearheaded by the Sudanese Professionals' Association (SPA) which issues regular online announcements of forthcoming rallies, using the hashtags #Sudan_cities_uprise or #Just_Fall. Other hashtags such as #SudanRevolts and #SudanUprising have also helped build momentum, amassing hundreds of tweets and retweets by the hour. The Sudanese government has sought to curtail the use of social networks, activists and analysts say. Internet users have reported difficulties accessing Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp since the early days of the protests. The demonstrations began in the farming town of Albara against the government's decision to triple the price of bread. — AFP

International

For Yemenis, shaky ceasefire not much different from war

Civilians fear even bloodier conflict if truce breaks down

AL-DURAYHIMI, Yemen: Yemeni medics scrambled to save a 20-year-old woman after a sniper's bullet tore a gash in her scalp in the port city of Hodeida, where a fragile ceasefire has brought limited respite to war-weary civilians. A truce brokered in Sweden in December between the Saudi-backed government and Houthi rebels was hailed as Yemen's best chance so far to end the four-year conflict, but it appears to be hanging by a thread with breaches reported by both warring parties.

Civilians in Hodeida, the war-ravaged country's main conduit for food and humanitarian aid, are caught between a bloody ceasefire and the prospect of an even bloodier conflict if the UN-brokered truce breaks down. "There is no truce," said Ali Hassan Marzouqi. His daughter Hayat was rushed to a field hospital in the village of Al-Durayhimi, on the southern edge of Hodeida, after a stray bullet grazed her head while she was sitting at home. "Snipers, improvised explosive devices, mines and mortars," said Iyad Nasser, deputy head of the hospital, rattling off the nature of casualties reported every day since the truce.

Despite the ceasefire, mortar shells continue to crash into camps near Hodeida, which are bursting with ever more displaced Yemenis - many of them malnourished. "Before the ceasefire, my house was hit," Mohammed Saleh, 46, said at a camp in the nearby town of Khokha. "After the ceasefire, my tent was hit. Nothing has changed." Many at the camp fear returning to their homes and farm lands despite the truce, accusing the rebels of rigging them with mines

- often camouflaged as rocks - as punishment for fleeing to government areas.

AFP travelled to Hodeida last week on a military embed organized by the Saudi and Emirati-led coalition fighting the rebels. Hospitals around the city have noted a reduction in fatalities since the truce took effect, local fishermen have felt safer going out to sea and aid workers have managed to reach starving communities previously cut off by war. But the ongoing bloodshed has fuelled a bleak view shared by dozens of civilians and military officials interviewed by AFP - that the ceasefire is likely to collapse, pushing Hodeida into a deeper spiral of conflict that could precipitate famine.

"While the truce agreement initially brought some hope and relief, Hodeida's poorest residents live under the shadow of a resumption of conflict, particularly as the implementation of deconfliction processes remains slow at best," said Adam Baron, a Yemen expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

Further casting doubt on the fate of the ceasefire, UN special envoy Martin Griffiths on Monday said some of the terms agreed during the Sweden talks, including a prisoner swap deal between the warring parties, had been delayed. Griffiths also confirmed plans to replace retired Dutch general Patrick Cammaert, who heads the monitoring team tasked with overseeing the withdrawal of rival forces from Hodeida.

The Houthis are using the truce to fortify their positions inside Hodeida with a maze of shipping containers, trenches and sniper nests



KHOKHA, Yemen: Yemeni fishermen clean and sell their catch at a market in this district of the western province of Hodeida on Jan 21, 2019. — AFP

inside dense residential neighborhoods, residents told AFP, in what they believe are preparations for a resumption of war. UN chief Antonio Guterres has separately pointed to Houthi allegations that pro-government forces were massing troops close to the city. Colonel Saeed Salmeen, an Emirati commander on Yemen's west coast, denied the allegation but said his men were ready for battle if required.

"The coalition and the Yemeni government will have to cope with an unforgiving international climate if battle recommences," said Michael Knights, a fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "Though the Houthis appear to have deliberately sought a collapse of the ceasefire, performing provocative strikes... blame will probably accrue to the coalition if they advance in Hodeida." —AFP

Iran state TV journalist held in US returns

TEHRAN: A US-born journalist working for Iran's English-language television station Press TV returned to the Islamic Republic on Wednesday night after 10 days of detention in the US. Marzieh Hashemi arrived at Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport and was greeted by over a hundred people. Most of the crowd were Iranian women dressed in black veils and holding anti-American posters, while loudspeakers played revolutionary songs and anthems in the background, an AFP reporter at the airport said.

"Welcome voice of the oppressed," read one sign, with another saying "Marzieh is freed, America is shamed." Disembarking from a Lufthansa flight from Frankfurt, Hashemi came down the stairs with a floral wreath around her neck, as supporters clapped for her. "I missed Iran so much," she said. "Now is not the proper time to speak about why I was arrested, I will explain why at an appropriate time," she added.

A Muslim convert who changed her name from Melanie Franklin, she was arrested upon arrival at St Louis Lambert International Airport on Jan 13.



Hashemi had reportedly flown to visit her ill brother and other family members. Press TV said she was released a week ago. She was arrested on a "material arrest warrant" and was to be let go after she gave testimony to a grand jury investigating unspecified "violations of US criminal law", according to a US court. It is not yet clear if she gave evidence before being released.

Prominent conservative political figure Gholami-Ali Haddad-Adel was at the airport among the crowd, and described Hashemi's arrest as "just like other acts" by US President Donald Trump. "It is another instance of 40 years of enmity by America with a nation that had a revolution to get independence," he told AFP. The Trump administration pulled out of a 2015 multilateral nuclear deal with Iran last year and re-imposed sanctions. — AFP

Lebanese leaders agree new govt; Hariri paper folds

BEIRUT: Lebanese leaders reached a deal yesterday to set up a new unity government, three political sources from different factions said, ending nine months of wrangling over how to share out cabinet portfolios in the heavily indebted state. It will be the third government led by the Western-backed Saad Al-Hariri, who has vowed to carry out economic reforms needed to put public finances on a sustainable path and to unlock billions in funding to boost low growth.

Meanwhile, Lebanese newspaper Al-Mustaqbal issued its last print version after 20 years yesterday, it said, the latest victim of the country's media crisis. Established by late billionaire premier Rafiq Hariri, Al-Mustaqbal is affiliated to his son Saad's Future Current party. "Al-Mustaqbal folds up its last pages today," said an editorial on the front page of the newspaper, whose name means "Future" in Arabic. "On February 14, 2019, it relaunches digitally."

For two decades, Al-Mustaqbal recorded key events of the multi-confessional country's history, including the 2005 assassination of its



TRIPOLI: The last print edition of Al-Mustaqbal newspaper is seen in a bookstore yesterday. — AFP

founder in a bombing. In the years after the Sunni Muslim politician's killing, the newspaper became a platform for the Future Current party launched in 2007, as it faced rivals including the Shiite movement Hezbollah.

Yesterday, Al-Mustaqbal editor-in-chief Hani Hammoud wrote that his newspaper was struggling to adapt to the digital era. "In 20 years, a generation of readers has turned into consumers who feel that 120 characters... is enough for them to know," he wrote. "The daily battle of editors at Al-Mustaqbal... has become to find a headline that doesn't make the reader feel like they already saw it the previous night on their smartphone."

The newspaper suffered a financial crisis in 2015, prompting the dismissal of employees and a delay in payment of salaries, media watchdog Reporters Without Borders says. — Agencies

Francis in Arabia, the Muslim-friendly pope

VATICAN CITY: When Francis becomes the first pope to visit the Arabian peninsula on Sunday, he takes another important step in his efforts to build bridges with Islam and confirms interreligious dialogue as a keystone of his papacy. In the long, complicated and often bloody history of papal relations with the Muslim world, Argentine pontiff Jorge Bergoglio stands out for his fraternal language and broader desire to reach out across religious divides.

Pope Francis said he was looking to write a new page in relations between religions with his visit to the United Arab Emirates. "I am happy... to write on your dear land a new page in the relations between religions, confirming that we are brothers although different," he said in a video message to the Emirati people released yesterday. Francis has made boosting ties between Christianity and Islam a cornerstone of his papacy.

"Pope Francis is different from his predecessor Benedict XVI because he prefers interpersonal encounters to theological subtleties," said Valentino Cottini who teaches Islamic-Christian relations at the Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies (PISAI) in Rome. Retired German pope Benedict XVI, a theologian, spoke the most about Islam, giving 188 speeches on the subject. But years of glacial relations followed his decision to quote a XIVth century Byzantine emperor. He insisted the comment during a 2006 speech at Regensburg in Germany did not reflect his own views, but the damage was done and street protests erupted in the Muslim world.

'Dialogue or war'

Pope Francis, however, avoids analyzing the Holy Quran. His constant appeals for refugees to be welcomed, many of whom are Muslim, have helped win him support from the community, just as when he brought three Muslim families back on the papal plane from the Greek island of Lesbos. In 2016 and 2017 the spiritual leader of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics met with the imam of Cairo's Al-Azhar University, Sunni Islam's highest body, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb.

Tayeb, an Islamic philosophy lecturer critical of jihadists who draw inspiration from hardline Salafism, will again meet with the pope on Monday in the United Arab Emirates for an international interreligious meeting. "It's either dialogue or war. We're condemned to dialogue," French Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran said frequently during his time at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Tauran, who died last year, said that the fact there was any dialogue at all was an enormous achievement. But he also feared that dialogue would be limited to "little steps at the level of the elites, which don't turn into laws, don't reach the street".

Pope Francis has insisted that "the dialogue is moving forwards", but also said Muslims should look at the Holy Quran in a more interpretive way. But, notes Christian-Islamic expert Cottini: "We have more freedom of interpretation of the founding texts of Christianity, because the status of the word of God in the Bible is not the same as in the Quran, which Muslims consider the literal word of God."



DUBAI: Two men and a girl pose for a selfie with a cutout image of Pope Francis, days ahead of his visit to the United Arab Emirates, at St Mary's Catholic Church on Wednesday. — AFP

Fundamentalisms

Pope Francis takes great care not to use the word "Islamist" when an attack is carried out in the name of Islam, preferring to use "terrorist". In 2014, he called for Muslim political and religious leaders as well as academics unambiguously to condemn terrorism, a source of Islamophobia. He also puts Christian, Jewish and Muslim fundamentalisms on the same level - they are all "deviations".

In 2016 Francis declined to "associate Islam with violence" when asked about the murder of French priest Jacques Hamel by two militants. In the wake of the attack, he said that "the world is at war" but argued that religion was not the cause. "When I speak of war I speak of wars over interests, money, resources, not religion. All religions want peace, it's the others who want war." — AFP

Kuwait Times

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International

Migrants land in Sicily as crew faces uncertain fate

Salvini considering legal action against Sea Watch

CATANIA, Italy: Forty-seven migrants disembarked in the Sicilian port of Catania yesterday, where the crew of the charity ship that rescued them feared legal action as Italy's far-right interior minister tries to stop new arrivals. The Dutch-flagged Sea Watch 3, which had been waiting off the coast of Sicily with people it pulled to safety in the Mediterranean on Jan 19, was finally given permission to anchor in Catania after six other countries agreed to take them in.

The exhausted migrants, including 15 minors, cheered and hugged the crew as the ship sailed into the harbor, escorted by half a dozen coastguard and police boats. "I foresee that there may be problems with the authorities," Sea Watch's mission head Kim Heaton-Heather told AFP. "But I am also very, very certain that in the end, no matter what allegations are brought against the organization, the ship or the crew as whole, none of these allegations will stick and the truth of the matter will come out," he said.

France, Germany, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Luxembourg had said they would share care of the mainly Sub-Saharan group of migrants. Yesterday, Lithuania said it would accept up to five of them, as long as they were not "economic migrants". It was not clear whether Italy would also host some of the migrants. The ship had been sheltering from a storm off the coastal town of Syracuse, which

had been ready to welcome those saved.

Italy's hardline Interior Minister Matteo Salvini has warned he is considering legal action against Sea Watch's crew, accusing them of sailing straight for Italy rather than taking the migrants to closer ports in Libya or Tunisia. The German charity says it tried but failed to get a response from Tripoli or Tunis, and yesterday launched an appeal for financial aid, tweeting "Help us with our legal costs!" Police boarded the ship in Catania to examine its papers and speak to the crew.

'Relentless campaign'

People rescued at sea have frequently been left in limbo since Italy's anti-immigration government came to power in July, and on Wednesday Salvini said he was looking to ban all ships with rescued migrants from entering Italian waters. The decision to send the ship to Catania raised red flags among migration and legal experts who said it might be impounded, as was the case with several rescue vessels previously in different Mediterranean ports. Should that happen, it would take the last rescue charity ship operating in the central Mediterranean out of action.

The only charity-run rescue vessel left would be the Mare Jonio - a surveillance boat which aims to spot migrants in distress but is not equipped to rescue them. Catania prose-



SICILY: A migrant gestures while disembarking from the Dutch-flagged Sea Watch 3 NGO rescue vessel after it docked yesterday in the Sicilian port of Catania, southeastern Sicily. —AFP

ctor Carmelo Zuccaro has made a name for himself as a legal thorn in the side of NGOs that rescue migrants at sea. In March 2018 he impounded the Open Arms ship as part of an investigation into the crew for allegedly aiding illegal migrants by refusing to hand them over to the Libyan coastguard.

The ship was released after a month following a court ruling that Libya could not be considered a safe country because of a lack

of safeguards for human rights, but the investigation continues. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) and SOS Mediterranee said in December that the Aquarius rescue ship would not sail again after "a relentless ongoing political, judicial and administrative campaign backed by several European states". The rescue vessel had been stuck in a French port for two months following the revocation of its registration. —AFP

Tourist numbers to Turkey surge in 2018

ISTANBUL: Nearly 40 million foreign tourists visited Turkey in 2018, an increase of more than 21 percent, according to tourism ministry figures released yesterday. The Turkish tourism industry has been recovering over the last couple of years after a spate of terror attacks in 2015 and 2016 seriously dented the sector as well as a failed coup in July 2016. "Tourism in Turkey continues to rise and break the records of recent years," the ministry said, adding that there was a rise of 21.84 percent in 2018 from 2017.

Turkey welcomed just over 46 million visitors in 2018, including 39.49 million foreigners and 6.62 million Turkish citizens from abroad. The number exceeded that of 2015 when 42 million visitors came to Turkey, before a decline of 24.6 percent was recorded in 2016. The last major terror attack to hit Turkey was during New Year celebrations in 2017 when a gunman killed 39 people at an elite Istanbul nightclub.

Tourism income increased by 12.3 percent to reach \$29.5 billion in 2018 compared to the

previous year, according to official statistics published by the Turkish statistics office (TUIK) yesterday. The 2018 figure was up from \$26.3 billion in the previous year, TUIK said. Official data revealed that 81.8 percent of the income came from foreign visitors and 18.2 percent from Turkish citizens living abroad.

Nearly six million foreigners coming to Turkey in 2018 were from Russia - an increase of 26.49 percent compared with 2017 - and 4.5 million visitors were from Germany, up by 25.88 percent from the previous year, according to the ministry's statement. Around 1.5 million people visited Ephesus in western Turkey - where the remains of one of the "Seven Wonders of the World", the famous Temple of Artemis lies - in 2018.

But in 2017, the figure was lower at 996,800 visitors, the tourism ministry said. During one weekend in January, several groups of tourists were enjoying the Ephesus ruins, which was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2015 and is the fifth most visited site in Turkey. Some of my friends warned me: 'you know all the events that happened two, three years ago?' Shi, a Chinese tourist at Ephesus, said. —AFP

Vaping 2x better for quitting smoking than patches, gum

TAMPA: E-cigarettes are twice as effective as nicotine patches or gum at helping people quit smoking traditional cigarettes, according to major British study Wednesday, involving nearly 900 people. The report in the New England Journal of Medicine found that 18 percent of smokers who switched to battery powered vaping devices were able to steer clear of combustible cigarettes for one year, compared to 9.9 percent of people who relied on nicotine replacement therapies to quit.

"This is the first trial to test the efficacy of modern e-cigarettes in helping smokers quit," said lead researcher Peter Hajek, a professor at Queen Mary University of London. "E-cigarettes were almost twice as effective as the 'gold standard' combination of nicotine replacement products." However, people who switched to vaping were far more likely to keep vaping, indicating they may have exchanged one nicotine delivery device for another, without ever beating their addiction.

The trial randomly assigned 886 people who sought help to quit smoking in Britain to receive either a three-month supply of a nicotine replacement treatment of their choice -

such as patches, gum, lozenges, sprays, inhalators, or a combination - or an e-cigarette starter pack with one or two bottles of nicotine-containing liquid. The vaping group was encouraged to buy future supplies in their own choice of nicotine strengths and flavors, which include fruit, candy and mint.

Counseling and behavioral support were offered once a week for at least a month. When researchers checked back after a year, they found that 80 percent of e-cigarette users who had managed to steer clear of combustible cigarettes were still vaping regularly. Just nine percent of those who had quit cigarettes for a year in the nicotine replacement group were still using patches, gum or other substitutes.

For that reason, an accompanying editorial in the New England Journal of Medicine urged caution. "While e-cigarettes are 'safer' than traditional cigarettes, they are not without risks," wrote Belinda Borrelli, professor of health policy at Boston University Henry M Goldman School of Dental Medicine, and George O'Connor, professor of medicine at Boston University School of Medicine.

The ongoing vaping habit among those in the e-cigarette arm of the study "raises concerns about the health consequences of long-term e-cigarette use", they added, noting that "e-cigarette vapor contains many toxins" though the levels and their effects are generally considered to be lower than those coming from cigarette smoke. —AFP

International

Arctic air sends US Midwest temperatures well below zero

Worst freeze to grip the region in a generation

CHICAGO: A brutal cold wave moved eastward yesterday after bringing temperatures in the US Midwest lower than those in Antarctica, grounding flights, closing schools and businesses and raising fears of hypothermia. The extreme weather has now been blamed for as many as eight deaths, US news outlets reported. Mail deliveries were suspended and people were encouraged to stay home in nearly a dozen US states where the mercury plunged into the negative double digits, the worst freeze to grip the region in a generation.

The phenomenon stemming from a blast of Arctic air caused surreal scenes throughout the region, such as steam rising off the waters of Lake Michigan - the result of extremely cold air passing over warmer water below. Parts of Niagara Falls solidified into frozen stillness, and blocks of ice covered the river winding through downtown Chicago.

America's third city was in the direct path of the harsh weather and experienced its second-coldest day ever. Chicago was on track to break new records overnight when temperatures were forecast to reach their lowest points in the early hours Thursday. "This is a historic cold, obviously," Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel told a Wednesday night news conference. "They are life-threatening temperatures, and they should be treated accordingly," he cautioned.

The most intense cold was expected overnight Wednesday into yesterday, said Ben Deubelbeiss, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service. The New York Times reported. The Wednesday morning temperature in the

Windy City was -30 Celsius, which felt like -46 Celsius with wind chill. It was colder than Alaska's state capital and even colder than parts of Antarctica. "It feels like being close to dry ice," Leon Gilbert, 31, told AFP. "I can feel my skin tighten up."

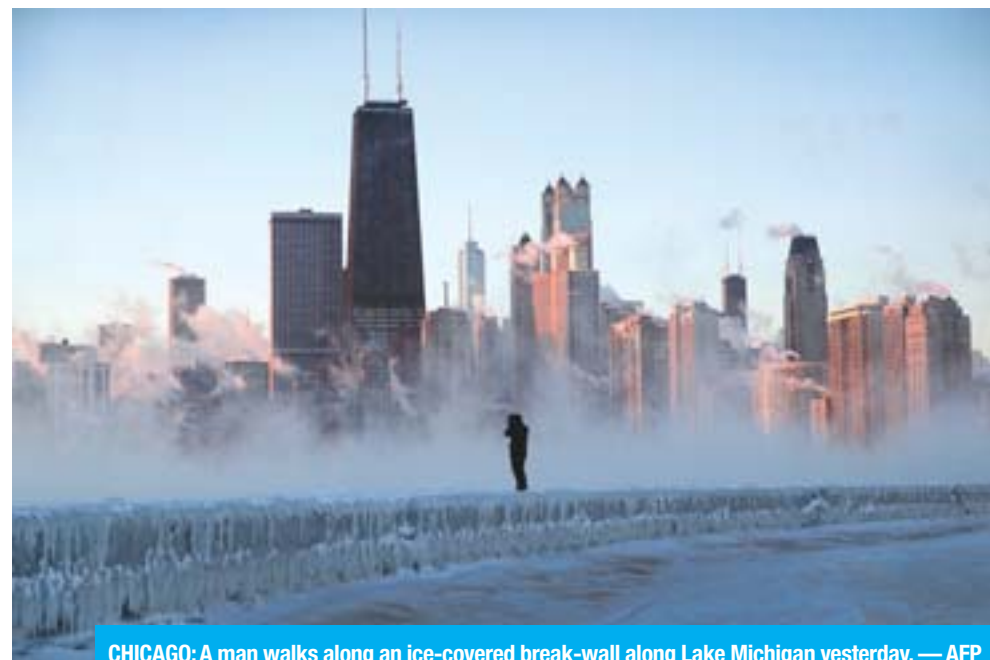
Unlike most Chicago residents, Gilbert was required to report to his job at a Starbucks on a downtown street largely devoid of its usual bustle of people and traffic. Sandwich shop manager Daniel Gonzalez, 37, also reported to work - at 5:00 am. "I have two shirts on... I have a hoodie, I have my big winter coat, I have a face mask and a skullcap and still cold," Gonzalez told AFP.

At Chicago's O'Hare airport, a major regional hub for airlines, ground crews struggled with freezing equipment and were told to avoid spending more than 15 minutes at a time exposed to the cold, causing delays for flights that managed to take off. More than 1,800 flights were canceled at Chicago's two major airports, while rail operator Amtrak scrapped train services from its hub in the city.

Homeless at risk

The US Postal Service suspended deliveries in parts of Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Iowa, the Dakotas and Nebraska. The cause of the subzero chill affecting tens of millions of Americans was a swirl of Arctic air that broke away from the polar vortex that usually encircles the North Pole.

The National Weather Service said temperatures would remain 25 to 45 degrees below average through Thursday, with wind chill



CHICAGO: A man walks along an ice-covered break-wall along Lake Michigan yesterday. — AFP

values as low as -32 to -48 Celsius. "The dangerously cold wind chills could cause frostbite on exposed skin in as little as five minutes," NWS said.

Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin implemented emergency measures. Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer said government offices would remain closed through yesterday. Nonessential employees would stay home. "The

priority must continue to be on keeping people safe," she said. Authorities and health experts warned of frostbite and hypothermia. Hundreds of warming centers were opened for vulnerable residents such as seniors, buses were employed as mobile warming spaces, and shelter capacities were increased for the homeless, including the approximately 16,000 living on the streets of Chicago. — AFP

Texas carries out first 2019 execution

WASHINGTON: The US carried out its first execution of 2019 on Wednesday, putting to death a Texas man convicted of murdering a police officer 30 years ago during an attempted robbery. Robert Mitchell Jennings, 61, was pronounced dead at 6:33 pm (0033 GMT Thursday) at a prison in Huntsville. Jennings gunned down Elston Howard in a Houston adult bookstore on July 19, 1988, according to a court filing and local media.

Howard, 24, was in the middle of arresting an employee of the bookstore for illegally showing pornographic movies when Jennings entered, having just robbed a neighboring adult movie theater. Jennings walked up to Howard and shot him twice. After the officer fell, Jennings fired again. He then demanded money from the store clerk before fleeing to his getaway vehicle, where he told an accomplice he had shot a "security guard".

The accomplice told Jennings to get out of the car and shot him in the hand when he refused. Wounded, Jennings made his way to a hospital and was arrested. He has launched multiple appeals since his sentencing in 1989, with supporters highlighting his difficult upbringing and intellectual limitations in their pleas for clemency. This week, a court rejected his latest appeal, which focused on deficiencies in his legal defense in earlier cases. The US carried out 25 executions in 2018, 13 of them in the state of Texas. — AFP

Congress tackles border security

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's planned "great, great wall" began morphing into a physical barrier and an array of high-tech gadgets in congressional talks launched on Wednesday to forge a compromise on security at the US border with Mexico. Although there were no guarantees a deal could be reached by a Feb 15 deadline, lawmakers on both sides showed a willingness to avoid ultimatums and seek common ground.

Some negotiators from Trump's Republican Party avoided uttering the word "wall" during the 17-member border security panel's first session on Wednesday. They spoke of a mix of enforcement tools, as Democrats had urged. The long, contentious debate over one of Trump's biggest 2016 campaign promises - a concrete border wall financed by Mexico - entered a new stage with the committee's launch last week ending a 35-day partial closure of the government.

Lawmakers have an opportunity, Republican Senator Shelley Moore Capito said, to choose "all of the above" for border investments, "including physical barriers where it makes sense". Even Trump's early morning Twitter message on the committee's urgent work left some wiggle room on the wall. "If the committee of Republicans and Democrats now meeting on Border Security is not discussing or contemplating a Wall or Physical Barrier, they are Wasting their time!" he tweeted.



ANTELOPE WELLS, New Mexico: A US Border Patrol agent walks along the US-Mexico border fence on Wednesday. — AFP

The Feb 15 deadline was imposed when Trump agreed last week to end the shutdown and give lawmakers another chance to forge a deal or face another closure. At a news conference, Democrats handed out a fact sheet they described as their opening proposal. It included no money for a wall or physical barriers, but House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Nita Lowey said: "Everything's on the table." But she added: "Smart border security is not overly reliant on physical barriers, which the Trump administration has failed to demonstrate are cost effective compared to better technology and more personnel."

Instead of Trump's wall, Democrats have been urging investment in high-tech equipment to enhance border security, such as drones, sensors and advanced scanning equipment, along with additional law enforcement personnel. — Reuters

International

Stranded by US, refugees build new life in Austria

Trump's restrictions hit refugees, immigrants

VIENNA: When Mahbud, 26, arrived in Vienna from Iran two years ago, he hadn't planned to stay here very long: He dreamt of moving to the United States and becoming an engineer. But along with more than 100 other Iranian refugees, he says his hopes have been dashed and he has been left stranded in Austria by US restrictions on refugees and immigrants. Mahbud belongs to a persecuted religious minority and left the Islamic Republic under a program run by a US refugee charity, HIAS.

Originally founded to help Jewish refugees who fled to the US, HIAS expanded its resettlement work to non-Jewish asylum-seekers in the early 2000s and says it has helped 25,000 Iranians from religious minorities flee the country since then. Because Tehran and Washington have no diplomatic relations, the refugees have traditionally been channelled through Austria, where they are temporarily housed while final checks are made by US authorities.

Mahbud arrived in Austria at around the time of US President Donald Trump's first travel ban in Jan 2017 - and it was then that his dreams of a new life in the US began to evaporate. His final interview for security clearance never took place. After more than a year of waiting and uncertainty, HIAS finally got in touch to say that his application had been closed. "You plan your life, you have all these dreams that you are going to... live freely and in just a moment they say: 'We cannot do anything for you,'" Mahbud says. "I thought: 'OK, my life's probably over, there is

nothing that I can do about it.'" His position in Austria was equally uncertain: HIAS warned he could be expelled within a matter of weeks.

Church steps in to help

Mahbud's plight and that of others like him came to the attention of Vienna's archbishop, Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, in Sept 2017, when the diocese's adviser on refugee issues, Manuel Baghdi, was contacted by a Iranian family who had found themselves destitute. As dozens of similar cases piled up, the Church decided to help arrange housing and drum up donations for the refugees. Requests for clarity from US authorities as to why they had been refused fell on deaf ears. "Of course we tried, but we always got the answer: 'No comment,'" Baghdi said.

Approached for comment by AFP, the US State Department denied that the sharp increase in the number of refusals for the Vienna program was due to Trump's travel ban, saying instead it was because of changes in the US Refugee Admissions Program in 2016. However, it's not clear what these could be: In 2016 President Obama had in fact raised the proposed ceiling for refugee admissions, but in Jan 2017 this was cut by Trump by more than half and the refugee admission program was suspended for 120 days.

Two years of 'torture'

Like Mahbud, most of the Iranians stuck in Vienna have now applied for refugee status in



VIENNA: A family of Iranian refugees and members of the country's Mandaean minority sit in an apartment on Jan 17, 2019. — AFP

Austria and are trying to build their lives in a country where they don't speak the language. A family of five from Iran's Mandaean minority are housed in the same building as Mahbud. In the small two-bedroom apartment they call home, the parents, two daughters and a son relate the

daily discriminations they suffered in Iran, and the pressure they faced to renounce their faith.

The father, Ahmed, insists that returning to Iran is not an option. And despite the family's current financial difficulties, he is full of praise for Austria. — AFP

Venezuela diaspora sees hope of return in Guaido

MONTEVIDEO: Whether working in a restaurant, playing street music, washing windcreens or selling sweets at traffic lights, Venezuelans who fled their homeland's economic meltdown are united in their dreams of one day returning home. For Venezuelans who are among the more than two million people who have emigrated since 2015, opposition leader and self-proclaimed acting president Juan Guaido offers hope that the day they will be able to pack their bags is drawing near.

Guaido's challenge to the authority of President Nicolas Maduro has been gathering pace on the back of notable support from the United States and other countries, but will likely require the military's backing to succeed. Leonel Nunez, 31, went to Mexico a year ago after his job as a political campaign adviser became increasingly difficult under what he calls Maduro's totalitarian government.

When arriving in his new city, Nunez took to cleaning toilets and working as a waiter. The urgency of his situation provoked a rapid change of priorities. "I was motivated by preventing my family from dying of hunger," said Nunez, now the manager of a Venezuelan restaurant. His current employment allows him to send home \$700-\$800 a month to his



MEXICO CITY: Leonel Nunez, 31, a member of the Venezuelan community in Mexico, makes a traditional Venezuelan arepa at a restaurant on Jan 28, 2019. — AFP

parents and three siblings. However, he says money isn't enough to look after his family's well-being. "I have a diabetic brother who is insulin-dependent. You can't find insulin and if you can it costs an arm and a leg." Nunez rejects the idea that Venezuela has two presidents. "For me there's only one and it's Guaido," who he said is showing Venezuelans "that it's worth continuing to dream."

Five Venezuelan classical musicians have taken to playing reggaeton in the streets of Bogota, the capital of Colombia. Venezuela's western neighbor has taken in more migrants than any other country. Starting 10 months ago, one by one the musicians left their symphonic orchestra in Caripito in northern Venezuela, packed up their instruments and moved away. — AFP

Rapes by Zimbabwe troops go unreported

HARARE: Sekai Hwangwa was asleep when soldiers carrying guns burst into her home in Zimbabwe's capital during a deadly crackdown on anti-government protests this month and beat and raped her. The 21-year-old, who was too afraid to report the attack to police, said the soldiers told her she was being punished for joining protesters who burned tyres and looted shops after President Emmerson Mnangagwa raised fuel prices.

"Soldiers stormed my home at midnight on the second day of the protests, their faces hidden behind balaclavas, and started beating me," said Hwangwa, whose name has been changed to protect her identity. "They were accusing me of participating in the protests, saying I was one of the hooligans that burnt tyres on the streets. After that, they raped

me," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Mnangagwa's government has come under severe criticism for a crackdown on protesters that rights groups say killed at least 12 people and injured scores. Police say three people died. The president, who took over in 2017 when his predecessor Robert Mugabe was forced to resign after a coup, promised during campaigning for a presidential election last year to repair the economy and break with Mugabe's politics.

But the crackdown has alarmed rights groups, who fear a return to the authoritarian regime that characterized much of the Mugabe era, and have demanded the government investigate reports of rape and other abuses by security forces. "Beatings, harassment and other abuses have continued without actions from government to hold accountable those committing the abuses," said Dewa Mavinga, Southern Africa director for Human Rights Watch.

Amnesty International said the Zimbabwean authorities "must act swiftly to ensure security forces are held to account for the ongoing brutal human rights violations - including torture, rape, beatings and killings of civilians". — Reuters

Kabul control slips amid US talks with Taleban

Afghan forces have suffered staggering losses

WASHINGTON: The Kabul government is steadily losing its grip over parts of Afghanistan even as American forces intensify their air campaign against insurgent groups, a US government watchdog said yesterday. The latest grim assessment of Afghanistan's security situation comes as the US pursues talks with the Taleban and urgently seeks a way out of the 17-year war. Numbers provided by Resolute Support, the US-led NATO mission in Afghanistan, show that as of Oct 31, only 63.5 percent of Afghans are living in areas controlled or influenced by the Kabul government - down from 65.2 percent the previous quarter.

According to the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), which compiled the data, the decrease came as Kabul's control or influence over Afghan districts dropped. SIGAR said just 53.8 percent of Afghanistan's 407 districts are in government hands, and experts on Afghanistan say the number is lower still. Instead of looking at population metrics, the Pentagon in a response to SIGAR said it is more important to "focus on the principal goal of the strategy of concluding the war in Afghanistan on terms favorable to Afghanistan and the United States." Officials pointed to ongoing talks between the Taleban and US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, who this week said he had sealed the outlines of a peace deal.

Unsustainable losses

Highlighting the ongoing security crisis, SIGAR said the US has dramatically increased air strikes, dropping 6,823 bombs in the first 11 months of 2018. The "figure was already 56 percent higher than the total number of munitions released in 2017 (4,361), and is more than five times the total in 2016," SIGAR said in its report. Meanwhile, the strength of Afghan security forces has continued to dwindle, and currently stands at 308,693 personnel. That means only 87.7 percent of positions are filled, the lowest level since January 2015.

Afghan forces have suffered staggering losses since they assumed responsibility for their country's security four years ago. President Ashraf Ghani last week said 45,000 security forces have been killed since he took office in Sept 2014. NATO combat forces pulled out at the end of that year, and observers say the losses may not be sustainable.

Surrender?

Officials say President Donald Trump has decided to pull half of America's forces from Afghanistan. The Pentagon insisted the numbers in SIGAR's report do not necessarily reflect poorly on his strategy to find an end to the conflict. "Measures of population control are not indicative of effectiveness of the South Asia



KABUL: An Afghan auto-rickshaw driver takes a woman wearing a burqa on Wednesday. — AFP

strategy or of progress toward security and stability in Afghanistan," the Pentagon said, according to SIGAR. Khalilzad has provided few specifics about a potential deal with the Taleban, but the militants are believed to have promised

not to provide shelter again to foreign extremists. However, the Taleban have so far refused another key US demand - that they talk to the internationally recognized government in Kabul, which the insurgents view as American "puppets". — AFP

Russia playing power broker

KABUL: Russia will host the Taleban and Afghan politicians opposed to President Ashraf Ghani on Tuesday, Russian and Taleban sources said, promoting its role of power broker in what a US official called an attempt to "muddle" the US-backed peace process. Moscow snubbed the Afghan government, sources said, to ensure the participation of the Taleban who refuse to hold talks with Ghani's representatives to end the 17-year-old Afghan war, branding them puppets of the United States.

"Senior Taleban leaders and prominent Afghan politicians will

travel to Moscow for a day-long summit. At this sensitive stage, it was best to not have Afghan government officials at the table," said a Russian official on condition of anonymity. The Moscow talks underline the increasing role Russia is playing in Afghanistan, decades after Soviet forces withdrew from the country, with business investment plans, diplomatic and cultural outreach and small military support for the central government.

The news of Russia hosting Ghani's critics, including former President Hamid Karzai who believes Russia can play a decisive role in ending America's longest war, has angered Kabul and US officials. "Russia is again trying to muddle the US-backed peace process and the political situation of Afghanistan," said a senior US official, adding that Russia's repeated overtures towards the Taleban and Ghani's critics proved its determination to belittle the government. — Reuters

Police arrest chief of 'Love Commandos'

NEW DELHI: The head of Love Commandos, an organization which offers shelter to runaway lovers, has been arrested in Delhi for extortion and abuse of desperate couples, officials said yesterday. The group became well-known for providing safe houses and legal advice to couples who defied family, religious and caste pressures to get married in the conservative country. Love Commandos founder Sanjoy Sachdev was arrested on Tuesday night after police

raided one of the shelter homes with members from the Delhi Commission of Women (DCW) and freed four couples.

"It was observed that (Sachdev) was indulging in illegal confinement and extortion of the couples behind the facade of providing a safe home to the victims," the DCW, an official body, said in a statement. The four couples found during the raid said they were forced to pay arbitrary sums as fees and threatened if they tried to leave, the statement added. Former journalist Sachdev launched 'Love Commandos' in 2010 after coming to the aid of a young man falsely accused of rape by the family of the woman he wanted to marry. The vast majority of marriages in India are arranged by families and couples who defy the tradition to marry outside caste and religion face a severe backlash. — AFP



NEW DELHI: In this file photo taken on Dec 2, 2014 the Indian head of the Love Commandos NGO Sanjoy Sachdev gestures during an interview. — AFP

News in brief

India summons Pakistan envoy

NEW DELHI: India summoned Pakistan's envoy in protest against a telephone call made by Pakistan's foreign minister to a separatist leader in Indian Kashmir and said there would be consequences if there was more such contact. Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale called Pakistan's ambassador, Sohail Mahmood, on Wednesday to denounce Pakistan for trying to subvert the country's integrity, the Indian foreign ministry said in a statement. It said the call by Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi to Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, a leader of the separatist umbrella All Parties Hurriyat Conference, based in Srinagar, the capital of Indian Kashmir, was deplorable. The Pakistani foreign ministry said in a statement it was a "travesty" to portray the struggle of the Kashmiri people as terrorism. — Reuters

Bibi still in Pak, free to go

ISLAMABAD: Asia Bibi, the Christian woman whose acquittal was upheld this week in a blasphemy saga which has made her a prime target for vigilantes, is still in Pakistan, the foreign ministry said yesterday. As Islamist extremists announced fresh protests demanding her execution, officials said she was free to go abroad, with speculation rampant that she will seek asylum in Europe or North America. The daughters of Bibi are now in Canada, a source close to the case said Wednesday. "To the best of my knowledge, Asia Bibi is still in Pakistan," foreign ministry spokesman Mohammad Faisal told reporters in Islamabad during a weekly press briefing. "She is a free citizen. If she wants to live in Pakistan, she can live in Pakistan. If she wants to go abroad she can go. This is her wish and there is no restriction on her," he continued. — AFP

International

Malaysia enthrones new king after resignation

Sports-loving sultan takes oath of office at national palace

News in brief

Convicts running for office

JAKARTA: Dozens of Indonesians who served jail time for corruption are running for public office, the electoral agency said yesterday, as the world's third-largest democracy gears up for national polls. The 49 candidates belong to more than half of the 16 political parties contesting April elections, including President Joko Widodo's Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle. Half a dozen represent Gerindra, a party lead by former military general Prabowo Subianto, who is challenging Widodo for Indonesia's top job, according to the General Elections Commission. They're among more than 8,000 people vying for seats in parliament and regional councils, with 192 million registered voters eligible to cast a ballot on April 17. —AFP

Dissidents allowed in Taiwan

TAIPEI: Two Chinese activists who spent more than four months trapped in limbo at a Taiwanese airport have been temporarily allowed to stay on the island, officials said yesterday. Liu Xinglian, 64, and Yan Kefen, 44, spent 125 days marooned in the transit area of Taoyuan airport after they arrived from Bangkok in September last year. The pair ran from China because of their political activism and were granted refugee status by the UN in Thailand. But they fled once more after receiving repeated visits from police in Thailand. The two men have pending refugee applications in Canada and were hoping Taiwan would allow them to stay while those claims were processed. —AFP

Paul awarded \$580,000

WASHINGTON: A jury awarded Republican Senator Rand Paul more than \$580,000 Wednesday over an attack by a neighbor that left him with broken ribs and fluid in his lungs, US media reported. Rene Boucher, who assaulted the junior senator from Kentucky in 2017, will owe \$375,000 in punitive damages, \$200,000 for pain and suffering and \$7,834 for medical expenses, according to local media reports. The New York Times, citing neighbors and Republican lawmakers familiar with the incident, reported that the assault stemmed from a landscaping dispute. Paul had dismounted from a riding lawn mower when Boucher, a retired anesthesiologist who lives next door, ran up and tackled him, the newspaper said. —AFP

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia yesterday installed a new king, Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, after the last monarch resigned in a historic first following his reported marriage to a Russian ex-beauty queen. In a ceremony steeped in pomp and centuries of tradition, the sports-loving sultan, dressed in aqua blue formal wear, took the oath of office at the national palace in Kuala Lumpur.

The ceremony was televised nationally and attended by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and hundreds of guests decked out in Islamic finery. Before being sworn in at the palace, the 59-year-old, who is also the ceremonial ruler of central Pahang state, was given a welcome at the national parliament and inspected a guard of honor.

His predecessor, Sultan Muhammad V, stepped aside this month following just two years on the throne after he went on medical leave. Reports then surfaced he had married a former Miss Moscow. No official reason was given for his resignation, but it was the first time a king had stepped aside before the end of his term in the Muslim-majority country.

Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy with a unique arrangement where the national throne changes hands every five years between royal rulers of the country's nine states. Pahang was next in line for the throne after Muhammad V stepped down, and Sultan Abdullah was formally chosen as the country's 16th king by Malaysia's royal families last week.

Aceh whips teens for cuddling

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia: Two teenagers were whipped in Indonesia's Aceh province yesterday after they were caught cuddling in public - a crime under the conservative region's Islamic law. Flogging is used as punishment for a range of offences in the region at the tip of Sumatra island, including gambling, drinking alcohol, and having gay sex or relations outside of marriage. Hundreds of spectators watched as a female university student and her boyfriend, both 18, were whipped 17 times each outside a mosque in the provincial capital Banda Aceh. —AFP



BANDA ACEH: An 18-year-old Indonesian woman is caned in public yesterday as punishment for being caught cuddling with her boyfriend. —AFP



KUALA LUMPUR: The incoming 16th King of Malaysia Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah salutes beside Queen Tunku as Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (center) observes during a welcoming ceremony at Parliament House yesterday. — AFP

The new king is an avid athlete who holds a string of positions on sporting bodies. He is on the council of world football governing body FIFA, president of the Asian Hockey Association, and used to be the head of the Football Association of Malaysia. After attending school in Malaysia, the keen polo player went on to study in Britain where he attended the Sandhurst military academy, according to a biography published on official news agency Bernama.

Despite the merely ceremonial role,

Malaysia's Islamic royalty command great respect, especially from Muslim Malays, the country's majority group, and criticizing them is strictly forbidden. Portraits of the king and queen adorn government buildings throughout the country. The king is also the symbolic head of Islam in the nation, as well as the nominal chief of the military. Malaysia's sultans trace a lineage back to the 15th century. The king is referred to as Yang di-Pertuan Agong, or "He Who Is Made Lord". —AFP

Toiling in toxic smog

NEW DELHI: Delhi is the world's most polluted major city, its toxic cocktail of vehicle fumes, dust and smoke choking the chaotic metropolis and taking years off its 20 million inhabitants' lives. But despite this, with levels of airborne pollutants routinely eclipsing safe limits in winter months, people in the Indian capital still have to go about their daily lives. AFP spoke to three Delhi residents doing just that.

The choking boatman

Between October and March, people in Delhi flock to the Yamuna rivers, one of the world's most noxious waterways, to feed migrating seagulls, believing it brings good karma. Rowing them in his red wooden boat as the sun struggles to break through the haze to shimmer on the cold brown water is 24-year-old Ganesh Pandit. "There is too much pollution here because of which there is smog. Phlegm gets stuck in the throat and it makes breathing tough," says Pandit, tossing out bits of bread to the squawking birds. He adds: "When we take medicines, we feel better. When we stop taking the medicines, then

problems start again. I always wake up with a headache. I have trouble rowing the boat."

The athlete

The Lodhi Gardens park, dotted with the atmospheric tombs of Islamic rulers of centuries past, is an oasis of calm and green, attracting Delhiites in their droves for sport or leisure. Hopping over yellow training cones and shin-high green metal frames and scampering side-to-side in her pink trainers, is high school student Anaya Goel, a national-level badminton player. "The pollution in Delhi has very adverse effects on my training and I don't feel like coming out and training," the 17-year-old explains. "After my training finishes, I feel a lot of nausea, headache and fatigue because of the pollution levels," she adds.

Sweeping the streets

Delhi's Red Fort was constructed in the 17th century by a Mughal emperor and housing pavilions and ornamental gardens behind its imposing sandstone walls. Outside toils Lajwanti, scooping up the city's detritus into a rudimentary wheelbarrow as the traffic roars past, her only protection from the pollution is a thin crimson scarf to cover her nose and mouth. "I come at 6:30 in the morning. My eyes burn, I cough often," the government employee reveals. —AFP

Lifestyle

Friday Times

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A model displays a creation by Atelier La Bourjoisie during the launch of the 6th edition of the Ladies A La Mode fashion show in the Omani capital Muscat.— AFP

Muezzin muscled out: Israeli mosque fires bodybuilder

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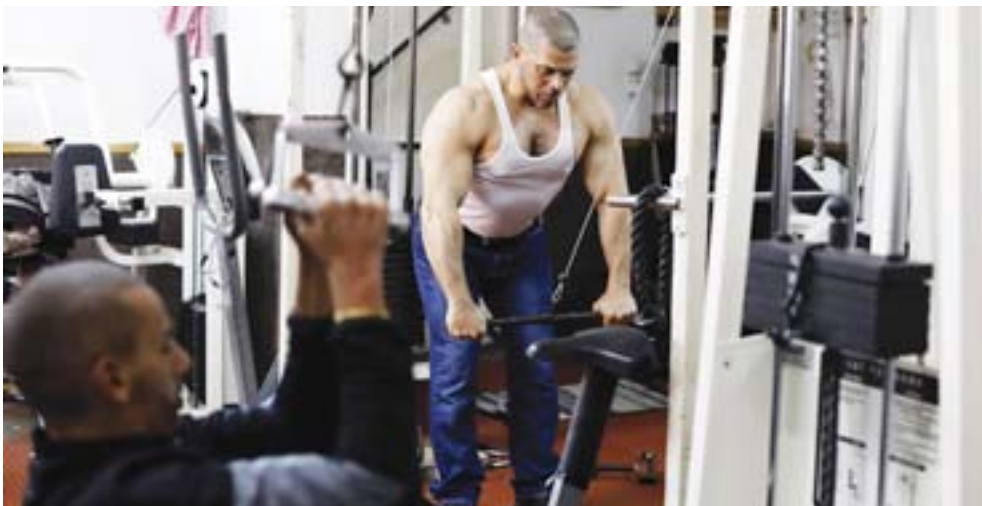


Arab Israeli bodybuilder and Muezzin Ibrahim Masri prays at El-Jazzar mosque in the northern Israeli port city of Acre. — AFP photos



Arab Israeli bodybuilder and Muezzin Ibrahim Masri holds a picture of himself taken during a competition, at a gym in the northern Israeli port city of Acre.

Muezzin muscled out: Israeli mosque fires bodybuilder



Ibrahim Masri works out at a gym.



Ibrahim Masri has been calling Muslims to prayer for nearly 15 years in an Israeli city but his voice is now being silenced because he took part in a bodybuilding contest. Israel's interior ministry is stripping him of his role as chief muezzin of El-Jazzar mosque in the northern city of Acre after having ruled that his participation in the 2017 competition was "incompatible" with his religious role. Muezzins call Muslims to prayer five times a day through loudspeakers, with the most renowned famed for their voice.

The 46-year-old Masri has been lifting weights since he was young and is well known in Acre. He has never seen a contradiction between his sport and his religion. "This is an unjust decision," he told AFP. "The religion of Islam en-

courages any individual to practice sport." A ministry spokesman told AFP he had been fired over his inappropriate dress. Bodybuilders typically wear brief trunks during competitions and Masri has many photos in such attire.

Scanty clothing

Masri, who has bulging arms and weighs around 105 kilos (230 pounds), is a member of Israel's Arab minority, who make up around 18 percent of the Jewish state's population. In 2017, he took part in the Israel bodybuilding championships, winning in his category. A few months later he was summoned to a committee of religious officials in northern Israel. "They showed me the pictures of me participating in the com-



A partial view of El-Jazzar mosque in the northern Israeli port city of Acre .

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petition, and they considered it was not appropriate for a muezzin to practice this sport," the father-of-three said. They said his scanty clothing was unacceptable for a religious figure.

The interior ministry oversees the religious organizations of Christians, Muslims and other non-Jewish minorities in Israel, and it has the final say over the full-time muezzin's job. Masri said he sent them a letter apologizing. "I told them I would not take part in any more competitions. "They knew I was involved in this sport before I was hired." But this month the ministry finally decided to dismiss him, and a spokesman told AFP he was fired effective this week. "The employee appealed to the state service commission, which concluded that the ministry's conduct was flawless and the firing was approved."

'No voice more beautiful'

El-Jazzar mosque in the Old City of Acre is one of the most beautiful in Israel, built in 1781. The Mediterranean city is considered a World Heritage Site, with its repository of remains from the Crusades. The mosque is named after the local Ottoman ruler at the time it was built and its design inspired by the famed mosques of Istanbul. The muezzin's firing has caused a stir among Acre's Muslim majority. "How can they separate Ibrahim from his work just because he took part in a competition?" asked Wissam Za-



Ibrahim Masri walks in front of El-Jazzar mosque.

lafi, a guard at the mosque.

"We don't have another muezzin with a voice as beautiful in all of Acre." Sheikh Mohammed Kiwan, the mosque's head imam, or prayer leader, said Masri had not asked the administration before entering the bodybuilding competition. "It is not permissible for him to expose his modesty in front of men, women and children."

However, the imam said he was in favor of giving Masri a final warning and agreed that he had a beautiful voice.

Masri worked out throughout his time as a muezzin and even helped open a club to train young people in Acre. Amal Khatib, 19, said the club had helped him focus and to find a job. Masri has filed an appeal, which will be heard next month,



Ibrahim Masri, calls to prayer at El-Jazzar mosque.

and has started a petition by local supporters. Jaber Mushahee, an 80-year-old who prays at El-Jazzar, said the decision would damage the mosque. "I've made umra and there is no voice anywhere more beautiful than his," said Mushahee, referring to the mini-pilgrimage to Mecca. —AFP



Ibrahim Masri, calls to prayer at El-Jazzar mosque in the northern Israeli port city of Acre.



Ibrahim Masri is embraced by a friend at El-Jazzar mosque.



Ibrahim Masri works out at a gym.

Rubens drawing fetches \$8.2 m at controversial auction

A drawing by Flemish Baroque master Peter Paul Rubens sold for \$8.2 million in an auction in New York on Wednesday that was criticized by some in the Netherlands who said the work should have been offered to a Dutch museum. Sotheby's described the small, rectangular "Nude Study of a Young Man with Raised Arms" as a key piece in the development of one of the artist's pivotal commissions, and one of only a handful of drawings of comparable importance by Rubens to have come on the market in the last half century.

Depicting a muscular, nearly nude young man who strains as he pushes an unseen weight above his head, the drawing was used in the

preparation of Rubens's famous "Raising of the Cross" triptych, painted in 1610. It was acquired by the Dutch royal family in 1838 by Prince William of Orange, who became the Netherlands's King William II. Unlike many monarchs, the Orange-Nassau dynasty, whose fortune Forbes magazine estimated to be \$220 million in 2011, owns personal assets separate from the institution's official holdings.

Dutch museums responded with criticism in recent weeks after the announcement that several works of art from the royal collection would be put up for auction. Some believed that Princess Christina, who owned the Rubens drawing sold Wednesday, should have given museums the chance to buy the work, which they see as part of Dutch cultural heritage, before selling it at auction abroad. Members of the D66 party, which is part of the governing coalition, also expressed reservations about the sale, before Culture Minister Ingrid van Engelshoven cut short the debate, saying the decision of whether or not to sell a work of art was up to the owner.

Prime Minister Mark Rutte added it was a "private matter." "It's an important distinction here that this drawing is actually the private property of a private individual," head of old



The Sotheby's auctioneer takes bids on the Flemish Baroque Master Sir Peter Paul Rubens' "Nude Study of a Young Man with Raised Arms" at Sotheby's in New York. —AFP

master drawings at Sotheby's Greg Rubenstein. "It doesn't belong to a royal collection or a public collection. As such, the owner is entirely able to do what they will, which includes selling." After several hectic minutes marked by a bidding battle between an in-person buyer and another over the phone Wednesday, the drawing finally sold for \$7 million, which came to a total

of \$8.2 million after fees and commissions—much higher than Sotheby's \$2.5 to \$3.5 million estimate. The buyer was not identified. The previous record for a drawing from a Dutch master was set during a 2014 Christie's sale in London, when the only known preparatory drawing from Rubens's "Samson and Delilah" went for 3.2 million pounds (\$5.5 million). —AFP

The public listens to musicians perform with ice instruments during a concert in the "Ice Dome" on Presena Galcier, Tonale Pass, near Trento in northern Italy. — AFP photos



ICE INSTRUMENTS MELT MUSICAL BOUNDARIES IN ITALIAN ALPS

When Tim Linhart started making instruments from ice they were more likely to explode with a bang than produce music, but things have come a long way since then. Today, the US-born artist is in charge of an ice orchestra of local musicians playing a series of concerts at sub-zero temperatures in a vast, custom-built igloo high in the Italian Alps. "I made snow and ice sculptures in the ski resort where I'm from in New Mexico (for 16 years)... and then I decided it would be cool to make a sculpture of a violin," Linhart, 59, told AFP.

Musicians play ice instruments during a concert in the "Ice Dome".



Musicians perform with ice instruments during a concert in the "Ice Dome".



US artist Tim Linhart works on an ice violin in the "Ice Dome".



A musician perform with an ice cello during a concert in the "Ice Dome".



A musician perform with an ice double bass during a concert in the "Ice Dome".

"I heard the sound coming from inside and thought 'wow this is super exciting, if I just tighten up the strings a little bit more it would be louder,'" he recalled. Overtightening the strings, however, caused the instrument to shatter into little pieces, he recounted. "But I had heard enough, it was the beginning," said Linhart, his large frame treading nimbly among the delicate instruments on stage in the igloo.

Strength in fragility

Cellist Nicola Segatta, who helped build his own instrument out of ice, says their sound is "more crystalline" than the classic wooden instruments. "They're incredibly fragile. When you're building them there's the constant risk that they'll disintegrate into a thousand pieces," said the musician, who had been part of the orchestra that day. But the intensity of the music produced by the ice instruments brings out a strong emotional reaction in the audience, in counterpoint to their fragility, he added.

The ice instruments require amplification, and technicians battle constantly to keep the sound coming in the adverse conditions. As the audience enters the igloo, where temperatures average minus 12 degrees C (10 degrees F), it begins to warm up, and so do the instruments, forcing the musicians constantly to retune.

Good vibrations

But the ice's flexibility is also a blessing, as it adapts to being played. "The instruments when they're first newly built, they sound kind of tinny, a weird-sounding little thing, and the more you play them, the bigger the sound gets," Linhart said. "Within the first couple of hours, the sound will be twice as big as it was just before and much nicer, sweeter sounding, because the ice is responding to this vibration passing through it and getting warmed up like it's getting a massage." Linhart spends the summer with his Swedish wife and their young son in northern Sweden, gardening and creating non-ice art, while some of the better instruments are kept in a freezer for the next winter.

"If they're old and worn we'll just hit them with a hammer or leave them out in the sun and let them die," he said. His current project is teaching people like Segatta how to make the instruments, and the concert hall, themselves. But this means resisting the constant temptation to think up even bigger instruments in "the cutting edge, the invention side of ice music again", he said. — AFP



Musicians perform with ice instruments during a concert in the "Ice Dome".

'Only setback is they melt'

In the Passo Paradiso winter sports station at an altitude of 2,600 meters (8,500 feet), instruments still at times spontaneously implode due to the brittleness of the ice, but less frequently. And when they do, it's not altogether a lost cause. "Then you know you're as close to the edge of ice music as you can get," Linhart said. Here, the artist has built a violin, viola, timpani drum set, xylophone, double bass, mandolin, cello and even his own invention, the giant Rolandophone, a huge percussion pipe instrument, all from ice.

After molding front and back plates, Linhart uses a white-ice mix of water and snow to build the instrument's walls, around a metal backbone, over which the strings are stretched and tightened. A mandolin takes five or six days to make, bigger instruments can take months. "It's a great material because you can both grow it and cut it away, and it's free," said Linhart. "The only setback is that it melts above freezing." Because of their weight, some of the instruments are played while suspended from mountaineering carabiners attached to steel cables drilled into the ceiling of the 200-seater igloo. For storage, many are kept in niches carved out of the igloo walls.

A musician performs with an ice xylophone during a concert in the "Ice Dome".



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Early human cousins may have been jewelers

A rare species of primitive human roamed the forests of Eurasia 200,000 years ago and may have made tools and even jewelry, according to new research published Wednesday. Denisovans—a cousin of Neanderthals—were discovered in 2010 when scientists working in a cave in southern Siberia obtained a finger bone of a girl belonging to a previously unidentified group of humans. Because they have so far only been located at the Denisova Cave, far less is known about them than their more famous relatives Neanderthals, who executed sophisticated hunting strategies in groups, made fire, tools and clothing.

In dual papers published in the journal *Nature*, two international teams of scientists now argue Denisovans inhabited the cave as far back as 200,000 years ago. To arrive at that conclusion they needed to overcome several hurdles that make dating prototypical man especially tricky. “The big challenge is that the human remains themselves are microscopic—the biggest one is 2 cm high and they are really difficult to date because they all fall either just at or beyond the reach of radiocarbon dating,” Tom Higham, director of the Oxford University Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit and study author told AFP.

Carbon dating, which uses the half-life of radioactive carbon isotopes to show the age of organic matter, is only reli-

able on specimens up to roughly 50,000 years old. Higham and the team unearthed several previously undiscovered bone fragments and managed to obtain a DNA sample from one of them. They then used a mathematical model comprised of available carbon data, as well as sediment dating, genomic mutation rates and archeological information to determine with high certainty when the Denisovans inhabited their eponymous dwelling. “200,000 years ago, maybe older up until about 50,000 when Denisovans disappear from the site,” said Higham.

Jewelry, tools

As well as human remains, researchers found perforated animal teeth possibly used as necklaces, bone tools, ostrich shell beads and stone-worked bracelets—all artefacts previously only associated with modern humans and, more recently, Neanderthals. In the absence of any other hominid remains in the areas of the cave where the objects were found, Higham said “the most likely explanation” was that they were the work of Denisovans. “The earliest (objects) date back to 49,000 years ago, which is the earliest evidence we have of this type of behavior in northern Eurasia, if not the entire Eurasian continent,” he said.

“The evidence suggests that the most likely explanation is



This handout picture shows a bone fragment of ‘Denisova 11’, evidence of interbreeding of a Neanderthal and a Denisovan, found in 2012 by Russian archaeologists at Denisova Cave in the Altai Mountains of Siberia. — AFP

that Denisovans are making them.” If confirmed, the finding could transform what we know about how our ancestors survived and socialized. The Denisova Cave last made headlines in August with the discovery of Denny, a half Neanderthal half-Denisovan hybrid who was the first evidence of interbreeding among those two early human species. —AFP

Fans call out Ariana Grande for misspelled Japanese tattoo

Too bad pop star Ariana Grande is vegan—she just tattooed an accidental homage to a Japanese barbecue grill on her palm. The American singer’s attempt to ink an ode to her hit single “7 Rings” backfired Wednesday, after social media quickly chimed in to tell her the characters actually translated to “shichirin”—a small charcoal grill.

Grande, 25, had posted a now-deleted photo of the new body art on Instagram before her fans pointed out the spelling error. In widely shared screenshots of now-deleted tweets, Grande acknowledged she had forgotten a symbol but noted that the design won’t last, as skin on the palm regrows faster than that on the rest of the body and tattoos there usually fade. “If I miss it enough, I’ll suffer thru the whole thing next time,” she said, later writing “Pls leave me and my tambourine grill alone. thank u.” Her apparent nonchalance didn’t stop Twitter from skewering her with memes and mockery. Some were ironically sympathetic: “Met with all the Asians, and our official ruling is that the Ariana Grande tattoo is good,” wrote Twitter user Kevin Nguyen. —AFP



‘Real change’ for Latinos in Hollywood? Gina Rodriguez hopes so

Gina Rodriguez, the Golden Globe-winning star of TV comedy “Jane the Virgin,” said she wept when she heard the Oscar nominations, and saw “Roma” star Yalitza Aparicio’s name on the list. For one of the first times, Rodriguez said she felt seen, along with many other Latinos working to be noticed in Hollywood and reflected in that work. “Oh my god, I am so proud,” the 34-year-old Rodriguez told AFP in an interview. “To have a Latina out there, my whole heart—my whole heart exploded.” If she strikes gold on February 24, Aparicio would be the first Hispanic woman to win the best actress Oscar—a sea change that Rodriguez hopes to be part of with her new film “Miss Bala.”

The film — a remake of a 2011 Mexican flick that hits US theaters on Friday—has been adapted as a “fun action movie” to appeal to a more global audience, Rodriguez said. But the difference is that the star is a woman—and a Latina to boot. “Miss Bala” tells the story of a Latina living in Los Angeles who travels to the Mexican border city of Tijuana to help a friend competing in a beauty contest—and finds herself mixed up in the dark world of drug trafficking.



Wilmer Valderrama (second left) takes a selfie with America Ferrera (third left), Gina Rodriguez (fourth left) and Ismael Cruz Cordova (right) upon arriving for the premiere of Columbia Pictures “Miss Bala” at Regal LA Live Stadium 14 in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

As the bullets fly and explosions ring out—all with a good dose of exaggeration—Gloria (Rodriguez) discovers she is a woman capable of doing things she never imagined possible, including using a firearm. Importantly, 95 percent of the cast and crew is Latino—that’s pretty rare for a Hollywood production, but Rodriguez is hoping it will become

more of a norm. “I believe that if we Latinos and Latinas come together and support ‘Miss Bala’, then we’ll see real change. We won’t have just one movie—we’ll have many more movies,” she said. “I think the studios will stand up and start putting money behind films with Latinos and Latinas, in front of and behind the camera.” —AFP



Family members of the late Nguyen Van Thang praying before his new casket during a reburial ceremony at a cemetery on the outskirts of Hanoi. — AFP photos



Nguyen Thi Un, cousin of the late Nguyen Van Thang, lighting incense on his unearthed coffin during a reburial ceremony at a cemetery on the outskirts of Hanoi.

Goodbye, again: Vietnam's reburials send souls on final journey

In the dead of night in a Hanoi cemetery, Nguyen Van Thang's casket is unearthed; his bones carefully cleaned, wrapped in silk and then reburied, so he can finally segue into the next life. The ceremony is one of Vietnam's most sacred death rituals, an ancient custom usually carried out before the Tet lunar new year, which falls in early February this year, as the final act in life's journey. Many Vietnamese, especially in the north, honor their dead with reburials—normally three years after their loved ones are first laid to rest.



A Vietnamese bone-cleaner arranging the recovered and cleansed remains of a woman in a new casket during a reburial ceremony at a cemetery in Nam Dinh province.

Modernity is chipping away at the tradition with cremations preferred as a more simple, clean and cheap passage into the afterlife. For Thang's relatives, however, meeting his wishes of a reburial three years after he died of cancer aged 59 was never in question. "Finally, he can rest in his nice new home. I feel so blessed and happy," said his wife Ha Thi Thua from his graveside at a cemetery on the outskirts of Hanoi. The hours-long ceremonies are not for the impatient—or faint of heart. Beginning in the evening, a shaman makes offerings to the spirit guardian and the deceased—in Thang's case, sticky rice, boiled chicken, a paper horse model for the spirit guardian to ride on and fake US dollar bills among a cornucopia of items.

Then the shaman chants and tosses coins to gain "permission" from the dead and the grave's spiritual guardian to begin the ritual, before the coffin is dug out by gravediggers and relatives. Once the coffin has been carefully lifted out of the ground, the bones

are gently removed. If the remains are black and bare of flesh, as Thang's were, it's a relief. Otherwise, the grim but essential task of scraping the flesh off must begin. The sight of her dead husband was too much for Thua to bear, and she fainted as his skull, ribs, tiny hands and feet were washed by bone cleaners in a pot of herbal water.

"Did the man have all his teeth when he was alive?" a bone cleaner asked the family, a sour odour wafting in the air. "Yes," replied a daughter, knowing the importance of reburying her father with all his parts in place. The final and most important step is re-wrapping the bones and placing them in a new "tieu"—a small, carved stone casket that is buried in a new resting place, this time forever.

Journey for the soul

Adherents to the ancient custom believe the souls of the dead are stuck in a spiritual limbo until they are reburied. "The soul can't make the journey by itself, it needs living humans, especially relatives, to do it for them," explains anthropology professor Shaun Malarney of Japan's International Christian University. According to the belief system, even the souls of the living might be eternally uncomfortable if the ritual is not correctly carried out.

Performed with few luxuries in the post-war period, the ceremonies have become splashier in step with rising wealth, Malarney added, with more elaborate offerings for the dead to enjoy in the next life. But modernity has seen the ritual fall out of favour with some families helped by government efforts since the 1990s to push cremations as a hygienic alternative. Today Hanoi families who cremate their dead get a \$130 rebate from the government, and once-scarce cremation parlors have popped up across the city catering to a growing number of customers.

Even some long-time bone-cleaners prefer the modern approach. "I sent my mother's body for cremation when she died in 2017. It was much nicer, simpler and cleaner," said Tien Huong, donning gloves and a face mask before cleaning Thang's remains. Those who oppose cremation believe burning a body after death will suspend a spirit in a hot state for eternity. Regardless of how the deceased are sent off, it is up to the living to make sure the proper respects are paid. "In the end, your attitude towards the death of your parents is what counts most. Reburial or cremation doesn't matter," cultural researcher Le Quy Duc told AFP. — AFP



A bone-cleaner arranging the recovered and cleansed remains of the late Nguyen Van Thang in a new casket during a reburial ceremony at a cemetery on the outskirts of Hanoi.



Vietnamese bone-cleaners cleaning the recovered skull and bones of late Nguyen Van Thang, during a reburial ceremony at a cemetery on the outskirts of Hanoi.



Family members of the late Nguyen Van Thang praying before unearthing his coffin, during a reburial ceremony at a cemetery on the outskirts of Hanoi.

Cheesy nachos that are sure to get your party started

These nachos are a cinch to make and can turn after-school snack time for a few kids into something of a fiesta. Or double the recipe and use a 13-by-9-inch baking dish, and you'll have enough nachos to really get the party started! If you like your nachos spicy, layer in some drained pickled jalapeno chiles along with the scallions. Monterey Jack cheese melts well and is the classic choice for nachos, but cheddar works too. Follow this recipe with your kids.

NACHOS

Ingredients:

Servings: 4-6

Start to finish: 35 minutes

1 (15-ounce) can pinto beans

4 ounces tortilla chips

1 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese

2 scallions, sliced thin

1 cup tomato salsa

Greek yogurt or sour cream

Gather Cooking Equipment

Colander

Can opener

1/2 cup dry measuring cup

8-by-8-inch square baking dish

Oven mitts

Cooling rack

Spoon

Preparation :

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 F. Set colander in sink. Open can of pinto beans and pour into colander. Rinse beans with cold water and shake colander to drain well. Measure out 1/2 cup beans; refrigerate remaining beans for another use. Spread half of chips in even layer in 8-by-8-inch square baking dish. Sprinkle chips evenly with half of cheese.

Sprinkle beans over cheese, then sprinkle half of scallions on top. Repeat with remaining chips, cheese, and scallions. Place baking dish in oven and bake until cheese is melted, 7 to 10 minutes. Use oven mitts to remove nachos from oven (ask an adult for help). Place baking dish on cooling rack. Let cool for 2 minutes. Spoon half of salsa over top of nachos. Serve with remaining salsa and yogurt.

Nutrition information per serving:

237 calories; 100 calories from fat; 11 g fat (4 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 18 mg cholesterol; 596 mg sodium; 25 g carbohydrate; 5 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 10 g protein.



NACHOS



DEEP-DISH PIZZA

Can you make a flaky and crisp deep-dish pizza at home? Sure

If you're from the Northeast, or if you haven't been to Chicago, you may dismiss deep-dish pizza out of regional pride. That would be a mistake. Real Chicago-style pizza is certainly thick, but its texture and flavor are something special: Instead of being bread-like, the crust offers the contrast of a good biscuit and airy inside, lightly crisp outside, and flaky throughout and boasts a rich taste that holds its own under any topping. We wanted to achieve such results at home.

Deep-dish pizza crust includes a fair amount of fat. Some recipes rely on oil, but we thought the rich flavor of butter was unbeatable in this crust. We found cornmeal in just about every ingredient list we reviewed, and it indeed added good earthy flavor and crunch.

To achieve maximum flakiness, after mixing the dough and letting it rise, we employed a technique called laminating, which involves layering butter and dough through a sequence of rolling and folding to create ultra-flaky pastries. Adding melted butter to the pizza dough and spreading the rolled-out dough with softened butter before folding did the trick in our crust. Moving the dough into the refrigerator for its second rise ensured that the butter remained in distinct layers and didn't get too soft. For the finishing touch on our crust, we oiled our cake pans, which made the crust crisp and even more flavorful.

Following Chicago tradition, we covered the dough with shredded mozzarella before topping it with a thick tomato sauce. The cheese formed a barrier between the crust and the sauce, which prevented sogginess. A sprinkle of nutty Parmesan over the sauce provided a second layer of cheesy bite. We do not recommend mixing this dough by hand. Use the large holes of a box grater to grate the onion.

DEEP-DISH PIZZA

Ingredients

Servings: 6-8

Start to finish: 3 to 4 hours (Rising time: 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 hours; Baking time: 20 minutes)

Dough:

3 1/4 cups (16 1/4 ounces) all-purpose flour

1/2 cup (2 1/2 ounces) cornmeal
2 1/4 teaspoons instant or rapid-rise yeast
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1 1/4 cups (10 ounces) water, room temperature
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, plus 4 tablespoons (2 ounces) softened
2 teaspoons sugar
1/4 cup (1 3/4 ounces) extra-virgin olive oil

Sauce and Toppings:

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1/4 cup grated onion
1/4 teaspoon dried oregano
Salt and pepper
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
1/4 teaspoon sugar
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
1 pound whole-milk mozzarella cheese, shredded (4 cups)
1/4 cup finely grated Parmesan cheese

Preparation

For the dough: Whisk flour, cornmeal, yeast, and salt together in bowl of stand mixer. Whisk water, melted butter, and sugar in 4-cup liquid measuring cup until sugar has dissolved. Using dough hook on low speed, slowly add water mixture to flour mixture and mix until cohesive dough starts to form and no dry flour remains, about 2 minutes, scraping down bowl as needed. Increase speed to medium-low and knead until dough is smooth and elastic and clears sides of bowl, about 8 minutes.

Transfer dough to lightly floured counter and knead by hand to form smooth, round ball, about 30 seconds. Place dough seam side down in lightly greased large bowl or container, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and let rise until doubled in size, 1 to 1 1/2 hours. (Unrisen dough can be refrigerated for at least 8 hours or up to 16 hours; let sit at room temperature for 30 minutes before shaping.)

For the sauce and toppings: Heat 2 tablespoons oil in medium saucepan over medium heat until shimmering. Add

onion, oregano, and 1/2 teaspoon salt and cook until onion is softened and lightly browned, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in tomatoes and sugar, bring to simmer, and cook until sauce measures 2 1/2 cups, 25 to 30 minutes. Off heat, stir in basil and remaining oil. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to bowl and let cool completely before using.

Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 425 F. Press down on dough to deflate and transfer to clean counter. Press and roll dough into 15 by 12-inch rectangle, with short side parallel to counter edge. Spread softened butter over dough, leaving 1/2-inch border along edges.

Roll dough away from you into firm cylinder, keeping roll taut by tucking it under itself as you go. With seam side down, flatten cylinder into 18 by 4-inch rectangle. Cut rectangle in half crosswise.

Working with 1 half at a time, fold dough into thirds like business letter, then pinch seams together to form rough ball. Return dough balls seam side down to greased bowl, cover tightly with plastic, and let rise in refrigerator until nearly doubled in size, 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Coat two 9-inch round cake pans with 2 tablespoons oil each. Press and roll 1 dough ball into 13-inch round of even thickness, sprinkling dough and counter with flour as needed to prevent sticking. Loosely roll dough around rolling pin and gently unroll it into prepared pan. Gently press dough into pan, working it into corners and 1 inch up sides. (If dough resists stretching, let it relax for 5 to 10 minutes before trying to stretch it again.) Repeat with remaining dough ball.

For each pizza, sprinkle 2 cups mozzarella evenly over surface of dough, spread 1 1/4 cups tomato sauce over cheese, and sprinkle 2 tablespoons Parmesan over sauce. Bake pizzas until crusts are golden brown, 20 to 30 minutes. Let pizzas cool in pans for 10 minutes, then transfer to cutting board with metal spatula. Slice and serve.

Nutrition information per serving: 622 calories; 316 calories from fat; 35 g fat (16 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 59 mg cholesterol; 1162 mg sodium; 58 g carbohydrate; 4 g fiber; 6 g sugar; 25 g protein.



Vietnam tips: A first-timer's guide



There's a lot to love about travelling in Vietnam, which stretches from the soaring mountains and fascinating ethnic groups of the north to the endless rice paddies and vibrant waterways of the Mekong Delta in the south, with more than 3000km of glorious coastline in between.

Throw in a good transport infrastructure of buses, trains and flights and an abundance of cheap but excellent street food and it's no surprise Vietnam is on countless bucket lists. Like any country, it has its challenges, and some visitors come home with tales of scams, hectic roads and pushy vendors. Following these tips will help you avoid the major pitfalls, ensuring you bring home only happy memories to accompany your conical hat.

Be open

Vietnam's long exposure to foreigners means that many local residents aren't as overtly curious about visitors as some of their counterparts in Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos. Also, because most Vietnamese are not confident with spoken English despite learning it in school, people tend to ignore lost-looking foreigners unless you actually ask for help. But be assured that the Viet-

namese really are friendly people. If you ask someone a question with a smile and in slow, clear English, you'll almost certainly have it answered and the smile returned. Simple phrases such as xin chào ('hello', pronounced 'seen chow') and c-m ?n ('thank you', pronounced 'kaam uhn') go a long way.

Get connected

While most hotels, cafes and restaurants have wi-fi, you can easily buy a SIM card and get connected to the internet for as little as US\$3. Vietnamese street names are notoriously long (most are named after people), so digital maps trump paper ones for many travellers. You'll also find having a local phone number handy for meeting up with tour guides and making last-minute bookings on the road. SIM cards are widely sold in corner shops and are easy to top up. Once you've a card, the process to register for internet can be tricky, so ask the shopkeeper or your hotel to do it for you. Lonely Planet's Guides app covers Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Know your dong from your dollar

The Vietnamese dong is the currency of Vietnam and comes in denominations rang-

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ing from 200 to 500,000 (about US\$23 at the time of writing). While it's thrilling to become a Vietnamese millionaire, dealing with that many zeros can become frustrating, especially since some of the currency is very similar in color. For example, the 10,000d note and the 200,000d note are both tan while the 20,000d and 500,000d notes are both blue. It's very easy to hand over the wrong bill to a taxi driver while in a rush. Spend a minute in your room before going out to sort your bills to avoid overpaying. Even if you do end up overpaying a small amount for certain things, take it in stride. In the scheme of things, it'll likely not be worth the aggravation.

While international credit and debit cards are accepted at most larger hotels, restaurants and travel agencies (sometimes with an added fee), cash is still king in Vietnam for day-to-day transactions. ATMs are widely available, and currency can be exchanged at banks (and some gold shops, although this practice is frowned upon by the government). Note that the official system of separate prices for Vietnamese and foreigners - which applied to everything from train tickets to entrance fees - is a thing of the past.

Be wary of taxi scams

For many, motorcycle taxis are the best way see the thronging streets of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. However, scams can happen, and your best protection is a decent knowledge of where you are going and points along the way. Always agree on a price beforehand and be prepared to be quoted a higher price than the locals. For regular taxis, stick to the two major companies of Mai Linh and Vinasun (both have apps). Smaller, independent taxis are known for fast meters and aggressive drivers. If you're in one of the larger cities, ride-sharing apps like Uber and Grab are good, offering both car and motorcycle taxis. Sometimes the driver will call to confirm, so having a Vietnamese-speaking friend nearby will come in handy.

Know your transport options

Overnight buses are a good way to cover long distances and save on accommodation costs. However, the layback seats don't offer much legroom, so tallish passengers (anyone over 1.6m) will find it impossible to stretch out fully. While the top bunk offers slightly more privacy, they can be right at the height of street lights. Sleep masks and noise-cancelling headphones (especially if the bus is playing music or movies) are recommended.

That said, sometimes you can pay a few more dollars and fly. Vietnam has several budget airlines, which offer cheap fares but are notorious for being late and strictly enforcing carry-on limits. The national carrier, Vietnam Airlines, has better service and comparable pricing if booked in advance.

Be aware of your surroundings

Violent crime is extremely rare in Vietnam, and firearms are heavily regulated. But snatch-and-grabs and, to a lesser extent, pickpocketing, do happen. It pays to be vigilant. Use your phone and other electronics sparingly when outside (even while sitting at a sidewalk cafe or on the back of a motorbike). Leave your passport at the hotel; there's rarely a reason to have the original on you.

Also, while Vietnam has some of the





cheapest beer in the world, be careful about overdoing it. Inebriated tourists wandering back to their hotel in the morning hours when there is little traffic around can be seen as easy targets. If you come home late at night, go with a friend and splurge the extra dollar or two on an automobile taxi instead of a motorcycle taxi.

Road safety

Traffic in Hanoi and Hồ Chí Minh City can seem terrifying at first glance. Just walking across the street during rush hour can feel like an impossible task! But there is method to the madness and, like a school of fish, the traffic will inevitably glide around you as long as you keep moving at a slow and steady pace. If unsure, do as the locals and raise one hand high to be seen above the sea of helmets. If you're looking to drive a motorbike yourself, it's best to save it for one of the quieter destinations like Hoi An, Dalat or Phu Quoc. Always wear a helmet, and be aware of the exhaust pipe, which has caused many a leg burn. As motorbikes tend to drive closely to each other, keep your feet pointed inwards and think of wearing closed shoes which offer extra protection for your feet. (www.lonelyplanet.com)



Comic

Word Search

St. Patrick's Day

Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 34 letters spell a secret message.

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

- | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|
| BEER | DANCING | HOLY DAY | POTATOES |
| BELFAST | DUBLIN | IRELAND | SEVENTEENTH |
| BISHOP | EVENTS | IRISH | SHAMROCK |
| CABBAGE | FEAST DAY | LEPRECHAUN | SNAKES |
| CELEBRATION | FESTIVAL | LIMERICK | SODA BREAD |
| CELTIC CROSS | GREEN | MARCH | TRADITION |
| CHRISTIAN | GUINNESS | MISSIONARY | YEARLY |
| CLOVER | HERITAGE | MUSIC | |
| CORK | HISTORY | PARADE | |
| CORNED BEEF | HOLIDAY | PATRON SAINT | |

Yesterday's Solution

Spring

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

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

The hidden sentence is: APRIL SHOWERS BRING MAY FLOWERS

Crossword 2125



ACROSS

1. An official language of the Republic of South Africa.
5. Pierce with a sharp stake or point.
11. Type genus of the Aceraceae.
15. A city in northern India.
16. An unnaturally frenzied or distraught woman.
17. Denuded of leaves.
18. A Bantu language spoken by the Kamba people in Kenya.
20. A federal agency established to regulate the release of new foods and health-related products.
21. An official prosecutor for a judicial district.
23. An independent agency of the United States government responsible for collecting and coordinating intelligence and counterintelligence activities abroad in the national interest.
24. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
25. Metal shackles.
28. Someone who bakes commercially.
30. (Irish) Mother of the Tuatha De Danann.
32. (zoology) Having a tail or taillike appendage.
34. Made afraid.
36. United States writer (born in Poland) who wrote in Yiddish (1880-1957).
37. By bad luck.
40. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
41. An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
42. (astronomy) The angular distance of a celestial point measured westward along the celestial equator from the zenith crossing.
43. A hard gray lustrous metallic element that is highly corrosion-resistant.
44. Type genus of the Anatidae.
46. 16 ounces.
49. An intensely radioactive metallic element that occurs in minute amounts in uranium ores.
52. Dried out by heat or excessive exposure to sunlight.
54. Shrubby lichens of the family Usneaceae having a flattened thallus.
57. An undergarment worn by women to support their breasts.
58. The capital and largest city of Japan.
60. Reprehensible acquisitiveness.
61. Used by southerners for an inhabitant of a northern state in the United States (especially a Union soldier).
64. A signal transmitted along a narrow path.
65. Someone who engages in arbitrage (who purchases securities in one market for immediate resale in another in the hope of profiting from the price differential).
66. A male child (a familiar term of address to a boy).
69. Spread or diffuse through.
73. An organ in its earliest stage of development.
77. The United Nations agency concerned with atomic energy.
78. Large recently extinct long-horned European wild ox.
80. A port city in northwestern Algeria and the country's 2nd largest city.
81. A vacuum tube in which a hot cathode emits a beam of electrons that pass through a high voltage anode and are focused or deflected before hitting a phosphorescent screen.
84. Large sweet juicy hybrid between tangerine and grapefruit having a thick wrinkled skin.
85. Fermented alcoholic beverage similar to but heavier than beer.
86. Lower the grade of something.
87. Disposed of to a purchaser.

DOWN

1. The basic unit of money in Bangladesh.
2. Any culture medium that uses agar as the gelling agent.
3. A large fleet.
4. A workplace for the conduct of scientific research.
5. The square of a body of any size of type.
6. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
7. A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
8. A genus of tropical American plants have sword-shaped leaves and a fleshy compound fruits composed of the fruits of several flowers (such as pineapples).
9. A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
10. A doctor's degree in education.
11. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
12. Make a cackling sound.
13. A member of an Iroquoian people formerly living on the south shore of Lake Erie in northern Ohio and northwest Pennsylvania and western New York.
14. Located in or toward the back or rear.
19. (of complexion) Blemished by imperfections of the skin.
22. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
26. Relating to the deepest parts of the ocean (below 6000 meters).
27. Of a kind specified or understood.
29. Essential oil or perfume obtained from flowers.
31. Come into existence.
33. Basic principles of the cosmos.
35. A historical region of southwestern India on the west coast.
38. Lack of normal muscular tension or tonus.
39. A deep bow.
45. A Kwa language spoken in Ghana and the Ivory Coast.
47. A cry or noise made to express displeasure or contempt.
48. Capital and largest city of the Czech Republic.
50. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
51. Make reference to.
53. United States industrialist who manufactured plows suitable for working the prairie soil (1804-1886).
55. (often followed by 'for') Ardently or excessively desirous.
56. (used of statements) Harmful and often untrue.
59. A wild gathering involving excessive drinking and promiscuity.
62. God of love and erotic desire.
63. The thin serous membrane around the lungs and inner walls of the chest.
67. (Mesopotamia) God of agriculture and earth.
68. Not out.
70. A British peer ranking below a Marquess and above a Viscount.
71. A network of intersecting blood vessels or intersecting nerves or intersecting lymph vessels.
72. A tall perennial woody plant having a main trunk and branches forming a distinct elevated crown.
74. Formerly a large constellation in the southern hemisphere between Canis Major and the Southern Cross.
75. An open sore on the back of a horse caused by ill-fitting or badly adjusted saddle.
76. A town in north central Oklahoma.
79. Piece of solid food for dipping in a liquid.
82. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
83. A chronic inflammatory collagen disease affecting connective tissue (skin or joints).

Yesterday's Solution

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

Daily SuDoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

TV Listings



01:45 SuperBob
03:25 Countdown
05:10 The Fast And The Furious
06:50 SuperBob
08:15 Clockstoppers
09:55 Countdown
11:35 The Wolverine
13:50 Beyond The Edge
15:50 Stratton
17:30 Bad Boys
19:30 Bad Boys II
22:00 Body Of Sin
23:30 Killers



00:50 Wolves And Warriors
01:45 North Woods Law
02:40 I'm Alive
03:35 Into The Shark Bite
04:25 Wolves And Warriors
05:15 North Woods Law
06:02 Wildest Indochina
06:49 Pit Bulls & Parolees
07:36 Meet The Orangutans
08:00 Meet The Orangutans
08:25 Wild Africa: Rivers Of Life
09:15 Animal Cops Houston
10:10 Wolves And Warriors
11:05 North Woods Law
12:00 Wildest Indochina
12:55 Pit Bulls & Parolees
13:50 Into The Shark Bite
14:45 Dr. Jeff: Rocky Mountain Vet
15:40 Scaled
16:35 I'm Alive
17:30 Africa's Outsiders
18:25 Animal Cops Houston
19:20 Great White: The Impossible Shot
20:15 The Vet Life
21:10 Amanda To The Rescue
22:05 Wildest Indochina
23:00 Alaska Monsters
23:55 Pit Bulls & Parolees



00:20 Our Girl
01:15 Holby City
02:10 Hold The Sunset
02:40 Prime Suspect: Tennison
03:20 Doctors
03:50 Doctors
04:20 Father Brown
05:05 Death In Paradise
06:00 Doctors
06:30 EastEnders
07:05 Stella
07:55 Doctor Who
08:45 Doctor Who
09:30 Death In Paradise
10:25 Agatha Raisin
11:15 Hold The Sunset
11:45 Doctors
12:15 EastEnders
12:50 Holby City
13:45 Casualty
14:35 Hold The Sunset
15:05 Death In Paradise
16:00 Doctors
18:30 The Coroner
19:20 The Coroner
20:10 Our Girl
21:05 Line Of Duty
22:00 Press
23:05 Father Brown
23:50 Doctors

09:05 Robbie Coltrane's Critical Evidence
09:50 Homicide Hunter
10:35 Homicide: Hours To Kill
11:30 Homicide: Hours To Kill
12:25 The First 48
13:20 Evil Up Close
14:15 Bloodwork
15:10 It Takes A Killer
15:40 It Takes A Killer
16:05 Homicide Hunter
17:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
18:00 Evil Up Close
19:00 I Killed My BFF
20:00 Cold Case Files
21:00 Homicide Hunter
22:00 Police Patrol
22:30 Police Patrol
23:00 It Takes A Killer
23:30 It Takes A Killer



00:25 South Park (Digital)
00:50 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
01:20 Roast Battle UK
01:45 John Oliver's New York Stand Up Show
02:35 South Park (Digital)
03:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
03:30 South Park (Digital)
03:55 South Park (Digital)
04:20 Lip Sync Battle
04:45 Lip Sync Battle
05:10 Catch A Contractor
06:00 I Used To Be Fat
06:50 Snack Off
07:15 Snack Off
07:40 Sweat Inc.
08:30 Lip Sync Battle
08:55 Lip Sync Battle
09:20 I Used To Be Fat
10:10 Disaster Date
12:15 Key And Peele
14:20 Friends
16:48 Impractical Jokers
17:12 Impractical Jokers
17:36 Impractical Jokers
18:00 Comedy Central Presents
Comedy 3alwagaf
19:00 Takeshis Castle Thailand
19:50 Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders: Making The Team
20:35 Barely Famous
21:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
21:30 Neal Brennan: Women And Black Dudes
22:25 Comedy Central Stand Up Presents
22:50 Tosh.0
23:15 Tosh.0
23:40 Todd Barry: Super Crazy



00:30 Xploration Outer Space
01:20 Pick A Puppy
02:10 Baby Animals
03:00 Wild Family Rescue
03:50 How It's Made
04:40 Weather Gone Viral
05:30 Xploration Outer Space
05:55 Xploration Outer Space
06:20 Kids Do The Craziest Things
06:40 Kids Do The Craziest Things
07:00 Mysteries At The Museum
07:50 Wild Family Rescue
08:40 How It's Made
09:30 Kids Do The Craziest Things
10:20 Pick A Puppy
11:10 Baby Animals
12:00 Mysteries At The Museum
12:50 Weather Gone Viral
13:40 Xploration Outer Space
14:30 How It's Made
15:20 Kids Do The Craziest Things
15:45 Kids Do The Craziest Things
16:10 Xtreme Waterparks
17:00 Pick A Puppy
17:50 Baby Animals
18:15 Baby Animals
18:40 Breaking Magic
19:05 Breaking Magic
19:30 The Next Great Magician
20:20 The Carbonaro Effect
21:10 Wild Family Rescue
22:00 How It's Made
22:25 How It's Made
22:50 Xtreme Waterparks

23:15 Xtreme Waterparks
23:40 The Next Great Magician



00:50 Scene Of The Crime With Tony Harris
01:45 Blood Runs Cold
02:40 American Monster
03:35 Murder By Numbers
04:30 Reasonable Doubt
05:25 Murder Comes To Town
06:20 The Perfect Murder
07:10 I Almost Got Away With It
08:00 I Was Murdered
08:25 Killer Instinct With Chris Hansen
09:15 Nightmare Next Door
10:10 Pandora's Box: Unleashing Evil
11:05 Grave Secrets
12:00 Who Killed Jane Doe?
12:55 Killer Instinct With Chris Hansen
13:50 I Almost Got Away With It
14:45 Murder Comes To Town
15:40 The Perfect Murder
16:35 Reasonable Doubt
17:30 Killer Instinct With Chris Hansen
18:25 Nightmare Next Door
19:20 I Almost Got Away With It
20:15 Murder Comes To Town
21:10 The Perfect Murder
22:05 Swamp Murders
23:00 Murder By Numbers
23:55 American Monster



00:10 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Alex & Co.
01:25 Alex & Co.
01:45 Disney Mickey Mouse
01:50 Evermoor Chronicles
02:15 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
03:05 Binny And The Ghost
03:55 Hank Zipzer
04:15 Disney Mickey Mouse
04:20 Hank Zipzer
04:45 Alex & Co.
05:35 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
06:25 Binny And The Ghost
06:45 Disney Mickey Mouse
06:50 Rolling With The Ronks
07:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
07:25 Raven's Home
07:50 Tsum Tsum Shorts
07:55 Penny On M.A.R.S
08:20 Bunk'd
08:45 K.C. Undercover
09:10 Bizaardvark
09:35 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
10:25 Tangled: The Series
11:15 Bizaardvark
12:05 Liv And Maddie
12:30 Liv And Maddie
12:55 K.C. Undercover
13:45 Bunk'd
14:10 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
15:00 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
15:15 Shake It Up
15:40 K.C. Undercover
16:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
16:10 A.N.T. Farm
16:35 Penny On M.A.R.S
17:00 That's So Raven
17:50 Raven's Home
18:15 Stuck In The Middle
18:40 Bizaardvark
19:05 K.C. Undercover
19:30 Bunk'd
19:55 Descendants Wicked World
20:00 Raven's Home
20:25 Liv And Maddie
20:50 K.C. Undercover
21:15 Disney Mickey Mouse
21:20 A.N.T. Farm
21:45 Bizaardvark
22:10 Hotel Transylvania: The Series

22:35 Stuck In The Middle
23:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
23:25 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
23:50 Lolirock



00:00 Puppy Dog Pals
00:30 The Lion Guard
01:00 Sofia The First
01:25 Minnie's Bow-Toons
01:30 Trulli Tales
02:00 PJ Masks
02:25 PJ Masks
02:50 The Hive
04:00 Henry Hugglemonster
04:30 Minnie's Bow-Toons
04:35 The Hive
04:45 PJ Masks
06:00 Disney Muppet Babies
06:20 Paprika
06:30 Paprika
06:40 PJ Masks
07:00 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
07:15 Puppy Dog Pals
07:30 Vampirina
07:45 Fancy Nancy
08:00 Sofia The First
08:30 Elena Of Avalor
09:00 Puppy Dog Pals
10:00 Disney Muppet Babies
10:20 Paprika
10:40 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
11:40 PJ Masks
12:40 Paprika
13:00 Claude
13:40 Vampirina
14:30 Paprika
15:00 Disney Muppet Babies
15:30 PJ Masks
16:00 Puppy Dog Pals
16:25 Playtime With Puppy Dog Pals
16:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
17:00 Fancy Nancy
17:15 Fancy Nancy
17:30 Vampirina
18:00 PJ Masks
18:30 The Lion Guard
19:00 Sofia The First
19:25 Claude
19:30 Elena Of Avalor
20:00 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
20:30 Fancy Nancy
20:45 Fancy Nancy
21:00 Vampirina
21:30 PJ Masks
21:45 PJ Masks
22:00 Puppy Dog Pals
22:30 The Lion Guard
23:00 Sofia The First
23:25 Minnie's Bow-Toons
23:30 Henry Hugglemonster



00:15 Ultimate Survival
01:05 Impossible Engineering
01:50 How Do They Do It?
02:35 What On Earth?
03:20 Fast N' Loud
04:50 How Do They Do It?
05:35 Property Wars
06:00 Storage Hunters UK
06:20 Container Wars
06:45 Ultimate Survival
07:35 Deadliest Catch
08:20 Gold Rush
09:10 Alaska: The Last Frontier
09:55 Alaskan Bush People
10:45 How Do They Do It?
11:30 Fast N' Loud
13:05 Storage Hunters UK
13:30 Container Wars
13:55 Alaskan Bush People
14:40 Alaska: The Last Frontier
15:30 Master Of Arms
16:15 Wheeler Dealers
17:05 Alaska: The Last Frontier
17:50 Gold Rush
18:40 How Do They Do It?
19:25 Fast N' Loud
21:00 Sticker Shock
21:50 Wheeler Dealers
22:40 Twin Turbos

23:30 Deadliest Catch



00:15 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
00:35 Boyster
01:25 Counterfeit Cat
02:10 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
03:00 Boyster
03:45 Dude That's My Ghost
04:35 Counterfeit Cat
05:00 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
06:00 Marvel's Spider-Man
06:29 Big Hero 6 The Series
07:00 Phineas And Ferb
08:00 Gravity Falls
09:00 Supa Strikas
09:29 Milo Murphy's Law
10:29 Lab Rats
11:00 Phineas And Ferb
12:00 Supa Strikas
12:29 Gravity Falls
13:29 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
14:00 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
14:29 Disney 11
15:00 Marvel's Spider-Man
15:29 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
16:00 Big City Greens
16:29 Marvel's Avengers: Black Panther's Quest
17:00 Milo Murphy's Law
17:29 Supa Strikas
18:00 Disney 11
18:29 Big Hero 6 The Series
19:00 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
19:29 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
20:00 Big City Greens
20:29 Gravity Falls
21:00 Gravity Falls
21:29 Star Wars Resistance
22:00 Milo Murphy's Law
22:29 Furiki Wheels
23:00 Dude That's My Ghost
23:25 Dude That's My Ghost
23:50 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja



00:00 Botched
01:00 Botched
02:00 E! News
03:00 Famously Single
04:00 Botched
08:00 E! News: Daily Pop
08:55 Botched
11:40 E! News
12:35 Model Squad
13:30 Model Squad
14:25 Model Squad
15:20 E! News: Daily Pop
16:15 Botched
19:00 E! News
20:00 Botched
21:00 Botched
22:00 Ashlee+evan
22:30 Ashlee+evan
23:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry



00:10 The Chase
01:00 Emmerdale
01:30 Coronation Street
02:00 Coronation Street
02:30 The Chase
03:25 What Would Your Kid Do?
04:20 Big Star's Little Star
05:15 Don't Tell The Bride
06:15 Culinary Genius
07:10 The Chase
08:05 What Would Your Kid Do?
09:00 Big Star's Little Star
09:55 Don't Tell The Bride
10:55 Culinary Genius
11:50 The Chase
12:45 Emmerdale
13:15 Emmerdale
13:45 Coronation Street

14:15 Culinary Genius
15:10 The Chase
16:00 Change Your Tune
16:55 The Jonathan Ross Show
17:50 Don't Tell The Bride
18:50 Emmerdale
19:15 Emmerdale
19:45 Coronation Street
20:10 The Chase
21:00 Change Your Tune
21:55 The Jonathan Ross Show
22:50 Emmerdale
23:15 Emmerdale
23:40 Coronation Street



00:00 Clash Of Warriors
01:00 Weapons At War
02:00 Ancient Impossible
03:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
03:50 UFO Hunters
04:40 Ancient Aliens
05:30 The Universe
06:20 Clash Of Warriors
07:10 Ancient Impossible
08:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
09:00 UFO Hunters
10:00 Ancient Aliens
11:00 The Universe
12:00 Clash Of Warriors
13:00 Weapons At War
14:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
15:00 UFO Hunters
16:00 Ancient Aliens
17:00 The Universe
18:00 Clash Of Warriors
19:00 Ancient Impossible
20:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
21:00 UFO Hunters
22:00 Ancient Aliens
23:00 Stan Lee's Superhumans



00:20 Alone
01:05 Alcatraz Escape: The Lost Evidence
02:35 Hunting Hitler
03:25 Ultimate Soldier Challenge
06:00 The Warfighters
06:45 Ultimate Soldier Challenge
09:45 Alcatraz Escape: The Lost Evidence
11:15 Alone
15:00 Hunting Hitler
18:45 Alcatraz Escape: The Lost Evidence
20:15 Fifth Gear
21:00 Ice Road Truckers
21:50 The Warfighters
22:40 Ultimate Soldier Challenge
23:30 Ultimate Soldier Challenge



00:15 What's For Sale With A View
00:45 David Rocco's Dolce Vita
01:10 Stepping Out
01:40 Miguel's Feasts
02:05 Chasing The Sun
02:35 Eat: The Story Of Food
03:30 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
03:55 Peter Kuruvita Coastal Kitchen
04:25 Jose Andres: Dinner In Haiti
05:20 The Food Files
05:45 A Is For Apple
06:15 David Rocco's Dolce Africa
06:40 David Rocco's Dolce Africa
07:10 Miguel's Feasts
07:35 Chasing The Sun
08:05 Eat: The Story Of Food
09:00 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
09:25 Peter Kuruvita Coastal Kitchen
09:55 Jose Andres: Dinner In Haiti
10:50 The Food Files
11:15 A Is For Apple
11:45 David Rocco's Dolce Africa
12:10 David Rocco's Dolce Africa
12:40 Miguel's Feasts
13:05 Chasing The Sun
13:35 Eat: The Story Of Food
14:30 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
14:55 Peter Kuruvita Coastal Kitchen
15:25 Cool Spaces

Stars



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Your way is the only way today. Others may not show great appreciation for this overly independent side of you. You may be dealing with some personal issues today. This may find you at odds with others. This is a very sensitive matter and others can not understand what you refuse to share. Your independence can be a blessing and a curse. You may feel as if no one is there for you when you need them most. This comes from you always putting on a strong front. Everyone needs a shoulder to cry on once in a while. Let your guard down and let others help you for a change.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You may find yourself realizing how special you are today. Appreciating all your gifts and talents and feeling a sense of pride. This is a great time of communication with those around you as you are able to express your emotions clearly to others. Dedication and devotion have gotten you to this point in life and you in a position you can provide much help to others. You are in touch with not only your emotions but also very in touch with the needs and emotions of those close to you. This is a very nice time in your life. You may find someone close shows great support and sympathy to you today when a situation you encounter puts you in need of a listening ear.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

This is a time you desire peace and harmony in your world. Make peace with your past. This is a great day to reach out and mend fences with those you have had differences with in the past. This is a great day in the workplace for you. It is your time to shine. Know that all you do will be noticed. You may be asked to represent your company in some way. Your communication skills are on point today and you will be a huge success.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Look for a rainbow today. Something good is happening in your life. It may lead to something important in your career or your personal life. Even if the pleasure you derive from it is not permanent, you can find pleasure in the moment. You're getting a break you deserve. Don't discount it by projecting the future. If you take a "live today" attitude, the future will take care of itself-and you.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

A friend will seek your advice today. What she really wants is your approval for what she has decided to do. If you tell her what to do, it may lead to a rift in your friendship. You can give your opinion, but make it clear that she has to make the decision for herself. You might offer some options and point out the possible consequences of each. That mean she takes responsibility for her action. Regardless of how her decision turns out, your friendship will be strengthened. You are a rock in the lives of many.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You don't need a shovel for the type of digging you are about to begin. This is an emotional venture. Digging deep into your inner workings. What has happened in your life that has molded you into the person you are today? Remember, stress is brought on not by circumstance, but by our reaction to circumstances. Take a step back, take a deep breath, and remember you are in control of your reaction. You have successfully turned stumbling blocks into stepping stones in the past. This has made you who you are today. You not only have the strength, but also the wisdom to make your world a happy place.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

This is a time you desire peace and harmony in your world. Make peace with your past. This is a great day to reach out and mend fences with those you have had differences with in the past. This is a great day in the workplace for you. It is your time to shine. Know that all you do will be noticed. You may be asked to represent your company in some way. Your communication skills are on point today and you will be a huge success.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You may find yourself tense and anxious about a situation you have found yourself in. You may feel under pressure and feel somewhat anxious. This may lead to you mentally checking out. You may use this as a coping mechanism for the stress you are under. An out of body feeling in a dreamy state may be the way your mind chooses to handle this conflict. Others may not be fond of this side of you and this could result in conflict with someone close to you. You will find your way and through your ability to get to the root of your problems, this too will be solved, Scorpio. You may find a negative result from the escape you take from reality as it may cause an opportunity you have been hoping for to pass you by.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

If you find someone challenging your good taste or choices today just brush it off. You may find your mind is a million miles away. Focus may not be a strong point for you today. This probably isn't a great day to make decisions but that is ok. Take a break. Get out and enjoy some of the beauty that surrounds you and enjoy what the world has to offer. Good fortune is soon to come your way. A break from reality may be in order to truly appreciate and recognize the opportunities that are placed in your path.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

All that is dear to your heart takes priority today, you need to love and be loved. Take a chance today. You may receive a great reward. Love is a huge factor in your life today. You are learning to love yourself and pay close attention to the needs and want of those close to you. Getting in touch with your emotions and the emotions of those around you will cause others to be drawn to you. Capricorn, others will value your opinions and sense of independence. You are becoming someone others look up to.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You may be faced with a career opportunity that goes against what you value. You have always prided yourself for clearly seeing things in life in black and white. There is no room for a grey area. If an opportunity that presents itself to you seems to good to be true, it probably is. Be sure you are able to lay your head down at night and sleep peacefully. You know right from wrong and this is a time for you to make the right choice. Actions have consequences and these consequences will have a lasting effect on your world. Do what satisfies your soul.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

If you ask you shall receive. You seem to have a way of getting exactly what you want. You are most persuasive today. Your words are sweet like honey. This is one of those days that seems to fall right into place for you. Enjoy because it just doesn't get much better than this. A great evening to spend time with someone you love. This could be very beneficial to your relationship.

Country Codes

Afghanistan	0093	Jordan	00962
Albania	00355	Kazakhstan	007
Algeria	00213	Kenya	00254
Andorra	00376	Kiribati	00686
Angola	00244	Kuwait	00965
Anguilla	001264	Kyrgyzstan	00996
Antiga	001268	Laos	00856
Argentina	0054	Latvia	00371
Armenia	00374	Lebanon	00961
Australia	0061	Liberia	00231
Austria	0043	Libya	00218
Bahamas	001242	Lithuania	00370
Bahrain	00973	Luxembourg	00352
Bangladesh	00880	Macau	00853
Barbados	001246	Macedonia	00389
Belarus	00375	Madagascar	00261
Belgium	0032	Majorca	0034
Belize	00501	Malawi	00265
Benin	00229	Malaysia	0060
Bermuda	001441	Maldives	00960
Bhutan	00975	Mali	00223
Bolivia	00591	Malta	00356
Bosnia	00387	Marshall Islands	00692
Botswana	00267	Martinique	00596
Brazil	0055	Mauritania	00222
Brunei	00673	Mauritius	00230
Bulgaria	00359	Mayotte	00269
Burkina	00226	Mexico	0052
Burundi	00257	Micronesia	00691
Cambodia	00855	Moldova	00373
Cameroon	00237	Monaco	00377
Canada	001	Mongolia	00976
Cape Verde	00238	Montserrat	001664
Cayman Islands	001345	Morocco	00212
Central African Republic	00236	Mozambique	00258
Chad	00235	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Chile	0056	Namibia	00264
China	0086	Nepal	00977
Colombia	0057	Netherlands (Holland)	0031
Comoros	00269	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Congo	00242	New Caledonia	00687
Cook Islands	00682	New Zealand	0064
Costa Rica	00506	Nicaragua	00505
Croatia	00385	Nigar	00227
Cuba	0053	Nigeria	00234
Cyprus	00357	Niue	00683
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Norfolk Island	00672
Czech Republic	00420	Northern Ireland (UK)	0044
Denmark	0045	North Korea	00850
Diego Garcia	00246	Norway	0047
Djibouti	00253	Oman	00968
Dominica	001767	Pakistan	0092
Dominican Republic	001809	Palau	00680
Ecuador	00593	Panama	00507
Egypt	0020	Papua New Guinea	00675
El Salvador	00503	Paraguay	00595
England (UK)	0044	Peru	0051
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Philippines	0063
Eritrea	00291	Poland	0048
Estonia	00372	Portugal	00351
Ethiopia	00251	Puerto Rico	001787
Falkland Islands	00500	Qatar	00974
Faroe Islands	00298	Romania	0040
Fiji	00679	Russian Federation	007
Finland	00358	Rwanda	00250
France	0033	Saint Helena	00290
French Guiana	00594	Saint Kitts	001869
French Polynesia	00689	Saint Lucia	001758
Gabon	00241	Saint Pierre	00508
Gambia	00220	Saint Vincent	001784
Georgia	00995	Samoa US	00684
Germany	0049	Samoa West	00685
Ghana	00233	San Marino	00378
Gibraltar	00350	Sao Tome	00239
Greece	0030	Saudi Arabia	00966
Greenland	00299	Scotland (UK)	0044
Grenada	001473	Senegal	00221
Guadeloupe	00590	Seychelles	00284
Guam	001671	Sierra Leone	00232
Guatemala	00502	Singapore	0065
Guinea	00224	Slovakia	00421
Guyana	00592	Slovenia	00386
Haiti	00509	Solomon Islands	00677
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Somalia	00252
Honduras	00504	South Africa	0027
Hong Kong	00852	South Korea	0082
Hungary	0036	Spain	0034
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Sri Lanka	0094
Iceland	00354	Sudan	00249
India	0091	Suriname	00597
Indian Ocean	00873	Swaziland	00268
Indonesia	0062	Sweden	0046
Iran	0098	Switzerland	0041
Iraq	00964	Syria	00963
Ireland	00353	Taiwan	00886
Italy	0039	Tanzania	00255
Ivory Coast	00225	Thailand	0066
Jamaica	001876	Toga	00228
Japan	0081	Tonga	00676

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
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- ◆ Minimally invasive Endoscopic sinus surgery including Balloon sinuplasty
- ◆ Minimally invasive Microscopic & Endoscopic Ear surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of Otolaryngology and Audiology (Hearing loss, Tinnitus & balance disorders)
- ◆ Facial Plastic and reconstructive surgeries (Rhinoplasty, Otoplasty, Fillers & Botox injections)
- ◆ Diagnosis & treatment of snoring & obstructive sleep apnea in clinic without surgery
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of voice and swallowing disorders.
- ◆ Diagnosis & Treatment of Head and Neck benign & malignant tumors.

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Health

'A way of life': Japan's whalers back treaty withdrawal

Neatly lining up sliced whale meat to make "jerky" in the wintry sea breeze, Tetsuya Masaki says whaling is just part of daily life in his tiny Japanese community of Minamiboso. Japan sparked outrage in December when it decided to withdraw from the International Whaling Commission, saying it would return to commercial whaling as part of its cultural heritage. Rarely is that heritage more in evidence than in Minamiboso, a town on the Pacific coast some 70 kilometers (40 miles) south of Tokyo that is home to Gaibo Hoge, one of a handful of remaining local whaling companies.

Masaki, 32, a processing factory worker for Gaibo Hoge, admits that the local whaling industry has shrunk but says it is still an "indispensable" part of the town-especially during the summer whaling season. The firm allows local residents and tourists to watch whales being dismembered at its slaughter-

house as part of efforts to keep alive the region's 400-year-old whaling history. Local schoolchildren also come to the seaside facility where they can get a closer look at the rare sight of workers stripping the flesh from the thick skin of whales with special choppers.

Gaibo Hoge's president, 57-year-old Yoshinori Shoji, said Japan's decision to withdraw from the IWC was "far too late but the right answer", adding that he backed it "100 percent". Shoji's firm annually harpoons 26 giant beaked whales—a type not covered by the IWC but subject to domestic Japanese quotas—and lands them at Wada port, one of the country's five bases for coastal whaling. He said he was gearing up "as a matter of course" to resume commercial whaling of minke whales—protected under the treaty—once Tokyo formally leaves the IWC in June.

'Regional specialty'

Tokyo's decision sparked a firestorm of criticism from environmentalists and anti-whaling countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada. It was a rare piece of provocative diplomacy by Japan, which has generally pursued an uncontroversial foreign policy since its World War II defeat. But a poll in January by public broadcaster NHK suggested that a majority (53 percent) of people backed the withdrawal decision, compared with 37 percent opposed. Japan vowed to forge ahead with commercial whaling of minke and other whales off its coast but said it was stopping its most provocative whaling—annual Antarctic expeditions that used an IWC loophole permitting hunting for scientific research.

The country makes little secret of the fact that much of the meat from the

"research" ends up on the dinner plate, and local Minamiboso resident Kazuo Tachikawa is proud that whale meat is a "regional specialty". "You can buy whale meat at all supermarkets and seafood shops here," the 70-year-old said at a roadside station, where a huge model of a blue whale skeleton stands alongside harpoon guns. But other locals appeared unmoved by the controversy. "I would be concerned if it were tuna or other fish," said Sadae Nakamura, a 67-year-old housewife. "I even don't know the difference between research whaling and commercial whaling," she laughed. "It's all politics that is beyond people like me." In terms of politics, many members of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's conservative Liberal Democratic Party are supporters of whaling, and he himself comes from a constituency where whale hunting remains popular. — AFP

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

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

BY NIGHT: Cold with light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 20 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear with a chance for fog forming over some areas.

WEATHER WARNING	No Current Warnings				
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 31/01/2019 0000 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	22 °C	13 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	23 °C	10 °C			
ABDALY	22 °C	09 °C			
BUBYAN	--- °C	--- °C			
JAHRA	23 °C	11 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	20 °C	12 °C			
SALMIYAH	20 °C	14 °C			
AHMADI	20 °C	14 °C			
NUWAISIB	23 °C	13 °C			
WAFRA	22 °C	09 °C			
SALMY	22 °C	08 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	02/01	Fair and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain	22 °C	11 °C	VRB-NW	06 - 26 km/h
Saturday	02/02	Fair and Partly cloudy	22 °C	11 °C	NW	12 - 35 km/h
Sunday	02/03	Fair	21 °C	10 °C	NW	12 - 38 km/h
Monday	02/04	Cool	18 °C	09 °C	NW	12 - 38 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:17
Sunrise	06:38
Zuhr	12:01
Asr	15:04
Sunset	17:25
Isha	18:44

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	00 °C
MIN. Temp.	00 °C
MAX. RH	00 %
MIN. RH	00 %
MAX. Wind	N 00 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
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Business

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2019

38 Ghosn: Bail refusal 'would not be normal in any other democracy'**39** Europe launches special payment vehicle to bust Iran sanctions**40** Eurozone growth slows sharply in 2018 amid gloomy outlook

GUWAHATI: Indian fishermen lay their fishing nets in Brahmaputra River at sunset in Guwahati on Wednesday. —AFP

India's unemployment rate hits 45-year high

Blow to Modi government • Statistical Commission chief, colleague resign

NEW DELHI: An official survey that has been withheld by the government shows India's unemployment rate rose to a 45-year high during 2017-2018, the Business Standard newspaper reported yesterday, delivering a blow to Prime Minister Narendra Modi just months before what is expected to be a closely fought general election. A political controversy over the survey erupted after the acting chairman and another member of the body that reviewed the jobs data resigned, saying there had been a delay in its scheduled December release. The head of the government-funded National Statistical Commission, P. C. Mohanan, said he and colleague J. Meenakshi were unhappy at the non-publication, alleging interference by other state agencies.

Rahul Gandhi, president of main Opposition Congress party, said that contrary to Modi's promise of creating two million jobs a year, the unemployment rate had reached its highest in 45 years, and 65 million youth were jobless in 2017/18. "Five years later, his (Modi) leaked job creation report card reveals a national disaster," Gandhi said on Twitter.

The assessment by the National Sample Survey Of-

fice (NSSO) conducted between July 2017-June 2018 showed the unemployment rate stood at 6.1 percent, the highest since 1972-73, the newspaper reported. In 1972/73, the NSSO data showed unemployment at 5.18 percent, after global oil shocks and a war with Pakistan.

The report said that joblessness stood at 7.8 percent in urban areas compared with 5.3 percent in the countryside. The unemployment rate for rural women stood at 13.6 percent, compared to 4.8 percent in 2011/12. The labor force participation rate - the proportion of population working or seeking jobs - declined to 36.9 percent in 2017/18 from 39.5 percent in 2011/12, the report said.

The data provides the first comprehensive assessment of India's employment since Modi's decision in November 2016 to withdraw most of the country's banknotes from circulation overnight.

After the chaotic launch of a national sales tax in July 2017, hundreds of thousands have lost jobs in small businesses. A report released by the All India Manufacturers' Organization said last month 3.5 million jobs had been lost since 2016, mainly due to demonetization and rising working costs after the launch of the national tax. The

government declined to confirm or deny the findings contained in the report.

"We have not released the report. I do not want to comment on it," Pravin Srivastava, India's chief statistician, told Reuters. But he said the report was not final and would be released after a review. The gloomy jobs data could be awkward for Modi's Hindu nationalist government to explain with a general election looming and opinion polls already showing the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party unlikely to keep its parliamentary majority.

Critics say Modi's push for raising the share of domestic manufacturing from 17 percent of GDP to about 25 percent has not taken off over the last four years. Modi came to power in 2014 promising to galvanize the economy and boost employment prospects for the millions of young Indians entering the job market each year.

But, while India's economy has been expanding by 7 percent plus annually - the fastest pace among major economies - its uneven growth has meant that there are not enough new jobs to keep pace. And critics say the government's claims of economic success have sounded increasingly hollow.

A statistics ministry official said the NSSO had submitted the report, but it was up to the government to decide when it should be released. But another senior official, dealing with data, said the government was delaying the release as the findings were so dismal, and there were plans to incorporate data on persons added in the social security network that could help improve the overall picture.

Pronab Sen, former chief statistician of India, said unemployment had been rising since 2012 and attempts to suppress the publication of data was not a solution. "It will only create more suspicion about the intentions of the government," he said. The last report published by the statistics ministry had shown that unemployment rose to 5.0 percent in 2015/16 from 4.9 percent the previous year and 4.0 percent in 2012/13.

Male unemployment stood at 4.3 percent, while it was 8.7 percent among women in 2015/16, the data showed. Earlier this month, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, a leading independent think-tank, said the country lost as many as 11 million jobs last year. —Reuters

Business

Ghosn: Bail refusal 'would not be normal in any other democracy'

Facing the army: Former Nissan chief speaks from the cell

TOKYO: Former Nissan chief Carlos Ghosn slammed his ongoing detention in Japan yesterday, telling AFP and a French newspaper the decision to refuse him bail "would not be normal in any other democracy." "Why am I being punished before being found guilty?" Ghosn asked, speaking to AFP and the Les Echos daily in his first interview with foreign media since his shock November 19 arrest.

Ghosn, who is being held at a Tokyo detention center on three charges of financial misconduct, said his arrest was "a story of betrayal." "There is no question about this," he said, speaking firmly and clearly in English, dressed in a black tracksuit and plastic sandals.

"I have in front of me an army at Nissan, more than hundreds of people are dedicated to the case, 70 people at the prosecutor's office, and I am being left in prison for more than 70 days," he added. "No phone, no computer... how can I defend myself?"

The 64-year-old Franco-Brazilian-Lebanese tycoon said he was the victim of a "plot" caused by opposition to his plans to more fully integrate the auto alliance he led of Nissan, Mitsubishi Motors and France's Renault. And he said Nissan was trying to "destroy my reputation."

"I have an army of people throwing trash at me every day," he said.

"There are not only allegations of the prosecutors, but also those of Nissan. They take a lot of facts out of their context. It is a distortion of reality to destroy my reputation."

A Nissan spokesman said the company had "uncovered substantial and convincing evidence of misconduct." "The sole cause of this chain of events is the misconduct led by Ghosn and (right-hand man Greg) Kelly."

'No sense of time'

Once feted in Japan for his role in turning around Nissan, Ghosn has gone from flying around the world in a private jet to a cell in Tokyo's Kosuge detention center. He spoke without emotion, but said it was "very hard" to be unable to speak with his family. "Since November 19, I could not even call my wife Carole, my children," he said. He said the lights were on even at night, and with no watch or clock, he had "no sense of time".

"I have only 30 minutes to go outside on the roof. I'm craving for fresh air. Yes, I am strong, but obviously I am tired." Nonetheless Ghosn, speaking from behind a window and flanked by two guards, did not appear noticeably gaunt and walked confidently into the room.

Japanese authorities did not permit any cameras or recording equipment to be used during the interview. Ghosn has only been seen in public once since his arrest, during a January 8 court appearance where he denied any wrongdoing.

He faces three charges of financial misconduct, including claims he under-reported his salary, tried to shift personal losses onto Nissan's books and used company funds to compensate a friend.

and more difficult points."

Trump said negotiators are working to complete a deal, leaving "NOTHING unresolved on the table" before the March 1 deadline agreed by both sides.

Meanwhile, hundreds of listed Chinese companies - from hog farmers struggling to buy pig feed, to glassware makers unable to collect receivables - flagged big losses for 2018, victim to a slowing economy and Beijing's deleveraging.

Once-acquisitive companies, who paid top dollar for assets during the boom years, are being forced to take heavy write-downs that are weighing on their balance sheets already weakened by a bruising Sino-US trade war. As of Wednesday, 129 companies estimated losses in excess of 800 million yuan (\$119.3 million) each for 2018, the Shanghai Securities News reported. Nearly 200 others flagged losses of over 100 million yuan each.

China's economy grew at its slowest pace in nearly three decades last year, as ramped-up deleveraging efforts to curb shadow banking triggered a funding squeeze among smaller firms and choked the private sector. Economic growth is expected to ease further this year.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite index has fallen more than a quarter in the past 12 months. —Agencies



TOKYO: This picture shows a general view of the Tokyo detention house, where former Nissan chairman Carlos Ghosn is being held, yesterday. —AFP

He denies any wrongdoing and repeated yesterday that "there is not one yen that I have received that was not reported". The court has judged Ghosn a flight risk who could tamper with evidence if freed, and his own lawyer has acknowledged the tycoon is unlikely to win bail before a trial, which could take at least six months.

He has pledged to stay in Japan, wear a tracking device and even hire guards of the court's choosing, but to no avail. "I have done

everything I can to show I can't flee, to reassure them I would not destroy any evidence," he said yesterday.

Ghosn's arrest has laid bare tensions in the alliance he forged and led among Nissan, Mitsubishi Motors and French automaker Renault. While the Japanese firms moved quickly to oust Ghosn from leadership positions, Renault was more cautious about the allegations against him, and he resigned before a board meeting to discuss removing him there. —AFP

Trump says China trade talks 'going well' but wants to see Xi

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump was upbeat yesterday about high-level trade talks with Chinese officials in Washington but said no final deal would be made until he meets with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The United States and China opened a pivotal round of talks on Wednesday aimed at bridging deep differences over China's intellectual property and technology transfer practices and easing a months-long tariff war.

Trump was scheduled to meet with Chinese Vice Premier Liu He at the White House as talks concluded yesterday. "China's top trade negotiators are in the US meeting with our representatives. Meetings are going well with good intent and spirit on both sides," Trump said on Twitter.

"No final deal will be made until my friend President Xi, and I, meet in the near future to discuss and agree on some of the long standing

High rents and austerity swell Britain's homeless

LONDON: Homelessness in London has gone up by 300 percent over an eight-year period, according to government data published yesterday that revealed a full-blown crisis fuelled by housing shortages and spiralling rents.

Almost 1,300 people sleep every night in the streets of the capital—the epicenter of a growing problem that is finally pushing local and national authorities to action as temperatures plunge in the city. Homeless deaths are frequent—one in late December at Westminster Underground station captured national headlines because it was in the shadow of parliament. "The other day a guy died of hypothermia over there," said Eric Green, a 56-year-old rough sleeper who begs every day in front of London's Trafalgar Square, rain, shine or snow. Wrapped in an old coat with a tattered hat over his ears, Green has been living rough for two and a half years—ever since he lost his job as a carpenter and then his flat.

Some 320,000 people now live on the street or in emergency accommodation nationwide, according to the charity Shelter. Most were driven out of their homes by unaf-

fordable rent, rather than by a life event, said the charity. "If you are on a very low income and you need welfare support to be able to pay your rent. When the rent goes up, it becomes very difficult," Jon Sparkes, CEO at fellow charity Crisis, told AFP.

'They are not doing enough'

The charities blame the government's social and housing policy for exacerbating the problem.

"We choose whether we invest in social homes, we choose whether we invest in the welfare system to support people out of homelessness," said Sparkes. Overseeing an austerity program implemented in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, the government has cut tens of billions of pounds from social programs. Over the same period, London's population has swelled by more than one million people from 7.8 million to 8.8 million, fuelled by high birth rates and international migration.

These trends are reflected in the official statistics released yesterday, which showed an annual rise of 38 percent in the number of non-UK EU nationals sleeping rough on London's streets.

While the population has risen, public investment in social housing has fallen sharply, creating a perfect storm for those on low incomes. The government financed 36,700 social housing units in England for the 2010-2011 fiscal year. —Agencies

Europe launches special payment vehicle to bust Iran sanctions

Mechanism could help save Iran nuclear deal

BUCHAREST: Britain, France and Germany will launch a special payment mechanism that the EU hopes will help save the Iran nuclear deal by bypassing US sanctions, European sources told AFP.

The entity, to be registered in France with German governance and finance from all three countries, will allow Iran to trade with EU companies despite Washington reimposing sanctions after President Donald Trump pulled out of the 2015 accord.

The three countries—the European signatories to the landmark deal that curbed Tehran's nuclear ambitions in return for sanctions relief—are expected to issue a joint communique launching the project, which has been in preparation for months.

While the new institution, called INSTEX—short for Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges—is a project of the three governments, it will receive the formal endorsement of all 28 EU members.

The announcement may come on the sidelines of a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Bucharest.

Washington has warned the EU against trying to sidestep its sanctions on Tehran,

while the Europeans—along with the deal's other signatories Russia and China—say Iran has not broken its side of the deal and should be allowed to trade.

The EU has growing concerns about Tehran's ballistic missile program, as well as its human rights record, its interference in Middle East conflicts and recent attempted attacks against opposition groups in Europe.

Washington has warned it will vigorously pursue any company breaching its sanctions against the Islamic republic, and a number of major international corporations have already pulled out.

Belgian Foreign Minister Didier Reynders said that despite differences over the nuclear deal, Europe shared many of Washington's concerns about Iran. "It's essential we show our American colleagues that we are going in the same direction as them on a series of issues such as ballistic missiles and Iran's regional activities," Reynders said as he arrived for the EU meeting.

On the INSTEX project, he said "at the end of the day it will be companies that decide whether or not they want to work in Iran, bearing in mind the risk of Ameri-



BRUSSELS: In this file photo, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (right) stands next to France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian (center) and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini in Brussels. —AFP

can sanctions."

The new European scheme was originally intended to allow Iran to sell oil to the EU on a barter basis but, with Europe now buying

very little Iranian oil, it is now aimed at small and medium-sized companies. "We'll have to wait and see who uses it," a European source said. —AFP

Nokia coy about 2019 growth despite strong Q4 profits

HELSINKI: Finnish telecoms equipment maker Nokia published better-than-expected fourth-quarter results yesterday, but revised downward its forecast for its networks business in early 2019.

Nokia reported a profit of 193 million euros (\$221 million) for October-December last year, marking a strong end to an otherwise challenging year, and a notable improvement on the same quarter a year earlier, when the firm posted a loss of 386 million euros. Its adjusted operating profit for the quarter was 1.12 billion euros, an increase of 12 percent on the previous year and surpassing analysts' predictions of 1.0 billion euros.

"We saw the second consecutive quarter of year-on-year sales growth across all five of our Networks business groups, as well as improved profitability in both Networks and Nokia Technologies," Nokia chief executive Rajeev Suri said in a statement. Nokia's outlook for 2020 remains "clearly positive", the firm said, due to strong market conditions driven by the growth of 5G.

However, Nokia forecast a "soft first half" of 2019 due to the staggered timetabling of its 5G rollout projects. "Nokia's own outlook for this year was fairly conservative and below expectations," Mikael Rautanen, an analyst at Finnish market research firm Inderes, said.

"Nokia's last year was quite challenging so they are

lacking some investor confidence at the moment, and today's report will not restore the investor confidence in Nokia fully," Rautanen said.

"If I compare with Ericsson's results last week, I would say the tone in their overall market comments was more positive and more optimistic than Nokia," Rautanen added.

Nokia's share price fell by 5 percent on the Helsinki stock exchange in midday trading.

The performance of Nokia's networks division, which represents 90 percent of its revenues, proved particularly strong in the final quarter of 2018. Net sales for the division were 6.2 billion euros for the period, a year-on-year increase of seven percent, compared to a three percent increase for the group as a whole.

Nokia Networks also reported 30 percent year-on-year growth in its quarterly operating profit, up to 841 million euros. Despite a 30 percent decrease in earnings per share over 2018 compared to the previous year, Nokia announced a dividend of 0.20 euros per share for the year, up from 0.19 in 2017.

Savings target reached

Nokia reported having reached its cost savings target of 1.2 billion euros between 2016 and 2018, in part by consolidating with Alcatel-Lucent, which Nokia acquired in 2016.

In October the company announced a further 700 million euros of savings by 2020, of which 500 million are expected to come from operating expenses. "The benefits from the savings and Alcatel integration are starting to kick in. But still the reality in this market is that you have to continuously keep your cost level in good shape in order to maintain your competitiveness," analyst Mikael Rautanen said. Earlier this month Nokia announced the reduction of 460 Alcatel-Lucent posts in France, the third round of restructuring at the subsidiary since 2016. —AFP

Central banks buy most gold since 1971: Industry body

LONDON: Central banks have bought the most gold in nearly 50 years as the precious metal profits from its safe haven status, the World Gold Council said yesterday, amid trade tensions and Brexit uncertainty.

The banks added 651.5 tons to official gold reserves in 2018, up 74 percent on a year earlier and the second highest annual total on record, the WGC said in its Gold Demand Trends report.

Total gold demand reached 4,345.1 tons, up 4.0 percent on 2017, also on worries about a global economic growth slowdown. "The annual increase was driven by a multi-decade high in central bank buying and accelerated investment in bars and coins during the second half of the year," the WGC said, when US-China trade war tensions and Brexit uncertainty caused volatility across financial markets.

The WGC yesterday said that global bar and coin demand rose 4.0 percent to 1,090 tons in 2018. In the UK, bar and coin investment jumped 12 percent to 11.6 tons "as investors looked ahead to 29 March 2019 — the day the UK is due to leave the EU—with a sense of trepidation", it said.

Bar and coin demand in Europe as a whole slid 11 percent in 2018. Alistair Hewitt, head of market intelligence at the WGC, said that "worries about a slowdown in global growth, heightened geopolitical tensions, and financial market volatility saw central bank demand hit its highest level since... 1971". —AFP

Business

Eurozone growth slows sharply in 2018 amid gloomy outlook

Exports slump in Germany, Brexit worries sap momentum

News in brief

Shell profit soars

LONDON: Energy giant Royal Dutch Shell yesterday said its net profit surged 80 percent to \$23.4 billion in 2018, thanks to higher oil prices and cost cuts. Profit after tax had come in at almost \$13 billion in 2017, the Anglo-Dutch giant said in a statement. "We delivered on our promises for the year, including the completion of the \$30 billion divestment program and starting up key growth projects while maintaining discipline on capital investment," Shell chief executive Ben van Beurden said. Oil prices jumped last year on tight supply concerns but have since fallen back sharply, in line with volatility seen across financial markets. "Of course, the generally higher oil price over the year gave a boost to the numbers" at Shell, noted Richard Hunter, head of markets at Interactive Investor. — AFP

H&M profit down sharply

STOCKHOLM: Swedish ready-to-wear giant Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) said yesterday its 2018 earnings fell sharply due to restructuring costs but online sales rose. Net profit tumbled 22 percent in its December 2017 to November 2018 year to 12.65 billion kronor (1.2 billion euros, \$1.4 billion) although total sales were up five percent to 210.4 billion kronor. Online sales rose 22 percent, the company said. "It was a complicated year for H&M and the sector generally but after a difficult first quarter, there are signs that our efforts to transform the business are beginning to bear fruit," it said in a statement. Analysts say H&M, which built a major presence on high streets around the world, struggled to get its online strategy in place and so has lagged its peers. — AFP

Central puts \$200m into Grab

BANGKOK: Thailand's biggest shopping mall owner, the Central Group, will pour \$200 million into the Singapore ride-hailing and food delivery firm Grab, the companies said yesterday, as they look to reel in customers now buying everything from food to holidays online. The investment means Central, which is also a major hotelier and supermarket chain whose business interests stretch into Europe, will acquire a non-controlling stake in Grab's Thai entity. Tos Chirathivat, CEO of Central Group and scion of the kingdom's second richest family with a fortune estimated by Forbes of \$21 billion, said the big buy-in will give his company's stores and hotels access to customers wherever they are. — AFP

BRUSSELS: Growth in the eurozone slowed sharply to 1.8 percent in 2018, data showed yesterday, as slumping exports in Germany and worries over Brexit sapped momentum.

The economy had expanded by a comparatively booming 2.4 percent in 2017. The dampened outlook is a huge disappointment to policy-makers as growth in the eurozone had been regarded as one of the strongest engines of the global economy. "The big picture remains that this was a disappointing end to the year... (and) the prospects for the first quarter of this year currently look no better," said Andrew Kenningham, an economist at Capital Economics.

This came as economic growth in the eurozone hit a weak 0.2 percent in the October to December period, the same as the previous quarter, the Eurostat agency said.

The sluggish end of year for the eurozone follows the IMF and European Central Bank warning last week of dark clouds over the economy in Europe. Feeding into fears is that the slowdown is in part coming from trouble in Germany, the pillar of the European economy. "The end of the year was marked by a disappointing recovery in auto production in Germany ... and yellow vest protests in France," said Bert Colijn, senior economist at ING bank.

Germany was the problem during the debt crisis, when Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy were the laggards of the eurozone.

'Suffer a bit'

Of the crisis-hit countries, only the Italian economy remains an active concern, as clashes between the populist-led government in Rome and Brussels has seen the country tip



Growth in the eurozone slowed sharply to 1.8 percent in 2018, data showed, as a recovery ran out of steam on worries over the US-China trade war and Brexit. —AFP

into recession.

Italy's Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte had anticipated the bad news on Wednesday. "Analysts tell us we'll likely still suffer a bit at the start of this year," he said, pointing the finger at a slowdown in China and Germany which are hurting Italian exports.

"But all the elements are there to recover in the second half," Conte added.

France's economic growth also sagged, but not as badly as expected given the chaos surrounding the violent "yellow vest" protests. Statistics office INSEE said French GDP expanded by just 1.5 percent in 2018 after the

2.3 percent rise in 2017.

Most of the threats to growth originate from abroad, ranging from a slowdown in China to protectionism in the US or the growing risk that Britain will quit the European Union chaotically in March. Given the gloom, the International Monetary Fund lowered its growth forecast for the eurozone in 2019 to 1.6 percent, compared to 1.9 percent previously.

The European Central Bank last week said interest rates would remain unchanged at their historic lows "at least through the summer of 2019," a spokesman said. —AFP

Nintendo says 9-month profit up nearly 25%

TOKYO: Nintendo said yesterday its net profit jumped nearly a quarter for the nine months to December, riding out the crucial holiday season thanks to blockbuster game titles for its popular Switch console. The Kyoto-based games giant said "Pokemon" and "Super Smash Bros" gave an extra boost for the third quarter but it lowered its annual target for Switch sales due to slower-than-expected hardware shipments. Its bottom-line profit rose 24.9 percent to 168.8 billion yen (\$1.6 billion) for the April-December period on sales of 997.3 billion yen, up 16.4 percent.

"During the holiday season, software was a great driver of hardware sales," the firm

said in a statement.

For the year to March, it maintained its optimistic annual targets, expecting a net profit of 165 billion yen, up more than 18 percent from the previous fiscal year.

Its annual sales target also remained unchanged at 1.2 trillion yen. Nintendo's latest portable console the Switch has become a huge global seller, helped by the release of innovative, family-friendly titles that have wowed critics and gamers alike. Nintendo shares soared more than 15 percent in January on expectations that sales were solid for the Christmas shopping season.

"Nintendo has maintained momentum, displaying strong performance in the year-end shopping season—a crucial period for the game industry," said Hideki Yasuda, an analyst at Ace Research Institute in Tokyo.

Yasuo Imanaka, an analyst at Rakuten Securities in Tokyo, also said: "Strong sales of software led Nintendo's upbeat performance." The company said three titles—"Super Mario Party", "Pocket Monster Let's Go!

Pikachu / Let's Go Eevee" and "Super Smash Bros. Ultimate"—became major hits with record sales, which helped invigorate the platform."

In particular, "Super Smash Bros. Ultimate,"—the latest in a series of crossover fighting video games featuring its star characters ranging from "Pikachu" to "Mario"—has already sold 12 million copies since its release in early December.

Nintendo is also hoping for hits with several new software titles coming out in the final quarter, including "New Super Mario Bros.U Deluxe."

But it lowered its hardware target to 17 million units sold by the end of this fiscal year, down from its earlier estimate of 20 million yen. "We have to watch hardware sales with caution for the next fiscal year as shipments are not significantly strong," Rakuten's Imanaka said.

Smartphone games could pose competition "which could threaten existing game giants in the future," he added. —AFP

Business

Foxconn 'adjusting' Wisconsin factory plans hailed by Trump

Investment backed by \$4 billion in controversial tax breaks

TAIPEI: Taiwanese electronics giant Foxconn said yesterday it was reassessing plans to build a cutting-edge factory in Wisconsin, which Donald Trump once hailed as part of flagship drive to revive America's manufacturing sector.

Foxconn, which makes devices and components for a host of major tech firms including Apple, had planned to build the \$10 billion plant to make LCD flat screen televisions and create around 13,000 jobs. The investment was backed by \$4 billion in controversial tax breaks and embraced by Trump, who described it as evidence of his "America First" plan in action when announced in 2017.

A year later he appeared alongside Foxconn CEO Terry Gou at a groundbreaking ceremony proclaiming: "This is just the beginning. This is one of the largest plants in the world."

But the global economic climate-roiled by Trump's trade war with China where Foxconn has most of its assembly lines—has led officials at the Taiwanese company to look again at the plans.

"The global market environment that existed when the project was first announced has changed. As our plans are driven by those of our customers, this has necessitated the adjustment of plans for all projects, including Wisconsin," Foxconn said in a statement yesterday.

Earlier reports quoted Louis Woo, an assistant to Gou, suggesting the company might scrap the flat screen factory and hire more high-skilled engineers for research and development—

leading to far fewer blue-collar jobs.

In its statement, Foxconn said it remained committed to building its science park in Wisconsin and "the creation of 13,000 jobs".

It added that "in addition to our consideration of plans to produce traditional products such as television sets" the company was also examining ways for Wisconsin's "knowledge workers" to promote research and development and produce "high-tech applications and solutions".

Woo also told Bloomberg there was "no scrapping of our plans". But he added: "Given global economic conditions and the trade tensions between China and the US... it's impossible that we can always stay committed to our original plan without any change."

As news of the announcement emerged and speculation about the future of the deal swirled, the firm released another statement insisting it was moving forward with "an advanced manufacturing facility in Wisconsin" and insisting it would create 13,000 jobs.

The update gave a list of facilities it planned to build in the next 18 months, including a "liquid crystal module backend packaging plant"—but it was unclear if that was the same as the factory promised by Gou in 2017.

Trump came to power on the back of a promise to revitalise US manufacturing and create millions of jobs, crucially wooing blue-collar workers.

However, the latest news could dent the image he likes to project of the dealer-in-chief

months and we don't see much evidence that the government shutdown spilled over into the private labor market in an especially meaningful way," said Daniel Silver, an economist at JPMorgan in New York.

The ADP National Employment Report showed private payrolls increased by 213,000 in January after surging 263,000 in December. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast private payrolls advancing 178,000 in January.

The ADP report, which is jointly developed with Moody's Analytics, was published ahead of the government's more comprehensive employment report for December scheduled for release on Friday.

While the ADP report is not considered a reliable predictor of the private payrolls portion of the government's employment report because of differences in methodology, it was in line with other market data, including weekly filings for unemployment benefits, that have suggested a healthy jobs market.

According to a Reuters survey of economists, nonfarm payrolls likely increased by 165,000 jobs in January after jumping 312,000 in December. The unemployment rate is forecast unchanged at 3.9 percent.

The dollar fell against basket of currencies on the Fed's dovish statement on interest rates, while U.S. Treasury prices rose. Stocks on Wall Street extended gains. —Reuters



TAIPEI: A motorcyclist rides past a Foxconn logo in Taipei yesterday. Taiwanese electronics giant Foxconn said it was reassessing plans to build a cutting-edge factory in Wisconsin, an investment hailed by President Donald Trump as a flagship example of his push to revive America's manufacturing sector. —AFP

who can deliver, and comes soon after he backed down in his standoff with Democrats over his Mexican border wall in a dispute that closed the government for a month.

"Trump claimed credit for Foxconn's planned investment in manufacturing in the United States, repeatedly pointing to Foxconn's promise as evidence that his economic agenda was working," a statement from the Democratic National Committee said. "But now, Foxconn is looking at moving its manufacturing to China instead."

Gearing up for 2020

Meanwhile the US economy showing signs of slowing just as campaigning for the 2020 election gears up, with the state of Wisconsin a key battleground. While Trump has not responded to the Foxconn announcement CNN quoted an official as saying: "The president has created one of the strongest business climates in American history because he lowered taxes and massively cut regulations.—AFP

US private payrolls rise strongly; housing market struggling

WASHINGTON: US private payrolls increased solidly in January, pointing to sustained labor market strength despite a recent easing in consumer and business confidence that has suggested a loss of momentum in the economy.

The strong hiring shown in the ADP National Employment Report on Wednesday also suggested there had been minimal impact on the labor market from the just-ended 35-day partial shutdown of the federal government. Other data showed contracts to buy existing homes tumbled to a more than 4-1/2-year low in December.

Amid growing uncertainty over the economy's outlook, the Federal Reserve on Wednesday kept benchmark US interest rates steady and said it would be patient in lifting borrowing costs further this year. "It looks like the labor market remains in solid shape despite significant weakening in business and consumer sentiment in recent

Italy in recession after economy shrinks in Q4 2018

MILAN: The Italian economy contracted in the fourth quarter of 2018, plunging the country into a technical recession, official data showed yesterday.

The 0.2 percent contraction—following a 0.1 percent fall in the third quarter—will put pressure on the populist government in the eurozone's third largest economy, which took power in June on the back of big-spending electoral promises. Italy's Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte had anticipated the bad news on Wednesday during a business conference in Milan.

"Analysts tell us we'll likely still suffer a bit at the start of this year," he said, pointing the finger at a slowdown in China and Germany which are hurting Italian exports.

"But all the elements are there to recover in the second half," Conte added.

The coalition government of the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) and the far-right League party was forced to water down its ambitious and costly budget in December to avoid being punished by the European Commission and the financial markets.

A slowdown will make it even harder to follow through on expensive vote-winning measures both parties promised their bases, from a reform to the pension system and income support for the poor.

Thursday's data "reflect a marked worsening of the industrial sector's performance, and of a negative contribution of agriculture," national statistics institute Istat said.

The institute had earlier released December's unemployment rate, which fell to 10.3 percent from 10.5 percent, a positive sign. The jobless numbers rose 0.1 percent for young people aged 15 to 24, however, bringing the rate to 31.9 percent. —AFP

Sports

Jokic's triple-double sends Denver Nuggets past Pelicans

NEW ORLEANS: Nikola Jokic had a triple-double as the visiting Denver Nuggets defeated the short-handed New Orleans Pelicans 105-99 on Wednesday night. Jokic had 20 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists. Malik Beasley added 22 points off the bench. Monte Morris scored 20 and Paul Millsap had 13 as the Nuggets won their fourth consecutive game. The Pelicans played without five of their top six scorers for the second consecutive night. Anthony Davis, Julius Randle, Elfrid Payton, E'Twaun Moore and Nikola Mirotic were all sidelined by injury, leaving just guard Jrue Holiday available among New Orleans' top six players. Holiday led the Pelicans with 22 points, and Kenrich Williams added 21 points.

CELTICS 126, HORNETS 94

Terry Rozier filled in for injured Kyrie Irving and had 17 points, 10 assists and five rebounds, and Boston remained hot with an easy victory over visiting Charlotte. The Celtics took control of the game in the third quarter, outscoring the Hornets 35-16 to push a four-point halftime lead to 23. They went on to lead by as many as 35 points in the fourth quarter. The Celtics have won seven of their past eight games. They are also now 24-4 over the past two seasons when playing without Irving, who missed his third game in the past week with a strained left hip. Kemba Walker paced the Hornets with 21 points.

TIMBERWOLVES 99, GRIZZLIES 97 (OT)

Karl-Anthony Towns hit a 20-foot jump shot at the overtime buzzer, and Minnesota pulled off a victory in Minneapolis, sending Memphis to its eighth consecutive road defeat. Towns had 16 points and 10 rebounds while Jerryd Bayless scored 19 points and handed out a career-high 12 assists for the Timberwolves. Minnesota's Andrew Wiggins missed a 21-foot jumper with three seconds remaining in overtime. Towns grabbed the rebound on the wing and got off his game-winning shot just before time expired. Mike Conley led the Grizzlies with 26 points and eight assists.

MAVERICKS 114, KNICKS 90

Dennis Smith Jr. finished with a triple-double, and Dirk Nowitzki scored a season-high 14 points in his possible finale at Madison Square Garden as visiting Dallas pulled away for a win over New York. The Mavericks have won three of four. The Knicks have lost 11 straight, 19 of 20 and 24 of 26. New York (10-40) has the worst

record in the NBA. Smith collected 13 points, 15 assists and 10 rebounds. Harrison Barnes led all scorers with 19 points while Wesley Matthews added 17 points and rookie sensation Luka Dončić had 16 points and eight rebounds. Kevin Knox topped New York with 17 points.

BULLS 105, HEAT 89

Bobby Portis scored a season-high 26 points to lead Chicago to a victory at Miami. Wayne Selden finished with 20 points while Lauri Markkanen and Kris Dunn scored 14 points each for the Bulls, who snapped a four-game losing streak and won their second in the past 16. Robin Lopez was Chicago's fifth double-figure scorer with 13 points, and Markkanen grabbed a game-high 13 rebounds. Tyler Johnson scored 15 points for the Heat, whose two-game winning streak ended.

WIZARDS 107, PACERS 89

Bradley Beal scored 25 points, Jeff Green added 23, and Washington routed visiting Indiana. Chasson Randle added 13 points for the Wizards, who had lost two straight. Jordan McRae and Trevor Ariza contributed 12 points apiece. Thaddeus Young led six Pacers in double figures with 13 points. The 89 points were a season low for Indiana, which fell to 0-3 since losing Victor Oladipo to a season-ending quadriceps injury. The Pacers have dropped three games in a row for the first time this season.

KINGS 135, HAWKS 113

Marvin Bagley III scored nine of his 17 points in the second quarter, helping Sacramento roll past visiting Atlanta. The win allowed the Kings to sweep the two-game season series from the Hawks for the first time since 2006. Sacramento put up an opponents' season high in a 146-115 romp at Atlanta in November. The Kings' total Wednesday was the sixth-most points allowed by the Hawks this season. Bagley, Harry Giles III (team-high 20 points), Bogdan Bogdanovic (16) and Yogi Ferrell (11) all scored in double figures off the bench for the Kings, who outscored the Hawks 80-49 in reserve points. Hawks rookie Trae Young won his individual duel with Kings point guard De'Aaron Fox, outscoring his rival 23-9 and out-assisting him 8-7.

TRAIL BLAZERS 132, JAZZ 105

Damian Lillard and CJ McCollum combined for 66 points as Portland dismantled Utah for



NEW ORLEANS: Kenrich Williams #34 of the New Orleans Pelicans shoots the ball against the Denver Nuggets on Wednesday at the Smoothie King Center in New Orleans, Louisiana. —AFP

NBA results/standings

Washington 107, Indiana 89; Portland 132, Utah 105; Boston 126, Charlotte 94; Miami 89, Chicago 105; New York 90, Dallas 114; Sacramento 135, Atlanta 113; Minnesota 99, Memphis 97 (OT); New Orleans 99, Denver 105.

Eastern Conference					Western Conference				
	W	L	PCT	GB					
Milwaukee	36	13	0.735	—	Golden State	36	14	0.720	—
Toronto	37	15	0.712	1.5	Denver	35	15	0.700	1
Philadelphia	33	18	0.647	4	Oklahoma City	32	18	0.640	4
Indiana	32	18	0.640	4.5	Portland	32	20	0.615	5
Boston	32	19	0.627	5	Houston	29	21	0.580	7
Brooklyn	28	24	0.538	9.5	San Antonio	30	22	0.577	7
Miami	24	25	0.490	12	Utah	29	23	0.558	8
Charlotte	24	26	0.480	12.5	LA Clippers	28	23	0.549	8.5
Washington	22	29	0.431	15	LA Lakers	26	25	0.510	10.5
Detroit	21	28	0.429	15	Sacramento	26	25	0.510	10.5
Orlando	20	31	0.392	17	Minnesota	25	26	0.490	11.5
Atlanta	16	34	0.320	20.5	Dallas	23	27	0.460	13
Chicago	12	40	0.231	25.5	New Orleans	23	29	0.442	14
Cleveland	11	41	0.212	26.5	Memphis	20	32	0.385	17
New York	10	40	0.200	26.5	Phoenix	11	42	0.208	26.5

its eighth straight home victory. Lillard collected 36 points, 11 assists and eight rebounds, and McCollum scored 30 points for the Trail Blazers, who led by as many as 33 points.

Donovan Mitchell scored 22 points for Utah, which had won nine of its previous 10 outings. Rudy Gobert added 15 points and nine rebounds for the Jazz. — Reuters

NBA fines Davis \$50,000 for making public trade demand

NEW YORK: Anthony Davis was fined \$50,000 by the NBA for making a public trade demand on Tuesday, a day after his agent went public with his desire to leave the New Orleans Pelicans.

Davis, a five-time All-Star and member of the 2012 London Olympic gold medal squad, told the team he will not sign a contract extension and wants to be traded to an NBA contender before the league's February 7 transfer deadline.

Davis violated a rule in the owners-players union agreement banning public trade demands, the fine coming for agent Rich Paul's statements to ESPN that the NBA characterized in announcing the fine as "an intentional effort to undermine the contractual relationship between Davis and the Pelicans".

The Pelicans confirmed Davis wanted to leave in a statement Monday. "Relative to specific talks of a trade, we will do this on our terms and our

timeline," the team said. "One that makes the most sense for our team and it will not be dictated by those outside of our organization."

Davis, top pick in the 2012 NBA Draft, shares second in the NBA with 29.3 points a game and third in the league with 13.3 rebounds per contest. At 22-28 with seven losses in their past eight games, the Pelicans are 13th of 15 clubs in the Western Conference, 5.5 games behind the Los Angeles Clippers for the eighth and last playoff berth. Davis, out since January 19 with a sprained left index finger but due back imminently, could become a free agent in 2020 and sign a five-year contract extension worth \$240 million after this season.

The Pelicans have missed the playoffs in four

of six seasons since drafting Davis, but swept Portland in the first round of last season's playoffs for their first post-season series triumph since 2008. New Orleans fell in the second round to eventual champion Golden State.

The Los Angeles Lakers, whose superstar LeBron James is also represented by Paul, and Boston Celtics are expected to be interested in Davis, but the Pelicans do not want the process to become a free-for-all as they risk losing him for nothing unless he is traded. "We have also requested the league to strictly enforce the tampering rules associated with this transaction," the Pelicans said, a reference to NBA rules prohibiting teams from trying to lure players who are under contract. — AFP

Sebastian Coe to stand for second term as IAAF chief

Dodgers pound three homers, dump Rangers

ABU DHABI: Sebastian Coe yesterday all but confirmed that he would run for a second term as President of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) to continue the fight against doping and complete his mission to rejuvenate the sport.

The 62-year-old British former Olympic 1,500 metres champion was elected to the post in 2015 amid the full storm of a major doping scandal and has spent much of his term trying to battle the use of banned substances in track and field. "I think we've made a very good start in the first few years," Coe told Reuters in an interview at the Leaders Sport Business Summit in Abu Dhabi. "The first two or three years were very clearly about reform, about creating structures that were safe and secure, about providing foundations that would give confidence ... that we are a sport worth investing time, resource and finance into."

"The next leg of the journey has to be about innovation, it has to be about growing the sport, creating an exciting experience, particularly for young people. "That's the fun bit, so clearly I would like to be part of it."

The densest cloud hanging over the IAAF for the last three years has been the fallout from the Russian doping scandal, which resulted in the country's athletics federation effectively being kicked out of the sport.

The IAAF instituted an independent process for the reinstatement of Russia, which included analysis of historic athlete samples now held by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). As it

was an independent process, Coe said it was difficult for him to predict whether Russian athletes would be able to compete under their own flag at this year's world championships in Doha or at next year's Tokyo Olympics.

"We need to have systems in place that we trust, we need to enable athletes are able to express concerns ... we need to have coaches that have been plying their trade not included in the sport," he said.

"We have to make sure that criteria is met, and when it is met, hopefully full reinstatement." In the meantime, in what Coe said was "very important philosophical position" for him, Russian athletes would continue to be able to compete internationally under "neutral status" once they fulfilled certain criteria.

Coe said the progress made in the fight against doping had also seen results in reassuring existing and potential sponsors and he looked forward to announcing new partners soon. The chief organiser of the 2012 London Olympics was also looking forward to getting into the business of reviving the presentation of the sport, a process which started with an IAAF innovation workshop in London last week.

Coe said market research showed that fans wanted a better broadcast and internet experience, and improvements in stadiums. "The next stage of the journey is making us relevant, making us fun, exciting in the world of young people," he said.

There would probably be changes to the



Sebastian Coe

elite Diamond League series from the 2020, he said, and attempts to re-engage retired Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt with the sport he dominated for a decade.

"I can't think of any competitor, barring Muhammad Ali, that has connected with people so well so of course we want him involved," he said. Although Coe said he was not "cavalier"

about the doping problem, he believes the IAAF congress that meets in Doha in September for the presidential election is overseeing a "significantly safer" sport than in years past. "One positive test is too many, but the systems that we have available to us are 20, 30, 40 times safer than they were 10, 15, 20 years ago and certainly when I was competing," Coe said. — Reuters

Rams coach McVay, NFL's boy wonder

ATLANTA: Los Angeles Rams head coach Sean McVay could make NFL history here Sunday by becoming the youngest head coach to win the Super Bowl if his team manages to outfox the New England Patriots.

The fresh-faced 33-year-old has emerged as the hottest young coach in the league over the past two years, transforming the Rams from one of the worst teams in the NFL to one of the most dynamic.

The McVay effect is already being felt across the league, with several teams now hunting down head coaches with a similar profile and style to the Rams coach. McVay meanwhile now faces the ultimate test of his young head-coaching career, attempting to come up with a gameplan capable of outwitting Patriots counterpart Bill Belichick, the most successful coach of the modern NFL era.

While the Patriots have been installed as favourites for Sunday's battle in Atlanta, few would be surprised if McVay pulls off an upset. Appointed in early 2017, McVay made headlines as the youngest coach in the history of the modern NFL, taking over the Rams just two weeks shy of his 31st birthday.

A franchise which had suffered a disastrous 4-12 campaign in their first season back in Los Angeles were badly in need of a shake-up.

McVay duly delivered, transforming the team in the 2017 season and leading them into the playoffs. Wade Phillips, the Rams veteran defensive coach, said McVay made an instant impact. "Within one week he knew every player, could recognize them and say their name," Phillips said recently.

"I didn't even know all of the coach's (names) in a week." Part of that can be explained by McVay's extraordinarily powerful memory. At the Super Bowl's media night in Atlanta on Monday, McVay was challenged by a television network to recall the details of several plays from random games during his high school playing days in 2003. He aced the test.

McVay had also set about re-establishing trust between players and coaching staff following his arrival. "It was really just the way he portrayed things," quarterback Jared Goff revealed. "The way he communicated. The way he made something that's so complicated seem so simple. Right then, it was like, 'Wow.'"

For McVay, the cornerstone of his coaching philosophy are human relationships. "That's the foundation of everything we do," he told reporters on Wednesday. "People want to feel like they're part of something bigger than themselves. "It's not about figuring out who's right, it's figuring out what's right.—AFP

England's Tuilagi starts against Ireland in Six Nations opener

LONDON: Manu Tuilagi is set to make his first England start in more than four years after being named in Eddie Jones' run-on XV to play champions Ireland in the teams' Six Nations opener in Dublin tomorrow. The injury-plagued Leicester centre got his chance after Ben Te'o was ruled out with a side strain.

Tuilagi last started a match for England in the third Test against New Zealand in June 2014. Elliot Daly held off the challenge of Mike Brown to remain at fullback for the Aviva Stadium clash when Jones announced his matchday 23 yesterday.

Daly, more comfortable as a centre or wing, has started England's last seven Tests at fullback. Jones could have opted to bring back specialist No 15 Mike Brown for an expected aerial bombardment by Ireland given

the Harlequins stalwart's skill under the high ball—an area where Daly struggled during the November internationals.

But Jones did hand a recall to Jack Nowell. Having spoken about the possibility of converting the Exeter flyer into a flanker, the Australian coach selected him in his usual wing position. There is no doubt, though, that England will want the defensively strong Nowell to help negate Grand Slam champions Ireland's threat at the ruck.

Henry Slade continues at outside centre where he partners Tuilagi in midfield, with Nowell and Jonny May the two wings. Owen Farrell again captains the side from fly-half, with the experienced Ben Youngs back at scrum-half.

Replacement scrum-half Dan Robson is poised to make his England debut off the bench. "I just felt for this game the best option was to play Owen Farrell at 10 and Manu as a like-for-like replacement for Ben Te'o," said Jones in a statement issued by the Rugby Football Union from England's training camp in Portugal.

"Manu has impressed us at the training camp, and is right to play." England's pack features both Vunipola brothers, with No 8 Billy and prop Mako having recovered from their respective arm and calf injuries.—AFP

Sports

Sharma shocked as NZ humble India

HAMILTON: Stand-in captain Rohit Sharma warned against complacency ahead of India's World Cup fight yesterday after a resurgent New Zealand inflicted one of his side's heaviest ever one-day defeats.

The New Zealanders cruised to an eight-wicket win in the fourth ODI in Hamilton as the dominant form that swept India to a 3-0 series victory disappeared. The tourists were skittled for 92 with 19.1 overs to spare—their lowest total in nine years—before the Black Caps chased down the modest total to triumph at 93 for two in 14.4 overs.

No opponent has ever defeated India with so many balls remaining in their innings and India has only scored as badly on six other occasions. With the series already won, captain Virat Kohli sat out the dead-rubber fixture and MS Dhoni was sidelined with a hamstring strain.

Sharma took the skipper's armband for what was supposed to be a celebration of his 200th ODI but Black Caps' paceman Trent Boult crashed the party to take five for 21. While Boult and the rest of the New Zealand attack benefited from humid conditions that allowed them to produce swing for the first time in the series, Sharma said that was no excuse.

"We never expected something like this but sometimes these games can happen," he said. Sharma said the pitch remained "a great wicket to bat on" but his batsman had failed to apply themselves because they had already won the series. He warned such an attitude could cost the second-ranked ODI team dearly at the World

Cup starting in England in May. "Just because we've won the series doesn't mean we can relax," he said. "We've got this big prize ahead of us and we've got to keep ticking the boxes. The good teams do that.

"At times you need to grind it out and absorb the pressure but we failed to do that today and we've only got ourselves to blame."

BOULT 'RELENTLESS'

While the performance will not cause India to hit the panic button ahead of the World Cup, there will be disappointment at how their batsmen fared without superstars Kohli and Dhoni. Yuzvendra Chahal top scored for the tourists with 18 much-hyped debutant Shubman Gill failed to reach double figures, falling for nine.

Boult's man-of-the-match performance resulted in the second-best ever figures for a New Zealander against India while all-rounder Colin de Grandhomme also contributed three for 26, his best ODI return.

"It was good to get out there and show what we can do," said Boult, whose third-ranked New Zealanders had been rattled by their lack of competitiveness in the opening three matches.

Boult and de Grandhomme tore the heart out of India's middle in a devastating spell that saw the tourists lose five wickets for seven runs.

New Zealand dropped opening batsman Colin Munro and promoted Henry Nicholls up the order in a bid to stop a string of slow starts. The experiment worked as Nicholls made 30 not



HAMILTON: New Zealand's Henry Nicholls (R) plays a shot during the fourth one-day international cricket match between New Zealand and India at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday. — AFP

out, although fellow opener Martin Guptill's poor run of form continued when he was dismissed on 14.

Black Caps bowling coach Shane Jurgensen said the conditions suited Boult. "I feel like in Hamilton it always offers something for the

bowlers here," he said. "It allowed him to work to his strengths. He's come over, he's come around and he's been quite relentless really."

The fifth and final one-dayer will be played in Wellington on Sunday, followed by three Twenty20 internationals. — AFP

No room for complacency, Paine warns

CANBERRA: Australia skipper Tim Paine warned yesterday there was no room for complacency after sticking with the same side for the second Test against Sri Lanka as the one that thrashed them in Brisbane. The home team routed the visitors by an innings and 40 runs under lights at the Gabba and Paine pointed to their recent experience against India, where Australia won a Test in Perth only to be comprehensively beaten in Melbourne.

"We touched on how we had a great win in Perth against India. I thought we turned up pretty poorly and really flat in Melbourne and started that Test match pretty ordinarily," Paine said. "And then you get a good side like India in front of you and we couldn't reel them back in.

"It's just been making sure our attitude to this Test is spot on and we're leaving nothing to chance." On the back of the Brisbane thumping, Australia have opted to make no changes for the second Test in Canberra starting Friday against a Sri Lankan team struggling with injuries and off-field dramas.

That includes keeping the under-performing Mitchell Starc as a new-ball bowler. "We're unchanged which is nice," Paine said ahead of the first-ever Test in the nation's capital, at picturesque Manuka Oval on a track regarded as one of the best batting wickets in the country.

"Coming off a good win we are happy with our combination." Limited-overs specialist Marcus Stoinis was added to the squad after Brisbane as a potential fifth bowling option, but Paine said Mar-

nus Labuschagne, who has been in good touch with the bat and can bowl leg-breaks, was preferred.

"This pitch is probably slightly different, we just think that we'll be able to get more overs out of Marnus on a pitch like this," he said. The Canberra Test is Australia's last before the Ashes tour to England in six months' time and there are still pieces to the puzzle for selectors to solve.

Pace spearhead Starc needs to find form again after a lean summer with his Test spot—once set in stone—now widely seen as under threat. Despite his struggles, Paine backed him to deliver and said he would open the bowling as usual.

"We've used Starc for a long time with the new ball," Paine said. "We think he is still our best new-ball bowler when he gets it right so we'll always give him the first few." Josh Hazlewood remains injured and will not play in Canberra, with Jhye Richardson handed another opportunity after performing admirably in the first Test. Selectors also showed faith with the batting line-up, meaning Will Pucovski, one of the brightest talents in the country, misses out again. Australia's batsmen have struggled over the summer, including a series defeat to India, with none managing to score a century. "We've talked for a long time about scoring hundreds and the impacts that can have on winning games of cricket and individual careers," coach Justin Langer said on SEN radio.

"It would be great to see one of the guys, or six of our guys, score a hundred. They're all working hard towards that." Sri Lanka have their own worries with pace duo Lahiru Kumara and Dushmantha Chameera both ruled out injured. They have also been dealing with off-field disruptions, including coach Chandika Hathurusingha being stripped of his team selection duties after Brisbane. "It's always tough for us as players with so many things happening, but whatever happens off the field we need to keep aside and control what we can control," said skipper Dinesh Chandimal. — AFP

Spirit of cricket needs to be protected, says outgoing ICC boss

GURGAON: The head of cricket's world body yesterday said the sport's "spirit" is under threat after recent scandals—ranging from racist comments to corruption—that have tarnished its reputation.

International Cricket Council chief executive David Richardson, speaking just days after Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed was banned for four games, insisted that tough action will be taken over misconduct and match-fixing.

Sarfraz was banned Sunday for making a racial slur against a South African player in Durban and has since returned home from the tour. The sport is also still reeling from the controversy that embroiled Australian players Steve Smith, David Warner and Cameron Bancroft after they were caught tampering the ball during a Test against South Africa and banned. "Regarding player conduct, in recent times we have had some incidents around the world and we have taken necessary steps to ensure that everybody understands the spirit of cricket," Richardson told reporters in Gurgaon.

"The spirit of cricket is something unique to the game and something that we need to protect," he added. Sri Lanka is at the centre of a major corruption investigation and Richardson reiterated ICC efforts to disrupt crime gangs believed to be behind match-fixing attempts.

The ICC has urged Sri Lankan players and coaches to give evidence on corruption before an amnesty expires this month. Sri Lankan cricket has been at the centre of allegations including attempted match fixing ahead of a Test against England last year.

"In recent years we have taken a much more pro-active approach to trying to disrupt these unscrupulous individuals that wander around the earth trying to fix cricket," said Richardson. "The players have been very good at reporting any approach they get. "Now you read more about anti-corruption in the media but that's not because it's getting worse but it's because we are trying do much more to disrupt these criminal elements," he added.

The former South African player is to stand down as ICC boss after this year's World Cup when Manu Sawhney of India is to take over. Richardson said the increased use of technology in the sport and efforts to boost the standing of Test cricket with a world championship had been his focus.

"Finally we convinced members that having a Test league is required. Probably that stands out as one of the things that I will proud of." — AFP

Juventus out of Coppa Italia, Roma humiliated by Fiorentina

MILAN: Four-time defending champions Juventus crashed out of the Coppa Italia on Wednesday with a 3-0 quarter-final defeat by Atalanta, as AS Roma suffered a humiliating 7-1 thrashing at the hands of Fiorentina.

Juventus had been bidding for a fifth consecutive league and Cup double this season. But a Duvan Zapata brace after Timothy Castagne's opener put the side from Bergamo through to a semi-final meeting with Fiorentina.

Cristiano Ronaldo's Juventus won their first trophy of the season in the Italian Super Cup this month. But they suffered their first defeat in a domestic competition this season, as they ride high and unbeaten in Serie A. Massimiliano Allegri's side had come from behind against Lazio in league action at the weekend with Ronaldo snatching a 2-1 win in Rome.

The Portuguese superstar could not find a way through for a first Cup goal in Italy with Juventus also hit by defender Giorgio Chiellini going off injured in the first half-hour. Castagne opened the scoring after 37 minutes with Zapata grabbing another two minutes later, before adding a third four minutes from time for his 17th goal in ten matches.

The Colombian ace also scored a double in a 2-2 draw when the sides last met in Serie A on December 26. "It's only human not to always be top. Now let's put this behind us and think about the next Serie A match against Parma," said Allegri, who was banished from the touchline for

dissent. "I don't know how many games the lads have won. In Rome we had a terrible first half but we fought back. This evening everything went wrong. "It would have been crazy to think we could win every match. It hurts to go out because we really wanted this trophy." "Even the most optimistic fan could not have predicted this victory," said coach Gian Piero Gasperini as the side from Bergamo target their second Cup title after 1963.

Earlier in Tuscany Federico Chiesa scored a hat-trick as Fiorentina crushed a "shameful" Roma side. Chiesa scored two early on, adding a third in the second half past overwhelmed Roma goalkeeper Robin Olsen, with Giovanni Simeone bagging a brace in the last ten minutes.

Colombian Luis Muriel and Marco Benassi also found the net against a Roma side who were reeling after throwing away a three-goal lead to draw 3-3 with Atalanta at the weekend in Serie A.

"I'm bitter, but I won't quit," said Roma coach Eusebio Di Francesco. "I'm disappointed in the team, there are no excuses. I struggle to explain what happened, as it was a game we got wrong in every conceivable way. It was shameful."

Di Francesco's side had fought back after a difficult start to the season with four straight wins in Serie A and the Coppa Italia, and are now fifth in the league. "The frustrating thing is it's so inexplicable," said the Roma boss. "Every time we think we are healed, we discover the ill-



BERGAMO: Atalanta's Albanian goalkeeper Etrit Berisha (R) defends against Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo (C) during the Italian Tim Cup round of eight football match Atalanta Bergamo vs Juventus on Wednesday at the Atleti Azzurri d'Italia stadium in Bergamo. — AFP

ness is still there." Chiesa got the first goal after seven minutes from a Cristiano Biraghi cross. A Bryan Cristante header rattled the post before the 21-year-old Chiesa lobbed in his second over-

Olsen just after quarter of an hour. Aleksandar Kolarov pulled one back for Roma after half an hour, but Fiorentina were soon two goals ahead again through Muriel. — AFP

UAE protest Asian Cup eligibility of Qatari players before final

ABU DHABI: Asian Cup hosts the United Arab Emirates have protested the eligibility of two Qatari players on the eve of Qatar's appearance in today's final against Japan. The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) confirmed to AFP on Thursday that it was investigating the case brought by the Emirati football association against the 2022 World Cup hosts.

The UAE's decision to appeal to organisers comes after Qatar thrashed the hosts 4-0 in a stormy semi-final that saw a hostile home crowd pelt the victors with plastic bottles and shoes. According to media reports, the players in question are striker Al-moez Ali, who has scored a record-equalling eight goals at the tournament, and defender Bassam Al-Rawi. Ali, 22, is of Sudanese descent, while 21-year-old Al-Rawi was born in Iraq. "The Asian Football Confederation has received a protest from the United Arab Emirates FA regarding the eligibility of two Qatar players," an AFC spokesman told AFP.

"This protest will now be reviewed in line with the AFC regulations." Qatar could potentially have to forfeit the match and be ordered to pay a fine, under the AFC's Disciplinary and Ethics Code. The AFC also has the power to exclude teams from a future competition if the ineligibility is discovered after a tournament, the document says. Qatar, who have been abused by local crowds over the long-running Gulf blockade of the tiny, energy-rich country, are appearing in their first Asian Cup final.

Their Spanish coach Felix Sanchez insisted there was no issue. "I'm not concerned at all," shrugged the Spaniard, after AFC moderators had tried in vain to block press conference questions on the issue.

"All the players are working with us, so no worries. "We're very isolated (at the hotel) and we're not looking for any outside discussion," he added. "This team doesn't need any extra motivation-to play an Asian Cup final is enough motivation."

Iran made a similar protest against an Iraqi player they claimed was ineligible at the 2015 Asian Cup in Australia, which was rejected by the AFC. — AFP

Japan's Yoshida blasts Asian Cup 'stupidity' before final

ABU DHABI: Japan captain Maya Yoshida has warned that problems on and off the pitch are embarrassing the Asian Cup as the Blue Samurai prepare to face Qatar in today's final. The Southampton defender called on tournament organisers to deal swiftly with incidents of "stupidity" that, according to Yoshida, risk damaging the reputation of Asian football.

His plea came as the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) confirmed to AFP that it had received a protest over the eligibility of two Qatari players from host country the United Arab Emirates and were investigating. "I think the AFC should control stuff about penalties and suspensions," Yoshida said Thursday, noting also that Japan's tempestuous 3-0 semi-final victory over Iran had ended with rival players almost coming to blows.

"But I would mention that if (the tournament) is broadcast all over the world, you don't want to see any stupid things, especially after the game," he added. "We are representing Asia under the hashtag #bringingasiatogether-so it's important to represent Asia by playing good football and with fair play."

The tournament slogan has rung hollow in the Emirates, where finalists Qatar have been frequently abused by hostile local fans over the Gulf blockade of the tiny, energy-rich state. The Qatari players were pelted with plastic bottles and shoes after thrashing

the hosts 4-0 in the semi-finals in disgraceful scenes that brought shame on the Asian Cup and prompted another AFC investigation.

Japan's upset of title favourites Iran also came close to boiling over, with Yoshida himself needing to be restrained by team mates after reacting furiously to a petulant slap from Sardar Azmoun.

"We met some of the Iran guys in the lift and they apologised for what happened," said Yoshida, looking forward to Friday's final in Abu Dhabi. "I expect both teams to give 100% effort tomorrow, with fair play, to show the world how we play. That would be a big step, not only for Japan but Asian football."

The Asian Cup has seen its share of controversial refereeing decisions, with hosts UAE twice awarded soft late penalties that left rivals players and coaching fuming. "It's important to control ourselves mentally in Asia," said Yoshida.

"The referees are totally different in style to European or even Japanese referees. I think we've done well in terms of adjusting." Japan enter the final as favourites to add to their record of four Asian Cup titles after peaking at just the right time.

But Qatar coach Felix Sanchez insisted the 2022 World Cup hosts were confident ahead of the country's first appearance in the final after comfortably winning all six of their matches and keeping a record six clean sheets.

"To us it's no surprise that we are in the final," said the Spaniard, who has received messages of support from Jose Mourinho and Arsene Wenger. "I have full trust in the players, they are motivated to make history." According to reports, striker Al-moez Ali, who has scored a record-equalling eight goals at the tournament, and defender Bassam Al-Rawi are the players being investigated by the AFC.

But Sanchez dismissed fears of AFC action. "I'm not concerned at all," he shrugged. "All the players are working with us, so no worries." — AFP

Sports

Jurgen Klopp takes Liverpool's title setback in his stride

LIVERPOOL: Jurgen Klopp refused to be down-hearted despite his annoyance at being denied a strong second-half penalty claim in Liverpool's 1-1 draw with Leicester at Anfield on Wednesday.

The result, coming 24 hours after Premier League title rivals Manchester City were beaten at lowly Newcastle, saw Klopp's team extend their lead at the top of the table to five points. But it could, obviously, have been seven points after Sadio Mane gave Liverpool an early lead, only for Harry Maguire to score a dramatic equaliser in first-half injury-time.

To compound Klopp's unhappiness, Maguire had been cautioned just six minutes earlier for a foul on Mane when the Liverpool striker appeared ready to break clear on goal in a counter-attack. Referee Martin Atkinson deemed that foul worth only a yellow card, and compounded his "crime" in the eyes of home fans, when he did not award Liverpool a second-half penalty following what appeared to be Ricardo Pereira's trip on Naby Keita.

"The 1-1 is OK even though everybody agrees it should have been a penalty," said Klopp. "I don't know why it wasn't. I don't know what he (Atkinson) saw in this moment because he had the best position. There was no blood involved but, still, it was a penalty." The Liverpool manager, looking to bring the English title to Anfield for the first time in 29 years, continued: "But he doesn't want to give it, and we can't tell him to come and look at it again.

"I think we agree it was a penalty, very often I stand here when we get a penalty and have to defend it." The German boss added: "And we had the situation with Maguire. I am not the referee, I am the manager, I am not sure, is it smart what he is doing?"

"I would say it is a 100 percent goalscoring chance at least that is something—a situation where there is a goalscoring chance that tells the ref he has to give a red card." The evening had started in perfect fashion for Liverpool as Mane scored their fastest league goal in nearly three years, with just two minutes on the clock, only for Maguire to level in first-half injury-time.

The England World Cup defender was left unmarked, six yards out, and swept the ball home after Wilfred Ndidi's shot, following a James Maddison free-kick, had been blocked and Ben Chilwell guided the ball back into the area with a clever header.

The goal was the culmination of a half which had seen the tension at Anfield increase as Liverpool pressed for a second goal. Their opener with just 124 seconds on the clock was a sublime effort that crowned a flowing, 30-pass move.

Eventually, Andrew Robertson's pass was touched on by Roberto Firmino and Mane curled into the bottom right-hand corner from 12 yards out. Firmino was then denied by Kasper Schmeichel before Mane headed wide from the resulting corner.

But, as City had done in surrendering an early lead at Newcastle, Liverpool looked nervous and



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Senegalese striker Sadio Mane (L) is tackled by Leicester City's English midfielder Hamza Choudhury (R) during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Leicester City at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on Wednesday. — AFP

susceptible at the back. A mistake by goalkeeper Alisson gifted Leicester a chance which ended with Maddison heading wide, unmarked at the far post, from all of two yards after 24 minutes.

In an entertaining second half, Maguire had an effort cleared off the line by Firmino while, in

the closing stages, Jordan Henderson's cross picked out Firmino whose ferocious drive was well parried by the diving Schmeichel. "We have a point more than before," said Klopp. "That is not exactly what we wanted to have but, still, everything is fine at the moment." — AFP

Sarri fumes after Chelsea meltdown

BOURNEMOUTH: Maurizio Sarri questioned his ability to motivate Chelsea's spluttering stars after their humiliating 4-0 defeat at Bournemouth on Wednesday. The shocking result at Dean Court ranked as Chelsea's biggest league defeat for 22 years and was their fifth loss in the last 12 Premier League games.

The Blues have dropped out of the top four-below Arsenal on goals scored—to leave their bid to qualify for the Champions League under severe threat. And Chelsea boss Sarri, who publicly questioned his side's approach after the recent defeat at Arsenal, conducted a lengthy post-match inquest alone with his players after asking his backroom staff to leave the dressing room.

The Italian maintained he does not feel under pressure but admitted the blame for the defeat could lie with himself. "In that moment I wanted to talk with them alone, without anybody else," he said.

"I needed to understand. It's impossible to play in such a different way between the first and second half. I don't understand why. I don't know exactly. I want to try again tomorrow because we want to solve the problem.

"I think (the players are good enough). Maybe we are not at the top of the Premier League at the moment, but we are competitive. "We cannot lose 4-0 against Bournemouth. I

want to respect Bournemouth, but it's impossible to lose 4-0 here. "Maybe it's my fault, maybe I'm not able to motivate them. But the team is very strong, it is also able to win without the coach." Sarri is facing growing questions about his tactics and motivational ability just half-way through his first season in charge.

And the former Napoli boss admitted he is starting to get annoyed by Chelsea's inconsistency. "I feel frustrated. Not under pressure. I didn't see the signal of my work. So I am frustrated," he said. Chelsea dominated long periods of the first half but after conceding Joshua King's opening goal in the 47th minute, they had no response as David Brooks doubled the lead in the 63rd minute.

King added a second eleven minutes later, and Charlie Daniels headed the fourth in stoppage-time. "What I saw in the first half, there was the possibility to solve the problem," Sarri said. "We had 43 minutes still to play, so we could solve the problem. But not with that kind of reaction.

"At the moment, they are able to react very well always against a big team. When we play against a big team, usually we are able to play with a very good level of motivation.

"In the first half, I saw a team with a very good level of motivation and determination. Then, suddenly after the first goal, we were not able to play." The withdrawal of Gonzalo Higuain in the 64th minute prompted chants of 'you don't know what you're doing' from the Chelsea supporters. Sarri said: "We have only to say sorry to our fans. We can lose, of course, in every match, but not in this way. — AFP

Pochettino smiles again after Spurs late show

LONDON: Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino praised his side's mentality after late strikes from Son Heung-min and Fernando Llorente earned a dramatic 2-1 victory against Watford on Wednesday to lift the club after a miserable week.

Spurs dominated possession at Wembley but lacked inspiration without injured England pair Harry Kane and Dele Alli and looked to be heading for their third Premier League defeat in five games after Craig Cathcart's first-half goal.

But Son, back in the side after South Korea were knocked out of the Asian Cup, equalised with 10 minutes to go and Spanish striker Llorente grabbed the winner in the 87th minute. Watford had taken the lead when Northern Ireland defender Cathcart headed home from a corner whipped in from the left shortly before half-time and looked like holding out despite severe pressure from the home side.

The win leaves Spurs in third place in the Premier League, just two points behind defending champions Manchester City and crucially seven points clear of fifth-placed Chelsea as the race for Champions League places heats up.

"I think we fully deserved the victory," said

Pochettino. "It arrived late but we kept pushing. It was a fantastic second-half performance. "The first half, it was difficult to create chances—we dominated but didn't create. It's fantastic to win again after a difficult week... it's nice to smile. The mentality is perfect."

Pochettino said he was happy that Son was back in the fold, saying he hoped he would be ready for Saturday's home match against Newcastle after he finished the game with cramp. Spurs had enjoyed the lion's share of possession in the first half without creating much of note and Watford threatened on a number of occasions when they ventured forward, with Gerard Deulofeu looking lively.

Son was the main threat for Spurs in the early stages, looking to run at the Watford defence at every opportunity. The South Korean went close with a left-footed strike from outside the box and shortly afterwards Christian Eriksen's deflected shot forced Watford goalkeeper Ben Foster into a scrambling save.

But Watford looked dangerous on the counter-attack and nearly took the lead shortly before the half-hour, when Deulofeu put the ball narrowly wide of Lloris's right-hand post. They silenced a disappointingly small crowd at Wembley in the 38th minute when Spurs goalkeeper Hugo Lloris misjudged Jose Holebas's corner and Cathcart put them in front.

Pochettino threw on Lucas Moura for the second half to add to his side's firepower and they mounted an all-out assault on the Watford goal, looking far more dangerous than they had during the opening period. — AFP

Sports

Sevilla hammering shows Barca want to win all three titles: Messi

BARCELONA: Lionel Messi believes Barcelona showed their appetite for the Copa del Rey by blowing away Sevilla 6-1 yesterday to pull off a brilliant comeback and book their place in the semi-finals. Sevilla had won the first leg 2-0 but their lead was wiped out within 31 minutes at the Camp Nou, after Philippe Coutinho scored a penalty, deferred to him by Messi, before Ivan Rakitic poked in a second.

Ever Banega had squandered the chance to level for Sevilla by missing his own spot-kick and Barca ran riot in the second half. Coutinho headed in his second and Sergi Roberto added a fourth, only for Guilherme Arana to give Sevilla brief hope. Luis Suarez and Messi wrapped up an emphatic victory late on, the latter after a superb counter-attacking move.

Some had suggested Barcelona would be relieved to exit the Copa del Rey to focus fully on La Liga and the Champions League but Messi said their display had silenced the doubters. "It was said that we had given up in the cup, that we didn't want it," Messi said afterwards. "But in no way is this the case. This team wants to fight for all three titles, as is the obligation of Barca every year."

Coutinho's form has wavered in recent weeks but his double could do wonders for confidence. Barcelona, meanwhile, are no strangers to these sort of revivals but against Sevilla, who sit fourth in La Liga and have been one of their closest challengers this season, it was particularly impressive.

The defending champions are into the last

four for the ninth consecutive year and edge closer to an historic fifth Copa del Rey title in a row. They join Valencia and Real Betis in the semis after Betis had earlier needed extra time to beat Espanyol 3-1, 4-2 on aggregate, while Valencia knocked out Getafe on Tuesday.

Real Madrid could fill the last spot. They carry a 4-2 lead into their second leg against Girona. Ernesto Valverde had rested players at the Ramon Sanchez-Pizjuan but he fielded almost his strongest XI in the return.

Messi, left out last week, was back in the starting line-up, along with Suarez, Jordi Alba and Coutinho. Jasper Cillessen kept his place in goal ahead of Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

Perhaps Messi felt Coutinho had played a big part in winning the penalty after it was the Brazilian's drag-back that gave him the ball. Messi went to shoot but struck the leg of Quincy Promes, who could do little about the contact. Referee Jose Sanchez checked with VAR and pointed to the spot. Messi gave way to Coutinho, who whipped it into the corner.

The night could have been different had Cillessen not produced a pair of brilliant saves to preserve his team's lead. First, he tipped Andre Silva's flicked finish onto the post and then he saved Banega's penalty, pushing it out after Gerard Pique had brought down Roque Mesa.

It could have been 1-1 but four minutes later, it was 2-0, Arthur Melo picking out Rakitic, whose attempt to control turned into a poke past the committed Juan Soriano. Rakitic held



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (L) vies for the ball with Sevilla's French defender Ibrahim Amadou during the Spanish Copa del Rey (King's Cup) quarter-final second leg football match between Barcelona and Sevilla at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona. — AFP

up his hands, choosing not to celebrate against his former club.

Barca appeared to have put the tie beyond doubt when they scored twice in as many min-

utes in the second half. Coutinho stooped low to head in Suarez's cross and then Sergi Roberto hammered in after a delicate ball through from Messi. — AFP

A World Cup, and a team to match? Qatar get it right on the pitch

ABU DHABI: Qatar's transformation from also-rans to Asian Cup finalists was meticulously planned and has been years in the making—and has finally given Qataris some swagger as they prepare to host the World Cup.

The wealthy Gulf state has long projected its power through football, notably by winning the right to host the 2022 World Cup and by buying Paris Saint-Germain, the club of Neymar, the world's most expensive player.

What was missing was a respectable national team, but Qatar seem to have solved that problem after putting together a record-breaking run in hostile conditions in the United Arab Emirates.

Plastic bottles and even shoes rained down on the Qatari players as they thrashed the hosts 4-0 to reach their first Asian Cup final, keeping an unprecedented sixth clean sheet in the process.

The ongoing Gulf blockade of Qatar has sent tensions sky-high, and with Qataris largely barred from UAE the Maroons have been virtually bereft of fans. But despite this, they have cut a swathe through the

competition. Almoez Ali has netted a record-equaling eight times, and Qatar's goal difference of scored 16, conceded none is the best in Asian Cup history. It is a far cry from 2015, when Qatar lost all three group games and left with zero points, with the prospect of World Cup embarrassment looming on the horizon.

But whatever happens in Friday's final with Japan, Qatar have shown they need to be taken seriously in 2022, despite being the World Cup's first post-war hosts not to have previously played in the competition.

Qatar's success on the pitch stems from Doha's Aspire Academy, which has produced athletes of the calibre of world champion high jumper Mutaz Essa Barshim. But the major focus is football and Aspire has gone to the lengths of buying clubs in Spain and Belgium, and forging links with others including Leeds United, to give its players greater exposure.

The quality of the facilities is such that Aspire is sought out for warm-weather training by major European clubs like Manchester United and Bayern Munich. It also searches far and wide for high-quality coaches, including current national team boss Felix Sanchez, who moved from Barcelona's academy in 2006.

Sanchez was in charge of Qatar's under-19s in 2014 when they won their first Asian title, with a squad including Ali and several others now at the Asian Cup. "We work very hard all the time. Every training session we train together, it's like a family," Portuguese-born defender Pedro Correia told AFP. — AFP

Martial signs new deal at Man United

LONDON: Anthony Martial has signed a new contract that will keep him at Manchester United until June 2024 just months after he seemed set to leave, the Premier League club announced yesterday. The 23-year-old Frenchman, who moved to Old Trafford from Monaco in 2015, has scored eight Premier League goals this season. "I am loving my time at this club," said Martial, whose new deal includes the option to extend for a further year.

"From the day I joined I have been made to feel part of the United family and I have been incredibly humbled and overwhelmed by the warmth and love of our fans, who continue to amaze me with their support.

"I would like to thank (interim boss) Ole (Gunnar Solskjaer) and his coaching staff for their belief in me and for helping me to take my game to the next level. This club is all about winning trophies and I am sure the next piece of silverware is not that far away." Martial signed from Monaco for an initial £36 million (\$47 million) and became the most expensive teenager in the world but until recently it appeared a matter of when rather than if he would leave Old Trafford.

The forward's agent Philippe Lamboley indicated in June that his client wanted to seek a new challenge and former boss Jose Mourinho was reportedly willing to sell him, although executive

vice-chairman Ed Woodward made clear he wanted to keep the player. Martial was fined by Mourinho after failing to return to the club's pre-season tour of the United States following the birth of his second child and was on the fringes of the side in the early weeks of the campaign.

But the Frenchman has been an integral part of the side since Solskjaer replaced the sacked Mourinho in December. "Anthony is one of those naturally gifted players that any coach would love to work with," said the Norwegian interim boss. "For a young man, he has a good footballing brain which, when coupled with his exceptional talent, makes for a player with an exciting future ahead of him." — AFP

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ASIAN NATIONS CUP	
Japan v Qatar beIN SPORTS MAX 2 HD AR beIN SPORTS MAX 1 HD AR	17:00
SPANISH LEAGUE	
Huesca v Real Valladolid beIN SPORTS HD 3	23:00
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA	
Hannover 96 v RB Leipzig beIN SPORTS HD 5	22:30
FRENCH LEAGUE	
LOSC Lille v OGC Nice beIN SPORTS HD 6	22:45



HAMILTON: New Zealand's Henry Nicholls plays a shot during the fourth one-day international cricket match between New Zealand and India at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday. — AFP

Sharma shocked as New Zealand humble India

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