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# Francis becomes first pope to visit Arabian Peninsula

## Pontiff urges 'respect' for Yemen truce ahead of historic Gulf trip

### Defense minister heads SCPD meeting



**KUWAIT:** First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah heads the fourth meeting of the second session of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (SCPD) for 2019 yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 3)

**ABU DHABI:** Pope Francis landed in the United Arab Emirates yesterday for the first ever visit by a pontiff to the Arabian Peninsula - the birthplace of Islam. The pope touched down in Abu Dhabi for the 48-hour trip during which he will meet leading Muslim clerics and hold an open-air mass for some 135,000 Catholics. The pontiff will take part in an interreligious conference today, meeting Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb, the imam of Cairo's Al-Azhar, Sunni Islam's prestigious seat of learning.

Hours before he flies back to Rome tomorrow, he will lead mass in a stadium in Abu Dhabi - set to be the largest gathering ever in the UAE, according to local media. His visit comes with the UAE engaged in a long-running military campaign in Yemen and embroiled in a diplomatic spat with nearby Qatar. Before heading to the Gulf, the pontiff urged warring parties in Yemen, where the UAE backs the government against Houthi rebels, to respect a truce agreement.

"I appeal to all parties concerned and to the international community to allow the urgent respect of established accords to ensure the distribution of food," he said. "The population is exhausted by the lengthy conflict and a great many children are suffering from hunger, but cannot access food depots, he added, in his strongest condemnation yet of the war in Yemen. "The cry of these children and their parents rises up to God."

Nearly one million Catholic migrants reside in the UAE, mostly hailing from the Philippines and India.

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**ABU DHABI:** Pope Francis is welcomed by Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan upon his arrival at Abu Dhabi International Airport yesterday. — AFP

## Two groups of MPs to meet Amir today

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday that two groups of lawmakers will meet HH the Amir today separately after they had requested such meeting. Ghanem however provided no details on the names of the two groups or the issues that will be raised, but he said he will be present in both the meetings. One of the groups will likely comprise of a number of opposition MPs, as Islamist MP Mohammad Hayef said about 11 opposition lawmakers have requested a meeting with HH the Amir directly through the Amiri Diwan.

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## Israel begins construction of Gaza barrier

**JERUSALEM:** Israel said yesterday that work to strengthen its border with the Gaza Strip had entered a new phase, with construction starting on a massive new barrier along the frontier. "Over the weekend we began building the above-ground barrier along the Gaza border," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told journalists before the weekly cabinet meeting. The barrier, set to stand six meters off the ground, "will prevent terrorists from Gaza from penetrating into our territory on the ground," he said in Hebrew.

Netanyahu gave no further details but

a defense ministry statement said that work on the structure began Thursday. It is set to follow the 65-km course of an underground barrier also under construction meant to neutralize the threat of cross-border tunnels built by Gaza militants. At its western end, the statement said, the above-ground barrier would join a fortified sea wall jutting into the Mediterranean, aimed at blocking Palestinian attacks by water. "It's massive and especially strong," the ministry said in an accompanying video clip.

In the last Gaza war in 2014, Israeli forces killed four Hamas militants who had managed to cross into Israel by water. Some Israeli commentators have said that Netanyahu would be unwilling to see a new uptick in hostilities with Gaza's Hamas rulers in the run-up to general elections set for April 9.

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**TEL AVIV:** A giant election billboard of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump shaking hands is seen yesterday. The writing on the billboard reads in Hebrew "Netanyahu. In another league". — AFP



**HONG KONG:** This handout photograph taken on Saturday shows a World War I-era German hand grenade that was found among a shipment of French potatoes bound for a potato chips factory. — AFP

## Bomb de terre: WW1 grenade found in French potato shipment

**HONG KONG:** A German World War I hand grenade was found among a shipment of French potatoes imported for a Hong Kong crisp factory, police said. The device was safely detonated after it was discovered at the Calbee snacks factory Saturday. "The grenade was in an unstable condition because it had been previously discharged but failed to detonate," Superintendent Wilfred Wong Ho-hon told reporters. Police detonated it onsite, Wong said, with a police video showing bomb

disposal officers packing the grenade in a drainage channel at the factory before blowing it up.

The grenade was eight centimeters wide and weighed about one kilogram. "All the information to date suggested that the grenade was imported from France together with the other potatoes," Wong said. The grenade is believed to have been left in a trench during World War I and accidentally gathered up with potatoes planted a century later in the former battlefield.

"If it was covered in mud, the grenade was likely to have been left behind, dropped by soldiers there during the war, or left there after it was thrown," Hong Kong University military historian Dave Macri told the South China Morning Post. "The ditch was then filled up and used as a growing field, and the explosive was tossed into the mix of harvested potatoes... and sent to Hong Kong."

Hong Kong police are used to dealing with old munitions, though more usually US bombs dropped on the

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### News in brief

#### MPs seek to extend Sisi rule

**CAIRO:** Egyptian lawmakers yesterday tabled proposed constitutional changes that would allow President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi to extend his rule beyond 2022. The bill submitted to speaker Ali Abdel Aal calls for several amendments to the constitution, including on the duration of presidential mandates currently limited to two four-year terms. The lawmakers hope to extend the length of mandates to two six-year terms, which they say would allow Sisi to run for the presidency two more times after his second term expires in 2022. One other amendment is for a return to a bicameral parliamentary system, with the establishment of a lower house. Another amendment would see the reinstatement of an information ministry, a portfolio that was abolished in 2014. — AFP

#### Novelist gunned down in Karbala

**KARBALA:** A motorcycle gunman shot dead an Iraqi novelist close to his house in the holy Shiite city of Karbala on Saturday, police and witnesses said. Alaa Mashzoub, 50, was on his way home when he was shot multiple times, police said. "The cultural scene has lost one of its special authors and creators," Iraq's Culture and Tourism Minister Abdul Amir Al-Hamdani said in a statement yesterday. Men carried Mashzoub's coffin, draped in an Iraqi flag, along a busy main road in Karbala during his funeral yesterday and others waved banners calling him a "martyr". Iraq's writers union condemned the shooting and blamed security forces for not doing enough to protect intellectuals. — Reuters



**HONG KONG:** A Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte impersonator and a North Korean leader Kim Jong Un impersonator wave as they attend a church service in the Central district yesterday. — AFP

## Duterte double sparks frenzy at HK church

**HONG KONG:** A Rodrigo Duterte impersonator sparked frenzy and confusion during Sunday mass when he walked into a Hong Kong church popular with the city's Filipino community. Accompanied by Howard X - the Hong Kong-based impersonator of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un - the Filipino actor arrived at St Joseph's Church dressed in the Philippine president's signature relaxed white shirt.

Hundreds of distracted worshippers erupted into cheers and took photos of the impersonator, who goes by the stage name Cresencio Extreme.

They settled down for the hour-long service but many continued to grin and glance at him. "Is that Duterte?" whispered an incredulous-looking woman, who said the man appeared too young to be the Philippine leader. As soon as mass ended, worshippers mobbed Cresencio Extreme, many screaming and taking photos with their mobile phones as he waved at them and shook their hands. Outside the church, some examined photos of the impersonator, saying it was odd that he did not have any bodyguards and that his personality seemed off.

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## Local

# Qatar's Sheikh Tamim due in Kuwait today, set to hold talks with Amir

Amir meets top Danish lawmaker, senior state officials



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Danish Parliament Speaker Pia Kjaersgaard, in presence of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

—Amiri Diwan photos



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani is due to visit Kuwait today, and is scheduled to hold official talks with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Amir then met the visiting Danish Parliament Speaker Pia Kjaersgaard and her accompanying delegation, in presence of His Highness the Crown Prince and National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. The meeting was attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah.

Afterwards, His Highness the Amir received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad then met with President of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Cassation Court, and President of the Constitutional Court, Justice Yousef Al-Mutawaa. Finally, His Highness the Amir received First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince received Ghanem, His Highness the PM Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, Mutawaa and Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad. His Highness the Crown Prince also met Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Crown Prince then met Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Chief Justice Yousef Al-Mutawaa.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Also yesterday, His Highness the Prime Minister met with the visiting speaker of the Danish Parliament and her accompanying delegation. The head of the accompanying mission of honor MP Safaa Al-Hashem, Undersecretary at His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Sheikhha Etemad Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Kuwait's Ambassador to Sweden and non-resident Ambassador to Denmark

Nabil Al-Dekheel attended the reception. Speaker of the Folketing (Danish Parliament) Pia Kjaersgaard had arrived to Kuwait on Saturday, leading a parliamentary delegation on a five-day official visit. They were welcomed at the airport by head of the foreign affairs committee of the National Assembly MP Dr Abdulkarim Al-Kandari, Ambassador Dekheel and the Danish Ambassador to Kuwait. —KUNA

## Deputy FM meets Egyptian diplomat

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah yesterday received charge d'affaires of the Egyptian Embassy in Kuwait Nazly Al-Fayoumi. During the meeting, they discussed Kuwaiti-Egyptian relations

and the latest regional and international developments. Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Foreign Minister's Office Affairs Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar was present at the meeting. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with the charge d'affaires of the Egyptian Embassy in Kuwait Nazly Al-Fayoumi. —KUNA

## FM leaves for EU-Arab meeting

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah headed yesterday to Brussels to head a Kuwaiti delegation to participate in the fifth EU-Arab ministerial meeting due today. Several state officials are included in the Kuwaiti delegation participating in the meeting. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah leaves yesterday to Brussels. —KUNA

## Saudi envoy congratulates Kuwait on national celebrations

KUWAIT: Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan Al Saud yesterday wished Kuwait well as it readies for its national celebrations, coinciding with the 13th anniversary of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's rise to power. In a statement, the Saudi diplomat spoke of a wave of euphoria sweeping over Kuwait, emphasizing that Kuwaiti lead-

ers are well known for their 'mental acumen and wisdom.' Some 58 years after independence, Kuwait is well on its way to global prominence, he added, reminiscing about how the Kuwaiti people valiantly stood in the face of an Iraqi invasion some 28 years ago, ultimately leading to a stronger and liberated Kuwait. On His Highness the Amir's 13 years at the helm of the Gulf state, he said His Highness led the country on a path towards unprecedented development. Heaping praise on bilateral ties, the Saudi envoy said the two Gulf neighbors have long shared a powerful bond that remains tightly-knit to this very day. —KUNA



Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Kuwait Prince Sultan Al Saud

## PM receives UN Mission chief in Iraq

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq and Head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert and her accompanying delegation. The meeting was attended by the Head of His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Sheikhha Etemad Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also met Hennis-Plasschaert. During the reception, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled congratulated the newly appointed UN official on her new position, and wished her the best of luck. They discussed the latest developments of search for Kuwaiti prisoners of war, missing citizens, Kuwaiti properties and national archives, along with the UNAMI's activities in Iraq.

Present at the meeting were Acting Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister's Office Affairs Ambassador Saleh Al-Lughani, Acting Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations' Affairs Abdulaziz Al-Jarallah and several other senior officials of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs. —KUNA



Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq and Head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq and Head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert.

Local

# Sheikh Nasser chairs Supreme Council for Planning and Development meeting

Current position, oil sector's future discussed



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the fourth meeting of the second session of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (SCPD) for 2019. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah yesterday headed the fourth meeting of the second session of

the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (SCPD) for 2019. The meeting reflected on a set of topics and subjects, including the current position and future of

the oil sector, the council said in a press statement. Set out by several national and world agencies involved, Kuwait's strategy for sustainable energy security was considered, it

added. As part of Kuwait's 2035 vision, culture and environment were also put on the agenda of the SCPD's fourth meeting, according to the statement. — KUNA

## Int'l Arabian Horse Festival concludes



KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Sabah awards a participant. — Amiri Diwan photos



Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Sabah awards another participant.

KUWAIT: The 2019 International Arabian Horse Festival, held at Bait Al-Arab and sponsored by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, concluded on Saturday. Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Sabah, who represented His Highness the Amir, commended efforts of the organizing committee, chaired by Sheikh Sarah Fahad Al-Sabah, also General Manager of Bait Al-Arab. Sheikha Sarah expressed gratitude for His Highness the Amir for his patronage of the Festival for the past nine years, which contributed to its success. She said in a press statement this festival helped in development of types of horses, specially Kuwait breed. She called on horse lovers to come to Bait Al-Arab during the All Nations Cup - Straight Egyptians - event on February 15. The International Arabian Horse Festival awarded the winning colts and fillies.— KUNA



## 50 law degrees investigated for possible fraud

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Ministry of education's assistant undersecretary for scholarships and cultural relations Fatima Al-Sannan announced referring 50 law degrees issued to Kuwaitis by an Arab state to the public prosecution over suspicions of being fake.

### Total debts

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah announced that the ministry's total debts to companies supplying the ministry with medicine and medical equipment during the fiscal years 2015-2016, 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 is KD 100 million. He noted that hospitals and medical centers treating citizens abroad also have variable claims according to the number of patients and the cost of treatment per patient, adding that such costs are usually paid by the concerned health office or the embassy in countries where Kuwait has no overseas health office. Meanwhile, well-informed health sources said that the ministry plans to build a new pediatric hospital by 2023, noting that the new hospital will include 792 beds, a large modern lab, a number of pharmacies, outpatient departments and surgery rooms.

### Automated handling

The customs department's general manager Jamal Al-Jalawi issued a decision reducing the fees collected for automated handling and custom inspection from KD 15 to KD 7 per loaded vehicle.

## Anti-corruption authority, transparency society discuss report

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Head of the Public Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) Abdul Rahman Al-Namash said responding to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2018 and the progress Kuwait made on it, a meeting was held yesterday at Nazaha headquarters with Kuwait Transparency Society to review its report. Namash added that both sides discussed means of cooperation on

executing the national strategy to enhance integrity and fight corruption. He noted that both sides agreed to continue holding periodic meetings.

### Run over attempt

Kuwait Municipality strongly condemned an attempt made by the owner of a mobile grocery to run over municipal inspectors in Jahra, adding that the inspectors were in the process of filing a citation against the owner for operating an unlicensed truck. The owner was

referred to relevant authorities for further legal action.

### Historic verdict

Lawyer Nasser Al-Ajmi said the administrative affairs court yesterday passed what he described a historic sentence against the Public Authority for Social Security, mandating it to pay a disabled retired widower a portion of his deceased wife's social security pension on grounds that he has a 50 percent disability.



## Fire guts four cars in Khaitan

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Four vehicles caught fire yesterday morning in Khaitan. Firemen from Farwaniya fire station dealt with the blaze that started in one car and spread to three adjacent vehicles. Kuwait Fire Service Directorate's public relations department said in a statement. No injuries were reported in the incident, while an investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire.



## News in brief

### KD 176m health insurance paid in 2 years

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said KD 176,644,485 was collected in expat health insurance fees during the fiscal years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. He said lists and statistics received by the ministry are crosschecked with what is being deposited in the ministry's Central Bank account by the contracting company with regards to this contract. He said the total annual support to the company to collect expats' health insurance fees is KD 25,000 to finance health enhancement and health awareness programs presented by the ministry. — Al-Rai

### 1 kg trash per person a day

Kuwait Municipality statistics revealed the amount of garbage received by landfills reached 2.5 million tons during 2017/2018. The stats showed that individual output is nearby 1.6 kg per day, including 1 kg of residential trash, which had the largest percentage of solid rubbish at 65 percent, with farming waste at 18 percent and commercial waste at 17 percent. There are three landfills in Kuwait - in Jahra, Mina Abdullah and south of the Seventh Ring Road. Statistics also showed that Hawally governorate produces the largest amount of trash, followed by the Capital and Farwaniya. — Al-Qabas

### Prison 'drug den' busted

An informed security source said the criminal security sector succeeded in controlling 'one of the most important drug dens' inside the Central Prison. The source said detectives succeeded in preventing the management and smuggling of drugs and illicit material from inside the prison. The source said the number of prisoners on drugs charges total 1,586 prisoners, including 116 Kuwaitis jailed for using drugs and 130 Kuwaitis for trading in drugs. The number of expats sentenced for using drugs is 142, while the number of expat drug pushers is 1,198 - 90 percent of the total. About the percentage of recovery from drug addiction inside the prison, the source said that it reached 95 percent, which is unprecedented. He said the most important items found in the Central Prison are mobile phones, and their prices have reached astronomical levels of KD 4,000 per phone. — Al-Qabas

### Murder threat

Jahra police detained a Kuwaiti youth who threatened to kill his father with a firearm. The youth - who works for the education ministry - was in an abnormal condition. He is charged with attempted murder and possession of an unlicensed weapon. The father said the incident took place after a verbal exchange, as the suspect wanted money. — Al-Anbaa

### Stamp machines theft

Criminal detectives are working on identifying a thief who broke into two stamp machines at the physiotherapy hospital, stealing money and stamps before escaping. The administrative supervisor of the hospital called police and told them about the incident, adding that KD 607 and a large number of stamps were missing. — Al-Rai

### Smuggling foiled

Nuwaiseeb customs prevented a Kuwaiti from leaving the country with hashish. The suspect seemed nervous and worried, so he and his car were searched and hashish was found in the car. The suspect himself was under the influence of drugs. He was sent to concerned authorities. Separately, a customs inspector was admitted in Jahra Hospital when his vehicle flipped over on Abdaly Road. The inspector - who works at Abdaly border outlet - was returning home when the accident took place. — Al-Rai

## Local

# 38% parents in META can't control what their youngsters see online

## More than half of children aged between six and nine use the Internet daily

**KUWAIT:** To help parents take the right steps towards children safety on the Internet, independent software assessor AV-TEST has evaluated a number of solutions specifically designed to protect children while they are online - and has awarded Kaspersky Safe Kids with three approved certificates.

As young children spend more time online, many parents are struggling to protect them from exposure to a raft of dangers and cyber threats. These include viewing inappropriate content, becoming a victim of cyber-bullying or unwittingly sharing private data. In fact, more than half of children aged between six and nine are now using the internet every day, and 38 percent of parents in the Middle East, Turkey and Africa (META) region believe they cannot control what their youngsters see online. With operating systems only providing basic protection tools, it is imperative that parents bolster protection to safeguard their children from evolving and growing online threats.

In recognition of its performance as one of the best child protection solutions on the market, Kaspersky Safe Kids achieved these certificates for its use on three of the major desktop and mobile operating systems: Windows, iOS and Android. This endorsement

comes after AV-TEST evaluated 11 parental control tools for desktops running on Windows 10 and MacOS, as well as 11 parent control apps for Android, iOS and Fire OS.

The test assessed how third-party child safety apps and internal operating system security tools performed in offering filters and settings to keep young people protected online. These were: protection against cyber-bullying, access control to adult content, control of private data transfer, controlling time spent on digital devices, protection from online money traps, protection against online grooming and protection of privacy.

Parents today face a tough challenge when it comes to protecting their children online from threats such as harmful content. They therefore need comprehensive software to help them. Kaspersky Safe Kids desktop version is just that - it was found to be more effective at protecting children from accessing harmful websites, with a superior filter

that blocks adult material in seven out of 10 content categories, when compared to competitors and internal operating system tools. With explicit and adult content not limited to the obvious - including pornography or gambling websites - Kaspersky Safe Kids can block content which is often overlooked, for ultimate peace of mind. This includes content around the illegal exchange of data and file sharing, and sites which contain weapons, ammunition and violent content.

The test also discovered that the Kaspersky Safe Kids app, along with the desktop version, does not only block more prohibited content links, but also protects children from more security threats than internal operating system tools. These include the control of private data transfer and protection from online money traps. The test also found that the Kaspersky Safe Kids desktop version was the only tested and certified solution that protects children from online grooming - something of vital impor-



### Children exposed to cyber threats



tance to parents considering that, according to some research, it can take as little as 45 minutes for offenders to groom a child online.

Timur Biyachuev, VP, Threat Research, at Kaspersky Lab said: "We are delighted to receive AV-TEST endorsement for our Kaspersky Safe Kids app as it reinforces our commitment to keeping children protected from many of the harmful threats and situations they may face when they are online. These types of independent assessment are very important in demonstrating which security industry products consumers can rely on."

## Zain sponsors Child Safety Exhibition



**KUWAIT:** Head of Child Protection Office and Deputy Head of the Supreme National Child Protection Committee Dr Mona Al-Khawari with Zain's team during the exhibition.

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its sponsorship of the Child Safety Exhibition organized by the Ministry of Health's Child Protection Office in collaboration with the Supreme National Child Protection Committee at the Avenues mall under the patronage of Minister of Health Dr Basel Al-Sabah.

Zain participated in the opening ceremony of the exhibition at the Avenues mall - Phase 2, which witnessed the attendance of Head of Child Protection Office and Deputy Head of the Supreme National Child Protection Committee Dr Mona Al-Khawari, as well as a number of Zain officials and the ministry's representatives.

Zain's support to this awareness exhibition came in line with its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy that aims at serving the community through shouldering initiatives that work towards enhancing the society's welfare in partnership with the various min-

istries and public authorities, including the Ministry of Health and the Child Protection Office. The company is keen on serving the community's various needs, especially in regards to assuring the safety and wellbeing of children.

In 2016, Zain launched the Child Protection Hotline 147 in partnership with the Ministry of Health and the Child Protection Office. The company dedicated this free hotline to offer a direct line for reporting any child abuse cases inside Kuwait as part of its commitment to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children. The exhibition featured a dedicated section to raise awareness about this hotline and introduce its many services to the event's visitors.

The Child Safety Exhibition mainly aimed at raising awareness about all topics related to the safety and security of children in line with the State of Kuwait's Child Protection Law. The event witnessed many awareness activities for parents and caretakers about

numerous topics, including children's physical, psychological, and mental safety, child first aid techniques, vaccines, healthy diets, road safety, children's car seats and seat-belts, and more. In addition, the event also focused on cyber security and children's safety on the internet.

Zain will continue to find ways to serve the community as to foster a better world and be a productive member of the society, being a leader in the Kuwaiti private sector. The company is proud to be one of the first organizations to partner with the Ministry of Health to make this event a success and contribute to the safety and wellbeing of children.

Zain's solid Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy primarily focuses on the wellbeing of the entire nation. For this reason, the company has maintained its support of numerous initiatives that spread awareness and help make a difference in people's everyday lives.

diabetes epidemic in Kuwait through focused diabetes, research, integrated prevention, training, education and treatment, have created and delivered a Postgraduate Master's program in Diabetes Care, Education and Management. This program has been undertaken by a wide range of Kuwait based healthcare professionals who studied part time while in work.

Through face-to-face and innovative blended, interactive teaching, the program enabled healthcare professionals to provide more effective care for their patients. They gained specialized knowledge of diabetes along with educational and management training that supported them in delivering high quality patient care, effective communication with colleagues and strong relationships with patients.

Throughout their studies all students

undertook multiple work-based development projects as assignments with the aim of immediately improving and developing diabetes healthcare provision and reflective practice throughout healthcare providers in Kuwait. Over 450 students have enrolled on the program and collectively they have achieved over 2,500 workplace based projects, direct impacting the quality of diabetes care in Kuwait.

The sixth Graduation Ceremony held yesterday marks the successful achievements of 40 new graduates who join a group of 210 total graduates across Kuwait. The program has delivered transformational change with a specific focus on diabetes within the Kuwaiti healthcare system, and these well-equipped Graduates will join existing alumni in shaping future healthcare changes within Kuwait for the benefit of patients and their families.

## Dundee University, Dasman Institute celebrate graduates

**KUWAIT:** Diabetes is a significant problem in Kuwait where it has been estimated that up to 1 in 4 of the adult population suffers from the disease. Since 2011 the University of Dundee in Scotland, a world leader in clinical diabetes care and diabetes research, in partnership with the Dasman Diabetes Institute (which was established by Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences), with its mission to address the



**KUWAIT:** Dr Mai Taha during the seminar with Ahli United Bank's employees.

## Gulf Bank supports local entrepreneurs at Qout Market

**KUWAIT:** In celebration of Qout Market's sixth season, Gulf Bank partnered with the artisanal market this past Saturday as part of its ongoing mission to support local and emerging small to medium businesses in the region. As a title sponsor, Gulf Bank added its own personal touch of innovation by hosting a mini carnival within the market for the first time in the market's history.

Qout Market, took place at the historic Safat Square, a symbolic venue for trade. With the National Day spirit in the air this month, the market hosted a variety of local businesses selling everything from farm produce and locally-made food products to artisanal crafts.

"We truly enjoyed partnering with Qout Market as part of our ongoing efforts to support local businesses and highlight the truly incredible talent that is emerging in our region," said Ahmad Al-Amir, Assistant General Manager of External Communications at Gulf Bank. "Much like how Qout Market has made it a point to shine a spotlight on local talent, we recognize how important it is for larger enterprises to also step up and support small vendors that are driving innovation and a spirit of creativity in the country. For decades, we have proudly supported local businesses through our various service offerings tailored to helping small businesses grow,

and we are proud to be a part of so many local success stories as a result. We have always made it a point to support our local community, and we could not be prouder to sponsor an initiative like Qout Market."

Gulf Bank is the first event sponsor to introduce a fair within the market, hosting a variety of entertainment activities in which guests won cash prizes and more. This year's activities included target shooting, arcade hoops, a boxing arcade, and a live graffiti show. Winners from each of the mini activities also had the opportunity to take home even larger prizes at the Gulf Bank wheel of fortune, where they had the chance to spin the wheel and win a variety of cash prizes or gifts such as AirPods, Fitbit bands, and GB playing cards. No matter the outcome, everyone was a winner.

Qout Market, an artisanal farmer's market established in 2013 with the aim of empowering the local community through seasonal initiatives, focuses on small and medium sized vendors specializing in farm produce, artisanal crafts and locally made food products. The market, which averages anywhere from 15,000-18,000 visitors per market, attracts a wide variety of families and visitors. The upcoming market, which is set to close out the sixth season, is scheduled for March 9.



Ahmad Al-Amir



**KUWAIT:** Tony Daher, CEO, and Ahmad Al-Amir with the Gulf Bank team.



Local

# Kuwait marks World Cancer Day themed 'I am and I will'

## Health Ministry denies high rise in cancer patients

**KUWAIT:** Although there has been noticeable progress in finding cures to some serious diseases, cancer remains one of the most deadly one. In Kuwait, proportion of cancer cases among nationals reached 183 out of 100,000 Kuwaitis, compared to 161 among women, according to official statistics (2015). The figures show that the total number of cancer patients, males and females, amounted to 2,680 in 2015. Among expatriates, there were 114 among 100,000 foreign residents of the country.

The disease, marked globally today as the World Cancer Day, is known as a case where human tissues swell abnormally due to dysfunction in genes, affecting various organs. Cancerous cells expand to neighboring ones causing tumors, largely curable if detected at an early stage. Therefore, it is quite necessary to guide people about early medical examination.

On the occasion, Deputy Chairman of the Cancer Awareness National (CAN) campaign Dr Khaled Al-Saleh said that Kuwait, since the 2010 international conference against chronic diseases, has exerted noticeable efforts to fight such illnesses, forming the National Committee for Fighting non-Communicable Diseases. The committee has trained scores of students on early detection of the disease, in addition to training hundreds of doctors and nurses.

Furthermore, there had been tangible work of various forms, such as launch of the Ministry of Health program for examining the breast, the colon, and the rectum, in addition to holding many awareness seminars.

Meanwhile, Dr Khuloud Al-Ali, Director General of Kuwait Cancer Control Center (KCCC), said cancer comes in second when it comes to causes of death, after cardiac illnesses. Cancer claimed, in 2015, 8.8 million lives worldwide.

By average, one out of six patients die and 70 percent of cancer related fatalities have been recorded in low and medium income nations. The 2015 statistical survey in Kuwait showed that most of the cases were in their 50s; four percent of them were aged under 18 and 36 percent were aged 60 and above.

Dr Khaled Al-Khalidi, tumors specialist at the same center, reaffirmed that cancer is treatable if detected early. Proportions of cancer cases in Kuwait did not noticeably rise over the past years due to improvement in treatment methods. This year's World Cancer Day, themed 'I am and I will,' aims at cutting number of fatalities among patients suffering from non-communicable disease by 25 percent by 2025 and educating communities about best means to fight and avert cancer.

In the meantime, the Ministry of Health (MoH) Saturday brushed aside social media reports about a rise described

cialist at the Ministry of Health.

Sahar Dashti, General Manager of the Customer Protection, and who is responsible for the social responsibility program at Ahli United Bank, highlighted that Ahli United Bank's management supports the health of its employees by increasing their awareness and promoting their knowledge of the methods of identifying the symptoms of diseases before they happen, along with their treatment methods and how to protect themselves following a better way of life.

Dashti added: "This seminar is the result of our understanding of the seriousness of cancer diseases that reflects our active support of the efforts and mission of the Cancer Aware Nation "CAN". It also emphasizes our keen desire to promote health awareness within the society in general and among the Bank's employees in particular, as they are our real human wealth." Dashti stressed that Ahli United Bank would hold more of such seminars towards employees wellbeing.



Deputy Chairman of the Cancer Awareness National (CAN) campaign Dr Khaled Al-Saleh.

as high in number of cancer patients, saying "the number of cancer patients increases simultaneously with population increase." The MoH said the social media reports about high rise in cancer patients "is inaccurate and is not based on scientific methods. The ministry called on people to "be accurate in terms of information they use in order to avoid panic and fear among the public." It said it was exerting efforts to raise awareness of people in importance of early examination, which could increase likelihood of healing. The early discovery of cancer can contribute to fully curing the patient by up to 90 percent, said MoH. —KUNA



## AUB holds health awareness seminar for its employees

**KUWAIT:** Ahli United Bank (AUB) was proud to arrange a health awareness seminar for its employees under the theme 'An Ounce of Prevention is Better than a Pound of Cure,' and coinciding with the GCC Week for fighting Cancer and in cooperation with Kuwait CAN cancer awareness campaign.

The seminar focused on the subject of head and neck cancer, the proper methods to prevent contracting cancer and the general symptoms of this critical disease. The seminar held yesterday at the Bank's head office was presented by Dr Mai Taha, periodontist spe-



KUWAIT: Dr Mai Taha during the seminar with Ahli United Bank's employees.

## Kuwait donates to re-equip Italian hospital

**ROME:** Kuwait offered a financial donation to help re-equip a hospital in the Italian city of Norcia, which was hit by a 2016 devastating earthquake in an effort to provide the medical facility with diagnostics and treatment technologies. Kuwait's Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Sabah handed a donation of one million euros (\$1.2 million) to the Italian Civil Protection Department, which takes up the reconstruction operation after the devastating earthquake that hit Umbria province. The donation was handed over to the President of the Department, Deputy Prime Minister Angelo Borelli in the presence of Mayor of Norcia Nicola Alemanno at a special ceremony.

On the occasion, Borelli expressed gratitude to Kuwait and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah: 'Leader of Humanitarian Action', and the

Kuwaiti people for their generous donation. Borelli considered this humanitarian initiative as a new proof of the depth of the friendly relations between the peoples of Italy and Kuwait, praising the Kuwaiti ambassador's role in strengthening these ties on all levels, especially closer cooperation with the Department. The Mayor of Norcia praised the Kuwaiti support, especially its interests in the health sector, pointing out that the donation will allow the hospital to provide diagnosis and treatment technologies. Alemanno then presented Ambassador Sheikh Ali Al-Khalid with the 'honorary Norcia citizenship' and an exceptional 'European citizenship'.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Sheikh Ali Al-Khalid expressed content over the level of ties with Italy, stressing Kuwait's keenness to strengthen the humanitarian aspect in its international relations as well as economic, political and cultural ones. He noted that this initiative reflects keenness and guidance of His Highness the Amir to uphold the priority of the human dimension. "We will never forget the Italian people's strong and honorable position during the Iraqi invasion," he said. The European Union has designated Norcia an example for the role of voluntary associations. —KUNA



ROME: Kuwait's Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Sabah with Mayor of Norcia Nicola Alemanno and Deputy Prime Minister Angelo Borelli. —KUNA

## Ministry announces winner of Amir elderly health care award

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said yesterday that the Executive Council of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva decided to grant the Award of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in elderly health care and health promotion to a team in Hospital La Paz Institute for Health Research in Spain.

Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah said that the WHO move came after its meeting at the 144th session in Geneva, pointing out that the winning team is concerned with osteoporosis and aging among elderly. The winning multi-specialty team founded in 2006 of 20 researchers conducts studies on

chronic diseases affecting the elderly, he added. The health minister expressed sincere gratitude for the patronage of His Highness the Amir to international health projects and initiatives. He also thanked WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom for the effort made by the organization to facilitate the work of the award committee.

Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah also congratulated the research team in Hospital La Paz Institute for Health Research in Madrid, Spain, and wished them further success and progress. The award is due to be presented to the winning team this year at a ceremony to be held in Geneva on the sidelines of the World Health Assembly in May. —KUNA



Dr Basel Al-Sabah

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# International

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UK PM May says she's 'armed with a fresh' Brexit mandate

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QUEENSLAND: Resident Amelia Rankin in flooded waters in Hermit Park, Townsville, Queensland. — AFP

## 'Once-in-a-century' floods hit Australia

'The volume of water is just incredible. Downstairs is gone, the fridge and freezer are floating'

**SYDNEY:** Once-in-a-century floods have turned streets into rivers and forced thousands to abandon their homes in northeast Australia, with authorities warning of tornadoes and more rain over the next few days. Australia's tropical north experiences heavy rains during the monsoon season at this time of the year, but the recent downpour has surged far above normal levels.

Thousands of residents in the city of Townsville in Queensland were without power and cut off by flooded roads. More severe weather could whip up tornadoes and destructive winds in the days ahead, Bureau of Meteorology state manager Bruce Gunn told reporters yesterday. Up to 20,000 homes are also at risk of being inundated if the rains continue. Military personnel were delivering tens of thousands of sandbags to affected locals, as Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk

warned residents to be careful. "It's basically not just a one in 20-year event, it's a one in 100-year event," she told reporters Saturday.

The Bureau of Meteorology said a slow-moving monsoonal trough was sitting above Queensland, with some areas expected to receive more than a year's worth of rain before conditions ease. Bureau meteorologist Adam Blazak told AFP the heavy downpours could continue until Thursday, while floodwaters would take some time to recede even when the rains lessen.

**'Never seen anything like this'**

The region receives an average of some 2,000 millimeters of rain annually but some towns were already on track to pass that. The town of Ingham, north of Townsville, received 506 mm of rain in 24 hours between

Saturday and Sunday, of which 145 mm fell in just one hour, Blazak said. "I've never seen anything like this," Townsville resident Chris Brookehouse told national broadcaster ABC, adding that his house was flooded with water more than one meter deep.

"The volume of water is just incredible. Downstairs is gone, the fridge and freezer are floating. Another five or six steps and upstairs is gone too," Blazak said that with adverse weather predicted to continue for up to 72 hours, some regions could see record-breaking levels of rainfall. There has been a silver lining to the deluge, with drought-stricken farmers in western Queensland welcoming the soaking.

"It is a welcome relief, especially in our western communities, to not only get the rain but also to fill up their dams," Palaszczuk said yesterday. "We're getting food

supplies in there. We still have many roads that are cut around those areas." The deluge comes amid a severe drought in the eastern inland of the vast Australian continent, including parts of Queensland state, that's left graziers struggling to stay afloat.

Extreme heatwaves during the southern hemisphere summer have also led to maximum-temperature records being broken in some towns. High temperatures are not unusual in Australia during its arid southern hemisphere summer, with bushfires a common occurrence.

But climate change has pushed up land and sea temperatures and led to more extremely hot days and severe fire seasons. In the southern states of Victoria and Tasmania, firefighters in recent days have been battling numerous bushfires threatening homes and communities. — AFP

### Iran warns EU not to force 'strategic leap' on missile range

**TEHRAN:** The deputy chief of Iran's Revolutionary Guards has warned Europe against forcing the Islamic Republic into boosting the range of its missiles by trying to halt their development. "If the Europeans, or anyone else, want to conspire to disarm Iran of missiles, we will be forced to make a strategic leap," the guards' deputy commander Brigadier-General Hossein Salami said on state TV on Saturday.

"All that hear me today, come to terms with the new reality of Iran's missile might: there are no obstacles or technical limitations to us increasing (their) range," he added. The Islamic Republic develops its missile technology according to a "defensive strategy" which changes according to need, he said. Earlier Saturday, Iran announced the "successful test" of a new cruise missile with a range of over 1,350 kilometers, coinciding with the anniversary of the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Defense Minister Amir Hatami said the Hoveizeh cruise missile had suc-

cessfully hit its targets, calling it the "long arm of the Islamic Republic of Iran". Iran reined in most of its nuclear program under a landmark 2015 deal with major powers, but has kept up development of its ballistic missile technology. Washington withdrew from the accord in May and re-imposed sanctions against Iran, citing the missile program among its reasons.

European governments have stuck by the agreement, although some have demanded a new section to address Iran's ballistic missile program and its intervention in regional conflicts including Yemen. Iran has voluntarily limited the range of its missiles to 2,000 kilometers, but that is still enough to hit its arch-enemy Israel and US bases in the Middle East.

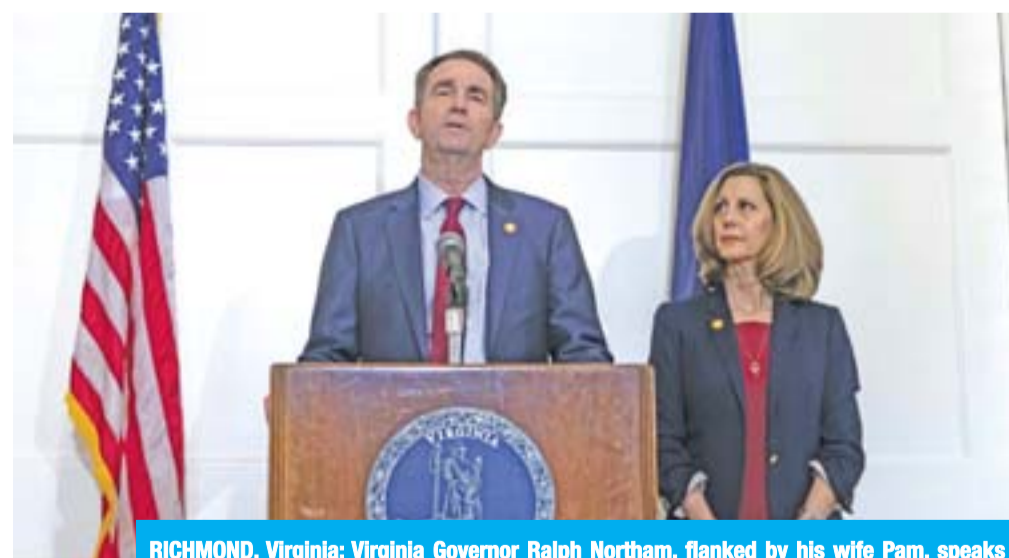
Washington and its allies have accused Tehran of pursuing enhanced missile capabilities that also threaten Europe. Tehran denies this, insisting its missile program is "purely defensive." The weapon tested Saturday takes its name from a city in the southwestern province of Khuzestan that was devastated in the 1980-1988 war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Salami on Saturday warned world powers "not to seek (new) negotiations or make recommendations or requests on Iran's missile power". "Our enemies only understand the language of force," he said. "If you cannot talk to them in that language, they will use it to talk to you." — AFP

### Virginia governor now denies appearance in racist school photo

**WASHINGTON:** Ralph Northam, the Democratic governor of the US state of Virginia, changed his story Saturday about appearing in a racist 1984 yearbook photo and insisted he will not resign from office. Northam held a press conference to say that he in fact was not one of the men in a photo from his university yearbook depicting two people — one in blackface, the other dressed in a Ku Klux Klan robe and hood.

"In the hours since I made my statement yesterday, I reflected with my family and classmates from the time and affirmed my conclusion that I am not the person in that photo," he told reporters, a day after saying he had appeared in the picture without specifying which of the individuals he was. Northam added that while he had not appeared in the photo, "many actions that we rightfully recognize as abhorrent today were commonplace" and he was not surprised such material made its way to the yearbook.

He said he did not know why it appeared on his page, adding: "I had nothing to do with the preparation of the yearbook, nor did I buy one." "And so this was the first time — yesterday evening was the first time I saw this photo. It was shocking and it was horrific." The governor, who began his four-year term in 2018, did admit however that he had applied shoe



RICHMOND, Virginia: Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, flanked by his wife Pam, speaks with reporters at a press conference at the governor's mansion on Saturday. — AFP

polish on his face on at least one occasion — to imitate Michael Jackson during a dance contest held that same year, which he went on to win. "I look back now and regret that I did not understand the harmful legacy of an action like that," he said.

On Friday, a website published a photograph from Northam's medical school yearbook "in a costume that is clearly racist and offensive," the governor said in a statement soon after the picture surfaced. "I am deeply sorry for the decision I made to appear as I did in this photo and for the hurt that decision caused then and now," Northam said. The admission prompted calls for him to resign — including from several Democratic presidential candidates.

"We made the decision to let Governor

Northam do the correct thing and resign this morning," the Virginia branch of the Democratic Party said on Twitter Saturday. "We have gotten word he will not do so this morning." Senator Cory Booker, an African-American 2020 presidential hopeful, was one of the first big name Democrats to react. "These images arouse centuries of anger, anguish, and racist violence and they've eroded all confidence in Gov. Northam's ability to lead. We should expect more from our elected officials. He should resign," he tweeted Friday.

California Senator Kamala Harris, another African-American running for president, tweeted that "the stain of racism should have no place in the halls of government." Other big-name Democrats such as Joe Biden and Elizabeth Warren also called for his departure. — AFP

International

# Venezuela's Guaido pressures Maduro over humanitarian aid

## The United States later said it would transport aid to Venezuela

**CARACAS:** Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido was yesterday set to announce a date for the arrival of humanitarian aid to the crisis-wracked country — a path President Nicolas Maduro believes will lead to a US-led military intervention. A day earlier, National Assembly head Guaido and socialist leader Maduro held competing mass rallies in the capital Caracas, ten days after Guaido stunned the world by declaring himself “interim president” of the oil-rich nation.

During the protest, Guaido announced the installation of collection centers for medicine and food in neighboring Colombia and Brazil. The United States later said it would transport aid to Venezuela in response to a request by Guaido. The 35-year-old received a boost before the demonstration had even started when an air force general became the highest ranking officer to abandon Maduro and recognize Guaido as the country's true leader.

US National Security Advisor John Bolton responded to that in a tweet calling on “all military members to follow General (Francisco) Yanez's lead.” The United States recognized Guaido as Venezuela's interim president on January 23 while four major European nations — Britain, France, Germany and Spain — have said they will do likewise unless Maduro calls presidential elections by midnight on Sunday.

### 'Let's have elections'

Speaking at a pro-regime demonstration marking 20 years since his predecessor Hugo Chavez came to power, Maduro ignored those demands and instead reiterated his call to bring forward legislative elections slated for the end of 2020 to this year. “They (the opposition) want to bring forward elections, let's have elections,” he said. Maduro, making his first public

appearance since a military parade in August when he claimed to have been targeted in an attempted assassination, accused Guaido of being a US “puppet” in a coup d'etat attempt. The National Assembly is the only one of Venezuela's five government branches controlled by the opposition. Guaido had earlier urged the armed forces to allow humanitarian aid from abroad into the country. “You, soldier... have the decision in your hands” to allow it in or not, said Guaido.

Under Maduro's stewardship, oil-dependent Venezuela has lurched into an economic crisis that has left the country suffering from hyperinflation and shortages of food and medicine. But he refuses to let aid into Venezuela, claiming it would precede a US-led military intervention.

### 'Decisive'

Guaido also called for a new demonstration on February 12, and another protest to push for the entry of humanitarian aid. Speaking at the European Union's headquarters in the east of the capital, he said this month “should be decisive.” The rival Caracas rallies, separated by 10 kilometers (six miles), attracted huge crowds.

Carlos Morales, a 62-year-old who voted for Chavez in 1998 but now says socialism only brings “misery,” attended a pro-Guaido rally with his wife. “This is the leader that all Venezuelans hoped for, a new leader, young, who is not contaminated,” he added. At the pro-Maduro demonstration, Virginia Rondon, 69, hummed songs that glorified Chavez, and reminisced about his socialist revolution, saying: “I never experienced anything more beautiful in all my years.”

Others denounced the specter of US intervention

weeks ago, are lined with the burnt-out skeletons of cars and bullet-pocked buildings, some of them completely destroyed. SDF fighters group in clusters around some of the structures, tending small fires and exchanging small talk and cigarettes. Others perch on balconies and roofs with a view over the other side. On one terrace, a fighter uses binoculars to get a closer look at jihadists just a stone's throw away.

As the SDF, with air support from the US-led coalition, ramped up its offensive in recent weeks, thousands of civilians have poured out of the beleaguered jihadist-held pocket. More than 36,000 people, mostly women and children from jihadist families, have fled since December via humanitarian corridors opened up by the SDF, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. That figure also includes some 3,100 jihadists, the war monitor added.

### 'Civilians on the front lines'

But while hundreds of people a day reached SDF-held territory early last month, the flow has slowed to a trickle. Recent arrivals say there are still many civilians and foreign fighters in the besieged pocket of territory. With the final push paused, the eerie quiet is only broken by intermittent gunfire and the occasional roar of a coalition airstrike or artillery fire targeting jihadist positions. In the neighboring village of Al-Shaafa, the SDF's spokesman for the Deir Ezzor region said the assault has been put on hold to protect civilians. “The jihadists are using the civilians as human shields to block our advance,” Adnan Afrin told AFP.

That has forced women and children, including members of fighters' families, to remain close to the battle. “They are putting the civilians on the front lines,” he said, adding that airstrikes and artillery continued to



CARACAS: Riot police clash with anti-government demonstrators in the neighborhood of Los Mecedores. —AFP

and called on the United Nations to halt “Trump's war.” Early on Saturday, General Yanez said in a social media video that he disavowed Maduro's “dictatorial” authority and recognized Guaido as the acting president. The air force high command strategic planning director said “90 percent of the armed forces don't support the dictator.”

His defection is “a hard blow” to Maduro, said Rocio San Miguel, an expert on the Venezuelan military. Later, in another video, retired Major General Jorge Oropesa, former air force general commander, also said he recognized Guaido as acting president. Oropesa and Yanez were also joined by Jonathan Velasco, Venezuela's ambassador in Iraq. —AFP

## Trapped in shrinking holdout, IS turns to human shields

**BAGHOUZ:** On a rooftop near the front line with the Islamic State group's collapsing caliphate in eastern Syria, a US-backed fighter and his comrades sip tea as they await orders to restart the battle. The Syrian Democratic Forces halted their ground assault on IS's final shreds of territory last week, saying the jihadists are increasingly using civilians as human shields to block the advance.

In the desert hamlet of Baghouz, held mostly by the SDF, 22-year-old Mohammed Ibrahim Mohammed points towards a dirt mound separating areas under their control and the jihadists. “Since we arrived to this point almost six days ago we haven't moved forward,” explained the young fatigue-clad man from the nearby town of Hajin, who joined the SDF just five months ago. “The fighting has stopped as we wait for the remaining civilians to leave,” he said.

Just a few dozen meters away, on the other side of the dirt berm, trucks, motorcycles and cars driven by IS fighters zip along the front line and out towards white tents further away, surrounded by women wearing long black robes. “These are all Daesh houses,” said Mohammed, using an Arabic acronym for IS. “Sometimes we see women coming to take wood” from nearby palm trees, he said.

The streets of Baghouz, which the SDF entered two

weeks ago, are lined with the burnt-out skeletons of cars and bullet-pocked buildings, some of them completely destroyed. SDF fighters group in clusters around some of the structures, tending small fires and exchanging small talk and cigarettes. Others perch on balconies and roofs with a view over the other side. On one terrace, a fighter uses binoculars to get a closer look at jihadists just a stone's throw away.

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A fighter from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) gather on the rooftop of a building in the front line village of Baghouz in the countryside of the eastern Syrian Deir Ezzor province. —AFP

target positions further back, “where the jihadists are concentrated”. IS has shown a pattern of trapping civilians among its fighters in order to slow offensives as its cross-border “caliphate”, proclaimed in 2014, has withered under multiple offensives.

As the jihadists withdraw, they leave minefields and booby traps to slow their attackers and prevent civilians from escaping. To help protect those that remain cornered, the SDF is pushing to open new “safe corridors” to help civilians escape before the US-backed force delivers the final blow, said Afrin. And while SDF leaders prefer not to speculate on when the battle against the jihadists will finish, they are clear it will end by military means. “We do not negotiate with terrorists,” Afrin said. — AFP

## Yemen's warring parties meet to discuss stalled troop withdrawal

**DUBAI/ADEN:** Representatives from both sides in the Yemen conflict met on a ship on the Red Sea yesterday in a UN-led push to implement a stalled troop withdrawal from Yemen's main port of Hodeidah as agreed at December peace talks, a UN official told Reuters. The United Nations is overseeing the implementation of a ceasefire and troop withdrawal accord in Hodeidah, the main entry point for most of Yemen's imports, in the hope it will lead to a political solution to the almost four-year war.

The warring parties were meant to withdraw their forces by Jan. 7 as part of efforts to avert a full-scale assault on Hodeidah, but have failed to do so as the Iranian-aligned Houthi group and the Saudi-backed government disagree on who should control the city and ports. Yesterday's meeting was the third time the UN-led Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC) convened since it was formed in December, bringing together the Houthis with the Saudi-backed, internationally recognized Yemeni government and UN mediators.

The parties met on a UN ship because attempts to convene the third meeting in territory held by coalition forces failed because the Houthis were unwilling to cross the frontline, sources have told Reuters. The first two meetings were held in territory under Houthi control, after which the head of the UN mission tasked with overseeing the deal, Patrick Cammaert, shuttled between the two parties.

The vessel picked up a delegation from Yemen's internationally recognized government at an off-shore meeting point in the Red Sea before sailing to Hodeidah to pick up the Houthi delegation, a UN statement said on Saturday. The spokesman for the Yemeni government's delegation to the RCC, Sadiq Dweid, told Reuters the committee had discussed Cammaert's proposals for the troop withdrawal at yesterday's meeting. “The meetings will continue,” he said. The truce has largely held in Hodeidah, but clashes have increased in recent weeks and the UN Yemen Envoy Martin Griffiths has urged all parties to reduce tensions. Violence has continued in other parts of the country not subject to the deal. Griffiths' office told Reuters the meeting had begun yesterday.

The conflict, widely seen in the region as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, has been bogged down in military stalemate for years. A Sunni Muslim Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates intervened in Yemen in 2015 to try to restore the government of Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi after it was ousted from power in the capital Sanaa by the Houthis in late 2014.

The Houthis, who say they are enacting a revolution against corruption, control most urban centres in the poorest Arabian Peninsula nation while Hadi's government controls the southern port of Aden and string of coastal towns. Pope Francis said yesterday he is following the humanitarian crisis in Yemen with great worry and urged all sides to respect international agreements and ensure food reaches suffering Yemenis. — Reuters

## Thousands protest in support for Turkey hunger strikers

**ISTANBUL:** Thousands of protesters yesterday joined a rally in Istanbul called by a pro-Kurdish party to show support for hunger strikes against prison conditions of Kurdish militant leader Abdullah Ocalan. The protesters gathered at a square in Bakirkoy on the European side of Istanbul, with police tightening security measures.

“I am saluting my friends resisting in prisons. They are our honor, they are not alone,” Fahit Ulas, a supporter of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). “If needed we will sacrifice our bodies for this cause. We have no fear,” he added. Some 250 prisoners all over Turkey have launched hunger strikes in support of HDP lawmaker Leyla Guven, who wants to pressure the Turkish government to allow Ocalan to hold regular meetings with his lawyers and family members.

Ocalan, one of the founders of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), has been serving a life sentence on a prison island off Istanbul since his 1999 capture. The 55-year-old Guven was jailed in January 2018 for her criticism of Turkey's military operation against a Syrian Kurdish militia. Last week, a Turkish court in Kurdish majority city Diyarbakir freed her under judicial supervision. Guven, who entered the 88th day of her hunger strike yesterday, launched the protest move on November 8 while in jail.

She told AFP in an interview on Wednesday that she would press on with the hunger strike at home. Garo Paylan, an HDP MP who joined the Istanbul protest, said choosing a hunger strike was a “last remedy,” hoping Guven's demand would be met as soon as possible. — AFP

## Salvadorans vote for new president

**SAN SALVADOR:** Polls opened yesterday in El Salvador's presidential elections amid heavy security as voters look for change in a country beset by gang violence and widespread poverty. Nayib Bukele, the 37-year-old former mayor of San Salvador, is the frontrunner in a race that could upend the nearly three decade old grip of the country's two largest parties on Salvadoran politics.

Rigorous security was in place as polling stations opened at 7am (1300 GMT). Some 5.2 million people are eligible to vote at the more than 1,500 election centers. Some 23,000 police officers and 15,000 soldiers have been deployed to protect the sixth presidential election since democracy was restored in the country in 1992 after 12 years of bloody civil war between state security forces and leftist guerrillas.

Should Bukele, who represents the conservative Grand Alliance for National Unity (GANA) party, win it would put to an end three decades of domination by the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) and leftist Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN). His main challenge is expected to come from 42-year-old supermarket magnate Carlos Calleja, representing ARENA.

If he does win, though, he will have to form an alliance with the right, which dominates congress. He has promised to increase investment in education and fight corruption but his main task will be to implement new programs to confront insecurity. El Salvador is one of the most violent countries in the world with a murder rate of 51 per 100,000 citizens. It has been battered by gang violence, which authorities say were the source of most of the 3,340 murders reported last year. Gangs are said to have 70,000 members, 17,000 of whom are behind bars.

### 'Daring security solutions'

“The new president must offer daring security solutions,” Carlos Carcach, an analyst and professor at the Higher School of Economy and Business in El Salvador,



SAN SALVADOR: A woman votes during the Salvadorean presidential election at a polling station. — AFP

told AFP. Another challenge will be to reduce illegal immigration to the United States given President Donald Trump has threatened to cut off aid if the stream of Central American migrants heading there is not stopped. During the last few months of 2018, more than 3,000 Salvadorans joined caravans marching towards the US, fleeing gangs and a lack of employment.

“You think and rethink about whether or not it's worth staying in this country or have the courage to go and try your luck in another,” Sergio Hernandez, a 41-year-old carpenter told AFP. “It's terrible with the gangs, someone has to do something because it's unbearable.” The other main worry for Salvadorans is the economy. Although it grew by 2.6 percent in 2018, its biggest rise in five years, that is considered insufficient to cover the demand for new employment.

The election winner will have to juggle the need to raise taxes to cover an external debt of more than \$9.5 billion while trying to maintain social programs in a country where the minimum wage of \$300 a month is barely enough to buy food. “The challenge for the new leader is to satisfy the demand for fairer salaries and avoid the social exclusion that forces many to flee the country,” said Raul Moreno, an economics professor at the state university. Just over 30 percent of El Salvador's 6.6 million inhabitants live below the poverty line. — AFP

## International

# UK PM May says she's 'armed with a fresh' Brexit mandate

## Attempts to get rid of the agreement's unpopular backstop provision

**LONDON:** British Prime Minister Theresa May said yesterday she would be "armed with a fresh mandate and new ideas" when she meets European Union negotiators over her Brexit deal. EU officials have insisted that the deal is not open for renegotiation. But May wrote in the Sunday Telegraph that she would be "battling for Britain and Northern Ireland" in her efforts to get rid of the agreement's unpopular backstop provision.

"If we stand together and speak with one voice, I believe we can find the right way forward," she said. The backstop is intended to ensure there is no return to a hard border with Ireland, but Brexit supporters fear it will keep Britain tied to the EU's customs rules. MPs voted last week to send May back to Brussels to renegotiate the clause, suggesting her deal would then be able to pass after it was roundly rejected in parliament last month. "I am now confident there is a route that can secure a majority in the House of Commons for leaving the EU with a deal," she wrote.

"When I return to Brussels I will be battling for Britain and Northern Ireland. I will be armed with a fresh mandate, new ideas and a renewed determination to agree a pragmatic solution". The EU insists that the deal "remains the best and only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal," but with the clock running down until the March 29 exit date the risks of a no-deal Brexit for both Britain and the bloc are coming into sharp focus.

May said opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn "also believes the potential indefinite nature of the backstop is an issue", and that the EU has "already accepted the principle of 'alternative arrangements' superseding the backstop should it ever be required." The backstop would kick in if Britain and the EU have not agreed a trade deal on their future relationship after a time-limited transition

period of up to two years. The prime minister rejected accusations that plans to reopen the backstop talks risked upsetting the Irish peace process. "Nor do I have time for those who believe the verdict passed by the British people in 2016 should be overturned before it is even implemented," she added, referring to the rump of MPs calling for a second referendum. "I'm determined to deliver Brexit, and determined to deliver on time — on March 29, 2019," she wrote. May has promised MPs that she will bring any revised deal back to be voted on by MPs on February 13.

### Exit from Brexit

While German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas would like to see an "exit from Brexit" — Britain abandoning its plan to leave the European Union — he said in a newspaper interview on Sunday that he saw such an outcome as extremely unlikely. In the interview with the Funke media group, Maas repeated the EU's position that the withdrawal agreement thrashed out between Brussels and London, which was rejected by Britain's parliament last month, could not be renegotiated.

He added that Britain's only path to avoiding a so-called "hard Brexit", in which London exited automatically on March 29 with no transitional arrangements in place to ensure the continued flow of goods, medicines and transport links, was to accept the existing deal. With less than two months to go until it automatically leaves the bloc, Prime Minister Theresa May's government has yet to agree an exit agreement or a position on its desired future relationship with the soon-to-be 27-member EU.

But Maas rejected British calls for further concessions to be offered to make the deal, negotiated over two years,



**LONDON:** People take in the view of the towers and offices at Canary Wharf from the viewing area in Greenwich Park. — AFP

more palatable to its critics in London. "The agreement we negotiated with Britain is already a compromise — especially regarding the arrangements for Northern Ireland," he said. "There must not be a hard border to the Republic of Ireland... We cannot risk the Northern Ireland conflict flaring up again."

The lack of progress has led some to call on London to

exercise its right to revoke the announcement of its intention to leave that it made two years ago, which would leave it as a full-fledged member of the bloc. Asked if he could envisage this happening, Maas was skeptical. "That's what I'd like the most," he said. "But we should have no illusions about this. The likelihood of an exit from Brexit is extraordinarily low." — Agencies

## South Africa disappointed after Western powers criticize policy

**JOHANNESBURG:** South Africa expressed disappointment yesterday after the United States and other Western powers wrote to President Cyril Ramaphosa urging him to tackle corruption, and said those countries had breached diplomatic protocol.

The Sunday Times newspaper reported that the United States, Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, had sent a joint memorandum to Ramaphosa through their diplomatic missions in Pretoria to warn that foreign investment was at risk unless South Africa takes tangible action against perpetrators of corruption and other serious crimes.

The countries also expressed concern over what they called "obstacles" to foreign investment such as "constant changes of goal posts" in the regulatory framework for mining and black economic empowerment targets, the paper said. It did not say when the memo was sent. South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) said it had noted "with disappointment the dispatching of a memorandum to the office of the presidency" by the five embassies. "This is a departure from established diplomatic practice," DIRCO said in a statement.

"In terms of acceptable diplomatic practice, protocol and convention, diplomatic missions are expected to communicate to the receiving state by means of a note verbale (diplomatic note) conveyed through the department," it added. According to the Sunday Times, the five countries said that there should be a "clear, unqualified and manifest political commitment to the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and to honest and ethical business practices." — Reuters

## French priest jailed for sexual abuse

**COLMAR:** A French priest was Friday sentenced to five years, two without parole, for sexually assaulting four young female parishioners, one of whom was just nine when the offences started, and embezzling 100,000 euros (\$115,000) to pay one of his victims. The trial was held behind closed doors at Colmar Criminal Court, in northeast France, which publicly announced the sentence late Friday.

The 60-year-old cleric, who will have to spend at least two years behind bars and be under restrictions for the rest of his term, could have faced up to 10 years in prison. The priest will also have to undergo psychological treatment, which he has already started, according to his lawyers. Under the judgment, he is forbidden from contacting his victims or any activity involving minors. He is also barred from staying in the Alsace region, where the offences were committed.

His sentence was lighter than that sought by the public prosecutor, who had asked for four years in prison followed by three years under a supervision order. The trial was held behind closed doors at the request of three of the four victims, who were minors at the start of the offences, the youngest just nine.

The attacks, which continued after three of the victims were adults, took place between 2001 and 2006 and between 2011 and 2016. The priest, who was remanded in custody for three months at the start of the case in September 2016, "bitterly regrets the crimes that he has acknowledged (...) and offers his apology to the victims and to people (...) injured by such intolerable acts," his lawyer Thierry Moser said in a statement. He had admitted to having diverted more than 100,000 euros in money destined for the Church and transferred it to one of the victims, then an adult, in exchange for sexual favors. In total, he paid her more than 240,000 euros, including a portion of his personal wealth. — AFP

## Head of Ukraine's new orthodox church enthroned

**KIEV:** The leader of the new independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church was enthroned in a ceremony in Kiev yesterday, formalizing a break with the Russian Orthodox Church that has enraged Moscow. During the three-hour event in the gold-decked 11th-century Saint Sophia Cathedral, Metropolitan Yepifaniy became head of the Church, having been elected by bishops last year.

The 40-year-old is a critic of Moscow's religious influence in Ukraine and has helped organize humanitarian aid for Kiev's army in its struggle against Russian-backed separatist movements. President Petro Poroshenko, who had promised an independent church ahead of this year's presidential election, attended the ceremony along with other top officials. Last week, he finally confirmed he was running for re-election in the March 31 poll.

Poroshenko described yesterday's ceremony as the "completion" of the process to create the Church, in comments carried by Ukrainian TV channels as part of a live broadcast. The new church would be independent of the state, he said. For more than 300 years, the Patriarch of Moscow controlled part of the Ukrainian Church. Kiev now considers this influence unacceptable given its ongoing war with Russia-backed rebels in the east that has already killed around 13,000 people. The Russian-controlled branch of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine has denounced the establishment of a unified church, breaking ties with the Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarchate of



**KIEV:** Metropolitan Epiphanius (or Yepifaniy), the head of the independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church, is pictured during his enthronement ceremony at the Saint Sophia Cathedral. — AFP

Constantinople over the issue. The Constantinople Patriarch's decision to recognize the Ukrainian Church's

independence from Russia was a huge blow to Moscow's spiritual authority in the Orthodox world. — AFP

## Bashir vows rural development as new protests loom

**KHARTOUM:** Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir yesterday pledged to bolster rural development, as he seeks to face down anti-government demonstrations that have rocked cities and villages. The veteran leader has been on a charm offensive with rallies across the country in a bid to head off weeks of protests seen as the biggest threat to his 30-year rule.

Addressing hundreds of villagers in North Kordofan state at a televised event he promised to bring clean drinking water to rural areas "across Sudan" and open a new hospital in the region. The speech came after he inaugurated a new 340-kilometre (210 miles) highway linking North Kordofan to Omdurman, the twin city of Khartoum. "Building such a road in present economic conditions is not an easy thing to achieve," said Bashir, after being

escorted to the stage by dozens of men on camels.

"Along this road we will bring electricity to boost the region's growth." Hours later Bashir addressed another rally where he called on the country's young men and women to help develop the country. "The youth, for whom we have built universities, have to be ready to continue with the mission of building a new Sudan," he said. The statement came after Prime Minister Moutaz Mousa Abdallah on Saturday called the protest movement a "respectable youth movement" and said its voice should be heeded.

Demonstrations erupted in Sudan in December after a government decision to triple the price of bread unleashed frustrations at years of deteriorating living conditions and growing hardship. Officials say 30 people have died in protest-related violence, while rights group Human Rights Watch says at least 51 have been killed. Bashir's attempts to rally support have so far failed to halt the wave of discontent, with the group leading the demonstrations calling for fresh protests over the next few days starting last night. Bashir and other senior Sudanese officials have repeatedly said that the government can be changed only through elections. The leader, who came to power in an Islamist-backed coup in 1989, is considering running for a third elected presidential term in polls due next year. — AFP



**OMDURMAN:** Sudanese protesters wave their national flag and chant slogans during an anti-government demonstration in the capital Khartoum's twin city. — AFP

## UK set to appoint top cop as new anti-slavery chief

**LONDON:** One of Britain's most senior police officers is set to be appointed the country's new anti-slavery chief almost nine months after the inaugural commissioner resigned citing government interference, the Times newspaper said yesterday. Sara Thornton, head of the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) since 2015, will take up the role later this year, the British newspaper reported.

Britain's Home Office (interior ministry) said it could not confirm the appointment, and that a candidate would be "announced shortly". Thornton could not be reached for comment. A source with knowledge of the situation told the Thomson Reuters Foundation yesterday that Thornton's name had been "heard on the grapevine" but no appointment has been confirmed.

Kevin Hyland was appointed as the inaugural independent anti-slavery commissioner in 2014 as part of Britain's landmark Modern Slavery Act, but he resigned last May and left the post in August, saying he had been frustrated by government meddling. Hyland was widely hailed for helping to champion the world-first law and pushing the United Nations to adopt a target to end slavery by 2030 among a set of global goals agreed in 2015.

Britain's push to be the world leader in tackling slavery has been "thwarted" by the delay in replacing Hyland, which has hindered policy advances and scrutiny of the government, sources told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in December. The Home Office has advertised twice for the role — a three-year contract with a salary of up to 140,000 pounds (\$178,000). Britain was in December urged by lawmakers to scrap its search for a new anti-slavery chief and address concerns about the independence of the role before re-advertising. In a government-ordered review of the law, three politicians said they were worried by reports that Hyland had not been free to criticize Britain's anti-slavery efforts and the job advert for his successor raised doubts about the role's independence. — Reuters



International

# Taleban delegation to meet Afghan oppn leaders in Moscow: Official

‘Our goal is to have a peace that comes with dignity’

**KABUL:** The Taleban said yesterday it will send a delegation to Russia for a rare meeting with Afghan opposition leaders, just days after peace talks with the United States that excluded the Kabul government. The two-day sit-down in Moscow, starting Tuesday, will be attended by some of President Ashraf Ghani's chief political rivals, but none of the government envoys tasked with Taleban negotiations.

Ghani has appealed to the insurgents to talk after being frozen out of six days of discussions between the Taleban and the United States in Doha last month that sealed the outlines of a peace deal.

Instead the Taleban, which refuses to recognize Ghani's government, will sit down in Moscow with some of the president's main opponents to discuss the country's future — stirring frustrations in Kabul.

“It shows the peak of depression, and begging to terrorists,” said Amrullah Saleh, who is running as vice-president on Ghani's ticket in elections slated for July. “A smile to the enemy is a blow to the national spirit,” he posted on his Facebook page yesterday. Among those who have confirmed their attendance in Moscow is Haneef Atmar, who is running against Ghani in the elections. Former warlord Atta Muhammad Noor and former Afghan president Hamid Karzai — both Ghani rivals — are also attending.

‘Important step’

Noor yesterday said the meeting was “a pathway

towards strengthening the peace efforts led by the US” while Atmar described it as “an important step towards intra-Afghan peace talks”. A government-appointed council tasked with Taleban engagement said Sunday it was not invited to Moscow. A senior Taleban official told AFP they would send a delegation, but described the meeting as non-political and “arranged by some organizations based in Moscow”.

The Russian Embassy in Kabul issued a statement late Saturday on behalf of the “Afghan Society of Russia”. The group said it had invited “influential figures” to the dialogue in the President Hotel in Moscow. “We are ready to play our role in bringing peace to Afghanistan,” the statement read. It is not clear what role, if any, Russia has in the summit. A spokesman for the Russian Embassy in Kabul could not be reached for comment.

The Taleban are scheduled to hold another round of peace talks with the US in Doha on February 25. The insurgents said discussions were “on the right path” — fuelling speculation of a breakthrough in the 17-year conflict in Afghanistan. US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad spoke of a “draft framework” for a deal but warned major hurdles — including any US withdrawal — remain. Ghani has refused to accept a “temporary” deal. “Even if I have one drop of blood in my body, I am not going to surrender to a temporary peace deal,” he told Afghan commandos in Kabul yesterday. “Our goal is to have a peace that comes with dignity.” — AFP



HERAT: In this photo taken on February 2, 2019, an Afghan National Army (ANA) soldier fire a D30 122mm Howitzer gun as members of the NATO military forces (unseen) look on during a training session of ANA soldiers at Arena base in the Guzara district of Herat province. — AFP

## Indian express train in Bihar derails killing six

**NEW DELHI:** At least six passengers were killed and more than 20 injured yesterday after an express train derailed in eastern India's Bihar state, officials said. Nine coaches of the Delhi-bound Seemanchal Express came off the tracks early yesterday near Sahadai Buzurg station, about 30 kilometers east of the state capital Patna.

“Six people have died and nearly 24 have been injured,” Indian Railways spokesman Rajesh Kumar told AFP. Local television footage showed huge crowds gathered near the accident site as emergency workers cleared the overturned wagons. Rescue teams with sniffer dogs sifted through the damaged carriages looking for trapped passengers. Most

of the travelers were asleep when the train travelling at 55 kilometers an hour came off the tracks around 4:00 am (2230 GMT Saturday). “I was sleeping and suddenly there was a big bang and found myself under a pile of bags,” passenger Mahesh Kumar told reporters.

A “rail fracture” caused the accident, Indian Railways said in a statement after an initial investigation. The company promised a thorough probe of the accident, which came days after the Indian government said it had improved rail safety. Cash compensation of 500,000 rupees (\$7,000) would be given to the relatives of those killed, the railways ministry said. Railways minister Piyush Goyal on Friday had claimed to have improved rail safety after a series of deadly accidents spooked the country.

Goyal told parliament that all unmanned rail crossing had been eliminated, one of the main causes of train collisions in India. India's railway network is the main form of long-distance transport, but has been lagging in improving its infrastructure, often leading to disasters. Nearly 150 people were killed after a passenger train derailed in Bihar in 2016, the deadliest accident in recent years. — AFP



National Disaster Response Force and police personnel along with onlookers stand next to derailed carriages after a train came off the tracks near Hajipur on the outskirts of Patna in India's eastern Bihar state. — AFP

## Chinese chemical firm ‘misled’ investigators over deadly blast

**BEIJING:** The Chinese chemical firm responsible for an explosion that killed 24 people and injured 21 others in northern China last year hid information and misled investigators, said local authorities in a report published yesterday. A gas leak caused the explosion last November at a PVC production plant in Zhangjiakou, a northern Chinese city in Hebei province that will host part of the 2022 Winter Olympics.

“After the accident occurred, Hebei Shenghua Chemical Industry Company did not report (the incident) to relevant government departments in accordance with regulations, concealed the accident, and misled investigators,” said the emergency management department of northern Hebei province. In its report, local authorities also pointed to the company's lack of safety

measures and “chaotic” management for contributing to the blast. Those in charge of key departments were “not at the company for long periods of time” and violations of labor regulations by employees were common, including playing on their mobile phones and sleeping during work hours, said the report. Police have investigated and taken “criminal compulsory measures” against twelve employees and thirteen local officials have been “punished”, the report said, without offering details.

The report also recommended Shenghua Chemical Company, a subsidiary of ChemChina, pay a 9.49 million yuan (\$1.41 million) fine. The Zhangjiakou blast is the latest alleged corporate cover-up in China, where industrial accidents are common as safety regulations are often poorly enforced. A few weeks before the explosion, a chemical spill left dozens ill in eastern Fujian province. Later that month, authorities said the company responsible for the incident had “deliberately concealed” the extent of the leak.

The Fujian Donggang Petrochemical Company had reported 6.97 tons of chemicals had spilled into the sea, when the true amount was 10 times higher. In August 2015, 165 people were killed in a chemical warehouse explosion in the port city of Tianjin. The government found that the disaster was caused by improperly or illegally stored hazardous materials. — AFP

## Nepali women dies in ‘menstruation hut’

**KATHMANDU:** A Nepali woman has died of suspected smoke inhalation while banished to a hut during her period, police said yesterday, just weeks after the deaths of a mother and two children in similar circumstances sparked outrage. Many communities in Nepal view menstruating women as impure and in some remote areas they are forced to sleep in a hut away from the home, following a centuries-old tradition known as “chhaupadi”.

Parbati Bogati, 21, was found dead in a smoke-filled hut on Thursday morning in the western Doti district when her mother-in-law went to check on her. “We suspect she died due to smoke inhalation and suffocation because she closed the door

of the windowless hut and lit a fire on the floor for warmth during the night,” local police officer Lal Bahadur Dhama said. The body has been sent for autopsy, Dhama said. Chhaupadi was outlawed in 2005 but is still enforced in parts of Nepal, particularly in remote and conservative western regions.

The practice is linked to Hinduism and considers women untouchable during menstruation and after childbirth. Under Chhaupadi, women are barred from touching food, religious icons, cattle and men. Just three weeks ago a mother and her two sons in neighboring Bajura district died of suspected smoke inhalation while observing the tradition. Their deaths prompted locals to demolish chhaupadi sheds in their village and local authorities to warn that services would be denied to anyone forcing their daughters and daughters-in-law to follow the banned practice. Last year, Kathmandu introduced a three-months jail sentence and a 3,000 rupee (\$30) fine for anyone caught imposing chhaupadi. — AFP

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Polish physicist and businesswoman Olga Malinkiewicz poses with a printed solar panel at her company Saule in Wroclaw on Jan 16, 2019. — AFP

Dirty money risks  
hit digital utopia

Estonia's push to become a digital society has left it vulnerable to dirty money and sanction breaches, the country's top banking regulator has warned. The Baltic state took center stage in one of the largest-ever money laundering scandals last year - the Estonian branch of Danske Bank helped funnel money from Russia and other ex-Soviet states, a report by the Danish lender showed. Danske Bank is now being investigated in Denmark, Estonia, Britain and the United States over the 200 billion euros (\$227 billion) of suspicious payments.

The Danske debacle was rooted in old school subterfuge - offshore shell companies were used to disguise where the money was coming from. But Estonia's population of e-residents, some of whom bank in the country even though they live abroad, potentially offers a high-tech route for suspect funds. "The lesson of Danske is, I hope, enough for us," Kilvar Kessler, the head of Estonia's financial watchdog, the Finantsinspektion, told Reuters. "You onboarded customers which were offshore companies. Now e-residents. Exactly the same questions will be asked. Who are they? Why do they need a bank account in Estonia?"

A former Soviet-occupied state on the edge of Europe, Estonia has remodelled itself as a hub for digital innovation through 'e-Estonia', a government-sponsored project to move almost all bureaucratic tasks, from voting to medical prescriptions, online. A key part of e-Estonia is e-residents, foreigners who have been given a digital identity card allowing them to access some online services such as government portals. It can also be a stepping stone to banking in Estonia, a member of both the European Union and the euro zone currency bloc.

Anyone can apply, including citizens of countries subject to US sanctions such as Iran and North Korea. Banks including Estonia's largest locally-owned lender LHV, as well as Sweden's SEB Bank and Swedbank, allow e-residents to open accounts after they prove their identity and business links to Estonia. Kessler, who has the power to withdraw a lender's license to operate, has been cautioning bankers for some time that they need to thoroughly vet e-residents before signing them on. He has stepped up his warnings since the Danske scandal.

Some 50,000-plus people hold the digital identity card but there is no public data on how many also bank in Estonia. Erki Kilu, the chief executive of LHV bank, said that while only a small number of e-residents opened a personal bank account in Estonia, the 6,000 companies registered in the country by e-residents required an account. One quarter of those bank with LHV, he told Reuters. Kilu said e-residents were subject to the same checks as other customers who lived abroad. In an email to Reuters, he said there were also "later screening and monitoring processes", declining to give further details. The bank does not open accounts for people or companies subject to sanctions.

Ainar Leppanen, responsible for SEB's retail banking in Estonia, said it took a cautious approach to foreign customers without "a clear link to the country", applying additional measures such as "background checks". He said customers were checked against international sanctions lists and described the number of e-resident customers of SEB as "insignificant".

A spokeswoman for Swedbank said it performed "due diligence ... to ensure that their businesses have a clear connection to Estonia" before taking on e-resident customers. Some banks, however, generally steer clear. "We don't see a business case here right now," said Erki Raasuke, chief executive of Luminor, one of the largest banks in the Baltics. "The potential downside, if some of the anti-money laundering or sanctions-related risks would materialize, can be significant."

## Cryptocurrencies

Closer scrutiny of e-residents is part of a wider effort to curb financial crime by authorities in Estonia since the Danske scandal. In addition to the e-residency program, the country's digital pedigree - video calling company Skype was built there - and pro-business culture have made it an attractive outpost for companies working with cryptocurrencies. It typically takes just hours and an online form to open a business in Estonia and some 600 digital currency companies are registered there.

"There is a money laundering risk with cryptocurrency operators. We have made it too easy for these crypto operators now. They get a reputational benefit from their link to Estonia. We get the reputational risk," Madis Muller, Estonia's deputy central bank governor, told Reuters. Lawmakers are considering giving police the power to scrutinize cryptocurrency companies and withdraw their licenses if executives fail a "fit and proper" test of their reputation and ability to do the job.

Under proposals before parliament, cryptocurrency companies will also be required to have a business presence in Estonia, something that many lack. "I understand that most would not be able to comply - and would not qualify to keep their license," said Muller. National elections in early March, however, could delay such reforms, as lawmakers would have to restart negotiations if they do not sign off the rules by February 21, when they disband. Estonia's vision of an advanced digital society open to all is a point of pride for its 1.3 million people, many of whom remember the constraints of life under Soviet rule. —Reuters

## 'Inkjet' solar panels to revolutionize energy

What if one day all buildings could be equipped with windows and facades that satisfy the structure's every energy need, whether rain or shine? That sustainability dream is today one step closer to becoming a reality thanks to Polish physicist and businesswoman Olga Malinkiewicz. The 36-year-old has developed a novel inkjet processing method for perovskites - a new generation of cheaper solar cells - that makes it possible to produce solar panels under lower temperatures, thus sharply reducing costs.

Indeed, perovskite technology is on track to revolutionize access to solar power for all, given its surprising physical properties, some experts say. "In our opinion, perovskite solar cells have the potential to address the world energy poverty," said Mohammad Khaja Nazeeruddin, a professor at Switzerland's Federal Institute of Technology Lausanne, an institution on the cutting-edge of solar energy research.

Solar panels coated with the mineral are light, flexible, efficient, inexpensive and come in varying hues and degrees of transparency. They can easily be fixed to almost any surface - be it laptop, car, drone, spacecraft or building - to produce electricity, including in the shade or indoors. Though the excitement is new, perovskite has been known to science since at least the 1830s, when it was first identified by German mineralogist Gustav Rose while prospecting in the Ural mountains and named after Russian mineralogist Lev Perovski.

In the following decades, synthesizing the atomic structure of perovskite became easier. But it was not until 2009 that Japanese researcher Tsutomu Miyasaka discovered that perovskites can be used to form photovoltaic solar cells.

Inside a raid in  
crackdown on  
critics in slums

After Venezuelan police officers clad in black military uniforms and masks stopped 27-year-old Yohendry Fernandez at gunpoint in the Caracas slum of Jose Felix Ribas, they asked him if he had a criminal record. He replied yes. The officers then dragged him into an alley and shot him twice in the chest, killing him, according to his family and a witness. It was the afternoon of Jan 24, the day after tens of thousands of slum residents left their hillside homes to join mass protests against President Nicolas Maduro, who they blame for an economic crisis that has left them without water, power, medicines and food.

Several dozen officers from the National Police's Special Action Force (FAES) drove into the slum in armored vehicles and on motorcycles. As they roared down the dusty streets, some opened fire as residents fled before them shouting "They're here," according to witnesses. Police snipers clambered atop tin rooftops and locals hid under beds as the gunshots rang out, the witnesses said. By dawn, the FAES unit had killed as many as 10 people, leaving with their bodies and about a dozen hooded detainees, according to four local community leaders.

Venezuela's Information Ministry, which handles all media inquiries, including on behalf of the national police, did not respond to requests for comment on the operation. Diosdado Cabello, the ruling Socialist Party's deputy head, accused the opposition of fabricating death tolls from police raids. The FAES said reports of abuses were "fake news" spread by rightwing opponents. "Our struggle is against all criminals that ravage our communities. If you fear the FAES it's because you're a criminal," the unit said on Thursday on Instagram.

Residents said the FAES officers returned to Jose Felix Ribas for the next three afternoons, spreading terror in a poor community that used to be a bastion of support for Maduro and his predecessor, the late Hugo Chavez. Five years of economic recession have turned many into Maduro's most fervent opponents. The raids, the deadliest of several in Caracas last month, show how the government has used the FAES to target critics since opposition leader Juan Guaido proclaimed himself interim president and won the support of Western powers who say Maduro is illegitimate.

Reuters spoke with a dozen witnesses, local politicians, and lawyers, along with experts who study the FAES, to provide the first detailed look at the operation. Reuters also pieced together footage of the raid posted on social media, which witnesses verified.

Initially the process was complicated and required ultra-high temperatures, so only materials that could withstand extreme heat - like glass - could be coated with perovskite cells. This is where Malinkiewicz comes in. In 2013, while still a PhD student at the University of Valencia in Spain, she figured out a way to coat flexible foil with perovskites using an evaporation method. Later, she developed an inkjet printing procedure that lowered production costs enough to make mass production economically feasible.

"That was a bull's eye. Now high temperatures are no longer required to coat things with a photovoltaic layer," Malinkiewicz told AFP. Her discovery quickly earned her all their laboratory equipment from scratch, before multimillionaire Japanese investor Hideo Sawada came on board. The company now has an ultramodern laboratory with an international team of young experts and is building an industrial-scale production site.

"This will be the world's first production line using this technology. Its capacity will reach 40,000 square metres of panels by the end of the year and 180,000 square metres the following year," Malinkiewicz said at her lab. "But that's just a drop in the bucket in terms of demand." Eventually, compact production lines could easily be installed everywhere, according to demand.

She went on to cofound the company Saule Technologies - named after the Baltic goddess of the sun - along with two Polish businessmen. They had to assemble all their laboratory equipment from scratch, before multimillionaire Japanese investor Hideo Sawada came on board. The company now has an ultramodern laboratory with an international team of young experts and is building an industrial-scale production site.

## Fear the FAES

The reporting reveals a pattern of street justice employed by FAES, set up in 2017 as an elite force to combat terrorism and organized crime, and an atmosphere of impunity. The Venezuelan Observatory of Violence, a local crime monitoring group, attributes 43 deaths to security forces during protests and raids since Jan 22, and says it is processing reports of more. Keymer Avila, a criminology professor at the Central University of Venezuela, said he had not yet verified all the deaths in Jose Felix Ribas but that 10 seemed reasonable based on his understanding of the events.

Rights groups accuse the government of using the FAES to raid Venezuelans' homes after they return from protests, with the help of tip-offs from supporters. Authorities have arrested more than 900 protesters since Jan. 21, the rights groups say. Jose Pinto, head of the Revolutionary Tupamaro Movement, a militant group that backs Maduro, told Reuters he and other so-called "colectivos" were expanding their networks of informants. They alerted police to "suspicious activity" before the Jan 23 protests, Pino said, sending them images and addresses of suspected "rightwing conspirators," which he said led to raids.

## 'Consequences'

On Jan. 22, according to residents, an unmarked pickup truck mounted with speakers drove through Jose Felix Ribas, a district within Caracas' sprawling Petare shantytown, broadcasting a message: "If you protest tomorrow, there will be consequences." Most said they took little heed. But six locals said the consequences became clear on Jan 24 when FAES officers pulled a 23-year-old mother, the cousin of an alleged gang leader, from her house and shot her dead. A church was sprayed with bullets. One man was executed after being handcuffed inside a vehicle, residents said.

Local politicians said authorities justified the raid as an operation against a criminal group. The government has yet to show any evidence against those killed. Paula Navas, a local political organizer, said the authorities sought to silence her community. "They traumatized children. What was the objective of this?" Navas asked. Yohendry Fernandez had been fixing motorcycles in a parking lot on the slum's main road, some 200 m from his family home.

Motorcycles were his obsession, relatives said, and videos on his Facebook page show him racing down Caracas avenues performing wheelies. He sometimes repaired motorcycles for the local police, they said. At 3 pm, just as Fernandez was about to head home, FAES officers arrived and split into groups that advanced into the barrio's upper reaches.

One group set up a blockade on a plaza where the road divided. Fernandez's home, where his wife and two children were waiting, was on the other side. After family members told his mother, Isabel Pino, that he had been arrested at the plaza, she raced to the scene and begged an officer: "Please don't hurt him, he's special." — Reuters

to manufacture perovskite solar panels that are made to measure.

## Self-sufficient buildings

The Swedish construction group Skanska is testing the cutting-edge panels on the facade of one of its buildings in Warsaw. It also inked a licensing partnership with Saule in December for the exclusive right to incorporate the company's solar cell technology in its projects in Europe, the United States and Canada. "Perovskite technology is bringing us closer to the goal of energy self-sufficient buildings," said Adam Targowski, sustainability manager at Skanska.

"Perovskites have proven successful even on surfaces that receive little sunlight. We can apply them pretty much everywhere," he told AFP. "More or less transparent, the panels also respond to design requirements. Thanks to their flexibility and varying tints, there's no need to add any extra architectural elements."

A standard panel of around 1.3 square metres, at a projected cost of 50 euros (\$57), would supply a day's worth of energy to an office workstation, according to current estimates. Malinkiewicz insists that the initial cost of her products will be comparable to conventional solar panels. Perovskite technology is also being tested on a hotel in Japan, near the city of Nagasaki.

Plans are also afoot for the pilot production of perovskite panels in Valais, Switzerland and in Germany under the wings of the Oxford Photovoltaics venture. "The potential of the technology is clearly enormous," Assaad Razzouk, the CEO of Singapore-based Syndicatium Renewable Energy, a developer and operator of clean energy projects in Asia, told AFP. "Just think of all the buildings one could retrofit worldwide!" — AFP

Dropping weapons  
treaty would let US  
update nuke arsenal

The US scrapping of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty with Russia could launch a new arms race, but will also allow the United States to update its nuclear arsenal, a publicly stated goal for the past year. President Donald Trump announced Friday the US was suspending its obligations under the INF treaty as of Saturday and starting a process to withdraw in six months. NATO has said that US allies "fully support" its withdrawal from the pact, and agreed that Russia's 9M729 ground-launched cruise missile systems violates the treaty.

A day later, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a tit-for-tat withdrawal from the pact to develop "new types of weapons," calling Washington's decision "unilateral and totally unprovoked". The United States has complained about the alleged Russian violations for years. But now it's also speaking openly about its chance to upgrade its arms stock. When the United States unveiled its new nuclear policy in Feb 2018, it warned that it planned to buy two new weapons: a new type of low-power nuclear missile to be launched from a submarine, and a new type of nuclear cruise missile that would violate the INF agreement.

This new missile - which would only come into service within a decade - would only be a violation of the treaty if it were deployed, the Pentagon says. It has always stressed that a research and development program was not prohibited by the 1987 treaty with Moscow. So starting Saturday "we are no longer bound by the constraints of the Treaty," Johnny Michael, a Pentagon spokesman, told AFP Friday. The 2019 US military budget provides funds for developing this new intermediate-range land-based missile and "we are still in the research phase," the spokesman said.

In fact, the Pentagon was already preparing its response to Russian missile 9M729, with a top range of 480 km, Moscow insists. But Washington, backed by NATO allies, says that Russian missile has already been tested on much greater distances.

Johns Hopkins University's Jeffrey Pryce argues that the INF treaty favors the United States because, while it prohibits all surface-to-air missiles with a range of 500 to 5,500 km, conventional or intermediate, anything fired from a submarine or dropped by a bomber, simply is not covered. — AFP

## Business

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**12** Federal Reserve shifts guidance, leaves rates unchanged at 2.5%**13** Huawei CBG opens Kuwait's first 'Huawei Experience Store' at The Avenues Mall**14** ABK bags J P Morgan Quality Recognition Award for 2018

SHANGHAI: This file photo taken on January 7, 2019 shows Tesla boss Elon Musk (left) walking with Shanghai Mayor Ying Yong during the ground-breaking ceremony for a Tesla factory in Shanghai. China is fast-tracking a foreign investment law at an unprecedented pace to meet Washington's demands on trade, but businesses fear that time to review and raise objections on a crucial piece of legislation has been cut short. —AFP

# Foreign firms fret as China fast-tracks law

## Clock ticking on a March 1 US-set deadline to address trade concerns

**BEIJING:** China is fast-tracking a foreign investment law at an unprecedented pace to meet Washington's demands on trade, but businesses fear that time to review and raise objections on a crucial piece of legislation has been cut short. The law will eliminate the requirement for foreign enterprises to transfer proprietary technology to Chinese joint-venture partners.

It also includes other steps to level the business playing field that Western trading partners have long demanded. China's parliament is expected to vote on the legislation in March—barely two months after debating a first draft.

"It is indeed unprecedented that the bill is being moved by the NPC (National People's Congress) at such a fast pace," Wang Jiangyu, an expert on Chinese law at the National University of Singapore, told AFP. "Normally it would take one to three years for a bill to be passed and signed into law." Foreign businesses worry the draft glosses over details and that vague language leaves room for broad interpretation. For example, it gives China the right to expro-

appropriate foreign investment "for the public interest", which foreign business groups fear could be abused.

### Ticking clock

A draft law was first published for comment in 2015 but was quickly shelved until it resurfaced late last year, Wang said. It was only submitted to China's rubber-stamp legislature for a first reading on December 23, and made available for public comment until February 24.

The top decision-making body of the legislature convened a special two-day session this past Tuesday to debate another "updated version", state news agency Xinhua reported. The law will probably be approved during the parliament's roughly 10-day annual session which opens March 5, Wang said.

The clock is ticking on a March 1 US-set deadline for China to address trade concerns and avert an escalation in their tariff war. "What we feel with this piece of legislation is that it's been squeezed between the normal legal process and the negotiation table (to defuse) the trade conflict," the president of the EU

Chamber of Commerce in China, Mats Harborn, said. "In our view this is a little unfortunate because this is an important piece of legislation that will have an effect... on all foreign companies." Both the EU and American chambers of commerce in China said they rushed to submit feedback from members this week.

### Falling short

Although the legislation covers several pain points highlighted by US President Donald Trump including safeguarding foreign capital from government "interference", it falls short in other key areas, the business lobbies said. "The current draft law is high-level and general" and requires more detailed guidelines and implementing measures, the American Chamber of Commerce in Beijing wrote in its feedback report, a summary of which was seen by AFP.

The December version debated by lawmakers is considerably shorter—by over 130 fewer articles—than the previous 2015 draft.

A section describing how the government will scrutinize foreign investments for potential national secu-

re concerns is limited to two sentences in the December version—simply stating that China would establish a review process and that decisions would be made according to law.

The earlier version had a beefy five-page chapter detailing how companies could appeal security rulings, plus examples of factors that could trigger a security review, said Jacob Parker, vice president of China operations at the US-China Business Council. But the latest draft stipulates that all national security review decisions are final, implying no administrative or legal appeals were possible.

Both the EU and American trade chambers are also urging China to consider having a single Company Law to govern both foreign and domestic enterprises, as is common in many countries.

"It's now time to make sure that all companies are seen as making the same positive contribution to China when it comes to growth, employment, taxes, R&D and so on. There shouldn't be a distinction based on where the investment comes from," Harborn said. —AFP

## Telecoms' dilemma: Huawei or the highway?

**PARIS:** It's a dilemma for European telecoms firms: Should they steal a march on competitors and rapidly roll out next-generation 5G mobile networks using equipment from top supplier Huawei? Or should they heed US-led warnings of security threats and sit tight, and possibly fall behind?

Getting it right will have big consequences as 5G networks are the next milestone in the digital revolution, bringing near-instantaneous connectivity, vast data capacity and futuristic technologies.

No operator wants to be left behind, and neither do governments who see 5G technology as a future key driver of economic growth. China's Huawei has quietly become a leading supplier of the backbone equipment for mobile networks, particularly in developing markets thanks to cheaper prices.

Spearheading cutting-edge 5G equipment has also seen it make inroads into developed markets.

However, a growing number of Western states are turning their backs on Huawei, fearful that its equipment could be a Trojan horse for Beijing's intrusive security apparatus as Chinese laws require its firms to cooperate with intelligence services. Huawei strenuously denies its equipment could be used for espionage.

While most European governments are trying to make up their minds, mobile operators must make their own choice, and it's a tough one. Several operators have already begun tests with Huawei equipment, such as Bouygues Telecom and SFR have in several French cities.

"Huawei is today more expensive than its rivals but it is also much better, they have really moved ahead in terms of quality of network equipment over their European competitors," said an executive of one European mobile operator recently on condition of anonymity.

Experts say Huawei is between six months and one year ahead of Sweden's Ericsson in terms of the quality of its 5G equipment. The number two mobile network equipment manufacturer, Finland's Nokia, is said to be even further behind.

### 5G leader

"Many want to avoid the Chinese but they are currently the most advanced in the area," said Victor Marcais, a telecoms and media specialist at Roland Berger consultancy. "Huawei has moved in the past few years from being the 'low cost' option to becoming the 5G leader."

Several sources said that Huawei even helped Nokia in research and development to avoid facing off alone against Ericsson in 5G. Huawei would only say that it has "long-term partnerships" with several of its competitors in areas such as production methods, standards and patents.

"We have always defended the principle of open innovation and collaboration to facilitate the devel-

opment of the telecoms industry," a Huawei spokesman said.

After establishing itself as a player on 4G networks, the Shenzhen-based group has doubled down to dominate 5G. Each year it invests between 10 and 15 percent of its sales revenue on research and development. It spent \$13.8 billion on R&D in 2017 and \$15 billion last year.

The strategy is paying dividends. In 2017 Huawei was by far the number one supplier of equipment for telecom networks, with a 22 percent market share, according to IHS Markit. Nokia trailed with a 13 percent share and Ericsson with 11 percent.

That gap could grow as more operators across the world develop 5G networks, although the current geopolitical tensions pose a risk to Huawei exploiting its technological lead.

### European ambitions

European nations, like those in Asia and the United States, want a rapid rollout of 5G with the first services expected to be running next year. A target that is difficult to attain without recourse to Huawei. "The regulators and governments have quite ambitious timetables while the operators see 5G as a way to reduce costs per gigabyte as data volumes explode," said Marcais at Roland Berger.

"However we see in Germany, for example, they aren't happy the way things are shaping up," Deutsche Telekom, in an internal document obtained by Bloomberg, warned that Europe could fall behind China and the United States by as much as two years if it forgoes using Huawei's 5G equipment. —AFP

## Nissan cancels investment plan for UK plant

**BRITAIN:** Japanese car manufacturer Nissan announced yesterday it was cancelling plans to build its X-Trail SUV at its plant in northeast England despite Brexit assurances from the government.

"While we have taken this decision for business reasons, the continued uncertainty around the UK's future relationship with the EU is not helping companies like ours to plan for the future," Nissan Europe Chairman Gianluca de Fichy said in a statement. "We appreciate this will be disappointing for our UK team and partners," he added. "Our workforce in Sunderland has our full confidence."

The car giant announced in 2016 that it planned to build the model at its plant in Sunderland, but will now assemble it instead at Nissan's global production hub in Kyushu, Japan.

"Other future models planned for Nissan Sunderland Plant—the next-generation Juke and Qashqai—are unaffected" by the decision, according to the statement. —AFP



## Business

# Huawei CBG opens Kuwait's first 'Huawei Experience Store' at The Avenues Mall

Located in Phase 4 Electra, the new store offers the latest innovative technology from Huawei



KUWAIT: Gene Jiao, President of Huawei CBG, Middle East and Africa, among the attendees



The first Huawei Experience Store in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Huawei Consumer Business Group (CBG) has extended the reach of its pursuit to build a fully connected and intelligent world with the launch of its flagship Huawei Experience Store (HES) in Kuwait's most prestigious venue, The Avenues Mall, Electra, Phase 4. The launch was graced by the attendance of Deputy General Director Mohamad Yaqoub of Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA), Cheng Yongru, Commercial Consul of People Republic of China to the State of Kuwait, Aref Al-Yousifi, CEO of Easa Hussain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co and Gene Jiao, President of Huawei CBG, Middle East and Africa, before it was officially opened for consumers for a full retail experience, which includes access to Huawei's latest products and services under one roof. All new products will now be available for pre-booking and sale at the same time as their respective global/regional launch.

The opening of the first brand store in Kuwait represents Huawei's commitment to deliver breakthrough technologies and become closer to their consumers. The store provides an immersive experience and exceptional customer service that is to set new industry standards in innovation, representing another step that Huawei is taking in the Kuwaiti market. This reflects Huawei's positive business outlook and goal of becoming an end-to-end solutions provider, offering consumers more convenient and smarter ways to connect the various aspects of their lives.



KUWAIT: Gene Jiao, President of Huawei CBG, Middle East and Africa, speaking during the launch.



KUWAIT: (From left to right), Jiang Guangao, General Manager of Huawei CBG, Cheng Yongru, Commercial Consul of People Republic of China to the State of Kuwait, Gene Jiao, President of Huawei CBG, Middle East and Africa and Deputy General Director Mohamad Yaqoub of KDIPA.



KDIPA Deputy General Director Mohamad Yaqoub of Kuwait speaking during the launch.

Commenting on the opening of Huawei's first flagship store in Kuwait, Gene Jiao, President of Huawei Consumer Business Group, said: "At Huawei, we are always eager to expand our reach and presence in new markets across the world and Kuwait is an important market to us, with a very big tech-savvy population that is enthusiastic to discover the latest advancements technology has to offer. This is reflected in an IDC report that shows Kuwait was a big driver in the smart-

phone shipment market in the region, with a growth of 2.6 percent in Q3 2018."

He continued: "we take pride in our commitment to R&D, which allows us to provide consumers worldwide with pioneering innovations supported by on-device Artificial Intelligence. The Huawei Experience Store is a flagship that customers can expect to find in different countries across the globe, and it is exciting to finally have it in Kuwait. Customers will have the chance to

obtain more information through their hands-on experience with our complete range of products, alongside our expert staff who will provide advice for whoever seeks any form of clarification."

The Huawei Experience Store is open daily from 10am - 10pm, Sunday to Saturday, the Avenues, Phase 4, Electra. For more information on Huawei's flagship smartphone Mate 20 Series, new product launches and exciting offers, don't hesitate to visit the Store.

## Australia banks set for major shake-up from landmark inquiry

SYDNEY: A major shake-up of Australia's massively profitable banking sector is on the cards as a landmark inquiry into abuses in the financial services industry releases its final report today.

Sweeping legislative and regulatory changes, a crackdown on the bulging pay packets of bankers and even criminal charges against senior executives could be among the recommendations issued by the royal commission. Major lenders including the country's "big four" banks—among the developed world's most wealthy—have been under scrutiny in recent years, amid allegations of dodgy financial advice, life insurance and mortgage fraud.

Some unscrupulous brokers were found charging customers long after they were dead.

The wide-ranging inquiry was established in late 2017 to quell public anger over their misbehavior, and a preliminary

report released in September slammed the banks' culture of greed. "I think there will be some substantive changes... around strengthening the regulators and increasing the punishments (for misbehavior)," RMIT University's Warren Staples told AFP. Australia's conservative government has been cautious in committing to implement the report's recommendations in advance, while the left-leaning opposition Labor Party said it would adopt the suggestions in full.

But with a federal election due by mid-May, the potentially explosive findings and recommendations are broadly expected to be embraced by legislators eager to cash in on the public's anti-bank sentiments. In the firing line will be the regulators, viewed as being too soft on corporations, and standards in the home lending, financial planning, insurance and pension sectors.

The commission's hearings exposed poor behavior by financial houses and executives with rules repeatedly breached, personal gains prioritized over clients' interests and loans given to customers who could not repay them. These sectors are expected to be reined in through tighter standards such as increased penalties for misconduct and greater oversight of behavior.

The recommendations could go as far as banning certain types of sales prac-



SYDNEY: A pedestrian is reflected in the window of a branch of the Australia and New Zealand Banking Group (ANZ) in central Sydney. —Reuters

tics and removing underperforming pension funds.

### 'Over-inflated pay'

Regulators the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA) and Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) are tipped to be given more powers to chase wrongdoers, while also being subjected to perform-

ance reviews. Shares in the major banks have weakened in recent days ahead of the report's release, but Bell Potter banking analyst TS Lim said investors had priced in any potential bad news.

"I think it's probably going to be a limited response... my belief is that they will increase the fines or penalties for companies that engage in misconduct," Lim told AFP. —AFP

### Wall Street Week Ahead

## Fed pause validates market fears about US growth

NEW YORK: While the US Federal Reserve's indication it is done raising interest rates - for now - has fueled stock gains, investors worry the US central bank's pledge is a double-edged sword and implicit confirmation of the markets' lingering anxiety about growth.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said on Wednesday that US economic growth is "solid" and expected to continue. But in a sharp reversal of their stance just six weeks ago, Powell said the Fed has "the luxury of patience" in deciding whether to raise rates again. The Fed's soothing message sent the S&P 500 up 1.6 percent on Wednesday and extended into Thursday, helping the benchmark index post its biggest January percentage gain since 1987.

But investors acknowledge that the Fed's

strongest signal yet that policymakers may have reached the end of its latest series of interest rate increases could reflect slower economic growth.

"Both the stock and bond markets applauded the Fed for its more dovish tone," said Michael Arone, chief investment strategist at State Street Global Advisors. "If you take a step back and evaluate why they're doing it, it's because they're concerned. So why shouldn't investors be concerned?"

The US bond market never fully bought into the enthusiastic tenor to risk markets, including equities, year-to-date given signs of cracks in the consumer and peaking corporate profit growth.

US 10-year government bond prices are trading around the elevated levels they commanded during last month's stock sell-off, with yields at 2.63 percent today compared with 2.69 percent on Dec. 31. US-based bond funds pulled in \$16.7 billion in January, according to early estimates from the research service Lipper. Investors took \$944 million out of domestic stock funds over the same period.

"The bond market always gets it before the stock market," said Chuck Self, chief investment officer at iSectors LLC. Stocks'

sure-footedness this year may end up like 2018's hot January rally only to peter out and end in the negative. Three- and 5-year yields are poised to dip below the 2.4 percent effective Fed funds rate for the first time since 2006, before the global financial crisis, noted Crescat Capital LLC analyst Otavio Costa on Twitter.

Powell said there were "conflicting signals" about the economy - many of them negative - including sharply slower growth in China and Europe, Britain's chaotic exit from the European Union, U.S.-China trade negotiations, effects of the US partial government shutdown and rougher markets.

The Fed acknowledged that some market gauges of inflation have fallen in recent months, a trend more typical of growth slowdowns rather than an economy on fire. The International Monetary Fund predicted the global economy will grow at 3.5 percent in 2019, down 0.2 percentage point from last October's forecasts, citing weakness in Europe and some emerging markets. It puts US growth at 2.5 percent this year and 1.8 percent in 2020, in both cases likely slower than 2018's figures, which have not been finalized due to the government shutdown.

"We're not favoring the US market, but

we're happy to own Treasuries," said Schroders Plc portfolio manager Angus Sippe. He said he does not see a recession on the horizon and gives the Fed an "A-plus" on its management of the economy. But he would rather take risk in emerging markets and wait for more evidence of US corporate earnings growth.

Financial research service Refinitiv expects 14.9 percent earnings growth for the final quarter of 2018, but just 5.1 percent for all of 2019, leaving less margin for error if consumer and business fear translates into lower spending and investment. Still, oil producers are working to stabilize prices, China is aggressively stimulating its economy and, as Bank of America Corp analysts said in a research note on Thursday, the Fed has shown that its commitment to supporting markets is alive and well. Those factors mean market pessimists are getting it wrong, according to Michael Jones, chairman at RiverFront Investment Group LLC.

Some investors appear to be positioning for the worst. Futures contracts tied to Fed rates imply the Fed's next move will be a cut. Markets are pricing in a higher probability of two cuts by next January than of a single rate hike. —Reuters

## Warba Bank announces 5 winners of Al-Sunbula draw

KUWAIT: Warba Bank, "the Best investment Bank" and "Best Corporate Bank" in Kuwait, held its weekly Sunbula draw number 5. The draw announced the five lucky winners in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and bank officials.

The bank proudly announced the lucky 5 winners of the 1000 Kuwaiti Dinar prize: Saji Salem Saji Al-Dosari, Sulaiman Dawoud Sulaiman Al-Houti, Meshal Lafi Ali Al-Mayouf Al-Azmi, Musaed Nawaf Najdi Al-Suwait and Mashea Mater Mervi Al-Dhufiri.

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

Warba Bank will continue its weekly draws for five winners of KD 1,000 each. What's new in 2019 are the "mega draws" which will be held every quarter to reveal five winners, the 1st winner will get KD 100,000! The four winners thereafter will each get the latest Land Cruiser VXR. Furthermore, the final Mega draw held in January 2020 will feature 2 more Land Cruiser VXRs!

As for the chances for winning, each customer is eligible to enter the draw against each KD 10 in the Sunbula Account. Nevertheless, Sunbula Fixed Deposit investors also get chances in the Sunbula draws along with high expected returns that reach up to 3.5 percent distributed either monthly or at maturity upon the customer's preference.

Furthermore, Warba Bank is leveraging on its Customer Onboarding solution, in line with its ambitious five-year strategy that enables non-Warba Bank customers to request the opening of Al-Sunbula account in a simple electronic manner without having to visit the branch, through 5 simple steps in 5 minutes. New customers will be able to request opening the account at anytime, anywhere, through the new and unique electronic system used to implement this service. Representatives will then contact the customer to determine the appropriate time to visit the branch to get required signatures, verify the customer's identity, deliver his/her debit card, and activate the account.

## Business

# ABK bags J P Morgan Quality Recognition Award for 2018

## Award recognizes bank's operational excellence

**KUWAIT:** ABK recently received the Elite J P Morgan Quality Recognition Award for 2018, acknowledging its operational excellence in straight through processing of commercial payments for 2018. ABK achieved an STP rate of 99.50 percent for the MT103 category of payments, exceeding J.P. Morgan's stringent STP performance standards and therefore qualifying for the Quality Recognition Award.

Sherif Abdelsalam, Executive Director - Treasury Services - Head of GCC Financial Institutions Coverage and Rana Abou Hassan Executive Director - META, Russia and Pakistan - Client Service Manager presented the award on behalf of J P Morgan to Somnath Menon, Group Chief Operating Officer and the ABK operations team.

This award reflects the successful hard work and dedication of ABK's operations team in achieving the best in class in processing and solutions to meet customers financial needs.

J.P. Morgan Chase & Co. is an American multinational banking and financial services holding company headquartered in New York City. It is the largest bank in the United States, and the world's third largest bank by total assets. The firm is a leader in investment banking, financial services for consumers, small business and commercial banking, financial transaction processing, asset management and private equity.



## NBK reveals winner of KD 125,000 prize in Al-Jawhara's monthly draw

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait announced the winner of the KD 125,000 prize in Al-Jawhara Account's monthly draw for the month of January 2019. The winner, Abdulmehsen Farhan Al-Farhan, was announced live on FM 88.8 Kuwait Pulse, in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry as well as representatives from NBK.

Informed in a call made live during the show, the winner expressed his happiness of winning such a prize and extended his gratitude to the Bank. Al-Jawhara Account customers are automatically entered in Al-Jawhara's week-



Suresh Varadarajan

ly, monthly and quarterly draws, giving them the chance to win KD 5,000 weekly, KD 125,000 monthly and the grand prize of KD 125,000 quarterly. Every KD 50 deposited in the Al-Jawhara Account gives customers one entry into the draw. The minimum opening amount for the account is KD 400 while the maximum amount that can be held is KD 500,000. Customers' chances of entering the draws double for every KD 50 when the amounts are not used for a given period of time.

"Al-Jawhara is a unique account that enables our customers to save and win through the weekly, monthly and quarterly draws. Customers can easily open an account with an opening balance of KD 400 by visiting their nearest NBK Branch or through NBK online

Banking and NBK Mobile Banking for existing customers," said Suresh Varadarajan, Head of Liabilities and Insurance, Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait. "By saving, customers also double their chances of winning when they do not withdraw or transfer amounts from their account during the required period."

Varadarajan added: "In addition to the draws, Al-Jawhara Account gives customers access to many features and benefits which include a free NBK Visa Debit Card that can be used anywhere around the world, the ease of managing their account through our advanced online and mobile platforms at a click of a button anywhere and anytime, in addition to our 24 hours, seven days a week call center support."

Since 2012, NBK has rewarded loyal customers with prizes worth a total of up to KD 2,200,000 annually through its weekly, monthly and quarterly Al-Jawhara draws. In addition to its attractive and most innovative and safe products and services, NBK is committed to providing customers with ongoing offers and rewards in line with the needs and lifestyles of its customers.

## EQUATE reports EBITDA of \$2.12bn, net income after tax of \$1.56bn for 2018

**KUWAIT:** The EQUATE Group announced its fourth quarter (Q4) 2018 and full-year 2018 earnings yesterday. In Q4 2018, the EQUATE Group reported an EBITDA of \$427 million, compared to \$388 million for the same period in 2017. EQUATE Group's total EBITDA for 2018 stood at \$2.12 billion, compared to \$1.73 billion in 2017. Net Income After Tax for the year was \$1.56 billion, compared to \$1.13 billion in 2017.

"EQUATERS across the globe defined excellence in 2018," said Dr Ramesh Ramchandran, CEO and President of the EQUATE Group. "The record-breaking EBITDA was a result of extraordinary performance across all functions. We had an exceptionally safe year without any recordable EH&S incidents across the globe, a manufacturing volume record at all global sites and a very good pricing environment - notably in the first three quarters - and excellent cost optimization."

Looking ahead to 2019, Ramchandran said, "Global headwinds in the commodity environment and high volatility due to uncertainty of tariffs resulted in a slowdown in the fourth quarter that persists in early 2019. That said,



EQUATERS have always overcome challenges and I have every confidence that their expertise and commitment will continue to result in success."

The EQUATE Group maintained its leadership position as the second largest producer of EG globally, with EG

production of over 2.5 million metric tons. This market leadership will be further strengthened in the coming months with an additional 750,000 MT in EG capacity as the new Oyster Creek, Texas Site comes on line on the US Gulf Coast.

## KAMCO GCC Markets Monthly Report

### Global markets rally in new year; optimism drives GCC markets

**KUWAIT:** The year 2019 started on a positive note with almost all the key global financial markets closing the month in the green. The easing of tensions between the US and China with China hinting at raising goods imports from the former by 2024 provided a boost to global sentiments. Emerging markets also turned positive after the US Fed hinted at being patient on future interest rate hikes and said it would be flexible in lowering its bond holdings. In addition, positive data related to US manufacturing activity further added to the optimism, although a late month report from China showed the slowest manufacturing activity since February-16.

Oil market was also positive during the month with oil price gaining almost 20 percent. Brent regained the \$60/b mark after US imposed sanctions on Venezuela further supported by a decline in inventories in the US. The OPEC+ agreement to curb crude output also came into effect during January-19 further boosting prospects for oil prices. GCC market activity followed global cues and were largely positive. The MSCI GCC index closed the month with a return of 7.4 percent after all GCC benchmarks showed growth during the month barring Oman.

Tadawul was the best performing market during the month with a return of 9.4 percent followed by Qatar at 4.1 percent. GCC markets also got support from positive earnings announcements from some of the large-cap stocks in the region. The sector performance chart in the GCC also reflected the positive earnings trend in the GCC. Banks continued to attract investor interest in the GCC following outperformance during last year. Within the

banking sector, Saudi banks topped the chart with double digit gains. Food & Beverage sector was also positive during the month recording double digit gains after a relative underperformance during most of 2018.

Kuwaiti stock market witnessed a broad-based surge during January-19 with all the three benchmarks closing the month in the green. Large-cap stocks remained investor's favorite pick with the representative Premier Market index gaining 3.1 percent during the month with 11 out of the 17 stocks showing positive monthly performance. Gains for the Main Market index was relatively muted at 1.3 percent resulting in 2.5 percent growth for the broader All Share Index.

Trading activity remained positive during the month with gains in both volume and value traded. Monthly volume of shares traded surged almost 60 percent to 4 Bn shares on the back of higher trades in small-cap stocks. On the other hand, monthly value traded saw marginal surge of merely 6 percent to reach KD 610 million in January-19 as compared to KD 575 million during December-18. A'ayan Leasing & Investment once again topped the monthly volume chart with trades more than doubling in the stock to reach 395 million shares as compared to 160 million shares during the previous month. Gulf Bank was next on the list with 337 million shares changing hands during the month followed by Ahli United Bank - Bahrain and Abyaar Real Estate Development with volumes of 332 million and 305 million, respectively. In terms of monthly value traded, Gulf Bank topped the list with KD 90.2 million worth of traded shares followed by KFH and NBK at KD 86.5 million and KD 81.5 million, respectively.

The sector performance chart was mixed during the month with the Financial Services index topping the monthly performance chart after gaining 5.6 percent. The Bank index was next on the list with a gain of 4.1 percent after all the banks recorded gains during the month barring KFH that declined marginally. Banking index got support from full year earnings for NBK, Boubyan Bank, KIB and Warba Bank with double digit net profit growth in 2018. The Telecom index was next on the monthly performance chart with a gain of 2.6 percent.

## KIB launches guide to boost work productivity

**KUWAIT:** The Board of Directors Affairs Management Department of Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently launched a staff guide. The guide was issued with the support of the Chairman of the Board, Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah, and aims at streamlining work processes to improve workflow and productivity at the Bank.

On this occasion, General Manager of the Board of Directors Affairs Management Department, Ismail Ibrahim Alshaikh, said:

"This guide was developed in light of the various day-to-day operations and various necessary tasks that are at times repetitive - all of which are needed to keep the organization running. In order to achieve optimal workflow, we issued a guide that clearly defines all processes and procedures, thereby improving the quality". Moreover, Alshaikh pointed out that the guide comprises general guidelines where all processes and procedures have been collated in a simple manner that is easily accessible by employees of the Board of Directors Affairs Management Department. The guide was developed using circulars, articles and laws issued by various regulatory bodies such as the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), the Capital Markets Authority (CMA), Boursa Kuwait, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Alshaikh noted that this guide does not - in any way - serve as a substitute for the approved policies and procedures which have been adopted by KIB, in line with regulations and instructions set forth by regulatory bodies. In the case that there are any conflicts between the guide and instructions issued by regulatory bodies, rules and regulations issued by the aforementioned regulatory authorities will supersede that which is mentioned in the guide; particularly as these instructions and regulations are subject to ongoing revisions and amendments.

At the end of his statement, Alshaikh expressed his thanks and gratitude to all those who participated in the issuance of this guide. He also lauded the Chairman of KIB, Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah, for his quick response as well as his cooperation with the Board of Directors Affairs Management Department to issue this guide, thereby benefitting the Bank as a whole and its employees.



Ismail Alshaikh



## Burgan Bank announces winners of Yawmi account draw

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

The lucky winners are:

1. Jamilah Abbas Hasan Allenqawi
2. Amal Jassim Mohammad Alsabah
3. Mubarak Faisal Saud Alsabah
4. Sabah Jawdat Khalaf
5. Abbas Ali Abbas Akbar

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a Quarterly Draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly Draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.

## Al-Tijari announces winner of weekly and monthly draw for Al-Najma program

**KUWAIT:** Commercial Bank of Kuwait announced the winner of the weekly and monthly draw as follows: Monthly Draw prize KD 20,000 - Mohammed Abdulhameed Mohammed Ali Qasim

Weekly Draw prize KD 5,000- Minor/ Sheikh Salem Mubarak Al-Sabah

The draw was conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Ms. Latifa Al-Jean.

The bank stated that the account prizes this year is featured by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that Al-Najma Account will offer weekly prize of KD 5,000, monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000 and documented in Guinness World Records. Al-Najma Account can be opened by depositing KD 100, and customer should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 to be eligible to enter all draws on Al-Najma Account prizes. As for the chances of winning, the more balance a customer maintains in Al-Najma Account, the more chances the account holder will get to win, where each KD 25 will give the customer one chance to win, the account also offers additional benefits like the ATM card, a credit card against customer's account and all CBK banking services that customer can enjoy.

Now CBK existing customers can open Al-Najma Account through Al-Tijari Online and enter all draws without visiting the Bank's branch. However, CBK non-customers can submit an account opening application via the Bank's website where the Bank's Sales Unit will call them to arrange a visit to the customers to complete the account opening formalities.

What's On

# LOYAC organizes annual blood drive

Sponsored by Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait and in collaboration with the Tri Star, the Bikes team and Kuwait Blood bank, LOYAC recently organized its seventh annual blood donation campaign at the Boulevard. The event was attended by LOYAC's board member, Fetouh Al-Dalali, Al-Ahli Bank's board affairs director, Fauzi Al-Thenayyan and Tri Star executive manager, Ja'far Bahbehani.

Speaking on the occasion, Al-Dalali thanked Al-Ahli bank for sponsoring the 'Be A Reason For Saving Lives' campaign and also thanked all donors for taking part in this national campaign. On his part, Al-Thenayyan stressed that Al-Ahli Bank fully believes in sponsoring humane initiatives and community serving activities. Also speaking on the occasion, Tri Star's executive manager, Ja'far Bahbehani stressed that Tri Star and the Bikes team fully believes in the significance of donating blood to save lives.



## LAPA participates in 4th Marakesh International Theatrical Festival

Following a series of successes and award winning in various local and Arab festivals, 'Sabeeliyyat Ismail' play, produced by LOYAC's Academy for Performance Arts (LAPA), recently took part in the 4th Marakesh International Theatrical Mono Dame Festival. Notably, this festival does not award any prizes as its main target is get participants take part free of any worries or fear of failure. It is the only theatre festival dedicated for women and only allows them on stage on grounds that women are the source of freedom and beauty.

Sabeeliyyat Ismail is a play based on 'Al-Sabeeliyyat' novel by the late novelist, Ismail Fahad Ismail and prepared by Fare'a Al-Saqaf. It was directed by Rasoul Al-Sagheer and starred by Shirine Hajji who portrayed an Iraqi woman, Um Qassim, who had to leave her village (Al-Sabeeliyyat) at the Iraqi-Iranian border during the war between the two countries. Her husband dies during the trip and asks her wife to bury him in his hometown, which she insists on doing despite her children's refusal and burying the husband elsewhere. She does insist and two years after his death, the wife goes back to Sabeeliyyat and gets a permission to bury her husband's remains there.



### NOTICE

**T**IES cordially invites to our Tafseer class (Divine Wisdom from the last Testament) today at 7pm in which we will focus on the last verse of Surat As - Saff (The solid Ranks). In this class, we will discuss Allah's promise to the believers, ponder the meanings of some of His beautiful names and attributes, the reasons we ought to learn them, and the various ways of supporting His path and the benefits we accrue from that. We will also explore some similarities between Jesus and Prophet Muhammad (PBU) and those between the disciples of Jesus and Prophet Muhammad's companions.

Finally, we will examine some things that Allah (SWT) likes about us and those that he dislikes. We will also explore the reasons Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) declared Az-Zubair bin Al-Awwam his disciple and the circumstance in which he declared that.



## Oncost Cash and Carry rewards membership program members

Oncost Cash and Carry, the first wholesale membership retail store in Kuwait, held an event last week in its Fahaeel branch to present some of its first members with their cash-back rewards. The presentation ceremony, which was held on January 17, 2019 saw three members of the program, Shahul Hameed Alingal, Haseeb Koramman Kandy and Mohammad Albasha, receiving KD 209, KD 191, and KD 24 respectively as cashback on their purchases made during their membership period.

The ceremony was conducted in the presence of management and members from Oncost Cash & Carry, namely Chief Operating officer Remesh

Ananda Das, Marketing Manager Talal Algharaballi, and Operations Manager Hassan Khalil. In his speech, COO Ananda Das highlighted the benefits of the program and expressed his appreciation for the relationship the company has and will continue to maintain with its loyal customers.

Oncost's Membership Program, which was launched over a year ago on January 1, 2018, provides members with up to four percent cashback on their purchases made during their membership period. The three patrons were among the early birds to register as members in the loyalty program, and more cashbacks are expected to be given on a daily basis, as other members complete their annual membership term.

The membership program seeks to reward members for their loyalty to the brand, in addition to providing them with a huge range of products at very cost-effective prices. Oncost Cash and Carry has consistently focused on satisfying the needs of individual customers, families and professional businesses, while also strengthening its relationships with shoppers through its customer-oriented approach to business.



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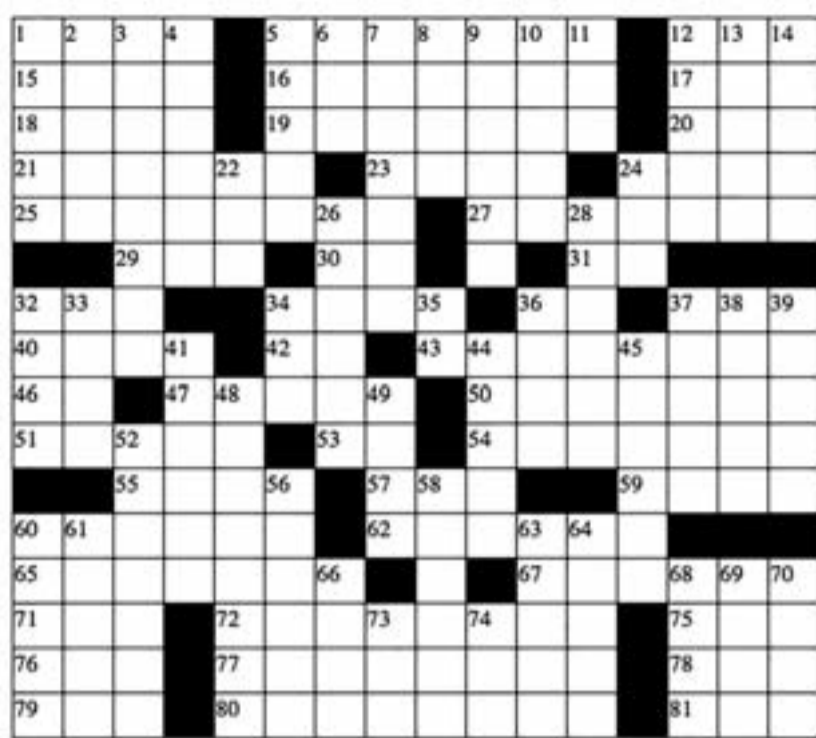
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Stars

CROSSWORD 2127



- ACROSS**
- Grains used as food either unpolished or more often polished.
  - Capital of Swaziland.
  - Used of a single unit or thing.
  - A river that rises in northeastern Turkey (near the source of the Euphrates) and flows generally eastward through Armenia to the Caspian Sea.
  - An artificial language proposed as an auxiliary European language.
  - A rapid escape (as by criminals).
  - A lawman concerned with narcotics violations.
  - A depository containing historical records and documents.
  - A castrated tomat.
  - Adorned by inlays.
  - A particular geographical region of indefinite boundary (usually serving some special purpose or distinguished by its people or culture or geography).
  - Spread abroad or out.
  - Any of numerous soft-finned schooling food fishes of shallow waters of northern seas.
  - Any of numerous hairy-bodied insects including social and solitary species.
  - The ratio of the circumference to the diameter of a circle.
  - A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
  - An undergarment worn by women to support their breasts.
  - An officer who acts as military assistant to a more senior officer.
  - (Greek mythology) A maiden seduced by Zeus.
  - A panel or section of panels in a wall or door.
  - A soft white precious univalent metallic element having the highest electrical and thermal conductivity of any metal.
  - Low land that is seasonally flooded.
  - A decorative framework to conceal curtain fixtures at the top of a window casing.
  - Wood of a larch tree.
  - A light strong brittle gray toxic bivalent metallic element.
  - A genus of fungi belonging to the family Geastraceae.
  - Fleshy and usually brightly colored cover of some seeds that develops from the ovule stalk and partially or entirely envelopes the seed.
  - The residue that remains when something is burned.
  - In or of the present month.
  - Capital and largest city of Colombia.
  - A Japanese woman trained to entertain men with conversation and singing and dancing.
  - A port in northern Belgium on the Scheldt river.
  - Of or concerning Qatar.
  - Being one more than two.
  - The quantity contained in a crate.
  - A unit of absorbed ionizing radiation equal to 100 ergs per gram of irradiated material.
  - (computer science) Memory whose contents can be accessed and read but cannot be changed.
  - A letter sent by air mail.
  - Rare (usually fatal) brain disease (usually in middle age) caused by an unidentified slow virus.
  - The compass point that is midway between north and northeast.
  - A river in northeastern Brazil that flows generally northward to the Atlantic Ocean.
  - Thigh of a hog (usually smoked).
- DOWN**
- Insectivorous usually semiaquatic web-footed amphibian with smooth moist skin and long hind legs.
  - A native or inhabitant of Iran.
  - A town in southeastern New Mexico on the Pecos River near the Mexican border.
  - The act of escaping physically.
  - English economist noted for his studies of international trade and finance (born in 1907).
  - Seed vessel having hooks or prickles.
  - A department of Greece in the central Peloponnese.
  - Danish physicist who studied atomic structure and radiations.
  - To or from every one of two or more (considered individually).
  - Connected with or belonging to or used in a navy.
  - The compass point midway between northeast and east.
  - Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
  - A Dravidian language spoken in south central India.
  - To fix or set securely or deeply.
  - A strong emotion.
  - An accountant certified by the state.
  - Great coolness and composure under strain.
  - Undo the belt of.
  - Port city that is the capital and largest city of Latvia.
  - An independent agency of the United States government responsible for collecting and coordinating intelligence and counterintelligence activities abroad in the national interest.
  - A person forced to flee from home or country.
  - Type genus of the Anatidae.
  - A fabric woven with fibers from the flax plant.
  - The ossicle between the malleus and the stapes.
  - Eliminate from the body.
  - A written agreement (or property or money) delivered to a third party or put in trust by one party to a contract to be returned after fulfillment of some condition.
  - A genus of Inidriidae.
  - A long noosed rope used to catch animals.
  - A wave that is blown by the wind so its crest is broken and appears white.
  - Small beads made from polished shells and formerly used as money by native Americans.
  - Music with a syncopated melody (usually for the piano).
  - Xerophytic evergreen shrubs.
  - Dried root of two plants of the genus Polygala containing an irritating saponin.
  - Edible bulb of an onion plant.
  - Short and fat.
  - A board game in which players try to move their pieces into their opponent's bases.
  - Queen of England as the 6th wife of Henry VIII (1512-1548).
  - (of persons) Highest in rank or authority or office.
  - A Hindu prince or king in India.
  - Severe diabetes mellitus with an early onset.
  - A United States unit of weight equivalent to 2000 pounds.
  - The sixth day of the week.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You find yourself still thinking about your emotional, material and spiritual evolution today. It's as if you're in a meditative trance now. Anything said or seen becomes an instant puzzle you must solve. Instincts and whatever is new makes you stay distant from those who want to get closer to you. You have so much on your mind that you don't have time for others. Sometimes it's better to go with the flow and let it work itself out. Aries. Security is your concern right now.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Your need for security in the form of material items such as money is at a high today. Finding new ways to achieve liquidity is on your mind. Be careful how you ensure it. You know it life there is always karma. You may be wrestling the angels on both shoulders even though you crave law and order. Events come as they should in your quest for more in life. Taurus. Emotional coolness is part of your demeanor now and may hurt those you love even if you don't mean to worry them.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Gemini today you're still thinking about your job or some other change in your life. "Life is too short to go through it unhappily," is a truism for you today. You've been thinking clearly now for the past couple of days but you're also full of idealism too. Sometimes you need to stand back and really look the situation over before you jump but that doesn't seem to be your intention now. Gemini. Instead you feel you can do anything and make it better later. Take more time to think more before you leap.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Today your "I want it now attitude" could cause some issues later. This feeling will have hold of you all day. If you can't go shopping stay in bed with your lover unless you have to go to work. Instant gratification will make you feel better for a little while but this is really the time to build your future in all ways. Generally, that starts with money. Cancer, something you love. It just makes it easier. Right now, your energy commands others to help you create just that. So, work today and enjoy what you'll reap tomorrow.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You're feeling a sense of emotional detachment now and this feeling will continue for a few more days. Though you love your children, partner, spouse, friends or work, you're in an idealistic mood and think that there could be so much more for you. Take a moment to think this through although you've got a clearer head than you've had in a while. Don't leap yet. Leo. This could be something you'll regret later. You may feel a little more cynical as a part of this feeling and want higher security. Stay the course and think about it.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Today you don't feel easy in your own skin. You feel more isolated and cynical than usual. Even your old standby of being logical and assuming a conventional air isn't working. Security and all the items that entails make you crave more but your unsure of how to proceed in getting those things. Other than to work, you're unsure of everything in your life right now. It's not going to last for long though. Virgo. Perhaps a few days of this is enough. Keep on keeping on and think about better times.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

A job where you travel is the best work you can be in right now. It could involve law, philosophy, education or advertising. All of these jobs give you the chance to expand your ever-questioning mind. You have a new cycle in your life now where you appreciate others just because they've been chosen by you to be in your life. Marriage means more to you right now but that doesn't mean you have to be legal with it. This can be non-conventional love between two who decide to stay together as in a marriage but without the papers. You revel in being loved by all. Libra. Enjoy.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Right now isn't the time to try to be buddy, buddy with anyone at work. It's not your style and others won't believe you anyway, especially with how aloof you've been today. It's not because you want to shy away from others. It's more about what you need now. Scorpio. You're thinking and it makes you appear reserved. This generally helps you when you're trying to sell a product or yourself. Right now, it's not helping you at all. Truly what you see is what you get with you today. You need to figure things out and won't rest until you do.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

If it's romantic in nature then it's in your wheelhouse. Things that are unusual get your attention. Needs of a more unconventional time in your life show that they're not gone yet. You wish for what you don't have but you're more pragmatic in your approach for achieving your desires. People think your stand-offish and you are. Like a scientist inspecting a bug, you're involved in seeing how others work especially since yesterday. Sagittarius, you want no one to catch you unaware again. You do want material things and you can't achieve them alone. Your still in a vulnerable position.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Pragmatism fills your thoughts today. You figure you'll make your money now and worry about love later. That's not always easy especially where children can become or are involved. You generally have a finely tuned thought process that allows you to be now and to build the best for your life. You might be considering marrying a person you love for his or her security but not for the comfort you feel you really need. That could be a Capricorn fault. Think about this before jumping from the frying pan into the fire. If you're unhappy at home, how can you be your best in the business of living?



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You realize just how alone you are in this world. Others don't seem to be as far-thinking as you are. You are intuitive enough to know that you need to keep work afloat until your coworkers decide that your ideas are not only inspiring but they work. Since you've been thinking about your life and perhaps need more than being alone, you may decide today is the time to tell your lover how much you love them. It goes further. You have a nesting instinct and have forgotten that you can be alone even with others around. That doesn't matter now though. Aquarius, you may decide you want to settle down and tell your love.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

A time of major change in your life is upon you. It will be strange and unusual in many ways. Everything new, unusual, and revolutionary seems to appeal to you now. A more eccentric side of you emerges. Thinking outside of the box may lead to a very profitable and creative invention. Let your thoughts lead you. You may find those close to you may be a bit uncomfortable with this unusual side of you. Pisces. Don't worry. They will grow to love the new you.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Summer Olympics

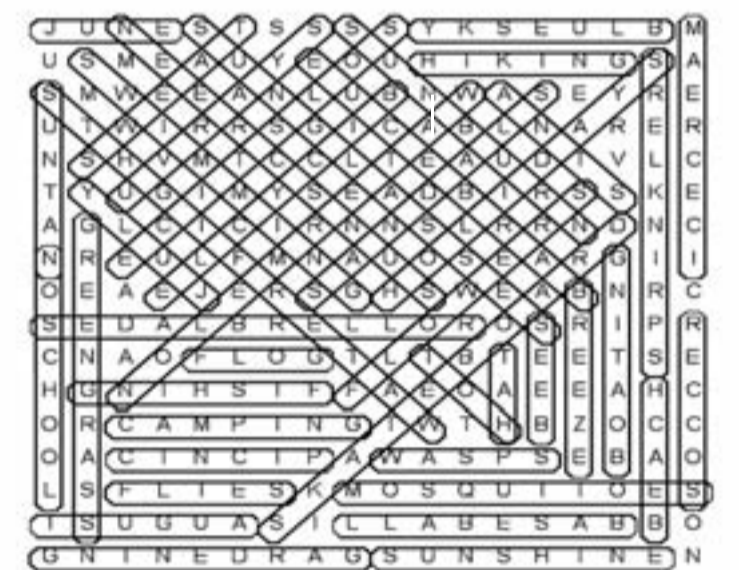
Find and circle all of the Summer Olympic events that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message.

Note: Similarly named events are hidden separately. For example, SWIMMING and SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING do not overlap.



- |           |                       |               |
|-----------|-----------------------|---------------|
| ARCHERY   | FOOTBALL              | TABLE TENNIS  |
| ATHLETICS | GYMNASTICS            | TAEKWONDO     |
| BADMINTON | HANDBALL              | TENNIS        |
| BASEBALL  | HOCKEY                | TRAMPOLINING  |
| BEACH     | JUDO                  | TRIATHLON     |
| BEES      | MODERN PENTATHLON     | VOLLEYBALL    |
| BICYCLE   | RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS   | WATER POLO    |
| BLUE SKY  | ROWING                | WEIGHTLIFTING |
| BOATING   | SHOOTING              | WRESTLING     |
| BREEZE    | SOFTBALL              | YACHTING      |
| CAMPING   | SWIMMING              |               |
|           | SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING |               |

Yesterday's Solution



- |          |             |               |              |
|----------|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| ANTS     | FISHING     | JULY          | SUNBURN      |
| AUGUST   | FLIES       | JUNE          | SUNGLASSES   |
| BARBECUE | FLOWERS     | MOSQUITOES    | SUNSCREEN    |
| BASEBALL | GARDENING   | NO SCHOOL     | SUNSHINE     |
| BEACH    | GOLF        | PICNIC        | SUNTAN       |
| BEES     | GREEN GRASS | ROLLER BLADES | SWEAT        |
| BICYCLE  | HAT         | SANDALS       | SWIMMING     |
| BLUE SKY | HIKING      | SKATEBOARD    | U V RAYS     |
| BOATING  | HOLIDAYS    | SOCCER        | WASPS        |
| BREEZE   | HOT         | SOLSTICE      | WATER FIGHTS |
| CAMPING  | ICE CREAM   | SPRINKLERS    | WATERMELON   |

The hidden message is: SUMMER VACATION

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



# Lifestyle

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2019



This photo shows a panda cub playing with a toy pig ahead of the Lunar New Year at the Shenshuping breeding base of Wolong National Nature Reserve in Wenchuan, China's southwestern Sichuan province. — AFP

## Berlin filmfest turns focus on women, Netflix

Women directors and the rise of streaming services will take the spotlight at the Berlin film festival starting Thursday, with a star-studded lineup making the case for big-screen diversity. The Berlinale, now in its 69th year, figures with Cannes and Venice among Europe's top cinema showcases. It will be the last edition led by Dieter Kosslick, 70, who is handing over to a younger duo after 18 years at the helm.

try. "But we wouldn't have done it if the films had been bad, simply to boost the women's quota." French Oscar winner Juliette Binoche will lead the six-member jury selecting the main prizes.

### Top of the mountain

The head of pressure group Women and Hollywood, Melissa Silverstein, said that, particularly in a year in which not a single female filmmaker was nominated for best picture or best director at the Oscars, festivals were essential to boost industry diversity. "We need women to get to the top of the mountain in the same way that men can," she told AFP.

"(A festival slot) means you get noticed, you get written about in papers across the world. People will be reviewing your film and buyers and other (event) programmers will be looking at it." Silverstein will attend the signing of a gender-parity pledge Saturday that Cannes, Venice and other major festivals have already inked, committing the Berlinale to striving for balance in the event's top management and transparency in the selection process.

In June, Kosslick will hand over the reins to Carlo Chatrjian, the current head of the Locarno film festival, and Mariette Rissenbeek, the Dutch director of German Film, which promotes homegrown movies abroad. Women have captured the Golden Bear the last two years—Romania's Adina Pintilie for her adventurous sex docudrama "Touch Me Not" and Hungary's Ildiko Enyedi for the political allegory "On Body and Soul".

Denmark's Lone Scherfig ("An Education") will open the event with the world premiere of "The Kindness of Strangers", a drama set in New York and starring Zoe Kazan, Andrea Riseborough and Bill Nighy. Polish veteran Agnieszka Holland will unveil the Stalin-era thriller "Mr Jones" starring James Norton ("Happy Valley") while France's Agnes Varda will premiere a new autobiographical documentary out of competition.

### 'Co-existence with Netflix'

After winning the Golden Lion top prize at the Venice film festival in September with "Roma", Netflix will enter the fray in Berlin for the first time with "Elisa and Marcela" by Spain's Isabel Coixet. Unlike Cannes, which has been at loggerheads with the streaming giant, the Berlinale sees scope for cooperation. "It's important that big, A-list festi-



Outgoing Berlinale director Dieter Kosslick poses with Berlinale paraphernalia before giving a press conference in Berlin to present the program of the 69th Berlin film festival. This will be Kosslick's last Berlinale as Director.



Workers put final hands on a banner installation depicting the Berlinale bear, on the Berlinale Palast facade, five days ahead of the film festival opening in Berlin. — AFP photos

Nearly 400 movies from around the world will be presented, with 17 vying for the prestigious Golden Bear top prize. Among the contenders, seven of the pictures or 41 percent were made by women—a Berlinale record and a milestone for an A-list festival. In comparison Cannes, which has been roiled by calls for more diversity, only managed 14 percent last year and Venice just under five percent.

"The debates of the last year opened our eyes and when your eyes are open, you make different decisions," Kosslick told AFP, referring to the #MeToo controversy over sexual misconduct and the #TimesUp movement against gender discrimination in the entertainment indus-

vals keep fighting for cinema," Kosslick said.

"Now it's about finding ways of co-existence, just like film and television did. But we have to find ways of protecting productions so that they can run in cinemas first and only then be streamed. I think that will work itself out in a big debate in Europe over the next three or four years." Other program highlights include acclaimed French director Francois Ozon presenting the drama "By the Grace of God" based on real-life cases of sex abuse allegedly committed by a French priest.

A cardinal, Philippe Barbarin, is currently on trial in Lyon on charges he covered up the assaults. German-born actress Diane Kruger and Britain's Martin Freeman are expected for the premiere of their Israeli spy thriller "The Operative" by director Yuval Adler. And Indian superstars Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt are to commandeer the red carpet for the premiere of "Gully Boy" by Zoya Akhtar, one of the few big-budget woman directors in Bollywood. The movie is inspired by a true story about street rappers.—AFP



Children play in the Peppa Pig World of Play indoor theme park in Shanghai. — AFP photos



A Peppa Pig figure seen on the side of a Ferrari 488 parked outside an office building in Beijing.



A billboard of Peppa Pig displayed at a toy store in Beijing.

## 'Gangster' Peppa back in China's good graces in Year of the Pig

Roasted as a subversive symbol and chopped from a video streaming website in China, it seemed Peppa Pig, the loveable but imperious British cartoon character, faced a bleak future in the Communist-led country. But her popularity has risen unabated, and now just months after state media slammed her as an emblem of the counterculture, she is playing a starring role as the country ushers in the Year of the Pig on Tuesday.

A new film titled "Peppa Pig Celebrates Chinese New Year" is being released on the first day of the holiday. The movie shows Peppa celebrating Lunar New Year with two new friends—"Jiaozi" (dumpling) and "Tang yuan" (glutinous rice ball) — named after popular local delicacies. The animation, which follows the daily adventures of a bright pink piglet, her brother George and her parents, is hugely popular with Chinese children.

Last year, five-year-old twins Mi Ai and Mi Ni made a video asking to meet Queen Elizabeth II after seeing their porcine heroine visit the monarch in an episode. The clip garnered more than nine million views and made such an impact that the pair were invited for tea by the British ambassador to Beijing and promised a tour of Buckingham Palace.

"It is really fun and the language is easy to understand", their mother, Bella Zhang, said of the girls' obsession with the show. She added that the series was popular with Chinese parents because it teaches "the importance of love and cooperation". The cartoon's focus on family values has resonated with Chinese parents who strictly monitor their children's TV time, agreed Li Xin as she bought a Peppa toy for her four-year-old at a Beijing store.

### Billions of views

Peppa Pig first broadcast in China in 2015 but last May some 30,000 clips of the cartoon were removed from a popular video streaming site, following criticism from state media. Papers affiliated to the Communist Party wrote harsh columns about Peppa Pig being hijacked by gangsters and subversives to create videos that reject mainstream values. Memes featuring the beloved children's character had also started to take on dark undertones at the time, occasionally veering into violent or pornographic territory.

"No matter how gangster Peppa Pig becomes, it cannot be allowed to destroy children's youth [or] break rules," The People's Daily said in an editorial last April. The shows have been watched around 60 billion times on the country's largest video streaming sites, including Tencent Video and iQiyi, since it first launched in China, said Jamie MacEwan from British TV analysts Enders. "This figure is up from 24.5 billion by May 2017, showing how China's appetite for Peppa has only increased," MacEwan told AFP.

### Who is Peppa?

Now Entertainment One—the Canadian media company that currently produces the series—is banking on her popularity translating to the big screen. A trailer for the movie, direct-



A woman walks past a Peppa Pig pop-up shop in the Yu Yuan gardens, a popular tourist spot, in Shanghai.

ed by Chinese film-maker Zhang Dapeng, has gone viral with the hashtag "Who is Peppa" being viewed more than 1.6 billion times on China's Twitter-like Weibo, a spokeswoman for Alibaba Pictures Group told AFP.

The promotional clip shows a rural villager's quest to find out what his city-dwelling grandson wants when he asks for "Pei Qi"—Mandarin for Peppa Pig—in a bid to create the perfect Chinese New Year gift in time for the boy's annual visit. The trailer struck a chord with Chinese audiences because it "showcases the same values highlighted in the movie—family, reunion, harmony and love", Zhang wrote on Weibo.

The film has already earned 12 million yuan in presale tickets. In a country where the pig is a symbol of wealth, Peppa merchandise is in high demand. There are even themed attractions—Peppa Pig World of Play opened in Shanghai in 2018 with another set to open in Beijing this year. But the success of the Peppa brand has also brought headaches for the cartoon's creators. Copycat merchandise—from cookies to pencil cases—can be easily found in corner stores in Chinese cities.

A spokesman for Entertainment One told AFP that in the last year more than half a million fake Peppa Pig items were seized and tens of thousands of online sale posts taken down. He added: "In China, Entertainment One has a dedicated team working on this ongoing issue and have already successfully dealt with many infringements." —AFP



Police walk past a Peppa Pig figure on a wall outside the Yu Yuan gardens.



This picture shows Peppa Pig toys at a toy store in Beijing.

## TV drama stirs debate over S Korea's cutthroat education culture

It was created as a biting satire of South Korea's notoriously competitive education system, but the country's most popular cable TV drama has inspired some fans to ignore its warnings and instead double down on their pursuit of success.

version of luxury residential community in Seoul's suburbs, but is also a nod to the acronym "SKY," which refers to South Korea's top three universities: Seoul National University, Korea University and Yonsei University. It's the most-watched drama ever to air on South Korean cable networks, according to Nielsen Korea, and has found a wide following in China.

As the series came to an end this week, however, there were signs the show has led some South Koreans adopt some of the more intense educational measures the creators intended to criticize. Sales of the "studycube", a 2.5 million won wooden closet less than one square meter in size where students can hide themselves away to focus on their homework, for example, have soared eight-fold after it was featured in the show, according to the company which makes it.

"I saw the studycube on 'SKY Castle' and bought it of my own will to create a suitable studying environment for me," said 16-year-old Lee Do-gyeong, who is hoping to be accepted to one of Seoul's top veterinary medicine programs. Demand for specialized university entrance coaches has also increased, after the show depicted a university admissions coordinator going beyond school records to guide everything from sleeping patterns to friendships.

Lee Man-ki, director of Uway Institute of Educational Evolution, plans to increase the number of courses for aspiring college prep consultants by 50 percent. All of this runs contrary to what the

show's creators intended. "SKY Castle" chief producer Kim Ji-youn said. "This news of a flood of orders for studycube or people eagerly searching for study coordinators are what the script writer wanted to avoid the most," she said. "The script writer, who also went through her child's university admissions process, wanted to give the audience awareness of excessive education fever."

### Reading in the toilet

Studycubes sparked debate when they first appeared in South Korea seven years ago, and their appearance in "SKY Castle" led to fresh questions over the country's high-pressure education culture. Lee Do-gyeong, the high school student, said she was looking forward to studying in cube's sound-proof seclusion, but she acknowledged that if parents forced their children to use the room it could be "nothing more than a rice chest," a reference to an infamous incident where an 18th Century Korean prince was locked away in a rice chest to die.

Choi Ki-ju, the chief executive officer of studycube maker EMOK, said seclusion can help students focus without distractions. One customer compared using the studycube to reading in the toilet, Choi said. "This is simply accurate, don't we concentrate better when we read books in the toilet?" he said.

### Life will get easier

South Korea's expenditure on educational institutions is around 5.8 percent of the country's GDP,

one of the highest among OECD countries, and nearly half of tertiary education expenditure is funded by households, compared with an OECD average of 22 percent, the report added. Three-quarters of students said they expect to complete university education, above the OECD average of 44 percent.

South Korea's education ministry in late January announced a plan to promote employment of high school graduates, saying the prevailing perception of university enrolment as the only way to success has created excessive competition and an overheated private education industry. The ministry wants to reach a 60 percent employment rate of vocational high school students by 2022, aiming to reduce unemployment of college graduates as well as labor shortages in smaller businesses that university graduates turn their noses up at.

Pressure at school and worries about jobs are seen as major contributors to South Korea's high youth suicide rate. "Even though (SKY Castle) may be extreme, it is still worth it to enter the top universities," said Kwon Seung-ok, a mother who said the show inspired her to hire a university consultant for her daughter ahead of entrance exams this year. "That will lead to better opportunities and better employment. Life will definitely get easier." —Reuters



Parents pray for their children's success in the college entrance examinations at a Buddhist temple in Seoul, South Korea. — Reuters

"SKY Castle" follows several ambitious families as their drive to send their children to the country's best universities and secure lucrative jobs leads to identity fraud, suicide and murder.

The show's name comes from a fictionalized

Lifestyle | Awards



Director Alfonso Cuarón poses with the award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Feature Film for "Roma" in the press room during the 71st Annual Directors Guild of America (DGA) Awards at the Ray Dolby Ballroom in Hollywood.



Director and actor Bill Hader poses with the award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Comedy Series for Barry, "Chapter One: Make Your Mark."



Director Bo Burnham poses with the award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in First-Time Feature Film for "Eighth Grade."



Director Russell Norman poses with the award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Reality Programs for The Final Table, "Japan."

# CUARON ON PATH TO OSCAR VICTORY AFTER DGA WIN



Director and actor Ben Stiller poses with the award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Movies for Television and Limited Series for "Escape at Dannemora."



Lifetime Achievement Award in Television recipient director Don Mischer.



Franklin J. Schaffner Achievement Award recipient Mimi Deaton

Mexican filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón on Saturday scooped the Directors Guild of America (DGA) award for "Roma"—a strong indicator he will be named best director at the Oscars in three weeks' time. "Roma," a highly personal ode to Cuarón's own childhood in 1970s Mexico City, is nominated for 10 Academy Awards, including best director. Cuarón, who won the same accolade for "Gravity" in 2014, thanked stars Yalitza Aparicio and Marina de Tariva, along with the rest of the cast for bringing a memory to life.

"Thank Libo [the domestic worker who inspired the film], my mother and my country, the real architect of 'Roma,'" he added. In a previous speech upon being presented as a nominee, Cuarón highlighted that there are over 70 million domestic workers in the world—not including children. "Roma was the story of one of them," he said. "When we villainize them, demonize them, calling them criminals and rapist, we diminish ourselves ... this is not about politics, this is about humanity," he added, referring to US President Donald Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric.

Cuarón received the top prize on Saturday from compatriot Guillermo del Toro, who won last year for "The Shape of Water." Speaking to AFP, Del Toro said the film was "absolutely superb, perfect and very complicated." Cuarón beat out Spike Lee ("BlacKkKlansman"), Adam McKay ("Vice"), Peter Farrelly ("Green Book") and Bradley Cooper ("A Star is Born"). He is the second director to be awarded the prize for a foreign language film: Ang Lee won in 2000 for "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon."

Elsewhere, Bo Burnham ("Eighth Grade") won the award for first-time feature—an award that was widely expected to go to Cooper. "A Star is Born" started the awards season as a hot favorite, but the anticipated success has not materialized. The DGA short list is considered an Oscars bellwether. Last year's DGA winner, Guillermo del Toro ("The Shape of Water"), went on to win the same prize at the Oscars and the film took best picture honors.

Hollywood's long awards season has often proved contradictory and inconsistent this year. The Screen Actors Guild (SAG), many of whose voters are also members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, last month selected musical "Bohemian Rhapsody" for its top award. But "Roma" and British historical comedy "The Favourite," which also has 10 Oscar nominations, were not among the SAG choices.

The Producers Guild, also a reliable bellwether of

## Nominee Winners



Director and actor Bradley Cooper poses with the Nomination Medallion.



Director Adam McKay poses with the Nomination Medallion.



Director Spike Lee poses with the Nomination Medallion.

Oscar success, in January chose 1960s road trip movie "Green Book" as its top movie. The Directors Guild also handed out prizes for television directing, with Adam McKay chosen for corporate family drama series "Succession," Bill Hader for comedy series "Barry," and Ben Stiller for limited TV series for "Escape at Dannemora." —Agencies



Director Peter Farrelly poses with the Nomination Medallion.



Cast of 'Campeones' (Champions) receive the best film award.



Spanish film director Javier Fesser (3rd right) poses with part of the team of 'Campeones' (Champions) after being awarded three Goyas, at the 33rd Goya awards ceremony in Seville. — AFP photos



Spanish film director Rodrigo Sorogoyen receives the best direction award for 'El reino' (The realm).



Spanish actress Susi Sanchez poses with the best actress award for her role in 'La enfermedad del Domingo' (Sunday's illness).

# 'Roma' wins best Latin American film award at Spain's Goyas

Mexican film "Roma", which is tipped for Oscars glory, was Saturday named best Latin American picture at the Goyas, the main Spanish film awards held in Seville. Shot in black and white by Academy Award-winning filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón, "Roma" has already won the Golden Lion at Venice, two Golden Globes and four awards at the Critics' Choice Awards.

Set in Mexico City in the 1970s, it has 10 nominations for the 91st Academy Awards to be held in Hollywood on

February 24. The 33rd Goya Awards' best picture went to "Campeones" (Champions), by director Javier Fesser, Spain's most successful film last year.

Rodrigo Sorogoyen took the best director award for his political thriller "El Reino" (The Realm) and the best actor gong went to Antonio de la Torre in the same film, while Susi Sanchez took the best actress award for her role in "La enfermedad del domingo" (Sunday's Illness). —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

# Bollywood film hailed for centering on lesbian romance

A Bollywood movie about a family accepting their daughter as gay was hailed on Friday for pushing the boundaries of cinema in socially conservative India. It comes after the country's Supreme Court scrapped a colonial-era ban on homosexuality in September, sparking wild celebrations amongst India's LGBT community. "Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga" (How I Felt When I Saw A Girl) is being lauded as the first mainstream Indian film to show parents dealing with their daughter being in a same-sex relationship.

"I can't believe what I saw," prominent LGBT activist Harish Iyer wrote on Twitter. "While people were waiting to find the right time and day and age for making a film like this, @VVCFilms actually went ahead and made it," he added. The Hindi-language drama, which was released nationwide on Friday, sees veteran actor Anil Kapoor star alongside his daughter Sonam Kapoor.

Kapoor, 62, plays the role of a father in a family that is eagerly trying to get his daughter Sweetie-played by Sonam Kapoor-married. She is in love with a woman though and the movie centres on her grappling with how to tell her family while

fearing they won't accept the relationship. "Looks like such a beautiful and heartfelt film... more power for pushing boundaries," filmmaker Karan Johar posted on Twitter.

"Such a difficult subject handled with so much dignity n restraint... wishing All the very best to its cast n crew!! Its an important film first of its kind..." tweeted director Farah Khan. Mumbai-based Bollywood doesn't have a good track record when it comes to portraying homosexuality. Many movies over the years have even mocked gay characters, sometimes making them the target of jokes. But several films have dealt with the subject sensitively, such as "Kapoor and Sons" and "Aligarh". "Fire" was widely considered to be the first mainstream Hindi movie to feature a gay relationship.

**Cinemas attacked**

The film centered on two women in unhappy marriages who have a sexual relationship. When the movie was released in India in 1998 Hindu extremists attacked cinemas showing it. Shelly Chopra Dhar, the director of "Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga", told AFP she hoped her movie

would help fight prejudice. "We do hope that this (film) breaks paradigms for many people and we realise that the dignity of all human beings is exactly the same and (that) love is love," she said via a WhatsApp message.

The movie received a mixed response amongst critics, however. A Scroll.in review praised its "bold theme" but said it was "undercut by its timidity". Shubhra Gupta, writing in the Indian Express newspaper, lauded "a progressive film" but questioned why it showed women being free "only after getting male approval and help". Promoters kept the nature of the movie's romance under wraps for fear of putting off some audiences, but did release a few hints including the official hashtag #SetLoveFree.

The trailer released last month gave little away-it could have been any Bollywood romance for the most part-but did include a short clip of Sonam Kapoor's character holding hands with a woman. On Friday, adverts taken out in newspapers hinted more at what was to come with the headline: "Today is the day of acceptance". The actors themselves remained tight-lipped ahead of the film hitting screens, with Sonam Kapoor telling



Indian Bollywood actors Rajkumar Rao (left), Sonam Kapoor (second left), Juhu Chawla (second right) and Anil Kapoor (right) pose for a picture during the promotion of the upcoming Hindi film 'Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga' in Mumbai. — AFP

AFP simply: "It's about family and acceptance, for who the person is, for their dreams, caste, religion or sexuality, is so important".—AFP



## GNTO hosts tourism promotion festival at Avenues Mall, Kuwait

The German National Tourist Office (GNTO) held a successful brand activation event at the one stop travel shop Souk Safar located at one of Kuwait's most prestigious malls The Avenues in partnership with the German national carrier Lufthansa and Munich Airport to promote 'Destination Germany' and to inspire mall visitors for their upcoming spring vacation through typical German cultural experiences. Award-winning Munich Airport Germany's second busiest airport further promoted its non-stop connections with Kuwait Airways at the venue.

The two-day promotional event displayed an extensive line-up of diverse activities and exciting entertainment and was aimed at families and children, who were able to experience what 'Destination Germany' is all about. By showcasing a specially flown in traditional music band from Bavaria wearing the region's typical Lederhosen outfits, Kuwaiti mall visitors were wooed to Souk Safar and further got to sample German culinary delicacies like pretzels, which were handed out by promotional staff in typical Bavarian Dirndl dresses. Lufthansa and Munich Airport further enticed the audience with competitions and great promotional offers.

Designed to cement Germany's status as a year-round tourism destination, the eye-catching live family entertainment reflected the unique blend of deep-rooted traditions and high-tech modernity that 'Destination Germany' offers, embracing vibrant cities, great shopping facilities, unspoiled natural landscapes and historic sightseeing attractions. The well-attended event was officially inaugurated by the German Ambassador Karlfried Bergner who drew attention to Germany's great touristic diversity, which builds the basis of visitors' unforgettable holiday memories.

Karlfried Bergner, German Ambassador to Kuwait highlighted during his speech: "Germany is one of the preferred European destinations for Kuwaiti travelers, and we are proud to have established such strong tourism and trade links between our two countries. Germany is a fantastic place not just to visit, but also to study, to seek medical treatment and do business and we look forward to welcoming more Kuwaitis to our wonderful country!"

Recognizing the importance of the Kuwaiti market, Sigrid de Mazieres, Director for the Gulf countries at the German National Tourist Office (GNTO), an affiliate of the German National Tourist Board (GNTB), commented: "Kuwait is one of Germany's key source markets within the GCC and travelers can enjoy great travel connections from Kuwait to our country. We are thrilled to raise awareness on what Germany has to offer together with our valued partners and hope to be able to inspire travelers to experience our beautiful country during the upcoming spring season."

The GCC is one of the top 15 source markets for Germany and the third largest non-European source market, after China and USA. In 2016, Germany ranked top among GCC travelers, even ahead of UK, Turkey and France. International visitor numbers in 2017 showed record results and will presumably be exceeded in 2018, further exemplifying Germany's attractiveness as a destination of choice for tourists worldwide. According to the Federal Statistical Office, there were 83.9 million international overnight stays recorded in accommodation establishments with at least ten beds. For the eight consecutive year, the number of visitors to Germany in 2017 reached record levels, showing a 3.6% increase overall to 2016.



## Watch Hollywood's biggest stars, scandals on OSN

This February, OSN, the region's leading entertainment network, brings you the real stories of some of the most talked about names in the world. Gear up for special documentaries on legends like Whitney, along with the much talked about Surviving R. Kelly and The Harvey Weinstein Scandal. There is also an incredible line up of new shows including The Passage and Sunshine Kings coupled with returning favourites such as Last Week Tonight with John Oliver and new seasons of Star and The Voice.

Below is our top eight on OSN this February. The full grid of exclusive movie premieres as well as, top-kids, factual, lifestyle and entertainment content for the month is enclosed.

**Must-See Documentaries**

**Whitney**

Filmmaker Kevin Macdonald examines the life and career of singer Whitney Houston. Featuring never-before-seen archival footage, exclusive recordings, rare performances and interviews with the people who knew her best. The documentary airs just two days before the seventh anniversary of her death. Premieres February 9, 2019, 8pm (KSA) on OSN First HD Home of HBO.

**Surviving R. Kelly**

Premiering on Wednesday 6 February, midnight (KSA), on Crime+Investigation, Surviving R. Kelly delves behind one of the biggest scandals in music to date - with women emerging from the shadows and uniting their voices to share their stories of abuse at the hands of the musician. The premiere episode in the six-part

series explores R. Kelly's rise to fame and power as an R&B icon, and his relationships with younger singers and dancers.

**The Harvey Weinstein Scandal**

The documentary takes a deep look inside Hollywood and the abuse by powerful men in the industry and includes exclusive interviews with people who knew Weinstein, women who have come face-to-face with him and exclusive re-enactment scenes. Premieres February 6, 2019, 1am (KSA), on Crime+Investigation.

**Brand New TV show recommendations**

**The Passage, season 1**

When a botched US government experiment turns a group of death row inmates into highly infectious vampires, an orphan girl might be the only person able to stop the ensuing crisis. Premieres February 9, 2019, 10pm (KSA), on OSN Series First HD.

**Sunshine Kings, season 1**

Sunshine Kings follows the life of Jacob, a young, aspiring South Sudanese-Australian



basketball player who is on the cusp of being picked up by scouts for the US College League. Premieres February 10, 2019, 9pm (KSA), on OSN First HD Home of HBO.

**New Seasons**

**Star, season 3**

Lee Daniel's Star follows three young singers, Star Davis (Jude Demorest), Simone Davis (Brittany O'Grady), and Alex Crane (Ryan Destiny) through their successes and failures in the cutthroat music industry. Premieres February 1, 2019, 10pm (KSA), exclusively on OSN Series First HD.

**The Voice, season 16**

Four-time Emmy winning talent show, The Voice, returns for its 16th season with Blake Shelton, Adam Levine, John Legend and Kelly Clarkson taking their places in the judge's chairs. The four superstar coaches search for the best voices in the US, and mentor the fledgling singers as America decides which will be worthy of the grand prize. Premieres February 26, 2019, 6pm (KSA), exclusively on OSN Series First HD.

**Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, season 6**

Former Daily Show host and correspondent John Oliver brings his unique brand of clever quick wit to this weekly news satire show. Premieres February 18, 2019, 8.30pm (KSA) on OSN First HD Home of HBO.

OSN customers can also watch and catch up on their favourites anytime, anywhere and on any device with OSN Play.

## OMEGA HOSTS STAR-STUDDED BOB RUN IN ST. MORITZ



An impressive line-up of local and international stars enjoyed the ultimate high-speed experience at OMEGA's Celebrity Bob Run in St. Moritz. Bob is fast - and not for the faint-hearted, but OMEGA's celebrity guests were up for the challenge and enjoyed every pulse-racing moment as they sped down the 1,722m track in St. Moritz.

The high-profile line-up included: Italian fashion entrepreneur Chiara Ferragni; actor and director Paul Wesley - 'Vampire Diaries' being his most well-known role; Spanish actor Miguel Bernardeau from the Netflix Series 'Elite' - and from Germany TV host Thore Schlermann and his girlfriend Jana Julie Kilka, as well as model Franziska Knuppe. The home-grown contingent included actress Zo' Pastelle

Holthuijzen, model Steven Epprecht; and model and TV host Christa Rigozzi Marchese.

The celebrities, who were in the safe hands of bob professionals as they raced downhill, got to experience the ultimate adrenalin rush and a taste of Olympic Games glory as they crossed the finish line. As Official Timekeeper of the Olympic Games and the International Bobsleigh and Skeleton Federation, OMEGA has recorded the speeds of top-level bob teams at multiple Winter Olympic Games and IBSF World Cup events.

Though the pace was gentler for OMEGA's celebrity guests, the venue was world class. The prestigious Olympia Run was the Bob venue at the 1928 and 1948 Olympic Games. As well as being the oldest bob run in the world, Olympia in St. Moritz is the only run that is naturally refrigerated.



# Once red-hot smartphone market sees cooler trend

**SAN FRANCISCO:** The smartphone market is down but not out, with high prices and other factors combining to chill what had previously been a red-hot sector. Fresh surveys show global sales had their worst contraction ever in 2018, and the outlook for 2019 isn't much better. Still, analysts don't see the sun setting any time soon on the smartphone era, seen as a must-have device for many people around the world. "They don't have a viable replacement yet," independent Silicon Valley analyst Rob Enderle said of the smartphone. "There is always the possibility to go to wearables or head-mounted displays, but none of those have emerged as a real threat."

Worldwide handset volumes declined 4.1 percent in 2018 to a total of 1.4 billion units shipped for the full year, according to research firm IDC, which sees a potential for further declines this year. Another market tracker, Gartner, said its research suggested some stabilization in the smartphone market at the end of last year, said analyst Werner Goertz. "Mobile phones are here to stay," Goertz said, while suggesting that consumers may be waiting for some devices with new features. "Foldable phones would represent a really nice disruptive feature," he said.

Analysts pointed out that other tech products such as personal computers have seen similar ebbs and flows. "Markets will always have slow moments when companies have to spend more on marketing money to get people to go out and buy stuff," Enderle said. He added that some consumers are holding off on replacing their devices amid price hikes for premium devices like Apple's iPhone.

During a recent earnings call, Apple

chief executive Tim Cook agreed that people were holding onto their iPhones longer. Cook contended that another reason for slower iPhone sales was that telecom carriers were cutting subsidies of handsets tied to service contracts, meaning customers were faced with paying full price of \$1,000 or more for high-end models. "People don't want to spend another thousand bucks to replace something that isn't broken," analyst Enderle maintained. "In emerging markets you can't get people to pay a quarter of their monthly income for a phone; they are not giving up food for texting."

In an unusual move, Apple lowered prices in some emerging markets to offset the effects of a strong US dollar on local pocketbooks. Cook said that in January, in some locations and for some products, Apple "absorbed part of the foreign currency move" to "get close or perhaps right on" prices in those respective markets a year ago. "So yes, I do think that price is a factor," Cook said.

Nonetheless, the latest data suggests the days of red-hot smartphone growth are over and that sluggish growth or contraction is likely in many saturated markets. Apple recently reported a rare drop in revenue in the fourth quarter South Korea's Samsung, the largest smartphone maker, reported a slump in fourth-quarter net profits, blaming a drop in demand for its key products. "Globally the smartphone market is a mess right now," said IDC analyst Ryan Reith. "Outside of a handful of high-growth markets like India, Indonesia, (South) Korea and Vietnam, we did not see a lot of positive activity in 2018."

Reith noted that along with consumers waiting longer to replace their phones and frustration around the high cost of premi-



**NICE:** An elderly man looks at his smartphone as he stands by the Mediterranean Sea near the Promenade des Anglais in this French Riviera city yesterday. — AFP

um devices, there was political and economic uncertainty. The Chinese market, which accounts for roughly 30 percent of smartphone sales, was especially hard hit with a 10 percent drop, according to IDC's survey. However, Chinese smartphone mak-

ers such as Huawei, Oppo, and Xiaomi defied the trend and ended the year with gains, according to Counterpoint Research.

This year, smartphone makers will likely entice customers to upgrade devices with innovations such as superfast 5G network

connectivity and foldable screens, according to Counterpoint associate director Tarun Pathak. Leading smartphone maker Samsung is expected to show off a smartphone with a foldable screen at an event here in February. — AFP

## Trump pushes withdrawal from 'endless' wars

**WASHINGTON:** Pushing back against Republican opposition, US President Donald Trump reaffirmed his determination to pull US troops out of "endless wars" in Syria and Afghanistan, in an interview that aired Sunday. But he said they would stay in Iraq to watch Iran. Trump cited the high cost in blood and money after years of fighting in Afghanistan, in arguing for a US withdrawal from the place where the 9/11 attacks were hatched.

"It's time," he said in the interview with CBS's "Face the Nation." "And we'll see what happens with the Taliban. They want peace. They're tired. Everybody's

tired." Trump's comments come in the face of warnings by US intelligence chiefs that a hasty US withdrawal from Afghanistan and Syria could allow a resurgence by Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group.

On Thursday, the US Senate voted overwhelmingly for a measure sponsored by Mitch McConnell, the majority leader of Trump's Republican party, warning against a "precipitous withdrawal" from either country. But Trump appeared unmoved by the rare Republican pushback, noting that his promises to bring US troops home was "a big part" of the reason he was elected. US officials have been holding talks in Qatar with the Taliban on a framework for peace negotiations, raising prospects for a breakthrough in the 17-year-old conflict.

On Syria, Trump said the 2,000 US troops in the country to assist local forces would leave "in a matter of time" but cited the need to protect Israel "and other things that we have" for slowing down - after initially announcing an immediate pullout. He said he will soon

be announcing the recapture of "100 percent of the caliphate" once claimed by the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria. "We're at 99 percent right now. We'll be at 100," said the president, who was expected to make the announcement during his annual State of the Union address on Tuesday.

### 'Pockets of something'

In a report to Congress last week, US intelligence leaders warned that IS still commands thousands of fighters in Iraq and Syria, and they could easily spring back in the absence of US forces. Trump responded by rebuking as "naive" and "wrong" his intelligence chiefs, who also had appeared to contradict him on Iran and North Korea.

In the CBS interview, he played down the danger of an extremist resurgence but said "we'll come back if we have to". "You're going to always have pockets of something," he said. "But you're not going to keep armies there because you have a few people. Or you even have fairly reasonable numbers of people."

### Watching Iran

However, the United States will not give up its bases in Iraq, he said. "We spent a fortune on building this incredible base. We might as well keep it. And one of the reasons I want to keep it is because I want to be looking a little bit at Iran because Iran is a real problem," he said. The US military presence in Iraq, he said, is "perfectly situated for looking at all over different parts of the troubled Middle East." "We're going to keep watching and we're going to keep seeing and if there's trouble, if somebody is looking to do nuclear weapons or other things, we're going to know it before they do," he said.

In Afghanistan, Trump said he would leave behind intelligence elements - "and if I see nests forming, I'll do something about it". "We got to get out of these endless wars and bring our folks back home," he said at another point. "Now, that doesn't mean we're not going to be watching with intelligence. We're going to be watching, and watching closely." — AFP

## Duterte double sparks frenzy...

Continued from Page 1

While most did not mind the stunt, one woman who identified herself as Linda found it "impolite". "Coming

in here to make a scene - our Duterte is not like that," she told AFP. The Philippine president has repeatedly attacked the Church since taking office in 2016, accusing the Catholic clergy of sexual abuse. And the Church has been one of Duterte's most outspoken critics, particularly over alleged human rights abuses during his deadly anti-narcotics campaign. Hong Kong is home to around 200,000 Filipinos, mostly women working as domestic helpers. —AFP

defused three large WWII bombs, two of which were found at a site in the busy Wanchai district where work was underway to build a new metro railway station.

Unexploded wartime bombs or grenades are frequently found by hikers or construction workers in the southern Chinese city, which was the scene of fierce fighting between Japanese and British allied forces in 1941. The then-British colony was heavily bombed by US and allied forces after the city fell to the Japanese imperial forces. —AFP

hosting a cleric of violence and terrorism... and those who host the pope and the Al-Azhar sheikh for a dialogue of love and communication".

The UAE, along with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt, cut all ties with Doha in June 2017 over allegations it supports extremists. The UAE prides itself on its religious tolerance and cultural diversity. It has eight Catholic churches. Oman, Kuwait and Yemen each have four.

Qatar and Bahrain have one each, while ultraconservative Sunni powerhouse Saudi Arabia bans all non-Muslim places of worship. The UAE ambassador to Washington, Yousef Al-Otaiba, wrote in an op-ed in Politico magazine yesterday that the pontiff's visit sends a signal of co-existence and respect in the face of the "menace of extremism" across the Middle East.

The UAE has however been criticized by rights groups for its involvement in a bloody Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen, where an estimated 10,000 people have been killed in four years of war. Millions of Yemenis face imminent starvation, according to the UN. Rights groups have also slammed the Gulf state for upholding a 10-year prison term against activist Ahmed Mansoor on Dec 31 - two weeks after the UAE declared 2019 the "Year of Tolerance".

"Despite its assertions about tolerance, the UAE government has demonstrated no real interest in improving its human rights record," Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch, said yesterday. "But the UAE has shown how sensitive it is to its image on the global stage, and Pope Francis should use his visit to press UAE leaders to meet their human rights obligations at home and abroad." — Agencies

## Two groups of MPs to meet Amir today...

Continued from Page 1

The speaker also delivered a message from the Amir to all MPs that no one should cite the Amir in any statement without obtaining a permit from the Diwan. He singled out Hayef, who reportedly quoted HH the Amir as giving a green light to a general amnesty law that is expected to include a number of ex-MPs and opposition activists who have been handed heavy jail terms for either storming the National Assembly building in 2011 or for writing comments on social media deemed offensive.

Hayef also revealed that opposition MPs had convinced their colleagues MPs Mohammad Al-Mutair and Shuaib Al-Muwaizri not to file to grill the prime minister as a goodwill gesture against resolving key outstanding issues. He said that they had received assurances from the Assembly speaker and the government to resolve three issues: The return of revoked citizenships of several opposition members, help in issuing a general pardon, and retaining the Assembly memberships of Jamaan Al-Harbash and Waleed Al-Tabtabaei, which have already been revoked.

## Israel begins construction of...

Continued from Page 1

But the premier, who is also defense minister, yesterday pledged the upcoming polls would not affect security decisions. "If the quiet is not maintained in Gaza, we will make the decisions even in the elections period and will not hesitate to act," he said.

Palestinians have for nearly a year gathered at least weekly along the Gaza border for often-violent protests. They want to be able to return to the homes their families fled in the war surrounding Israel's creation in 1948, and are calling for an end to the Jewish state's blockade of Gaza. At least 246 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in Gaza since March 30, the majority during border protests but also by tank fire and airstrikes. Two Israeli soldiers have been killed over the same period.

Meanwhile, a giant billboard of a smiling US President Donald Trump shaking hands with Netanyahu loomed over a main entrance to Tel Aviv yesterday, part of the Israeli leader's re-election campaign. Trump is popular in

Hayef said that by revoking the membership of Harbash and Tabtabaei, the deal has ended. He also refuted a number of statements made by Ghanem during a television interview late Thursday. The lawmaker said that after the membership of the two MPs had been officially revoked, a number of opposition MPs requested a meeting with HH the Amir to urge a general pardon.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Banking Association said yesterday that local banks will not allow the passage of any suspicious operation in implementation of the anti-money laundering and terror financing laws and other related legislation. The association said in a statement that banks deal within the framework of the law with regards to any suspicious transaction and directly report such cases to the intelligence financial unit of the finance ministry.

It said the unit is legally responsible to receive such complaints and analyze them before referring serious cases to the public prosecution for a criminal investigation. The statement was issued in response to claims made on Thursday by MP Riyadh Al-Adasani that some local banks have reported some cases of inflated bank deposits belonging to some MPs. Adasani also threatened he will file to grill the finance minister if no action was taken against them or if any attempt was made to shelve the investigation like what happened with a previous similar case in 2008.

Israel because of his tough policies towards the Palestinians and Iran and his transfer last May of the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which he recognized as Israel's capital in a break from long-standing US policy.

"Netanyahu. In another league," read the Hebrew-language billboard, in a swipe at the caliber of the veteran prime minister's opponents in the April 9 national election. A spokesman for Netanyahu's right-wing Likud party, whose logo adorns the sign over Tel Aviv's busy Ayalon highway, did not immediately respond to a Reuters query on whether the White House had authorized it to use the photograph. Photos of the billboard have been trending on social media networks.

Netanyahu is favorite to win the election but opinion polls show one of his toughest challengers, former general Benny Gantz, making gains. The prime minister is facing possible charges in three graft cases. He denies any wrongdoing and has called the investigations a witch-hunt. On Friday, Israel's attorney general said there was no legal reason to prevent him from announcing, before the election, any intention to indict Netanyahu on corruption charges should he decide such a move was warranted. Formal indictment in court would depend on pretrial hearings, likely to be held only after the poll. — Agencies

## Francis becomes first pope to visit...

Continued from Page 1

Around 135,000 have secured precious tickets to tomorrow's mass at Zayed Sports City Stadium. Yesterday morning, hundreds of Catholics queued in drizzling rain outside St. Joseph's Cathedral in Abu Dhabi to get their passes. "I think the pope coming really opens doors for conversations about tolerance that the whole world needs to hear," said Collins Cochet Ryan, a 39-year-old expectant mother from the US.

For Indian Doris D'Souza, who lives in Goa, Pope Francis's trip to the UAE was not to be missed. "Since I came to know about the pope's visit to Abu Dhabi, we jumped (at) the opportunity to be witness." The UAE capital's main streets and those leading to St. Joseph's Cathedral - which the pope is set to visit tomorrow - were lined with Vatican City flags and banners of the interreligious meeting.

UAE minister of state for foreign affairs Anwar Gargash extended an official welcome to Pope Francis yesterday. "It is a visit that carries great humanitarian value, and the UAE adds a new (chapter) in the history of fraternity and tolerance," he tweeted. He took an apparent jab at Qatar, which hosts Islamist cleric Youssef Al-Qardawi and is engaged in a bitter standoff with its Gulf rivals. Gargash pointed out the difference "between those



Sports

# Harden scores 43 in Rockets' win, Hawks hold off Suns

## Walker scores 37 as Hornets beat Bulls

**SALT LAKE CITY:** James Harden recorded his 19th 40-point game this season, and the Houston Rockets snapped a two-game slide with a 125-98 win over the Utah Jazz on Saturday at Salt Lake City. Harden stuffed the stat sheet with 43 points, 12 rebounds, six steals, five assists and four blocks. He finished 15 of 15 at the free-throw line and essentially carried the Rockets to their second win in four meetings with Utah this season while extending his streak of consecutive 30-point games to 26. Kenneth Faried added 16 points and 12 rebounds while Gerald Green (25 points) and Austin Rivers (16) combined for 41 points on 10-of-18 3-point shooting off the bench. The Rockets played without guard Chris Paul, who rested in the second game of a back-to-back. Donovan Mitchell tallied 26 points on 7-of-24 shooting for Utah, which had won 10 of 12. Four others scored in double figures, but the Jazz mustered only 36 percent shooting against the Rockets' scuffling defense. Rudy Gobert had 10 points and 13 boards. Derrick Favors blocked five shots.

**NUGGETS 107, TIMBERWOLVES 106**  
Nikola Jokic had 13 points, 16 rebounds and 10 assists for his ninth triple-double of the season, and Denver held on to beat Minnesota at Minneapolis. Malik Beasley scored 22 points, Will Barton finished with 20 points and Monte Morris had 17 points and 10 assists for Denver, which has won six straight. The result allowed Nuggets

coach Michael Malone to clinch the job as the coach of Team LeBron in the All-Star Game. Karl-Anthony Towns had 31 points and 12 rebounds, and Jerryd Bayless had 15 points and 10 assists for Minnesota.

**HAWKS 118, SUNS 112**  
John Collins scored 35 points, and Trae Young scored 17 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter to help visiting Atlanta down Phoenix. Collins was 13 of 20 from the floor and grabbed 16 rebounds — 10 on the offensive end. Young drained four 3-pointers and added seven rebounds and eight assists. Devin Booker scored 32 points to lead Phoenix, the third time he has scored 30-plus points in the last four games. Booker made four 3-pointers and added 10 assists and eight rebounds.

**MAVERICKS 111, CAVALIERS 98**  
Rookie Luka Doncic scored 35 points, including 18 in the first quarter, to lead short-handed Dallas to a road win over Cleveland. Doncic grabbed 11 rebounds and dished out six assists. Dallas dressed only 11 players after acquiring Kristaps Porzingis from the New York Knicks in a seven-player trade on Thursday. Jordan Clarkson led the Cavaliers with 19 points off the bench. Dallas outscored Cleveland 48-12 from 3-point range.

**WARRIORS 115, LAKERS 101**  
Andre Iguodala ignited a fourth-quarter runaway with



**SALT LAKE CITY:** Kenneth Faried #35 of the Houston Rockets shoots the ball against the Utah Jazz on Saturday at Vivint Smart Home Arena in Salt Lake City, Utah. — AFP

consecutive 3-pointers as Golden State broke open a tight game to beat LeBron James-less Los Angeles at Oakland, Calif. James was a late scratch after being unable to shake general body soreness that resulted from a 40-minute return to the Lakers' lineup Thursday after having missed 17 consecutive games with a groin injury. The soreness is not considered an aggravation of the groin injury, Lakers coach Luke Walton announced before the game. Klay Thompson led Golden State with 28 points while Kevin Durant (21 points, 11 assists) and DeMarcus Cousins (18 points, 10 rebounds) recorded double-doubles.

**SPURS 113, PELICANS 108**  
LaMarcus Aldridge led a balanced scoring attack with 25 points, and host San Antonio withstood a remarkable comeback attempt by New Orleans. Aldridge was joined in double figures by Marco Belinelli (17), Rudy Gay (17), DeMar DeRozan (13), Bryn Forbes (12) and Patty Mills (12) as the Spurs won their fifth in a row and completed a sweep of a four-game homestand. Frank Jackson scored 25, Jrue Holiday and Ian Clark added 15 each. Cheick Diallo had 13, Kenrich Williams had 12 and Darius Miller 11 to lead the Pelicans, who lost for the fifth time in six games. — Reuters

### NBA results/standings

Minnesota 106, Denver 107; San Antonio 113, New Orleans 108; Cleveland 98, Dallas 111; Miami 88, Indiana 95; Sacramento 115, Philadelphia 108; Phoenix 112, Atlanta 118; Utah 98, Houston 125; Charlotte 125, Chicago 118; Orlando 102, Brooklyn 89; Washington 115, Milwaukee 131; Golden State 115, LA Lakers 101; Detroit 101, LA Clippers 111.

Eastern Conference				Western Conference			
W	L	PCT	GB	W	L	PCT	GB
Milwaukee	38	13	0.745	Golden State	37	15	0.712
Toronto	37	16	0.698	Denver	37	15	0.712
Philadelphia	34	19	0.642	Oklahoma City	33	18	0.647
Boston	33	19	0.635	Portland	32	20	0.615
Indiana	33	19	0.635	San Antonio	32	22	0.593
Brooklyn	28	26	0.519	Houston	30	22	0.577
Charlotte	26	26	0.500	Utah	30	24	0.556
Miami	24	27	0.471	LA Clippers	29	24	0.547
Detroit	22	29	0.431	Sacramento	27	25	0.519
Washington	22	30	0.423	LA Lakers	27	26	0.509
Orlando	22	31	0.415	Minnesota	25	27	0.481
Atlanta	17	35	0.327	Dallas	24	28	0.462
Chicago	12	41	0.226	New Orleans	23	30	0.434
Cleveland	11	42	0.208	Memphis	20	33	0.377
New York	10	41	0.196	Phoenix	11	43	0.204

## Shiffrin set to shine, Vonn and Svindal bow out

**ARE:** US ski great Lindsey Vonn will try to throw her hurting body down a slope one last time before heading into retirement while Norwegian Aksel Lund Svindal is also ready to bow out at the Alpine world championships starting in Sweden tomorrow.

The farewells from two giants of the sport, their long careers garlanded with success and scarred by injuries, are high on a list of compelling storylines playing out over the next two-weeks in Are.

When it comes to winning, Austria's Marcel Hirscher and Vonn's team mate Mikaela Shiffrin will take some beating however. The World Cup's king and queen are as dominant as ever—Hirscher, 29, heading to Sweden with 10 wins this season while Shiffrin has racked up 13 and looks likely to be the stand-out skier of the championships.

Hirscher is on course for an eighth successive overall World Cup title and the reigning slalom and giant slalom world champion, and double Olympic gold medalist, also leads the standings in those disciplines.

Shiffrin, also a double Olympic gold medalist and now with 56 career wins, leads the women's overall, super-G, giant slalom and slalom World Cups. "She is in a really good place and in my opinion will come away from the World Championships with a lot of medals, at least three," said Bode Miller, the most successful male

U.S. skier of all time. If her dominance has become too predictable for some, Shiffrin is unrepentant as she heads to the resort where she took her first World Cup win in a slalom in 2012. "I heard many people say to this point that it's boring to watch these races if it's the same winner. For me, it's not boring," she said after winning a slalom in Maribor, Slovenia, on Saturday.

"Every race I'm fighting, I'm trying my hardest. There's always a new goal, always something to keep doing better."

**FOUR IN A ROW**  
Shiffrin won slalom gold at the 2017 St Moritz world championships, after victories in 2015 and 2013 and a likely fourth in a row would be unprecedented. And yet her surprise fourth place in the discipline at last year's Pyeongchang Olympics means nothing can be taken for granted.

The American should be in the thick of the action from tomorrow, with the women's super-G the opening race on the programme. Ester Ledecka, the Czech Olympic super-G champion who also won gold in snowboarding at Pyeongchang in an historic double, is another contender.

Vonn, who in 2010 became the first American woman to win Olympic downhill gold, announced on Friday that she will compete in the super-G and downhill before hanging up her racing skis for good at the age 34.

Training for the speed events starts on Monday and promises to be painful for the photogenic skier, who once dated professional golfer Tiger Woods and whose popular appeal transcends the sport.

"My body is broken beyond repair and it isn't letting



Lindsey Vonn

me have the final season I dreamed of. My body is screaming at me to STOP and it's time for me to listen," she said on Instagram last week.

Svindal, a double Olympic gold medalist and two times overall World Cup winner whose eight world championship medals include five golds between 2007-13, will also be pushing back the pain barrier. "When we're both done, I'm pretty sure there will be a hell of a party to celebrate," the 36-year-old Olympic downhill champion said on Instagram.

Sweden's 2018 Olympic slalom champion Andre Myhrer, 36, is also likely to be saying his goodbyes on home snow. Are will be hosting the biennial world championships for the third time, after 2007 and 1954.

The showcase men's downhill is on Saturday, Feb. 9, with the women's race on Sunday. The technical disciplines are in the second week. — Reuters

## Dominant NZ take Sydney Sevens men's and women's crowns

**SYDNEY:** New Zealand made it a double victory in the Rugby Sevens in Sydney yesterday, winning both the men's and the women's tournaments to top the overall standings. The All Blacks Sevens claimed their second title in the fourth leg of the season, comfortably beating the USA 21-5 in the men's final.

Earlier, the Black Ferns Sevens stamped their dominance in the women's competition when they beat arch-rivals Australia 34-10 in the final to extend their record 48-match unbeaten run. The Americans were looking to win their first men's gold medal this season after three silvers in the first three rounds, but were only able to score one try against the injury-hit Kiwis' three.

Two tries from Regan Ware and Sam Dickson—later awarded player of the final—took New Zealand to a 14-0 lead at half-time, with Tone Ng Shiu adding a third just after the break. The Eagles finally got on the scoreboard through Brett Thompson, but they were not able to overcome the deficit as New Zealand comfortably hung on for the victory.

England secured third place after defeating Fiji 19-17. The All Blacks Sevens' win means they are now joint



**SYDNEY:** Australia's Evania Pelite fends off New Zealand's Stacy Waaka (L) in the women's cup final in the Rugby Sevens tournament in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

leaders of the World Series standings with the USA on 76 points with six rounds to go.

The women were just as commanding in their final, with their win a sweet revenge after they were crushed 31-0 by the Australians in the Sydney final last year. World Rugby women's sevens player of the year Michaela Blyde scored a hat-trick while Stacey Waaka

put away two tries. Australia suffered a blow in the first-half when skipper Sharni Williams was yellow-carded, leaving the Kiwis to take advantage of their superior numbers and go into the break 17-5 after two tries.

Despite the loss, Australia's women climbed to joint-third on the overall standings behind New Zealand, the USA and Canada. — AFP

## Super Bowl records to fall as Patriots, Rams clash

**ATLANTA:** Tom Brady will chase an unprecedented sixth Super Bowl crown here as the New England Patriots face the Los Angeles Rams in a clash of the generations set to rewrite the NFL record books. Patriots star Brady, 41, will become the oldest quarterback ever to lift the title if he masterminds yet another championship in the latest milestone of a career that has shown no signs of flagging.

A win would see Brady become the only player in history to win six Super Bowls, an achievement which may never be beaten in an era of ever shorter NFL careers. A capacity crowd of 75,324 will pack Atlanta's futuristic Mercedes-Benz Stadium for the NFL spectacular, the biggest annual event on the US sporting calendar, which kicks off at 6.30pm (2330 GMT).

Grammy Award-winning band Maroon 5 will headline the traditional half-time concert, which comes after several performers reportedly turned down the opportunity to participate in protest at the NFL's treatment of activist former San Francisco quarter-back Colin Kaepernick. Kaepernick has been effectively frozen out of the NFL after his "take a knee" protests which led to a political firestorm in 2017.

On the field, Brady is bidding to lead the Patriots to the Vince Lombardi Trophy fully 17 years after orchestrating the team's first triumph back in 2002. "When you've been in the position I've been in, you just count your blessings every day," Brady said, who will be playing in a record ninth Super Bowl.

Records are also set to tumble in the event of a win by a youthful Rams team led by 24-year-old quarterback Jared Goff and coaching prodigy Sean McVay. McVay, only 33, will become the youngest head coach ever to win the Super Bowl if he manages to outwit Patriots counterpart Bill Belichick, who at 66 is twice McVay's age. Belichick, who has won five Super Bowls as head coach and two as an assistant, would become the oldest head coach to take the Lombardi Trophy with a win.

Belichick was in relaxed mood on Saturday as the Patriots players were given a day off training to visit the venue for today's game with family and friends. Belichick said there were no special plans for his eve-of-game team talk.

"Just us circling the wagons and playing for each other," he said. "We are playing a good team, and we are going to have to play our best game of the year."

The generational chasm that exists between Sunday's principal protagonists is highlighted by a cursory comparison of their respective biographies. When Brady inspired the Patriots to their first Super Bowl, Goff was seven years old.

Similarly, McVay was playing at quarterback for his high school football team when Belichick was in charge for New England's 2002 win.

The vast differences in experience between the rivals have prompted bookmakers to install the Patriots as favorites to win a sixth title, putting them level with the Pittsburgh Steelers as the most successful franchise in Super Bowl history.

Despite the experience gap, the Rams have drawn confidence from a free-scoring campaign that saw them emerge as one of the most exciting offenses in the league. The Rams also point to their victory in the NFC title game against New Orleans, where they battled through an ear-splitting maelstrom in the Superdome, as evidence of their maturity.

"Obviously they've played in a bunch of big games," Goff said of the Patriots. "But we were inexperienced against New Orleans and we put that one away." The Rams also boast Aaron Donald, named as the NFL's defensive player of the year on Saturday, after a league-leading 20.5 quarterback sacks in 2018. — AFP

## Sports

# Khawaja smacks ton as S Lanka chase massive 2nd Test total

## Sets Sri Lanka 516 to win second Test

CANBERRA: Usman Khawaja finally found form again to stroke a fine century yesterday and steer Australia into a massive lead over Sri Lanka as the tourists battle to stay in the second Test at Canberra.

At stumps, the visitors were 17 without loss, chasing a huge 516 to win with two days remaining after Tim Paine declared Australia's second innings at 196 for three. Dimuth Karunaratne and Lahiru Thirimanne were both unbeaten on eight, weathering some 30 minutes before bad light stopped play slightly early.

Sri Lanka had resumed the third day at 123 for three and in a hostile morning session lost four wickets and Kusal Perera, who retired after being hit on the head by a bouncer. Their resistance folded in the second over after lunch, with Mitchell Starc taking five wickets to leave them trailing by 319 after Australia's first innings 534 for five declared.

Paine opted against the follow-on in Australia's last Test batting opportunity before the Ashes tour to England later this year. Khawaja padded up knowing his place in that squad was in doubt after managing a

high-score of just 72 across six Tests in a lacklustre summer.

He responded in emphatic fashion, smashing his eighth Test ton off 134 balls. "Obviously getting a hundred and setting up another game that we can hopefully win, that's the ultimate feeling for the team and for myself," said Khawaja, who admitted it had been a tough few months on and off the field.

His brother was charged in December with trying to influence a witness over a case where he allegedly framed a love rival with a fake terror plot. "It made it tougher to try and concentrate and go out and execute my skills," he said, adding that it had been "very taxing mentally".

It was Australia's fourth century of the match after Joe Burns, Travis Head and Kurtis Patterson reached the milestone in the first innings. Paine declared with Khawaja on 101 and Head not out 59, following his first innings 161.

But it was far from plain sailing. Marcus Harris again failed, out for 14 with Kusal Mendis taking a superb diving catch at slip off Kasun Rajitha, throwing his Ashes place into question.

Mendis held another catch to dismiss Burns for nine, this time off Vishwa Fernando, and Rajitha struck again to remove Marnus Labuschagne for four. In an incident-packed morning, Jhye Richardson and Pat Cummins opened with a slew of bouncers.

Both Perera, who resumed on 11, and Dhananjaya de Silva, on one overnight, took blows to the head in the opening two overs. Perera was then hit flush on the helmet ducking into a Richardson ball on 27.

The neck protector flew off and a physio rushed to his aid. He continued and added two more runs only to call the physio again four balls later. Once again he opted to bat on but was feeling the effects and was helped off the field soon after.

### KARUNARATNE RETURNS

Ironically, the courageous Karunaratne replaced him after being declared fit again after being felled by a



CANBERRA: Australia's Travis Head (C) plays a shot during day three of the second Test cricket match between Australia and Sri Lanka at the Manuka Oval Cricket Ground in Canberra yesterday. — AFP

brutal bouncer on Saturday from Cummins. He had laid prone on the ground for at least 10 minutes before being stretchered off in a neck brace, but after a hospital check was cleared of concussion and given the OK to resume his innings.

The opener returned on 46 and brought up his 22nd Test 50 before being caught at Patterson off Starc after adding nine more. He was out just three balls after de Silva bizarrely hit his own wicket while attempting a

pull shot off Starc. As his bat swung around it took one of the bails off and he was gone for 25.

The tail was quickly polished off with Starc doing the damage, ending with 5-54 to silence his critics after a lean spell. "Certainly was a great start we had and we thought we could get a very reasonable score in the first innings." Sri Lankan bowling coach Ramesh Ratnayake said. "But things happened that didn't help us and we are really disappointed with what they got." — AFP

### SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on day three of the second Test between Australia and Sri Lanka in Canberra yesterday:

Australia 1st innings 534-5 dec (J. Burns 180, T. Head 161, K. Patterson 114 no; Fernando 3-126)

Sri Lanka 1st innings 215 (D. Karunaratne 59; M. Starc 5-54)

Australia 2nd innings 196-3 dec (U. Khawaja 101 no, T. Head 59 no; Rajitha 2-64)

#### Sri Lanka 2nd innings

D. Karunaratne not out 8

L. Thirimanne not out 8

Extras: (lb) 1

Total: (no wickets: six overs) 17

Did not bat: Dinesh Chandimal, Kusal Mendis, Kusal Perera, Dhananjaya de Silva, Niroshan Dickwella, Dilruwan Perera, Chamika Karunaratne, Vishwa Fernando, Kasun Rajitha

#### Fall of wickets:

Bowling: Starc 3-1-6-0, Richardson 2-0-9-0, Lyon 1-0-1-0.

## No stars mean no crowd for India's Ranji Trophy

NEW DELHI: India's premier domestic cricket tournament, the Ranji Trophy, climaxes this week. But with the big stars absent and fans preferring shorter, sharper matches, the stands have been largely empty.

At a recent match between Delhi and Andhra Pradesh at the Feroz Shah Kotla stadium in the Indian capital, there were about the same number of people in the stands—around 20 — as on the pitch.

On the final day of the four this swelled to 150, but only because it was a special occasion—the swansong of former India opener Gautam Gambhir. Part of the problem is that once the likes of India's superstar captain Virat Kohli make it big, the packed international timetable of the modern game means they have no time for the Ranji—reducing its pulling power for spectators.

People in cricket-mad India also no longer have much passion for the four-day Ranji games—named after a maharaja who played for England in the 1890s—preferring the excitement of one-day games and the razzmatazz of Twenty20.

"(The) attention span of today's youngsters is less, they want action all the time," former India great Sunil Gavaskar, who used to electrify packed Ranji Trophy crowds back in the 1970s and 80s, told AFP.

"(But) most importantly it's the absence of the international stars which does not help draw the crowds. The international schedule being what it is, the players are tied up with that," he said. It doesn't help that the facilities are not very inviting. Unlike during international games, the toilets are seldom cleaned and refreshments are hard to come by.

One of the few fans at the Feroz Shah Kotla grounds is AP Bhalla, a grey-haired regular in the stands who remembers people "thronging" to games in decades gone by. "Especially during the Delhi-Mumbai games the stands were filled, with their city rivalry being legendary," the retired doctor told AFP.

"This one-day and T20 cricket has really taken the zip out of the longer format. Who cares for domestic four-day games? In the 1970s and 80s even inter-university games attracted crowds like in ODIs now," he added.

Ranji was and remains the breeding ground for India's future stars. India's latest addition to the senior team, Prithvi Shaw, is a case in point. The teenager scored heavily for Mumbai before shining in India's Under-19 World Cup triumph in 2018. He has also played for the Delhi Daredevils in the big-budget Indian Premier League T20 extravaganza.

Veteran sports journalist Vijay Lokapally remembers how stars used to go the extra mile to play in Ranji matches. "Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, Anil Kumble, Virender Sehwag were always available for their state teams when not playing for India," he said. — AFP

## Lightning hang on to beat Rangers

NEW YORK: Steven Stamkos scored his 28th goal of the season in the second period to match his total from last season, and it turned out to be the game-winner as the Tampa Bay Lightning held on for a 3-2 victory over the host New York Rangers on Saturday night. Tampa Bay jumped on top 3-0 at 8:33 of the second period on Stamkos' fourth goal of the season against the Rangers. Stamkos received a cross-ice pass from defenseman Victor Hedman and lifted a wrist shot from the middle of the right faceoff circle off Rangers goaltender Henrik Lundqvist's left shoulder. The Lightning's Yanni Gourde scored in the first period and rookie Erik Cernak scored his first career goal before Stamkos netted his 376th career goal. Nikita Kucherov recorded the secondary assist on Stamkos' goal and increased his league-leading points total to 80. Kucherov also became the quickest player in Tampa Bay history to reach 80 points, getting there in 52 games. He surpassed the mark set by Vincent Lecavalier (60 games) in 2006-07.

### ISLANDERS 4, KINGS 2

New York scored three goals in the final five-plus minutes of the third period, including Michael Dal Colle's go-ahead tally with 2:23 left, as it came back to beat visiting Los Angeles. The win snapped a two-game losing streak for the Islanders, who have won 16 of 21 (16-3-2) and are now 8-0-0 in the second game of back-to-back sets this season. Casey Cizikas scored in the first period for the Islanders while Mathew Barzal scored the tying goal in the third period before Brock Nelson added an empty-netter. Winning goalie Robin Lehner made 34 saves. Anze Kopitar scored in the first, and Ilya Kovalchuk scored in the third for the Kings, who have alternated wins with losses in their last six games. Goalie Jonathan Quick recorded 28 saves.

### JETS 9, DUCKS 3

Jack Roslovic delivered his first career hat trick, and Bryan Little added two goals as host Winnipeg came out fast with a six-goal first period and rolled to victory in the first game since the All-Star break for Anaheim. Roslovic had two first-period goals while Little had one. Andrew Copp, Blake Wheeler and Brendan Lemieux also scored in the opening period as Ducks All-Star goaltender John Gibson was pulled less than 18 minutes into the game after giving up the six goals on 14 shots. It was the first time in franchise history the Jets scored six goals in the first period. It was also the most goals the Jets have scored in a home game in franchise history.

### SHARKS 3, COYOTES 2 (OT)

Brent Burns scored at 3:14 of overtime, and San Jose defeated visiting Arizona as both teams came off the All-Star break and their bye weeks. Kevin Labanc and Joe Pavelski also scored for the Sharks, who were 1-3-0 in their previous four games, surrendering six goals in each. Goaltender Martin Jones stopped 31 shots. Conor Garland and Josh Archibald scored for the Coyotes, who are 6-2-2 in their past 10 games. Goalie Darcy Kuemper stopped 32 of 35 shots.

### MAPLE LEAFS 3, PENGUINS 2

Zach Hyman scored the go-ahead goal late in the second period as Toronto came back to defeat visiting Pittsburgh. Auston Matthews and Travis Dermott also scored goals for the Maple Leafs, who trailed 2-0 during the first period. Jake Gardiner added two assists for Toronto. Sidney Crosby and Teddy Blueger scored



UNIONDALE: Derek Forbort #24 and Jonathan Quick #32 of the Los Angeles Kings defend the net against the New York Islanders during the first period at NYCB Live's Nassau Coliseum on Saturday in Uniondale, New York. — AFP

goals for the Penguins. Garret Sparks made 28 stops for the Maple Leafs, who have won two of three games for the Penguins this season. Matt Murray made 30 saves in Pittsburgh's goal.

### FLYERS 5, OILERS 4 (OT)

Nolan Patrick scored 2:01 into overtime as host Philadelphia pushed its season-high winning streak to seven games with a victory over Edmonton. Patrick redeemed himself after missing an open net in the waning moments of the third period by wristing a shot under the crossbar in overtime to send Philadelphia to its second straight overtime win. Sean Couturier, Claude Giroux, Travis Konecny and Wayne Simmonds each scored a power-play goal for Philadelphia, which has tallied six times with the man advantage in the last two contests. Connor McDavid and Zack Kassian each collected a goal and an assist for the Oilers, who dropped their fourth straight game (0-3-1) in their return from the All-Star break.

### DEVILS 3, CANADIENS 2 (OT)

Nico Hischier scored twice—first to force overtime, then 116 seconds into the extra frame—as visiting New Jersey claimed an overtime win over Montreal. On the winner, Hischier gained the puck at center ice, worked his way to the net and ripped a blocker-side shot past Canadiens goalie Antti Niemi for his 16th goal of the season. Goalie Mackenzie Blackwood made 37 saves for the Devils, who have won two of three games. Blackwood had some good fortune, too, as Montreal's Max Domi hit the post in the first few seconds of overtime.

### BLACKHAWKS 4, WILD 3 (OT)

Erik Gustafsson scored his second goal of the night in overtime, and Patrick Kane extended his points streak to 11 games as Chicago won a season-high fourth straight game by downing Minnesota at Saint Paul. Minn. Kane assisted on Jonathan Toews' tiebreaking goal 15:25 into the third period. But the Wild equal-

ized with 3:02 remaining in regulation on Victor Rask's first goal since being acquired from Carolina last month. In overtime with the man advantage, it was Gustafsson's second goal of the game at 1:19 into the extra session that sent Chicago on its first four-game winning streak since December 2017. — Reuters

## Bangladesh's Taskin ruled out of NZ tour

DHAKA: Bangladesh's tour of New Zealand this month suffered a blow yesterday after pace bowler Taskin Ahmed was ruled out of the series with an ankle injury by the team doctor. Ahmed was recalled into the side's one-day international and Test squads after an impressive show for the Sylhet Sixers in the Bangladesh Premier League Twenty20 tournament.

He was the competition's leading wicket-taker with 22 scalps until an injury against Chittagong Vikings on Friday. "Taskin tore a ligament in his left ankle. He will be in complete rest for three weeks and then we will review his situation," Bangladesh Cricket Board physician Debashish Chowdhury told AFP.

"He is definitely ruled out of the New Zealand tournament as this kind of injury usually takes a long time to heal," he added. Chief selector Minhajul Abedin said a replacement for Ahmed had not yet been decided. Bangladesh will play three ODIs and three Test matches in New Zealand between February 13 and March 20. Bangladesh failed to win any matches during their last New Zealand tour in 2017-18. — AFP

Sports

# Gervinho matches Ronaldo double as Parma frustrate Juventus

## Napoli are back strong: Ancelotti

MILAN: Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice but champions Juventus had to settle for a point as a late Gervinho double snatched a 3-3 draw after promoted Parma staged an impressive comeback in Serie A on Saturday. Juventus' dropped points allowed Napoli to cut the gap on the leaders to nine points after a confident 3-0 win over Sampdoria.

Massimiliano Allegri's side had already had their confidence shaken after a 3-0 defeat to Atalanta shattered their hopes of winning a fifth straight Coppa Italia. Saturday's draw was not the response Allegri had called for ahead of their Champions League last 16 first leg tie against Atletico Madrid on February 20.

"I'm happy for the goals but not the result," said Ronaldo. "Parma didn't do anything special, they waited for us to make a mistake. "But we're not worried, we know it will be a great season for Juventus."

Juve, hit by injuries to defenders Leonardo Bonucci, Giorgio Chiellini and Andrea Barzagli, have now conceded six goals in their last two matches. But they still have a comfortable nine-point lead over Napoli with Inter Milan 20 points behind in third.

"It doesn't change anything, but we must not take anything for granted," said Allegri. "We were too light in defence. It was the first time this back four had played together." Juventus lined up with an inexperienced back line of Leonardo Spinazzola alongside Uruguay defender Martin Caceres who got his first start since moving from Lazio.

Sami Khedira rattled the post twice, before Ronaldo opened the scoring after 36 minutes with Daniele Rugani again scoring for the hosts on 62 minutes. An Antonino Barilla header clawed one back for Parma two minutes later before Ronaldo completed his brace to return to the top of the Serie A goalscorers' chart with 17. But Ivorian Gervinho threw his side

a lifeline on 74 minutes and grabbed a point at the death for Parma who remain 12th in the table, 31 points behind Juventus. "At least we satisfied those who complained we weren't entertaining," said Allegri. "But the beautiful football doesn't pay off, at the end of the day you have got to just kick it away from your goal." The seven-time reigning champions nevertheless remain unbeaten this season having dropped points just twice before against Genoa and Atalanta. Earlier Arkadiusz Milik and Lorenzo Insigne scored quick-fire goals and Simone Verdi added a third from the spot as Napoli got back on track. AC Milan had dented Carlo Ancelotti's side's title hopes with a goalless draw in the San Siro last weekend before dumping the southerners out of the Coppa Italia midweek. "Napoli are back strong," said Ancelotti. "Today we found the depth and the ability to quickly overturn the game. "The two tests against Milan were not our usual selves, we're back to our normal standard."

Sampdoria striker Fabio Quagliarella was thwarted in his bid to set a new record of scoring in 12 consecutive Serie A games as the side from Genoa also missed the chance to move up into fourth and the Champions League places.

But Quagliarella—who is from Naples and had scored in Sampdoria's 3-0 win over Napoli earlier in the campaign—was denied his best chance to make history by a sliding Kalidou Koulibaly tackle.

Napoli skipper Marek Hamsik—reportedly set for a move to China—returned from injury and orchestrated the opener after 25 minutes in the San Paolo Stadium. The Slovak international's cross found Jose Callejon who burst through to provide the assist which Milik finished off for his 12th league goal this season.

Less than a minute later Insigne connected sweetly with another Callejon assist for his first



TURIN: Juventus' Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo goes for a header during the Italian Serie A football match Juventus vs Parma on Saturday at the Juventus stadium in Turin. — AFP

league goal in three months. Napoli were awarded a penalty for a Joachim Andersen handball but despite the calls of "Kalidou, Kalidou" from the crowd for the Senegalese defender to take it after

his towering performance, it was Verdi who stepped up to convert in the final minute. Sampdoria remain sixth, two points off AC Milan in the final Champions League berth. — AFP

## Messi double earns Barca a point in thriller with Valencia

BARCELONA: Lionel Messi scored in a ninth consecutive match but his latest double on Saturday was only enough to earn Barcelona a 2-2 draw against Valencia. Messi instigated another Barca comeback at the Camp Nou before placing an injury doubt over his availability for Wednesday's Copa del Rey Clasico against Real Madrid.

Ernesto Valverde confirmed after the game his captain had felt a "small problem" but insisted it was nothing serious. Valverde is still unlikely to take any risks given Barcelona's testing month ahead, even if Messi's absence, however brief, would be a blow, particularly while he is in such irresistible form.

Kevin Gameiro and Dani Parejo's penalty gave Valencia a surprise two-goal lead but Messi pulled one back with his own spot-kick before curling in a brilliant equaliser with 26 minutes left.

After their stunning turn-around against Sevilla in midweek, Barca looked destined again to finish the job, but at the end of a breathless contest, Valencia had held on for a point. "When you don't win, you always feel you have missed something," Valverde said. "But the league is long and there are matches where you come up against a good team. This was one of those."

Messi's 20th and 21st league goals of the season leave him team six points clear of Atletico Madrid, who could cut the gap to three by beating Real Betis on Sunday, with Real Madrid, 11 points back, at home to Alaves.

After eight consecutive Barcelona wins in La Liga, this result perhaps offered the chasing pack a little encouragement at least. Real could inflict further disruption themselves. The first leg of the Copa del Rey semi-finals on Wednesday will be the first of three Clasicos in a month.



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Uruguayan forward Luis Suarez (R) vies for the ball with Valencia's Danish midfielder Daniel Wass during the Spanish league football match FC Barcelona against Valencia CF at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Saturday. — AFP

The latter two will be back-to-back, within four days.

But Messi fit and in this sort of form means any confidence Real feel comes with an asterisk. His 12 goals in his last nine games is the same number the whole Valencia squad managed in their first 15 league matches. Valencia were 15th in December, with only three wins, and their coach Marcelino was under pressure, just six months after propelling them back into the Champions League.

The club kept faith and results have improved. They have now lost only one of their last seven matches and are within sight of the top four. Valencia deserved their first-half lead and could have scored sooner, Parejo drawing a smart save from Marc-Andre ter Stegen before Denis Cheryshev lashed the rebound off the far post.

The visitors rode their luck as two decisions went their way in a matter of minutes. First, Barca could have had a penalty when Gabriel Paulista blocked Nelson Semedo's shot with his hand. Then the home team should have had a free-kick as Messi was bundled over by Parejo. The latter proved key, with Valencia sprawling forward on the count-

er-attack.

Rodrigo carried the ball 40 yards before slipping a cute reverse pass behind Vermaelen and Gameiro banged in the finish. Valencia's penalty was clear after Sergi shoved Daniel Wass in the back, with Parejo whipping the ball into the corner to make it two.

Barca looked shell-shocked but the third goal in 15 minutes was theirs. Semedo beat Toni Lato to Arturo Vidal's pass and tumbled after a clip on his shin. Messi slammed the loose ball into the top corner but the whistle had blown. He rolled in the penalty instead.

Sergi's shot crashed against the post and Barca were dominant after half-time. At the other end, on a rare Valencia break, Rodrigo should have made it three but, on the stretch, put it over from six yards.

That was in the 63rd minute, and in the 64th, Barcelona were level. Vidal teed up Messi, who teed up his own left foot and curled the ball inside the post. The teams, and the crowd, seemed to take a breath, in anticipation of a late push, but it never came. The draw was a fair result. — AFP

Live		Matches on TV
(Local Timings)		
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
West Ham United v Liverpool		23:00
beIN SPORTS HD 2		
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Rayo Vallecano v CD Leganes		23:00
beIN SPORTS HD 3		
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
Frosinone Calcio v SS Lazio		21:00
beIN SPORTS HD 4		
Cagliari Calcio v Atalanta		23:00
beIN SPORTS HD 4		

## Neuer injury adds to Bayern's woes as title-race slip

BERLIN: Bayern Munich are unsure whether Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer can play in next week's crunch German Cup tie at Hertha Berlin after losing more ground in the Bundesliga title race on Saturday.

The defending German champions were humbled 3-1 at Bayer Leverkusen to leave them seven points behind leaders Borussia Dortmund in the title race. To make matters worse, Bayern later dropped to third in the table after Borussia Moenchengladbach's 2-0 win at 10-man Schalke meant they drew level on 42 points and leap-frogged into second on goal difference.

"The only positive thing is that Dortmund didn't get three points," said Bayern's head coach Niko Kovac after Dortmund drew 1-1 at Eintracht Frankfurt on Saturday. "Now we are seven points behind and that's no small amount."

"We have to use the remaining games, which won't be easy, but we won't give up, we still believe and will keep on working." After Leon Goretzka gave Bayern a 1-0 first-half lead and Robert Lewandowski had a goal ruled offside, Kovac's side had few answers as Leon Bailey curled in a free-kick, then Leverkusen attacked on the counter with goals by Kevin Volland and Lucas Alario. "We should have led by more after the first-half, then what happened is exactly what I didn't want," said Kovac as Bayern's seven-match winning streak in the league ended abruptly. "We got into an exchange of blows with Leverkusen and they killed us."

"The goals we conceded shouldn't have happened the way they did, so we have to be annoyed with ourselves. "The result doesn't reflect the game and we shouldn't have lost it. "Leverkusen had four shots on goal and created three goals."

The last half an hour was a horror show for Kovac and Bayern supporters as Leverkusen shredded the Bavarians defence with both Volland and Alario tapping home after the hosts countered at will.

To compound matters, Munich club captain and Germany shot-stopper Neuer missed the defeat in Leverkusen after injuring his thumb in training last week. It is unclear whether Neuer can play in Wednesday's German Cup, last 16 clash at Hertha Berlin, where Bayern have already suffered one of their four league defeats this season last September, going down 2-0 at the Olympic Stadium.

Kovac refused to say if Neuer could be fit in time, but Bayern's stand-in goalkeeper Sven Ulreich, playing his first game for the Bavarians this season, was more candid. "The thumb (Neuer's) is really fat, but in one or two days things should look different and he could be able to play," said Ulreich, after his first game for seven months. — AFP

## City have leaders to catch Liverpool, says Guardiola

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola is convinced that Manchester City have enough leaders to chase down a significant points deficit in the league, something he has never previously achieved as a manager.

Guardiola's side go into Sunday's Premier League home match against Arsenal in third place, five points behind leaders Liverpool with 14 games to play. City suffered their fourth defeat in nine league matches as they were beaten 2-1 at Newcastle on Tuesday in a lethargic display.

They were without the leadership skills of club captain Vincent Kompany, who has made only six league starts this season because of injuries. Guardiola, though, has rejected the idea that he does not have the players willing to take responsibility in the absence of the Belgian.

"Of course, there are guys with a huge personality to talk, to communicate, but that is only worth so much," he said. "I am not going to call out a guy who is shy, who expresses himself with a lot of character on the pitch, but off the pitch is more quiet and doesn't talk too much with his mates."

The former Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss added: "I met incredible players who didn't speak one word. And I saw a lot of players who speak a lot in the locker room, 'I want to do that', and afterwards, when they go out on the pitch and they are under pressure, say 'I don't want the ball and I don't want to defend'. There are so many of these kinds. — AFP



## Kuwait Martyrs Mini Goal Football tourney

By Abdellatif Al-Sharrah

KUWAIT: Schools of Sheikh Ahmad Al-Farisi and Ibn Asaker (Ahmadi), Ibn Tufail and Zaid bin Ali (Jahra), Ammar bin Yasser and Saud Al-Abdelrazzaq (Farwaniya) qualified for the finals of the third Kuwait Martyrs Mini Goal Football tournament during qualifying matches held earlier.

The teams of Mulla Hassan Al-Kandari and Saeed

bin Al-Aas (Hawally) qualified during the qualifiers held in December so the total number of teams is 8 so far. Coordinator General of the tournament Hassan Al-Khawajah said the tournament is being held under the patronage of Al-Shaheed office of the Amiri Diwan in coordination with the education ministry, and is being held under the knock out system. He said 8 teams qualified representing Hawally, Ahmadi, Jahra and Farwaniya, while the qualifying rounds of the capital and Mubarak Al-Kabeer governorates in addition to private education.

Al-Khawajah said the previous rounds witnessed strong competition between teams with 24 teams in Ahmadi, 12 teams in Jahra and 18 teams in Farwaniya participating. Hassan Al-Khawajah said the finals are being held at Martyr Fahad Al-Ahmad Center in Daeya area during the period 10-12/12 to coincide with Kuwait celebrations of national days.

**25** Shiffrin set to shine, Vonn and Svindal bow out



**26** Khawaja smacks ton as S Lanka chase massive 2nd Test total



**27** Gervinho matches Ronaldo double as Parma frustrate Juventus



## India beat NZ to wrap up series

Rayudu to the rescue with a commanding knock of 90



WELLINGTON: India celebrate winning the ODI series following the fifth one-day international (ODI) cricket match between New Zealand and India in Wellington yesterday. — AFP

WELLINGTON: A commanding knock of 90 by Ambati Rayudu rescued India from deep trouble and saw them beat New Zealand by 35 runs in the fifth one-day international in Wellington yesterday to wrap up the series 4-1.

Captain Rohit Sharma admitted he took a gamble and Rayudu made sure it paid off—when he opted to bat first instead of playing to India's run-chasing strength. They made a disastrous start and were four for 18 before Rayudu, with help from Vijay Shankar, steered the side to 252 and New Zealand in reply were all out for 217.

"That partnership was crucial," Sharma said. "It was not easy after losing four wickets at the start and then to build that partnership and get to a decent total. I thought 250 was a really good score on that pitch."

India went into the match with an unbeatable 3-1 lead in the series and looking to atone for their sole loss, an eight-wicket defeat in the previous match. "If the series was on the line I would have batted second, it's our strength to chase but we wanted to test ourselves, how we bat," Sharma said.

"We required guys to show character and they came out and showed a lot of character today." Four months out from the World Cup the series highlighted the gulf between second-ranked India and third-ranked New Zealand. It did look as if India were heading for another defeat when Matt Henry and Trent Boult ripped out the first four wickets in under 10 overs.

But when the swing bowlers were taken out of the equation, Rayudu and Shankar toyed with the attack, putting on 98 for the fifth wicket before Shankar was

run out at 45. Rayudu, who faced 84 deliveries to reach 44, needed only 27 more for his remaining 46 runs in an innings that included eight fours and four sixes.

He had a life on 60 when dropped by Boult and was eventually removed when Henry, New Zealand's most successful bowler, came back for his second spell.

Hardik Pandya provided late fireworks for India with 45 off 22 deliveries, while Henry finished with four for 35. New Zealand batted through to the 45th over, which captain Kane Williamson described as "a step in the right direction" after being comprehensively beaten in the first three games of the series.

"Throughout the series they had us under more pressure than we would have liked," Williamson admitted. "Trying to soak that up with the ball, in the field, with the bat, and revert it back on the opposition we

were able to do that on occasions but not often enough." Like India, New Zealand's top order also went cheaply, before a 67-run stand by Williamson (39) and Tom Latham (37) for the fourth wicket. But after they went in quick succession Yuzvendra Chahal led a spin assault that saw the hosts all out for 217, with Chahal taking three lbw decisions for 41.

James Neesham threatened to get New Zealand up to their target when he whacked 44 off 32 deliveries before inexplicably running himself out. When India fruitlessly appealed for a leg before decision, Neesham stepped out of his crease in search of a possible leg bye, unaware the ball had been picked up by wicket-keeper MS Dhoni who had an easy shot at the stumps.

The series now moves on to three Twenty20 matches beginning in Wellington on Wednesday. — AFP

## Rashford strike lifts Solskjaer's surging Man Utd into fifth

LEICESTER: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer remains unbeaten 10 games into his caretaker reign of Manchester United as the rejuvenated Marcus Rashford and Paul Pogba combined to earn a 1-0 win at Leicester yesterday to close in on the Premier League top four.

Rashford blasted home his sixth goal since Solskjaer took charge after taking an exquisite touch to control Pogba's lofted pass and United held out to move above Arsenal into fifth and within two points of fourth-placed Chelsea.

A 2-2 draw at home to Burnley in midweek is the only match Solskjaer has failed to win and much of that form is owed to the turnaround in both Rashford and Pogba's roles since Mourinho was sacked in December with United 11 points adrift of the top four.

Solskjaer again chose to leave Romelu Lukaku on the substitutes' bench, with Rashford promoted as his central forward. The England striker took just nine minutes to respond with the crucial goal, having already missed a

good chance when he headed over when unmarked from a handy cross by Nemanja Matic.

Rashford's confidence was clearly unaffected, as he took just four minutes to respond in style. Ricardo Pereira was the guilty party for Leicester with a dangerous ball that was intercepted by Pogba.

The Frenchman proceeded to display his deftness of his touch with a beautiful pass that was lofted over the Leicester backline for Rashford to run onto and he did the rest, taking a touch before drilling a low shot past a helpless Kasper Schmeichel.

However, as is often the case on the road, United relied on goalkeeper David de Gea for all three points as a Leicester side that have often troubled the top six this season improved after half-time.

Twice the Spaniard stood tall to deny Jamie Vardy, but De Gea's best save came from Rachid Ghezzal's free-kick that arrowed towards the top corner. A Ghezzal goal would have been rich vindication for Leicester boss Claude Puel who was met with chants of "you don't know what you're doing" from his own fans for replacing James Maddison with the Algerian just after the hour mark.

Jonny Evans and Harry Maguire also failed to hit the target as the Foxes laid siege towards the United goal in search of an equaliser that never came to pile more pressure on the under-fire Puel. His stock at Leicester remains on the slide but Solskjaer's at Old Trafford continues to soar. — AFP



LEICESTER: Manchester United's English striker Marcus Rashford (C) celebrates after scoring the opening goal of the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Manchester United at King Power Stadium in Leicester, central England yesterday. — AFP