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6 MPs walk out as Assembly declares PM grilling illegal

Merger of manpower bodies to proceed • Registration for by-elections opens

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: For the second week running, opposition lawmakers yesterday walked out in protest against a decision to declare a grilling filed against the prime minister as not in line with the constitution. Six MPs left the session as the Assembly began voting on a decision by its legal and legislative committee saying the grilling was unconstitutional, insisting the whole process was a flagrant violation of the constitution and the country's laws.

Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said 41 MPs and ministers voted in favor of the committee's decision, 16 voted against while three refused to vote and three others had already left the chamber. The speaker then declared that the grilling has been removed from the agenda of the Assembly. The grilling was filed by MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri in November, holding HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah responsible for the devastation caused by heavy rains that lashed the country.

MP Khaled Al-Shatti, head of the legal committee, told the Assembly that the panel had invited Muwaizri twice to its meetings but he declined to attend. He added that the committee polled the opinions of several constitutional experts and the Assembly's legal advisors, and the overwhelming majority of them said the grilling was unconstitutional.

But opposition MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari said the

entire process violated the constitution and Assembly laws and no one has the power to stop lawmakers from grilling the prime minister or ministers. Kandari said the committee had only invited experts whose opinions were well known of opposing the grilling and failed to invite experts who had a different opinion.

MP Riyadh Al-Adasani said the prime minister must accept the grilling, adding that the participation of Cabinet ministers in the voting over this issue constitutes a flagrant breach of the constitution. The lawmaker described what is happening as catastrophic, saying it is illegal to even consider voting on an issue like this and accused the legal committee of "executing" grillings against Cabinet ministers.

But MP Safa Al-Hashem said that all should obey the wish of HH the Amir to not make grillings tools of destruction, adding that the country should remain united at this time when regional tensions are rising rapidly. MP Muwaizri reiterated his claims that he was not responsible for the signing of several contracts when he was housing minister in 2012 and accused the current housing minister of providing false information. Following the voting, opposition MP Abdulwahab Al-Babtain also said that the whole process was unconstitutional and any attempt to stop MPs from grilling the prime minister or other Cabinet ministers is illegal.

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KUWAIT: Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel speaks during a session of the National Assembly yesterday. — KUNA

Privatization of telco, post, info sectors in works

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Well-informed ministerial sources said as part of measures to be taken to shrink the state's organizational structure, resolve deficit problems and reduce expenditure at a number of government bodies, the government is getting closer to announcing privatizing some ministries and government bodies. The sources said the ministerial

economic committee has agreed to privatize the ministry of services (formerly communications), especially after establishing the telecommunications authority and having telecom and Internet companies take up many of the ministry's responsibilities.

The sources said the government has also prepared a bill on privatizing the postal sector and is getting ready to offer a tender for public bidding to private sector companies to provide telephone services by the end of the year. Moreover, the sources said various sectors at the ministry of information, including art, production, TV and radio and tourism, would be privatized, leaving only the news sector to be supervised by the ministry.

99.9% accuracy at AIDS clinic; MoH allays bird death concerns

KUWAIT: A senior official at the health ministry affirmed yesterday that a new clinic for AIDS gives results with 99.9 percent accuracy. In a statement, Assistant Undersecretary Dr Majeda Al-Qattan said the clinic is finally ready to operate after a long period of experiments and coordination. "This clinic is located at the Communicable Diseases Hospital in the building of Islamic medi-

cine, and operates 24 hours a day with a privacy policy that allows patients to receive their results discreetly," she said. "The clinic does not only provide examinations and checkup, it also provides consultations and awareness about the disease," she added.

Qattan earlier said the health ministry has reported no cases of human infection with the virus that led to the death of pet birds at the bird market in Rai in recent days, after a campaign to destroy the birds at the market was held on Tuesday. "As a precaution, the ministry is working closely with the interior ministry, the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources and the Municipality to get rid of the birds at the Al-Rai marketplace," she affirmed.

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UN: Last 4 years hottest on record

PARIS: The last four years were the hottest since global temperature records began, the UN confirmed yesterday in an analysis that it said was a "clear sign of continuing long-term climate change". The UN's World Meteorological Organization said in November that 2018 was set to be the fourth warmest year in recorded history, stressing the urgent need for action to rein in runaway planetary warming. Yesterday, it incorporated the final weeks of last year into its climate models and concluded that average global surface temperature in 2018 was 1 degree Celsius above pre-industrial baseline levels.

2016, boosted by a strong El Nino that normally tips the mercury northwards, remains the hottest year on record. It also said that the 20 warmest years in history all occurred within the last 22 years. "The long-term temperature trend is far more important than the ranking of individual years, and that trend is an upward one," said WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas. "The degree of warming during the past four years has been exceptional, both on land and in the ocean."

The WMO said heightened temperatures also contributed to a number of extreme weather events such as hurricanes, droughts and flash flooding. "Many of the extreme weather events are consistent with what we expect from a changing climate. This is the reality we need to face up to," Taalas said. The UN body also said that 2019 had picked up where 2018 left off, with Australia experiencing its warmest January on record. It warned that intense heatwaves "are becoming more frequent as a result of climate change."

As parts of the mid-western United States were gripped by a "polar vortex" last week that saw temperatures plunge to lows of -53 C, US President Donald Trump suggested that the cold weather front cast doubt over the veracity of climate change data. "What the hell is going on with Global Warming? (sic) Please come back fast, we need you!" he said on Twitter.

Taalas said that the deadly cold snap was entirely consistent with the effects of man-made climate change, including the warming of the poles. "A part of the cold anomalies at lower latitudes could be linked to dramatic changes in the Arctic," he said. "What happens at the poles does not stay at the poles but influences weather and climate conditions in lower latitudes where hundreds of millions of people live."

Weather extremes in 2018 included wildfires in California and Greece, drought in South Africa and floods in Kerala, India. Record levels of man-made greenhouse gas emissions, mainly from burning fossil fuels, trap ever more heat. — AFP

Trump calls for unity in State of the Union speech

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump urged Americans to come together Tuesday in a State of the Union speech seeking to turn the page on two years of divisive turmoil and transform him into a bipartisan national leader. But opposition Democrats almost instantly rejected the overture, while Trump's steadfast insistence on building US-Mexico border walls promised new political strife in the near future.

At times joking, at times impassioned, Trump told Congress and a huge televi-

sion audience that "we must reject the politics of revenge, resistance, and retribution - and embrace the boundless potential of cooperation, compromise, and the common good". On foreign policy, Trump reaffirmed his determination to get US troops out of Afghanistan and Syria as quickly as possible. And he announced he would extend his trail-blazing personal diplomacy with North Korea by meeting reclusive leader Kim Jong Un on February 27-28 in Vietnam.

Trump touted what he hopes will remain his strongest card with voters - "the hottest economy anywhere in the world." He also called for a bipartisan push to eradicate the AIDS epidemic in the United States in a decade. But the key aim in the speech, littered with soaring rhetoric and interrupted

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WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump delivers the State of the Union address alongside Vice President Mike Pence and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi at the US Capitol on Tuesday. — AFP

Qatar takes delivery of first Rafale jet fighter

MERIGNAC, France: Qatar yesterday took delivery of the first of 36 Rafale multipurpose jet fighters it has ordered from French manufacturer Dassault. The handover ceremony in Merignac, southwestern France, where the planes are built, was attended by Qatar Defense Minister Khalid bin Mohamed Al-Attiyah and Dassault Aviation chief Eric Trappier. Qatar ordered 24 of the fighters in 2015, adding 12 more last year. It also has an option to buy 36

more. The twin-engine fighter has been in service with the French Air Force since 2004.

France has also sold Mirage F1, Alpha Jets and Mirage 2000 fighters to Qatar. After failing to sell the Rafale abroad for several years, France finally won a contract from Egypt in 2015 for 24 jets, followed by the sale to Qatar. In September 2016, India also agreed to buy 36 of the fighters.

Qatar has upped its defense spending after being diplomatically isolated by its Gulf neighbors. Since June 2017, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt have imposed a boycott on Qatar, accusing it of backing terrorism and being too close to Iran. Qatar denies the allegations and has accused the Saudi-led bloc of aiming to incite regime change in Doha. — AFP



MERIGNAC, France: Qatari Defense Minister Khalid Al-Attiyah delivers a speech during a ceremony for the delivery of its first Rafale multipurpose fighter from French manufacturer Dassault yesterday. — AFP

Local

Organized crime continues to pose threat to int'l peace, security: Kuwait

'Illegal migration remains one of the most important global challenges'

KUWAIT: Kuwait has affirmed that transnational organized crime continues to pose a threat to international peace and security and is closely related to the phenomenon of terrorism, which requires greater coordination of efforts, especially with countries suffering from these phenomena. Kuwait's permanent representative to the UN, Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi, made the remarks during a meeting of the Security Council on 'Organized crime across the national border at sea as a threat to international peace and security.'

Otaibi said that the international community is making strenuous efforts to preserve and protect the seas, the most important of which are the conclusion of various agreements and the holding of various international and regional conferences such as the Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security in the Western Indian Ocean in Mauritius in April 2018, which issued the Mauritius Declaration on Maritime Security and an agreement on coordination of maritime operations in the western Indian Ocean. Such regional measures would build and strengthen the international legal framework to ensure the security of maritime navigation, which would have a positive impact on peace, security, cooperation and friendly relations among all nations, he added.



Terrorist groups engage in many illegal activities

Otaibi said the report of the Secretary-General on Oceans and the Law of the Sea at the current session of the General Assembly indicated that 80 percent of international trade passes through the shipping corridors, which is the international trade artery and a key driver for achieving the 2030 sustainable development goals. Transnational organized crime at sea poses a serious threat, as terrorist groups such as those operating in the Gulf of Aden, the coasts of Somalia and the Gulf of Guinea engage in many illegal activities such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling, smuggling of migrants, human trafficking, piracy, armed robbery and terrorist acts against sea carriers and kidnapping.

Otaibi explained that these actions are aimed at obtaining ransom, resulting in loss of life and severe damage to international trade, energy corridors and the global economy in general, in order to achieve illegal objectives. He pointed out that illegal migration by sea is still one of the most important challenges facing the international community because of its security and humanitarian dimensions. He added that the statistics of the International Organization for Migration show that 1,514 people died during their journeys in the first seven months of 2018 while the number in 2017 is 3,140 people. —KUNA



NEW YORK: Kuwait's permanent representative to the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi speaks during a Security Council meeting on organized crime. —KUNA



KUWAIT: The Ambassador of the Kyrgyz Republic to Kuwait Samar Giul Adamkulova visited Kuwait Times yesterday and discussed matters of mutual concern with Editor-in-Chief Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Italian govt bids farewell to Kuwait's outgoing ambassador

ROME: The Italian government and the diplomatic corps in Rome have bid farewell to outgoing Kuwaiti Ambassador and Dean of the Gulf Diplomatic Corps Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of ending his tenure and to his role in promoting bilateral rela-

tions in various fields. The Kuwaiti embassy in Rome said in a statement that the Foreign Ministry held a special dinner in honor of Sheikh Ali which was attended by a number of senior diplomats last night.

Ambassador Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled received a special message from Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, expressing his high appreciation to his role, lauding his distinguished role and sincere efforts in consolidating the Italian-Kuwaiti friendship and cooperation relations at various levels. The Kuwaiti diplomat thanked the Italian government for the hospitality extended to him during his stay in Italy which reflected the deep-rooted ties between the two countries. —KUNA



ROME: Kuwaiti Ambassador and Dean of the Gulf Diplomatic Corps Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with a number of senior diplomats during a ceremony to commemorate him on the end of his tenure. —KUNA

Foreign Minister en route to Washington on official mission

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, heading a senior-level delegation, departed Kuwait yesterday, heading to Washington on an official visit. Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled's delegation includes Ambassador Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the State of Kuwait's Ambassador to the United States, Ambassador Sheikh Dr. Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, the Assistant Foreign Minister for the latter's bureau affairs, Reem Mohammad Al-Khaled, the Assistant Foreign Minister for the Two Americas, and a number of other ministry officials. He and his entourage were seen off by Ambassador Saleh Al-Loughani, the Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for the latter's bureau affairs, Counsellor Abdulmohsen Jaber Al-Zaid, the Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocol and other senior personnel. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah leaves Kuwait, heading to Washington on an official visit. —KUNA

Nicaragua expresses appreciation to Kuwait

MANAGUA: Nicaragua's Foreign Minister Denis Ronaldo Moncada has expressed his country's appreciation and gratitude for Kuwait's humanitarian stances towards his country and KFAED's contribution of \$30 million to finance a hospital in his country. Kuwait's Embassy in Nicaragua said in a press statement that this came during Moncada's reception of Kuwait's Ambassador to Mexico and non-resident in Nicaragua Metib Saleh Al-Mutotah.

During the meeting, Mutotah conveyed the best regards of Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah to Moncada who will be visiting Kuwait in a few days. He added that the visit would be a great opportunity to emphasize the deep brotherly relations between the two countries. Meanwhile, Moncada expressed his happiness for his upcoming official visit to Kuwait carrying a written message from the President Daniel Ortega Saavedra to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. —KUNA



MANAGUA: Nicaragua's Foreign Minister Denis Ronaldo Moncada meets with Kuwait's Ambassador to Mexico and non-resident in Nicaragua Metib Saleh Al-Mutotah. —KUNA

Kuwait participates in 15th meeting of Senior Donors to Syria

ISTANBUL: Kuwait reiterated its keenness to exert more humanitarian efforts to alleviate suffering of the Syrian people. Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations Nasser Al-Hayyen expressed great pleasure in Kuwait's participation at the 15th meeting of the Group of Senior Donors to Syria in Istanbul. In his speech during the meeting, Hayyen said that Kuwait took the initiative to host the first nine meetings where it had a great impact on highlighting the suffering of the Syrian people, refugees and displaced persons, as well as efforts of neighboring countries in hosting them and providing all means to ensure their human dignity.

Kuwait is convinced that the human suffering in Syria could not be ended immediately, and from its humanitarian and moral responsibilities, Kuwait worked through its non-permanent membership in the Security Council to draft resolution 2401, which demands a cessation of hostilities without delay for at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria to facilitate delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need. He also reiterated that Kuwait has fulfilled all its commitments to relieve the Syrian people, with a paid sum amounting to \$1.6 billion, of which \$300 million for each year from 2016 to 2018.

Moreover, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science are also signing memorandums of understanding in health and education projects with the countries hosting Syrian refugees, he said. He praised the efforts exerted by the UN Special Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs, Dr Ahmad Al-Muraikhi, for increasing the efficiency of humanitarian aid. He also thanked the Turkish government for hosting this humanitarian meeting, as well as the Syrian refugees. —KUNA

Local

Residents slam authorities' lack of attention to falling wooden poles

Public institutions' negligence endangers people's lives

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The negligence of some public institutions is endangering people's lives. A resident of block 4 in Fintas has complained about wooden poles repeatedly falling on the street, a building and even on his vehicle. Abdullah Al-Tayeb told Kuwait Times he has lost hope in receiving help from the ministry in charge. Since last year he has witnessed more than one incident of falling wooden posts, which he first thought were for electricity.

"When I called the Ministry of Electricity and Water, they immediately came to the site to check the wooden post lying on the ground. They told me it is for the Ministry of Communications, as these posts were used for landline phones in the past. When I called the Ministry of Communications, they refused to come and did not even want to talk to me. A group of the residents then sent an official letter to the ministry in October, but nobody responded," Tayeb said.

According to him, the first pole fell in October, when a laborer of a building contractor hit it by mis-

take with his vehicle. "That post fell on the street. The residents gathered and pushed the post to the side of the road, and since then it remains in the same place. A month later, during the rainstorms, another post fell, this time on my vehicle. The ministry did not respond and even the municipality has not removed it till today," he rued.

Tayeb tried to contact the emergency line. "On the hotline, they transferred me to the police, who asked whether the post was blocking the road. When I said that we had pushed it aside, they did not come. Then the ambulance called me to ask if someone was injured - fortunately, no one was," he added.

Recently, another pole fell on a nearby building. "Nobody came to remove it too, and the residents pulled it off the structure. These posts are really dangerous, and one day some of them may fall on people walking on the street. These wooden

posts are completely useless and the communications ministry should remove them. This problem has occurred in Fintas' block 4 and Mahboula's block 1," Tayeb pointed out.



Ministry called to remove 'useless' poles



Zain sponsors Project UCON environmental initiative

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its platinum sponsorship of Project UCON, an environmental initiative for the construction and design of Terminal 2 at Kuwait International Airport with the aim of promoting waste management and recycling. The event, held from 6 - 13 February at Shaheed Park, comes under the patronage and attendance of Board Chairman and Director General of the Environment Public Authority (EPA) Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Homoud Al-Sabah and Chief Engineer of the Kuwait International Airport Terminal 2 project Faisal Al-Ostath.

Zain's platinum sponsorship of this initiative falls under the company's solid Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy towards the environment sector, which centers around supporting the various efforts that serve environmental causes. Zain's social message seeks to stress on the importance of preserving natural resources and enrich environmental awareness in the community in which it operates.

Project UCON features a number of architectural offices and design firms that took part in constructing and designing the Kuwait International Airport Terminal 2 project. The firms designed and showcased various pavilions using waste materials from the project with the aim of promoting concepts of waste management and recycling. The Kuwait International Airport Terminal 2 project is considered the biggest strategic project of Kuwait's National Development Plan and one of the biggest projects of its kind across the Middle East region, resulting in a vast amount of construction waste. Project UCON's vision centered around promoting the importance of preserving the environment by recycling the waste of this mega project.

The event witnessed the presence of the Environment Public Authority (EPA), which Zain collaborated with in the past by supporting an awareness campaign launched by the EPA with the aim of introducing Kuwait's new environment law. The campaign witnessed tremendous success within the Kuwaiti community, and helped raise the lev-



KUWAIT: Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah and Faisal Al-Ostath recognize Waleed Al-Khashti for Zain's support to the event.



From the event.

els of environmental awareness. Project UCON also featured the presence of Omniya, an environment project that Zain strategically partners with to provide recycling bins for plastic bottles and plastic caps on every floor of Zain's three main headquarters buildings. The initiative aims at encouraging Zain employees to recycle, ultimately raising awareness about the importance of preserving the environment.

Zain is keen on shouldering such initiatives that contribute to preserving Kuwait's environment, as well as encouraging volunteering, recycling, and taking part in social activities within all age groups within the community. The company will spare no efforts to con-

tribute to spreading positive awareness for a better environmental culture in the society.

As part of its environmental contributions, Zain is a strategic partner of the Kuwait Dive Team for over 16 years. The company dedicated a brand new boat to the team, which is utilized to carry out marine preservation projects throughout the upcoming years. The boat is fully equipped with the latest state of the art equipment, and is being used for removing wrecked ships and boats from the bottom of the ocean, removing abandoned fishing nets, installing and maintaining environment-friendly anchors, monitoring coral reefs, cleaning shores, islands, and beaches, documenting marine life, and more.

KFAS, KISR ink deals to safeguard beaches, assess pollutants

KUWAIT: Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Science (KFAS) yesterday signed contracts with Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) to implement findings of two research projects for the Environment Public Authority (EPA); one about moving sand and receding beaches along the northern strip of Kuwait Bay and the other on Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. KFAS Director General Dr Adnan Shihab-Eldin, during a ceremony held by the foundation on the inking occasion, has affirmed that studies and environmental initiatives loom high in KFAS' 2017-2021 strategy.

The foundation funded, over the past five years, 35 environmental studies and projects, valued at some KD 2 million-focusing on desertification, air quality, water pollution, environmental well-being and biodiversity, Shihab-Eldin said. He affirmed that the first project aims at assessing hazards affecting the northern shore of the bay for sake of protecting planned installations in this

region. The second one, he continues, is designed to conduct full assessment of the persistent organic pollutants, enlisted in the Stockholm convention. The Stockholm convention is an international environmental treaty, signed in 2001 and effective from May 2004. It aims to eliminate or restrict the production and use of persistent organic pollutants (POPs).

Meanwhile, EPA Director General and Chairman Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Homoud Al-Sabah praised in remarks he made on margins of the ceremony the fruitful cooperation between the two sides. The first project, he affirms, will tackle hazards resulting from sand movement and beaches' erosion. KISR Director General Dr Samira Al-Sayed Omar affirmed the approach to eliminate dangers resulting from POPs, indicating that execution of the project would last for 24 months-at a value estimated at KD 288,100 (\$950,000). Kuwait hosts the regional center for West Asia for implementing the Stockholm accord. It occupies some offices at KFAS. — KUNA



KUWAIT: KFAS Director General Dr Adnan Shihab-Eldin (center) and KISR Director General Dr Samira Al-Sayed Omar (left) shake hands after signing the deal, as EPA Director General Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah looks on. — KUNA

Three persons freed from Andalus fire

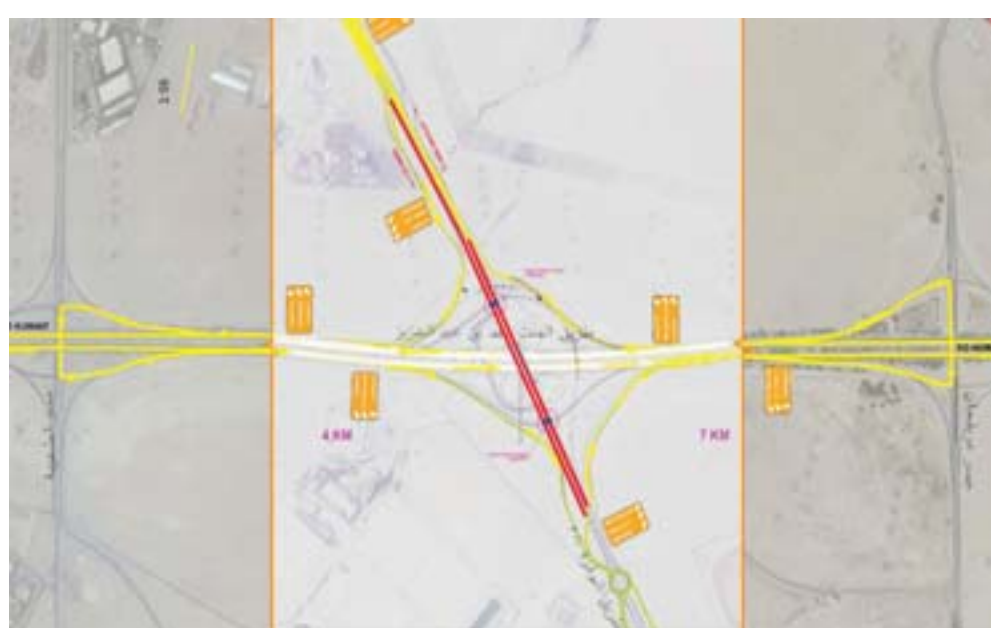
By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A three-storey building and a basement in Andalus caught fire, prompting Ardiya and Sulaibikhat fire stations to respond. The fire was on the

first floor with three persons trapped on the second floor (a woman and two girls, in good condition). A fireman suffered from smoke inhalation and lost consciousness, and was taken to hospital.

Inspection campaign

Farwaniya governorate's prevention department carried out an inspection campaign in Rai, where 20 violations were detected for non-renewal of licenses, random storage, closure of emergency exits and turning offices into laborers' residence.



KUWAIT: The traffic department, in coordination with Public Authority for Roads and Transport, will open a detour on Wafrat-Mina Abdullah Road with King Fahd Expressway to remove the temporary steel bridge at dawn on Friday, Feb 8.

Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A general view of Kuwait City at sunset. — Photo by Mohammad Al-Hadhoud (KUNA)

Ministry celebrates graduation of new batch of physicians

120 doctors completed academic courses under Kuwaiti medical board

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah on Tuesday honored 120 physicians and surgeons who completed post-graduate academic courses under the Kuwaiti medical board. The board, organized by Kuwait Institute for Medical Specializations (KIMS), includes 25 training courses in various specializations and six fellowship programs. At the graduation ceremony, the minister handed out the graduation certificates to the doctors and congratulated them on the occasion.

Sheikh Basel wished the graduates success in their professional life, voicing hope that they would contribute to the humanitarian action. He commended the achievements made by KIMS in modernizing the medical education system in the country and winning the accreditation of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada for its training programs. "The KIMS policies and training programs aim to ensure postgraduate education quality and provide guidance to newly established programs according to the world's latest standards of post-

graduate training," he pointed out. The minister called on the graduates, males and females, to continue delivering their humanitarian mission and upgrading the healthcare system in the country.

Meanwhile, KIMS Secretary-General Dr Ibrahim Hadi thanked Sheikh Basel for his firm support to the Institute in its efforts to reach the highest international levels. "In its institutional work since its inception, the Institute has been keen on keeping abreast with the latest developments in postgraduate education worldwide through an integrated system; this process led to KIMS accreditation by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada in June 2017," Dr Hadi noted. "The Institute is reaching out to Canadian colleges and the UK General Medical Council (GMC) and to secure more fellowships for the Kuwaiti doctors with a view to modernizing the medical careers in Kuwait," he revealed. — KUNA



Organized by KIMS



KUWAIT: Minister of Health Sheikh Basel Al-Sabah poses for a group photo during the graduation ceremony. — KUNA

Association commemorates World Cancer Day

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous cancer awareness and health advocacy initiatives in Kuwait, Fadia Survive and Thrive Cancer Association proudly organized 'Together we are Unstoppable in fighting Cancer: I Am and I Can' awareness event and workshop dedicated to the World Cancer Day on February 4, 2019. World Cancer Day is an initiative of the Union for International Cancer Control, the largest and oldest international cancer organization committed to taking the lead in uniting the cancer community to reduce the global cancer burden. The event aimed at raising awareness, while encouraging participants from cancer patients and the public to express themselves in terms of this year's campaign 'I am and I can' and make a personal commitment to accelerate actions against cancer.

The event was held at The Hub Gallery, the artistic space that pays homage to old Kuwaiti traditions, and was attended by many participants and guests of honor from over 13



nations. The event kicked off by a short speech given by the President of Fadia Survive and Thrive Cancer Association, Dr Rania Azmi, who started by thanking everyone for joining today, especially the diplomatic guests of honor, the Association's founding members Fadia Abdel Salam Ibrahim and Dr Eman Azmi, the distinguished guest speakers: Dr Fahad Abdul Rahman Marafi, Director of Jaber Al-Ahmad Center for Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging and President of

Kuwait Society of Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging, who shared the scientific potential in countering cancer in 2019 and beyond. Emilia Barr, registered psychotherapist, who gave a warm message to cancer patients, appreciating them while emphasizing the Body-Mind Integration perspective, other diplomats were also in attendance, community guests, cancer patients and their loved ones, besides representatives from local newspapers and magazines.

Commercial Bank decorates head office building

KUWAIT: In an annual tradition to express loyalty and belonging to Kuwait, and in celebration of the 58th National Day and the 28 Liberation Day, the Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) recently decorated its headquarters with illuminated artistic images taken from its annual calendar. Speaking on the occasion, CBK's deputy director for corporate communication Amani Al-Wer'a stressed that CBK is always keen on celebrating the national

anniversaries through many activities, including decorating the head office and various branches all over Kuwait. Wer'a added that this year's decorations highly appealed to the public, which was detected through comments made on the bank's social media accounts. "The head office was decorated with images of traditional games young boys and girls used to play in the past such as Mogsli, Haylah, Tayyara and Logsa," she added.



Local

Writer calls for further attention to women's issues at Kuwait's theater

Houti laments lack of 'perfect text' to adopt women's issues

School female cleaners protest unpaid salaries

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Female cleaners at Jahra schools yesterday went on strike after a one-week grace they had given to get two months of delayed salaries expired without any payment. Commenting on the strike, director of a girls school said the cleaners had been planning the strike for days and that the school administration had tried to report the matter to concerned officials, but their attempts were in vain.

Separately, the Ministry of Education (MoE) stressed the need that all female expatriate teachers update the information related to rent allowance and submit the needed documents - be they married or single. This came in a directive circulated to all educational areas urging the teachers to provide the new information to their respective educational zones. Meanwhile, MoE is expected to begin recruiting expat teachers in subjects where citizens are rare within a few days, added informed educational sources, noting that interviews of new applicants will start on Feb 17.

In another educational concern, MoE decided allowing Kuwaiti students to register their names at public schools at any time throughout the school year, said informed sources, noting that the new instructions came in a directive issued by MoE's acting undersecretary Fahd Al-Ghais. Notably, according to the annual MoE calendar, the last day to register primary school pupils was Sept 30, and transferring students from private to public schools had been limited to two weeks after the commencement of the school year.

CAIRO: Kuwait's female writer Nermeen Al-Houti on Tuesday underlined the necessity of paying much attention to women's issues at Kuwait's theater. Speaking during a seminar at Cairo International Book Fair, Houti stressed that theater has always been the reflection of any society. She demanded giving enough spaces to women's issues at theater similar to social and political issues. Despite the presence of several excellent writers at the Kuwaiti theater, there is no perfect text to adopt women's issues and depict their problems, she confirmed.

"We should not focus only on negative behaviors committed against women like beating and suppressing them since such acts don't express the whole society, but are individual cases," she said. There are attempts in Kuwait to graduate youth playwrights, she added, referring to efforts by Public Authority for Youth in this regard. She also pointed to some schools, which aim to train youth in different fields of theater like singing, music and others.

Houti expressed her satisfaction about children's theater in Kuwait, saying that there are theatrical wonderful performances in this category. She called for rebuilding the school theater to be a strong base for this purpose. Houti confirmed that this mission is not only based on the Ministry of Education but also on the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), and the Ministry of Information.

The body tasked with evaluating artistic texts does not prohibit them from being performed or published, but it writes only some notices for re-writing works in proper ways, she made clear. The body reads texts several times during several meetings held every week for the final approval, she revealed. After performing theatrical works, a committee is held to make sure that the texts are in line with the agreed-upon rules, Houti stated. She lauded Egypt's role in enhancing Arab cultural movement, affirming that it has been remaining the cradle of culture, arts and innovation. — KUNA



Theater is the reflection of any society



CAIRO: Kuwaiti writer Nermeen Al-Houti speaks during a seminar at Cairo International Book Fair. — KUNA

News in brief

New student credits transfer rules

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Education Minister Dr Hamed Al-Azmi has approved new guidelines over academic credit transfer and accumulation systems for students pursuing post-secondary education abroad. The new rules are meant to ensure a higher quality of education through regulating the process of academic credit transfer, the minister said in a statement yesterday. The guidelines meet world-class standards in education to help Kuwait students excel in their academic careers, he added, promising similar reforms as part of an education overhaul. — KUNA

Rent allowances

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Housing Welfare announced that in compliance with a decision made by Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Housing Affairs Jenan Bushehri, the authority will resume paying rent allowances to citizens whose allowances had been suspended because they had not applied to get any of the housing alternatives the authority provides. The authority's official spokesperson Ibrahim Al-Nashi further noted that the payments will resume in March. — By Meshal Al-Enezi

900 domestic helpers recruited

KUWAIT: Official sources said the Al-Durra company for manpower has brought around 900 domestic helpers since the company began accepting citizens' applications in Sept 2017 until now. They said Durra has signed 150 more contracts to bring in laborers soon. They said the company brought nearly 190 male and female workers from India, 700 domestic helpers from Sri Lanka - 650 women and 50 men, three female helpers from Burkina Faso and 24 from the Philippines. — Al-Rai

Ticket prices

The Civil Aviation General Directorate issued a decision banning all travel agencies authorized to sell tickets on behalf of airline companies from changing or adjusting declared prices by those companies. Measures will be taken against any offices that announces the prices in lesser amount than that declared by the company or its conditions. A source said all airline companies and travel agencies were informed about this matter, adding that agencies should issue tickets the same way companies do. — Al-Jarida

Bachelors residence

KUWAIT: Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Minister and State Minister for Municipal Affairs Fahd Al-Shula said he is committed to follow reports to confront the issue of 'bachelors residence' in private and model residential areas. He said the municipality seeks to remove bachelors from all private and model residential areas, and expected concerned authorities will succeed in solving the problem. — Al-Rai

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International

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Supreme Court rebukes Pakistani military and intelligence agencies

A 'special place in Hell' for Brexiteers: EU leader Tusk

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A fighter from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) walks past a former Islamic State (IS) group jihadist alms tax centre in the city of Hajin in Syria's eastern Deir Ezzor province on January 27, 2019 after the Kurdish-led and US-backed SDF retook the city from IS fighters. — AFP

Remnants of a crumbling IS 'caliphate'

Islamists leave troves of documents behind

HAJIN: "The caliphate is here to stay": in the last town it controlled in Syria, the Islamic State group is little more than a slogan on a broken storefront and a dark memory. Hajin has been largely leveled but reminders of jihadist rule remain on those walls that still stand amid the mounds of rubble and mangled construction iron rods. "We did not lie to God when we declared the State," reads another one, spray-painted on a wall in the town that was briefly the "capital" of IS's crumbling empire.

The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces expelled IS from Hajin in December and have now confined jihadists to a handful of hamlets a few miles down the Euphrates. Hajin's mayor, Ali Jaber, 56, points towards vacated buildings and houses dotting the sides of the road. "IS used to confiscate people's houses and transform them into headquarters. Every time someone vacated their house, they would seize it," he says.

He singles out an embattled building that has been reduced to a single floor following intensive shelling. The structure, which used to serve as a doctor's clinic, was

used by IS as a police base, he says. Nearby, a pile of rubble stands at the entrance of a destroyed house. A resident says jihadists used it as a religious tax office. "Take it with you, we don't want this here anymore," Jaber tells an AFP reporter, pointing to a document listing farming taxes issued by IS's very organized administration.

Copper coins

Further down the road, a set of white chairs are lined up on the sidewalk. Hays Al-Sheikh, 35, a resident, described it as a sort of outdoor cinema. Jihadists broadcast "horror films" there to attract recruits, he says, referring to IS propaganda videos that often included executions and gruesome scenes. Residents point to three utility poles nearby. They claim IS used to hang people from the three columns before stoning or shooting them to death.

Corpses would hang for at least three days, they say. IS converted some homes into makeshift prisons. In one of them, they had sealed off empty rooms with a metal

gate and installed bars on each of the windows. The group left troves of documents behind, including lists detailing the names of jihadists, the battalions they belonged to, and the number of their children and wives. SDF fighters have also found military identification cards seized by jihadists following battle, as well as copper coins that IS used as currency.

One SDF fighter pulls out a copper sovereign bearing an inscription at the bottom that reads: "The Islamic State-A caliphate modeled on the doctrine of the Prophet". IS swept across large swathes of Syria and neighboring Iraq in 2014, implementing their brutal interpretation of Islamic law in areas they controlled. At the height of their power, the group's former spokesman vowed to conquer Europe but the jihadists' statehood dreams have been reduced to ashes by relentless offensives.

'It's over'

Standing at the entrance of the main market in Hajin,

Shab Turki Al-Ayesh, 48, points towards the second biggest mosque in town. The resident recalls an announcement by an IS leader in the mosque. "He was carrying weapons and ammunition and he was surrounded by bodyguards," he says. "He told us, 'God willing, we will take over the world and in one week's time we will overtake Rome.'" Ayesh, who was detained five times by the jihadists, grins: "One week after the announcement we heard that he had escaped to Turkey or Germany."

"I never expected an organization of this size to lose," he says. The SDF is now trying to secure the last patch of Baghouz from IS. Near Baghouz, a village from which SDF forces are poised to launch the final assault on the last shreds of the "caliphate", Sami Abdulhamid sits in the back of a truck waiting to have his fingerprints taken. The 30-year-old Iraqi national, who has recently escaped jihadist territory, says IS is now very weak. "It's over. There's nothing left for them, just one street," he says. — AFP

'Get out of Syria,' Tehran tells US

GENEVA: Senior Iranian figures said yesterday that Syria was a top foreign policy priority and American troops should withdraw, as planned by US President Donald Trump. "Whether they want to or not, the Americans must leave Syria," Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was reported as saying.

There are fears in the West that Trump's plan to extricate about 2,000 soldiers from Syria will cede influence to Tehran, which has backed President Bashar Al-Assad in the nearly eight-year war, and also allow Islamic State militants to regroup. "Now 90 percent of Syrian soil is under the control of the government and the rest will soon be freed by the

Syrian army," Velayati added during a meeting with Syria's Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem in Tehran, according to the Tasnim news agency.

President Hassan Rouhani told Moualem that peace in Syria was a priority. "One of the important regional and foreign policy goals of the Islamic Republic is the stability and complete security of Syria," Tasnim quoted him as saying. "And establishing normal conditions in Syria and the return of the people of this country to their normal lives." Moualem was in Tehran for negotiations before the meeting of leaders of Russia, Turkey and Iran in the Russian Black Sea resort town Sochi on Feb. 14 over Syria.

Separately, Rear-Admiral Mahmoud Mousavi, a deputy commander of the regular armed forces, said yesterday that Iran plans to extend the range of its land-to-sea missiles beyond 300 kilometers (186 miles), according to the Fars news agency. — Reuters

The world trusts us: Vietnamese proud to host Trump, Kim

HANOI: Vietnamese young and old expressed their delight yesterday after hearing their country had been chosen for the second face-to-face meeting between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. The communist-run Southeast Asian country was announced during Trump's State of the Union address as the location for the high-profile summit due to take place later this month.

It follows the pair's historic handshake and brief declaration on denuclearization at their inaugural meeting in Singapore in June last year. The pick brings prestige to the former US foe-turned-ally and is symbolic for Vietnam of a certain generation, who welcomed the move. "Our country now has a new position and the world trusts us," Pham Van Thau, an 82-year-old communist party member, told AFP in Hanoi.

"The summit will help the world understand more about Vietnam." The precise location for the summit-to be held on February 27 and 28 — has not been announced, though both the capital Hanoi and beach resort town Danang have been rumored. Nguyen Hong Nhung, a masters student, hoped the summit could expand her country's budding tourism industry. "We have a chance... to show everyone that Vietnam



HANOI: A Vietnamese policeman stands guard outside the North Korean embassy. — AFP

is a beautiful country and that the Vietnamese are friendly," she said. Analysts say the trip, which is set to be Kim's first to Vietnam, could offer the North Korean leader a model of post-war economic transformation under a communist state with capitalist leanings. Nhung agreed: "I think North Korea now is like Vietnam before the US embargo was lifted, poor and economically limited." On Facebook and other social media platforms, users beamed with pride at the prospect of the summit.

Commenters on one site said Kim could even take inspiration from the country's north and south reunifying after the war. "They meet in Vietnam so that Kim can see how the two parts of a country will look like after reunification," Gia Hoang commented on otofun.net. Vietnam is looking to follow up on its successful hosting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in 2017 and the regional World Economic Forum last year-boosting its diplomatic gravitas on the global stage. — AFP

Nearly 200 'Bangladeshis' crammed into shophouse

MEDAN, Indonesia: Almost 200 men identified by police as Bangladeshi have been found crammed into a shophouse in Indonesia, authorities said yesterday. Police in the city of Medan on Sumatra island were tipped off to the group by suspicious residents who lived nearby. When police raided the shophouse on Tuesday they found some 192 men, mostly in their twenties, occupying the two-

storey building with many complaining about lack of food, authorities said.

Officials said they believed the men had arrived from Bangladesh and were living in the cramped quarters for several months in the hopes of going to neighboring Malaysia for work. "We think they arrived here by boat. They don't have any documents," said head of Medan immigration Fery Monang Sihite. "We're still questioning them and will later decide whether we need to deport them or not." It was not immediately clear who owned the building or what role they may have played in the affair. In recent years, Indonesia has seen hundreds of asylum seekers — mostly Afghans and minority Rohingya from Myanmar — arrive in the northern part of Sumatra. In 2015, hundreds of Muslim Rohingya arrived ashore in Aceh, where they were welcomed in the staunchly conservative Islamic province. — AFP

International

Brain drain is a pre-election headache for Algerian govt

Young professionals seek opportunities abroad

ALGIERS: No matter who wins Algeria's presidential election, 29-year-old cardiologist Moumen Mohamed plans to seek his fortune elsewhere. He is one of a growing number of young, educated Algerians who are looking for work in Europe or the Gulf to escape the low salaries imposed by a state-dominated economy at home. The exodus of doctors, engineers and other highly skilled workers is a headache for a government hoping to engage with its largely youthful electorate ahead of the vote on April 18. President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, 81, has not said if he will seek a fifth term, although the ruling FLN party, labor unions and business leaders are urging him on.

For young professionals, the question is scarcely relevant. Many feel disconnected from an elite populated by the veterans of Algeria's 1954-1962 war of independence from France, an era they only know about from their grandparents. They want to pursue their careers but feel discouraged by a system that offers low-paid jobs and little opportunity to better themselves. "I have already done my paperwork to migrate," said Moumen, the cardiologist, who works at a state hospital. "I am waiting for a response."

Nearly 15,000 Algerian doctors work in France now and 4,000 submitted applications to leave their home country last year, according to official figures. The government does not accept all the blame. "The press has exaggerated the phenomenon ... it is a problem for all Algerians, not just the government," Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia said in response to a reporter's question about young doctors leaving. But in Europe doctors can earn ten times what they get in Algeria, a socialist economy where medical professionals are paid little more than less skilled public employees.

"Salaries, working conditions are bad, and above all there is no appreciation of doctors," said Mohamed Yousfi, head of the specialist doctors' union. "Our doctors are filling the medical desert in Western countries like France, Canada and Germany. They are also present in the Gulf," said Yousfi, sitting in his office in the public hospital at Boufarik, a town near Algiers. The hospital, which opened in 1872, was being refurbished by building workers, and Yousfi said medical equipment was readily available. "The authorities focus on walls and equipment but forget human resources," he said.

Public sector

Algeria has poured billions of dollars in the health sector in the past decades, with around 50,000 doctors and 150,000 beds available in 2018, official data shows. The North African oil and gas producing nation guarantees citizens cradle-to-grave welfare, but lack of competition from the private sector means some services are poor. The country only ranks 85 out of 189 in the Human Development Index of living standards compiled by the United Nations Development Program. This is behind Western and Eastern Europe, the Gulf and even sanctions-hit Iran.

Many public hospitals do not offer the same level of quality as private clinics, which have been slowly opening. Those who can afford it go abroad for treatment. "We are not respected as we should be as long as our dignitaries, ministers and generals continue to seek treatment overseas," said a doctor who asked not to be named. Doctors are not the only ones who want to migrate. Pilots, computer engineers, oil drillers and even journalists are also heading for the airport, privately owned Algerian media report.

Around 10,000 engineers and drillers from the state energy firm Sonatrach have left the company in the past ten years, according to senior company officials. "If nothing is done to improve working conditions and salaries, more and more will leave," a Sonatrach source said. Most professionals head for the Gulf, where they earn good salaries. "I left Algeria in 2015. I am a computer engineer and I am now in Oman working for a big telecoms firm," Messaoud Benali, 39, said by phone. "I know plenty of educated Algerians who work in Gulf countries," he said.

Bouteflika must say whether he will run or not by March 3, according to the constitution. If he does, he is expected to win despite his poor health, because the opposition remains weak and fragmented, analysts say. But how the ruling elite can connect with young people is another question altogether. Algeria has one of the world's slowest internet speeds, but its young people are still very tech-savvy. This became clear when 21-year-old singer Farouk Boujemline invited fans via Snapchat to celebrate his birthday in the centre of Algiers.

About 10,000 showed up, jamming the traffic for hours, and police had to set up barriers around the city's



ALGIERS: Algerian Ministers and representatives of the president-candidate Abdelaziz Bouteflika (poster), (L to R) Amara Benyounes, Ahmed Ouyahia, Mouad Bouchareb, and Amar Ghoul shake hands after a political meeting in the capital. — AFP

independence monument to make sure the party didn't get out of control. By contrast, Bouteflika, Prime Minister Ouyahia and several other ministers do not have Twitter accounts to communicate with the public. Algeria is one of the few countries where government ministries still use fax machines to communicate with the outside world. "How to reconnect with the young elite, this is the top priority for Algeria's next president," said political analyst Ferrahi Farid.

In the past, authorities could ensure public support by

increasing salaries or extending the welfare state. When riots erupted in Algiers in 2011, the government sought to prevent any spread of the Arab Spring uprisings by offering billions to pay for salary increases, interest-free loans, and thousands of jobs in the public sector. But 95 percent of government income depends on oil and gas revenues, which halved in the years from 2014 to 2017, forcing officials to impose a public hiring freeze. "When the oil price is \$100 you can do a lot, but when it is \$50 there is not much you can do," Farid said. — Reuters

Pope hopes his Arabian trip will help Christian, Islam relations

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis said yesterday he hoped his historic trip to the Arabian peninsula will help dispel the notion of an inevitable clash of civilizations between Christianity and Islam. Francis returned to Rome on Tuesday from the United Arab Emirates, where in Abu Dhabi he presided at the largest public Mass ever celebrated on the peninsula where Islam was born.

"In an era, like ours, where there is a strong temptation to see a clash between Christian civilization and the Islamic one, and even to consider religions as a source of conflict, we wanted to send another clear and decisive signal that encounter is possible," he said at his regular general audience. Francis was referring to a document he signed during the trip with Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, grand imam of Egypt's al-Azhar mosque and university, one of the most authoritative theological and educational institutions in Islam.

The pope said the "Document on Human Fraternity" was proof that "it is possible to respect each other and hold dialogue, and that despite differences in culture and traditions, the



ABU DHABI: Christian worshippers attend a mass, led by Pope Francis, at the Zayed Sports City Stadium. — AFP

Christian and Islamic worlds appreciate and protect common values ...". The document, signed on Monday, called on "all concerned to stop using religions to incite hatred, violence, extremism and blind fanaticism, and to refrain from using the name of God to justify acts of murder, exile, terrorism and oppression."

He invited everyone to read the document, saying it would offer ideas on how individuals can work for tolerance and coexistence. Ultra-conservative Catholics have been opposed to any dialogue with Islam, with

some saying its ultimate goal is to destroy the West. On the plane returning from Abu Dhabi on Tuesday, a reporter asked Francis about possible negative reaction to the document by Catholics "who accuse you of allowing yourself to be used by Muslims".

Francis, a progressive who has been in the crosshairs of conservatives since his election in 2013, responded with a joke: "Not only the Muslims. They accuse me of allowing myself to be used by everyone, even journalists. It's part of the job." — Reuters

remain vacant. Trump's first secretary of state Rex Tillerson, a former oil executive tasked with decreasing the size of the State Department, had suggested eliminating the envoy, arguing that other officials already handle anti-Semitism.

Lawmakers disagreed, with Congress last month passing a law that will require the administration to fill any vacancy in the anti-Semitism envoy position within 120 days. "For too long, the Trump administration failed the global Jewish community, dragging its feet to fill this critical position during a time of increased anti-Semitism around the world," Representative Eliot Engel, a Democrat who heads the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a statement as he welcomed Carr's appointment.

A total of 13 Jews were killed around the world last year in anti-Semitic attacks, the highest level in decades, according to an Israeli government report issued for Holocaust Remembrance Day. Eleven of the dead were shot dead in October at a Pittsburgh synagogue in the deadliest-ever anti-Semitic attack in the United States.

Trump, while a close ally of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, caused an uproar in 2017 when he said that "some very fine people" were among white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia who chanted anti-Semitic slogans in a rally that ended in the killing of a counter-protester. — AFP

Trump names envoy to fight anti-Semitism

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's administration on Tuesday named a seasoned prosecutor as the US envoy to fight anti-Semitism abroad, waiting two years to fill the post despite rising violence against Jews. Elan Carr, the grandson of Holocaust survivors who has served on the national council of the pro-Israel pressure group AIPAC, is a former deputy district attorney in Los Angeles known for prosecuting gangs and ran unsuccessfully for Congress as a Republican. "Promoting human rights and religious freedom, including by combating anti-Semitism everywhere it exists, is a US foreign policy priority that furthers our national interests of stability and democracy," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement announcing Carr's appointment.

Carr immediately headed on his first foreign trip to attend conferences in Slovakia and Belgium on anti-Semitism in Europe, according to the State Department. The appointment came more than two years after Trump took office and as many key diplomatic positions

Tunisia school mum receives suspended sentence for racism

TUNIS: A Tunisian mother has been given a suspended jail sentence for hurling racist insults at a teacher who threw her daughter out of class. Campaigners hailed Monday's judgment by the court in Tunisia's second city Sfax as the first under a new anti-racism law approved by parliament last October. The woman, who had spent several days in custody awaiting trial, was handed a suspended jail sentence of five months and a 400 dinar (130 euro) fine, court spokesman Mourad Turki said on Tuesday.

Three months and 300 dinars of the sentence were for the racist nature of the abuse, while the rest was for insulting a state employee. The court heard

that the mother, who had rushed to school after receiving a phone call from her daughter to say she was being expelled for her behavior, had insulted the teacher over the color of his skin. Under the law passed by parliament on October 9, offenders can be jailed for up to one year and fined 1,000 dinars (\$350, 300 euros) for making racist insults.

Incitement to hatred, making racist threats, spreading and advocating racism, and belonging to an organization that supports discrimination are punishable by one to three years in prison and carry fines of up to 3,000 dinars. Tunisia has a significant black minority whose ancestry goes back to the days of the slave trade. — AFP

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International

A 'special place in Hell' for
Brexiters: EU leader Tusk

'Divorce deal will not be reopened'

BRUSSELS: European Union leader Donald Tusk yesterday condemned those calling for Brexit with no idea how to carry it out, saying he hopes Theresa May now has a "realistic" plan. The British prime minister is due in Brussels today to discuss ways to ensure Britain's orderly withdrawal from the EU and avoid what Tusk warned would be a "fiasco."

But Tusk, standing by Irish leader Leo Varadkar, warned once again that the divorce deal May agreed last year but failed to sell to her parliament will not be reopened. Neither will the deal's "backstop" that ensures an open Irish border, he said, damning the British eurosceptics pushing for an abrupt "no deal" departure. "I've been wondering what that special place in Hell looks like, for those who promoted Brexit without even a sketch of a plan how to carry it out safely," Tusk said.

Ireland's Varadkar met Tusk, who represents EU member states as president of the European Council, before talks with EU Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker. Both top EU officials are due to host May today, but few in Brussels expect her to come with an acceptable offer to revive the deal, 50 days from Brexit. "Today our most important task is to prevent a no deal scenario," Tusk said, stressing that the EU "is not making any new offer" and the deal is "not open for renegotiation."

Offering warm support for his guest, Tusk said the European Union "will not gamble with peace" on the Irish border by removing the backstop from the deal. "I hope that tomorrow we will hear from Prime Minister May a realistic suggestion on how to end the impasse," he said.

And Tusk added: "A sense of responsibility also tells us to prepare for a possible fiasco." Varadkar, whose government has stressed the importance of maintaining an open border between Ireland and Northern Ireland after Brexit, thanked Tusk.

Painstaking talks

"While we expect the backstop will never be used, we agreed again today it is needed as a legal guarantee to ensure there is no return to hard border," he said. May fears she will not be able to command a majority in the House of Commons to ratify a withdrawal that binds Britain into a customs union until the border issue is resolved. Yesterday, she discussed the issue with Northern Irish leaders in the British province before her difficult visit to Brussels to confront a

European Union 'will not gamble with peace'

sceptical Juncker and Tusk.

Last month, the House of Commons overwhelmingly rejected the Brexit deal that May had negotiated with the EU over 18 months of painstaking high-stakes diplomacy. May is now looking into changes to satisfy her MPs, who fear the backstop would keep Britain indefinitely tied to EU rules with even closer alignment for Northern Ireland. Speaking in Northern Ireland on Tuesday, May vowed to seek a solution that keeps the border open and preserves the peace that ended years of violence in the British province.

The impasse in Brussels has led to heightened fears Britain could crash out of the EU, its closest trading partner, without a deal on March 29, disrupting trade flows.



BRUSSELS: Ireland's Prime Minister Leo Varadkar (L) and European Council President Donald Tusk shake hands after making a statement following a meeting yesterday at the European Council headquarters. — AFP

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said during a trip to Tokyo on Tuesday: "Two months is not a long time but there is still time, and this should be used by all sides." British MPs who met Juncker's right-hand man, Martin

Selmayr, in Brussels on Monday said he did not rule out some kind of legal assurance on the backstop. But Selmayr himself rejected this, tweeting: "On the EU side, nobody is considering this." — AFP

News in brief

Indian Hindu temple case

NEW DELHI: A board that oversees an ancient Hindu hill temple in southern India said yesterday it now favored allowing women of menstruating age to enter the temple, reversing its previous support for a centuries-old ban. The Sabarimala temple has been the site of tension since India's Supreme Court ruled in late September to end a ban on women and girls aged from 10-50 from entering. The Travancore Devaswom Board, which administers the temple, had refused to abide by the court ruling and thousands of devotees have blocked attempts by women to visit the site. Yesterday, the board said it would now abide by the court ruling. "After the Supreme Court judgment, we discussed a lot. We realise that we should respect the judgment of the court," lawyer Rakesh Dwivedi said after a board hearing on the matter. — Reuters

British woman jailed

DENPASAR: A British woman was handed a six-month jail term yesterday for slapping an immigration officer in Bali after she missed her flight because of an expired tourist visa. A court on the Indonesian holiday island found Auj-e Taqaddas, 43, guilty of assaulting the officer at Ngurah Rai international airport in July last year. A viral video of the episode showed the woman launch into an expletive-laden rant when she was told she would have to pay a \$4,000 fine for overstaying her visa by several months. She then hit an officer, accusing him of making her miss a flight. Taqaddas, who vowed to appeal the verdict, was physically taken to the courthouse yesterday after missing several earlier court dates, authorities said. She was not detained before the sentencing. — AFP

Woman wins rare acquittal

ALMATY: A Kazakh woman standing trial over political posts she wrote on a messenger application was found not guilty yesterday, her lawyer said, months after her husband was sentenced to jail in a similar case. A court in Aktau, a city in western Kazakhstan, acquitted Aigul Akberdi of calling for "forcible overthrow of the constitutional order" in posts on the Telegram messenger app, her lawyer Zhanara Sundetkaliyeva said. The judge found there was "no evidence" to convict the mother of four, and said the probe contained violations, the lawyer added. The verdict was greeted by observers as a rare victory for long-suffering civil society in the authoritarian Central Asian country. Akberdi was seen weeping with joy in scenes broadcast live on Facebook. "Forward, Kazakhstan!" she cried. — AFP

Turkey blasts Macron

ANKARA: Turkey yesterday hit out at President Emmanuel Macron's announcement that France would make April 24 a "national day of commemoration of the Armenian genocide." "We condemn and reject attempts by Macron, who is afflicted by political problems in his own country, to try and save the day by turning historical events into a political matter," Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said in a statement after the French leader's announcement on Tuesday. Macron said Tuesday: "France is, first and foremost, the country that knows how to look history in the face," during a speech to the Armenian community at a dinner in Paris. Turkey and Armenia have long been at odds over the treatment of Armenians during World War I. Armenians say up to 1.5 million of their people were killed during the war. — AFP

At US State of the Union, women in white stand up (or sit down) to Trump

WASHINGTON: He didn't count on the women in white. President Donald Trump's State of the Union speech on Tuesday was billed as his attempt to unify the country. But Democratic women lawmakers from the House of Representatives, many of them dressed elegantly in white to celebrate 100 years of women having the right to vote, projected a picture of calm displeasure during Trump's speech that made clear his version of unity was not one they could accept.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the most powerful Democrat in the country, sat behind the president on the stage, wearing a white pantsuit. She shook her head or looked on disapprovingly when he challenged Democrats or laid out a dark vision of illegal immigrants assailing America. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a young social media star, looked down or away when Trump delivered comments she viewed as egregious and stared daggers at colleagues who stood and clapped.

Then the president spoke about women in the workforce, and the dynamic changed. As he lauded the growing number of women finding jobs in the economy, the women lawmakers in white rose and cheered, apparently for themselves, for filling many of the open jobs in Congress during the congressional elections in November. "You weren't supposed to do that," Trump said with a smile, pointing at them and drawing laughter. Telling them not to sit down yet because there was more good news to come, Trump went on to recognize the record number of women serving in the Capitol.

They cheered some more and chanted: "USA, USA!" Republicans joined in. It was a rare moment during the

Greek PM in symbolic visit to Istanbul's disputed landmarks

ISTANBUL: Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras yesterday visited the disputed landmarks of Hagia Sophia and a now-closed seminary in Turkey, in a sign of detente in the neighboring countries' strained ties. Istanbul's Hagia Sophia, a former church and mosque that is now a museum, often sparks tensions between Christians and Muslims over Islamic activities held there including the reading of verses from the Koran or collective prayers.

Its secular status allows believers of all faiths to meditate, reflect or simply enjoy its astonishing architecture of what is one of the most emblematic edifices of human civilization. But calls for it to serve again as a mosque have caused anger among Christians and raised tensions between historic foes and uneasy NATO allies Turkey and Greece. Tsipras' symbolic visit to the Hagia Sophia came on the second day of his first trip to Turkey in four years. The prime minister met Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin at the museum, an AFP correspondent said. "You can feel the burden of history here," Tsipras told AFP.

The Greek premier listened enthusiastically as a guide accompanying the delegation explained the history of the edifice. Police tightened security measures around the museum. The Hagia Sophia was first built as a church in the sixth century under the Christian Byzantine Empire as the centerpiece of its capital Constantinople, today's Istanbul. Almost immediately after the conquest of Constantinople by the Muslim Ottomans in 1453, it was converted into a mosque before becoming a secular museum in a key reform of the new post-Ottoman Turkish authorities under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in the 1930s.

Ataturk was the founder of the Turkish republic. Since Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power, critics and advocates of secularism fear the government harbors a hidden agenda to reconvert the Hagia Sophia into a mosque. But Turkey's top court in September last year rejected an asso-



WASHINGTON: Congresswomen, dressed in white in tribute to the women's suffrage movement, pose for a photo as they arrive for the State of the Union address at the US Capitol on Tuesday. — AFP

ciation's demand that the Hagia Sophia be opened for Muslim prayers. Greece, which closely follows the future of Byzantine heritage in Turkey, has repeatedly expressed concern over efforts to change the museum's status.

When he declared the state of the union "strong," they disagreed and most stayed in their seats. When he warned against "ridiculous partisan investigations," the sound of hissing could be heard. Proclaiming that the United States would never be a socialist country, Trump drew an ovation from Republicans and even some Democrats. Senator Elizabeth Warren, a Democratic presidential hopeful, hesi-

tated but eventually stood up and clapped. Ocasio-Cortez, a self-described Democratic Socialist, smiled broadly.

There were some moments of bipartisanship. When the president called for embracing the principles of compromise, Pelosi stood up and applauded heartily. Trump turned around and nodded to her in acknowledgement. Lawmakers applauded an elderly American who helped liberate the Dachau concentration camp in Germany during World War Two and erupted in cheers for former astronaut Buzz Aldrin, the second man to walk on the moon. But those moments were more a rarity than a rule. At the beginning of the evening, as Trump entered the chamber, Republicans clapped, while some Democrats stood and kept their hands folded. — Reuters



ISTANBUL: Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras (C) and Turkish officials visit the Byzantine-era Hagia Sophia museum. — AFP

another AFP journalist reported. It is the first visit to the service at the seminary by a Greek prime minister since it was closed in 1971 by the Turkish government during tensions between Athens and Ankara over the Cyprus issue. "Next time I come I hope we reopen the school with Erdogan," Tsipras said. "The minorities in Greece and Turkey are no reason for conflict but are here to build bridges," he added.

Future priests of the Constantinople diocese had been trained at the seminary. "We pray that the momentous and significant day will arrive soon when this seminary that cultivates our theological education will once again open its doors," Bartholomew said. Turkey, a Muslim-majority country, has in recent years returned the land seized from Halki in 1943 back to the seminary but its reopening is not planned despite international pressure. Erdogan has in the past said the reopening of the seminary depended on reciprocal steps from Greece to enhance the rights of the Turkish minority. — AFP

'Reopen school with Erdogan'

Greece has for centuries had a testy relationship with Turkey, with rows ranging from Aegean sea issues and the Cyprus problem to minorities' rights, the migrant crisis and the flight of Turkish military soldiers after a 2016 coup attempt. Tsipras and Erdogan on Tuesday agreed to resolve disputes between their two countries through dialogue, with the Turkish president saying a "politician's job is not to win enemies but friends". The Greek premier later attended a religious service with Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople at the Greek Orthodox Halki seminary, located on Heybeli island off Istanbul. After lighting a candle, he attended the service by the patriarch's side but did not pray,

International

Supreme Court rebukes Pakistani military and intelligence agencies

Court tells army to stay out of politics

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Supreme Court rebuked the powerful military and intelligence agencies yesterday, calling for them to uphold free speech and stay out of politics in a country ruled by the generals for nearly half its existence. The unusually strong criticism was issued in a judgment released criticizing the role of the intelligence agencies in anti-blasphemy protests which paralyzed the capital Islamabad for several weeks in 2017.

"If any personnel of the Armed Forces indulges in any form of politicking or tries to manipulate the media he undermines the integrity and professionalism of the Armed Forces," the judgment, posted on the Supreme Court website, stated. Pakistan's Constitution "emphatically prohibits" members of the armed forces from "engaging in any kind of political activity", it added, ordering the government and the chiefs of the army, air force and navy to take action against anyone found violating their oaths to uphold the document.

The 2017 protests were led by a then-little known Islamist group called the Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), and were only dispersed after violent clashes led to a military-brokered deal which forced the resignation of the federal law minister. Viral videos showing what appeared to be soldiers handing out cash to protesters helped fuel specu-

lation the demonstrators were backed by the military as it sought to put pressure on the then-ruling party of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

The judgment also spelled out curbs on free speech, singling out the intelligence agencies for a stern warning. "All intelligence agencies... and the (military's media wing) must not exceed their respective mandates. They cannot curtail the freedom of speech and expression," the judgment said. "Those who resort to such tactics under the mistaken belief that they serve some higher goal delude themselves," it continued.

Local media have complained about pressure in the run-up to a general election in July to self-censor in favor of the eventual victor, cricketer-turned-prime-minister Imran Khan. Activists and bloggers speaking out against the state and military have also complained of repression. The Committee to Protect Journalists said the army had "quietly but effectively, set restrictions on reporting" in a report released September last year. Pakistan's courts have cautioned the military establishment against meddling before-and paid a price. An Islamabad High Court judge was ousted last year after he publicly accused the country's top intelligence agency of manipulating judicial decisions to influence the general election.—AFP



LAHORE: Pakistani policemen scuffle with Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) party activists outside the anti-terrorist court on the arrival of their leader Khadim Hussain Rizvi during a hearing in Lahore on February 4, 2019, following last year's violent protest in opposition to the acquittal of a Christian woman from blasphemy charges.—AFP

Two journalists killed in attack on radio station

KABUL: Two journalists were shot and killed when gunmen stormed their radio station in northeast Afghanistan, officials said yesterday, underscoring the dangers faced by reporters in the war-torn country. The pair, both men in their 20s, were gunned down inside the studios of Radio Hamsada, a private broadcaster based in Taloqan, the capital of Takhar province. Nobody has claimed responsibility for the attack and an investigation was underway, provincial spokesman Jawad Hejri said. "Two unidentified gunmen entered the radio station's office at around 6pm on Tuesday. They opened fire on two reporters who were behind their mics during a live program. Both reporters died at the scene," he said.

The attack is the second this year in Afghanistan targeting journalists, and comes as diplomatic efforts to end the 17-year war have intensified. Last month, Afghan citizen journalist Jawid Noori was snatched from his car and murdered by the Taliban in Farah province in the country's west. 2018 was the deadliest year on record for journalists in Afghanistan, according to Reporters Without Borders. US ambassador to Kabul, John Bass, said he was "saddened and angered" by the killings. "It is time to #EndImpunity for crimes against journalists. #PressFreedom," he tweeted.

Amnesty International described the latest attack as a "horrific crime" and urged Afghan authorities to ensure protection for journalists so they could work safely. "This attack once again highlights the risks journalists continue to face in Afghanistan for just doing their job," the group's South Asia researcher, Zaman Sultani, said in a statement. Afghanistan's Journalists Safety Committee called on the government to "identify the perpetrators and make sure that the justice is served." AFP's chief photographer in Afghanistan, Shah Marai, was among 25 people killed along with eight other journalists in a bomb attack in April 2018.—AFP

India political parties abuse WhatsApp

NEW DELHI: India's political parties have been abusing Facebook Inc's popular messaging service WhatsApp ahead of the country's general election and the company has warned them not to do so, a senior executive said yesterday. WhatsApp declined to name the parties or give the exact nature of the alleged misuse, but there is mounting concern in India that party workers could abuse the platform by using automated tools for mass messaging, or spread false news to sway voters.

The messaging app has become a key campaign tool used widely by workers of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the opposition Congress party, which accuse each other of propagating fake news while denying they do so themselves. "We have seen a number of parties attempt to use WhatsApp in ways that it was not intended, and our firm message to them is that using it in that way will result in bans of our service," Carl Woog, head of communications for WhatsApp, told reporters. The next general election must be held by May.

Broadcast platform
The platform's challenges in India are not unique. It was flooded with falsehoods and conspiracy theories ahead of the October election in Brazil, raising concerns that it was being used to distort the political debate. India is WhatsApp's biggest market with more than 200 million users. Ahead of state polls in the western state of Rajasthan in December, BJP and Congress workers showed a Reuters reporter dozens of WhatsApp groups they belonged to and used for campaigning.

Woog said they had engaged with political parties to explain the company's view that the app was not a "broadcast platform". "We are trying to be very clear going into the election that there is abuse on WhatsApp. We are working very hard to identify it and prevent it as soon as possible," he said. The BJP's head of information technology, Amit Malviya, told Reuters he had not met with WhatsApp representatives and declined to comment further. Congress' social media head, Divya Spandana, said the party does not abuse WhatsApp. WhatsApp has been at the centre of controversy in India since last year after false messages spread on its platform sparked a number of mob lynchings.

WhatsApp has tried to curb the spread of fake news by educating users through roadshow campaigns, as well as print and radio advertising. It also limited the number of



NEW DELHI: In this file photo taken on December 11, 2018, president of the Indian National Congress Party Rahul Gandhi speaks during a press conference at the All India Congress Committee offices.—AFP

people someone can forward a message to at one time. WhatsApp, which has 1.5 billion active users globally, said on Wednesday it bans two million accounts each month for sending bulk or automated messages. It did not say how many are banned in India.—Reuters

Australia cancels residency of China billionaire

SYDNEY: A prominent Chinese billionaire political donor has been stripped of his Australian residency and barred from returning to the country after scrutiny of his Communist Party ties, media reported yesterday. Huang Xiangmo was reportedly left stranded outside of Australia after Home Affairs cancelled his permanent residency and rejected his application for citizenship. The prominent property developer has donated millions to Australia's two main political parties and been photographed with key figures including

former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull and opposition leader Bill Shorten.

But he has come under scrutiny for alleged links to the United Front Work Department—a Communist Party-linked body accused of neutralizing opposition and buying political influence around the world. Asked about Huang's case, Prime Minister Scott Morrison said he would not comment on such "sensitive matters", but added "the government has always acted consistent with the advice that we've received and that's what has happened on this occasion."

Quoting unnamed sources, the Sydney Morning Herald newspaper said Huang had his application for an Australian passport blocked on "character grounds" and concerns over the "reliability" of information he had supplied in interviews. The Home Office declined AFP's request for comment on the case.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Marise Payne played down suggestions that the decision to strip Xiangmo of his residency could poison relations between Canberra and Beijing. The countries' economies are deeply intertwined, but conflicting political systems and China's increasingly strong-arm tactics in the Pacific region have made cooperation more difficult. "I don't expect it to be the subject of a bilateral discussion. These are matters that occur from time to time," she told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation when asked about the Huang case.

Influence campaign

Australia's main spy agency has long voiced concerns that China was interfering in Australian institutions and using the opaque political donations system to gain access. It reportedly warned the country's political elite about taking donations from

Huang—who owns a multi-million-dollar mansion in Sydney — and a fellow billionaire property developer, Chau Chak Wing. In 2017, one-time opposition Labor powerbroker Sam Dastyari was forced to quit politics when it emerged his office took cash from Huang to pay legal bills. The Sydney Morning Herald said Dastyari had repeatedly contacted immigration personally to check on Huang's case.

Canberra last year introduced sweeping reforms to its espionage and foreign interference laws, strengthening existing offences and introducing new ones targeting the foreign influence of domestic politics, including a ban on foreign donations to political parties. "Foreign adversaries are actively working against Australia's interests through a variety of means, including obtaining classified information or seeking to influence the outcome of Australia's democratic processes," the government said upon passing the laws in June.—AFP

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Stray cows add to Modi farmer woes as election looms

As night fell on the bucolic northern Indian hamlet of Mahaban, Gopi Chand Yadav gathered blankets and a flashlight to spend the night sitting on a wooden platform in his field. His task: To use bamboo sticks to ward off stray cattle from intruding and eating a maturing mustard crop. Like Yadav, many thousands of farmers stay awake to guard their farms over a cold winter or face losing their crops to the cattle - a double whammy for growers already reeling from a plunge in Indian crop prices.

While stray cows ambling around towns and villages have always been a feature of life in rural India, farmers say their number has increased sharply in recent years to the extent that they have become a menace, and blame the policies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government.

Protecting cows - considered sacred to Hindus - was one of the measures meant to shore up support in the heavily populated, Hindi-speaking belt across northern India that has been a heartland of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP). Instead, it is creating a backlash, even among Hindu farmers. "We already had enough problems and now the government has created one more," said octogenarian farmer Baburao Saini from Kakripur village, about 85 km from New Delhi. "For the first time, we've been forced to stay in the fields to protect our crops."

More than 50 farmers Reuters spoke to in Mahaban and nine other villages in Uttar Pradesh state said they would think twice before voting for Modi's BJP in the next general election, due by May. The cattle issue and low farm prices are major reasons behind their disillusionment with a party that most say they voted for in the last election in 2014. Modi swept Uttar Pradesh at that poll, winning 73 of 80 seats in India's most populous state, with rural voters swayed by a promise of higher crop prices, and as Hindu farmers supported the BJP amid tensions with the minority Muslim community.

Cow protection

Modi is trying hard to claw back support among India's 263 million farmers and their many millions of dependents after the BJP lost power in December to the opposition Congress in three big northern states where agriculture is a mainstay. Indian farmers keep cows to produce milk, cheese and butter, but to harm or kill a cow, especially for food, is considered taboo by most Hindus. Most states in India have long outlawed cow slaughter, but after coming to power in 2014 the BJP ratcheted up its distaste for trade in cattle, launching a crackdown on unlicensed abattoirs in Uttar Pradesh and on cattle smuggling nationwide.

At the same time, a wave of attacks on trucks carrying cattle by Hindu vigilante groups has scared away traders, most of whom are Muslims, bringing to a halt the trade even in bullocks, which are not considered sacred. Rising sales of tractors and increasing mechanization mean that more animals are redundant for use in farming. The farmers Reuters spoke to said they revered cows as most devout Hindus would, but a sudden halt in the trade of cattle had hit the rural economy. In their view, the government should come up with more cow shelters and let cattle traders deal in other animals without fear of attack. "The government has only enforced the laws by closing down unlicensed abattoirs and cracking down on cattle smuggling," said BJP spokesman Gopal Krishna Agarwal, who added that he runs a cow shelter of 1,300 cattle. "We're not trying to hurt either any community or the rural economy."

Crop trampled

Fodder prices have gone up by more than a third in the past year and most farmers cannot afford to keep cows after they stop producing milk, said farmer Rajesh Pahlanwan as he smoked a hookah pipe in the village of Manoharpur. Six farmers sitting with him mainly nodded in agreement. In India, the world's biggest milk producer, about 3 million cattle become unproductive every year. In the past, Hindu farmers would sell unproductive cows to Muslim traders and about 2 million of these would end up smuggled to Bangladesh for meat and leather. But that trade has now been throttled by the government crackdown, trade and industry officials say.

That has led to many unproductive cattle being abandoned, farmers said, but governments - both state and federal - have failed to construct new shelters, leaving rising numbers of stray cattle that are feeding on crops, or even garbage. "The government clearly did not think of alternatives before putting these curbs in place," said farmer Deepak Chaudhary, who grows wheat on the outskirts of Mathura, considered to be the birthplace of the Hindu god Krishna. "As Hindus, we treat cows as sacred but these unwarranted measures have upended the economics of farming." The government did provide some relief in its interim budget last week as it announced a cow welfare program costing 7.50 billion rupees (\$104.6 million) in the year beginning April. But there are hardly any "adequate measures to rehabilitate" cattle, said Fauzan Alvi, vice-president of the All India Meat and Livestock Exporters Association. "Forget about cows, we cannot sell even a single animal to even our relatives thanks to cow vigilante groups which are aided and abetted by the BJP," said the wheat farmer Chaudhary. — Reuters



Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi listens as US President Donald Trump delivers the State of the Union address at the US Capitol in Washington on Tuesday. — AFP

Despite bipartisan sheen, Trump spoke to his base

Even as he appealed for unity, President Donald Trump made it clear in his State of the Union address on Tuesday that his idea of common ground is having Democrats back his policy agenda and stop investigating his administration. For all of Trump's talk about bridging "old divisions" and pursuing bipartisan initiatives, Trump previewed the well-trod themes that will power his 2020 re-election campaign: a hard line on immigration and border security, a deep suspicion of trade deals, and an "America First" foreign policy.

This time, the dissonance between Trump's words and the political reality was more jarring than ever. For the first time in his presidency, Trump had a Democrat seated behind him in the House chamber. Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and spoke to a Congress where Democrats share power with Republicans. Beyond Capitol Hill, the field of Democrats seeking to challenge Trump for the presidency is growing by the week.

The speech suggested that Trump, while talking up such lofty bipartisan goals such as combating HIV and childhood cancer, was signaling to his most passionate supporters that he was not about to compromise on the issues that matter most to them. "While there were many unifying moments, the president took time to appeal to his base over issues that split the parties such as investigations, immigration and abortion," said Ron Bonjean, a longtime Republican strategist in Washington. "Nothing has changed after tonight's delivery by Trump because both sides are simply too dug in to allow any sort of major compromise legislation to occur," Bonjean said.

Fresh off a month-long partial government shutdown that damaged him politically, Trump showed no inclination

he would back off his demand for more than \$5 billion for a barrier along the U.S. border with Mexico - and in fact used a large portion of the speech to make his case for the wall to the American people. In doing so, Trump employed much of same rhetoric he used during last year's congressional elections, warning of an "onslaught" of migrants from Central America, labeling the border "lawless" and declaring that "countless" Americans had been murdered by illegal immigrants.

For a reminder of how his party fared in those midterm elections, Trump only had to look at the sea of white outfits worn by Democratic women in attendance on the House floor. They chanted "USA! USA!" when Trump recognized their achievement. Regardless, Trump delivered a stark warning to Democrats such as Pelosi who have said they will push to hold his administration accountable: Back off, or I won't work with you. "If there is going to be peace and legislation, there cannot be war and investigation," Trump said. "It just doesn't work that way." And in talking about the vibrant American economy, Trump implied he would be quick to blame Democrats for any slowdown.

Culture wars

Trump also re-stoked America's culture wars, spending a portion of the speech blasting abortion-rights legislation in New York and Virginia, a move that will endear him to evangelical voters. "There was very little difference between this speech and what you'd hear at one of his campaign rallies," said Doug Thornell, a longtime Democratic congressional aide. "To many people this speech will be remembered for his continued obsession

with the wall, the demonization of immigrants, and his bizarre attack on congressional investigations. Truly stunning." But Alex Conant, a former top aide to Republican presidential candidate Marco Rubio, said that Trump succeeded in showing that he was open to working with Democrats on issues such as prescription drug prices. "After a tough couple of weeks, this was the reset that Trump needed," Conant said. "He laid out a popular agenda and framed the big political issues of the day in the most favorable way possible."

There are clear signs that the slowdown over the border wall has dinged the president: The most recent Reuters/Ipsos tracking poll had Trump's approval rating at a shade over 39 percent, the lowest it has been since early last October. The number of Americas who disapprove of Trump's job performance stood at more than 56 percent. With Trump's re-election campaign set to begin in earnest, the president must also await the final determination of Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who is investigating ties between Trump's campaign team and Russian officials as well as possible obstruction of justice.

A year ago, Trump made a similar plea for bread-breaking with Democrats, only to have the year swallowed up by scorched-earth congressional elections, a divisive fight over Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, and finally the 35-day government shutdown. All the while, Trump regularly blasted Democrats on his Twitter feed as unhelpful, obstructionist and unpatriotic. "There is no reason to think he wants unity. He thrives on disunity," said John Geer, an expert on public opinion at Vanderbilt University. "The president may call for working together, but past behavior suggests otherwise." — Reuters

Wild wolves in crosshairs of German politics

The sneak attack happened at a cemetery and quickly turned into a whodunnit that fired up a heated debate about the return of wolves to the wild in Germany. A municipal gardener reported kneeling by a cast-iron fence one November morning when a four-legged predator approached from behind and sank its fangs into his left forearm. Stunned, the 55-year-old man, who has not been publicly named, struck the beast with a hammer and scared it off, according to his report to town authorities in Steinfeld, Lower Saxony.

"Man Attacked By Wolf", headlined the tabloid-style Bild newspaper, only adding a question mark - and thus, an element of doubt over whether the unconfirmed attack actually happened - lower down in the article. Laboratory tests on the bite wound, the man's clothing and hammer found no saliva, fur or other genetic traces of a wolf. Some observers have wondered whether the culprit might have been a wild dog.

While the gardener walked away with a bite wound and a bad fright, the case has assumed fundamental importance in a highly politicized debate. Wolves were extinct in Germany for over 150 years, only making a comeback in 2000 after they began crossing the border with Poland. Since then, no attacks on humans had been recorded.

Campfire vigils

Environmentalists have celebrated the return of the European grey wolf, a keystone species rooted in German folklore and the fairytales of the Brothers Grimm. But the animals provoke fear and loathing among sheep farmers, equestrians - and some mainly rightwing politicians, who have seized on the issue in a year with three regional elections in eastern Germany, prime wolf territory. The anti-wolf lobby points to wolf attacks like one last October when the hunters ripped through a fenced-in herd of sheep and wrought havoc, leaving some 40 bloody carcasses strewn across a field.

Farmers often complain that putting up electric fences and using dogs to guard their flocks is impractical and expensive. A growing band of wolf opponents has staged campfire vigils and launched petitions and social media campaigns against what they see as a ruthless killer. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, best known for railing against immigrants, was first to campaign against the furry newcomers.

Echoing their language on restricting the number of asylum seekers in Germany, they have demanded an



Two wolves are pictured at their enclosure at a park in Eekhoft near Itzehoe, northern Germany. — AFP

"Obergrenze", or upper limit, for the wolf population. "Animals lose their fear of humans if they stop seeing them as a natural enemy," said the AfD's main spokeswoman on wolves in Saxony state, in a recent statement. "In the case of the wolf, this can lead to attacks... including on humans."

By coincidence, her name is Silke Grimm. Some observers have suggested that many of the 700-800 wolves estimated to roam Germany are actually wolf-dog hybrids, which would exclude them from wolves' protected status. "Bastards in Germany - Dogs in Wolves' Clothing?" ran a provocative headline in hunting magazine "Jagd und Hund" ("Game and Hound"). Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative CDU party, which has suffered heavy losses at the hands of the AfD, has recently voiced support for regional wolf culls to limit their population growth.

'Mafia wolf' mystery

Nature guide Stephan Kaasche's jaw clenches when he is asked about the proposed culls. Kaasche, 43, is firmly in the pro-wolf camp, having turned his boyhood love for the animals into a full-time job as a wildlife lecturer. "Ten percent of wolves are already shot illegally now," he said. "But that doesn't stop wolves from approaching towns, just as it doesn't stop wild boars. It just doesn't work like that."

On a frosty morning recently, Kaasche was standing, binoculars in hand, at the edge of a huge former open-pit coal mine turned nature reserve in Saxony's Lausitz region. It was around here, near the Polish border, that Germany's first litter of wolf pups was born in the wild in 2000 to a female dubbed "One-Eye". Scanning the post-industrial wastelands, Kaasche's eyes light up. "There, a wolf," he exclaimed, pointing at a long-legged juvenile slinking through the distant underbrush.

Others at this point would have loved to pull the trigger. In fact, some 280 wolves have been killed by humans in Germany since 2000, according to a police count. Most were run over, but about three dozen were illegally shot, and several were beheaded. — AFP

CAR 'repats' unfazed by poverty, conflict

"When I decided to come back, my friends took me for a fool," recounts Clement Ndotizo, who spent a decade in France before returning to settle in his native Central African Republic, one of the world's least-developed and most dangerous countries. But a "fool", he is not. Like other CAR "repatriates", Ndotizo used skills and experience acquired abroad to carve out success in the country, even as it spiralled further into conflict and poverty.

In his huge villa with swimming pool and sweeping views over the river Oubangui, Ndotizo tells his story with evident pride. After founding Fox Private Security in France, Ndotizo returned to the CAR in 1993 to create the same firm in the capital Bangui. It quickly became one of the most important businesses in the war-torn country, with more than 1,500 agents. "In France at the time we were a small company, there was competition," he told AFP. "I saw that it could not go further," added the businessman, who became a member of parliament in 1996.

On the face of it, CAR is not the most promising of business environments. The landlocked country is rich in natural resources - including diamonds, uranium, timber, gold, and oil - but has been brought to its knees by conflict. CAR plunged into chaos after mainly Muslim insurgents called the Seleka overthrew President Francois Bozize, a Christian, in 2013, sparking the bloodiest sectarian violence in the country's history. Since then thousands have been killed and a quarter of the population of 4.5 million have fled their homes.

While the country has seen a modest economic recovery in recent years as fighting stabilized, it remains among the poorest in the world. In 2017, about 75 percent of the population lived below the international poverty line (\$1.90 per day), according to World Bank projections based on gross domestic product per capita. "You quickly realize that the fact of having worked abroad is an advantage," said Auguste Ogoula, who moved back to CAR in 2008. "I came back on holiday. I never intended to return to do business here," he said. At that time he lived in Britain where he had, over the years, taken up an array of professions - postman, guard, gardener. "It was when I arrived that I became aware of the opportunities," he said.

Since then he has opened a bar and music venue, a bakery and a catering service. And his latest project seems to be the one that he holds most dear: Developing agricultural land inherited from his family some 30 km from Bangui. The previously-abandoned plot now has a cottage surrounded by tropical flowers, fields of corn and cassava, a pigsty, a hen house, and a huge fish farm pond. — AFP

Business

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MUNICH: In this January 30 file photo, Joe Kaeser, CEO of German engineering giant Siemens (right), and Ralf P Thomas, CFO of German engineering giant Siemens (left), pose ahead the press conference ahead of the company's annual shareholder's meeting at the Olympic hall in Munich. — AFP

EU blocks Siemens-Alstom rail merger

Germany, France call for an overhaul of EU competition policy

BRUSSELS/ZURICH: Siemens and Alstom's plan to create a European rail champion collapsed yesterday after EU regulators rejected the deal, prompting Germany and France to call for an overhaul of EU competition policy to better meet global challenges. The European Commission also blocked a bid by German copper company Wieland-Werke AG to buy a business unit from Aurubis, Europe's biggest copper smelter, similarly arguing the deal could have pushed up prices for consumers.

The two vetoes are likely to spur efforts by France and Germany to loosen EU competition rules so as to take a more global than solely European view of mergers and potentially to allow EU ministers to have a say. Shortly after the Commission's announcements, German economy minister Peter Altmaier said Berlin and Paris were working on a proposal to change European competition rules.

Alstom said the veto was a clear set-back for industry in Europe, while Siemens Chief Executive Joe Kaeser said Europe urgently needed to reform its industrial policy to help its companies compete.

"Protecting customer interests locally must not mean that Europe cannot be on a level playing field with leading nations like China, the United States and others," Kaeser said in a statement.

Proponents of the bloc's strict merger regime, however, argue such changes could lead to opaque and unpredictable rules. EU Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager said the Commission had approved over 3,000 mergers in the past 10 years and blocked only nine, including those on Wednesday.

"Prohibition decisions, they are rare and it is the first time (we have announced...) two prohibition decisions on the same day," she told a news conference, adding most mergers either did not pose a problem or the

companies involved offered sufficient remedies.

Shares in Siemens and Alstom were little changed by the announcement, which was widely expected.

Insufficient concessions

Siemens and Alstom had wanted to combine their rail operations to compete more effectively with China's state-owned CRRC Corp Ltd, a move backed by the French and German governments, which favor creating industrial champions. However, Vestager said she blocked the deal to protect competition in the European railway industry.

"Without sufficient remedies, this merger would have resulted in higher prices for the signalling systems that keep passengers safe and for the next generations of very high-speed trains," she said.

In the copper case, Vestager said rolled copper would become even more important in an age of elec-

trical vehicles. She said the companies in both deals were not willing adequately to address the regulator's competition concerns and their concessions fell short.

The rail deal also triggered criticism from national competition agencies in Germany, Britain, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Siemens makes the ICE trains for Deutsche Bahn and also builds units for Channel Tunnel operator Eurostar. Alstom is the manufacturer of France's signature bullet train, locally known as the TGV. The rolling-stock maker also sells urban and suburban trains as well as signalling systems. Canadian rival Bombardier welcomed the Commission's decision. "It would have severely undermined the health and competitiveness of the whole European rail market, leaving European consumers, both as rail users and tax payers, to pay the price," said Daniel Desjardins, Bombardier general counsel and company secretary. —Reuters

US-China talks dominate oil outlook

LONDON: The deadline for the United States and China to reach a trade deal before US tariffs increase on \$200 billion worth of Chinese imports (scheduled for March 2) is the most important date in the calendar for oil traders. The deadline will probably have more impact than the next OPEC+ joint ministerial monitoring committee (March 18), OPEC's extraordinary meeting (April 17-18) or even the White House review of Iran sanctions waivers (May 4).

The outcome of trade talks will have a decisive influence on the oil consumption outlook for the rest of the year since the threat of tariffs and associated uncertainty are proving the largest drag on global economic growth.

Because the trade deadline comes first, the outcome will shape the subsequent strategic choices made by OPEC and its allies over oil production and the White House on how far to toughen Iran sanctions.

Stalling growth

Uncertainty about the outlook for global trade has already pushed the world economy close to the brink of recession, judging by a range of business surveys and statistics on trade volumes (<https://tmsnrt.rs/2TyUPm>).

China's manufacturers reported a fall in business activity in December and January, and the official purchasing managers' index has fallen to its lowest level for three years.

Global manufacturers have reported declining export orders for five months now, according to the new export orders component of the JPMorgan Global PMI, with new business falling at the fastest rate since 2016. Freight flows through Hong Kong International Airport, the world's busiest air cargo hub, are also falling at the fastest rate since 2016, according to government statistics. The only significant exception to the global slowdown has been the United States itself, where manufacturers report a continued widespread upturn, albeit more slowly than the frenzied rates in late 2017 and early 2018.

In the rest of the world, the slowdown has taken a toll on current and prospective oil consumption growth, pushing the global market towards surplus and causing prices to fall sharply in the fourth quarter.

The biggest impact of the slowdown is being felt in the consumption of middle distillates such as diesel and jet fuel used in trucking, shipping, railroads and airlines as well as by manufacturers, miners and farmers. Given distillate's predominant use in freight transport and industry, distillate consumption and prices have been closely correlated with the business cycle at US and global levels in the last 50 years.

If the economy slides into an extended slowdown, or worse an outright recession, distillate prices will come under renewed pressure and

take crude prices down with them.

Deal or no deal?

The global economy has been battered by a series of negative shocks in the last six to 12 months, including the stalled Brexit negotiations, rising US interest rates, an appreciating US dollar, and sharp falls in world equity markets. But the largest source of uncertainty stems from the deteriorating trading relationship between the United States and China, which is spilling over to both countries' trading networks.

The resolution of US-China tensions will therefore have more impact on the global economic outlook and oil consumption than any other single factor in 2019. Of all possible outcomes, four are the most likely:

- (1) Comprehensive agreement settling all or nearly all outstanding issues between the two countries;
- (2) Limited agreement settling some issues but leaving more difficult items to be dealt with later (risking recurrent tensions);
- (3) No deal but with an agreement to postpone the tariff deadline while the two sides continue negotiating (risking recurrent tensions);
- (4) No deal, with an immediate imposition of US tariffs on China's exports.

A comprehensive agreement on all issues would be the most positive result and could lead to a major boost in business confidence, but because some issues are so difficult, it is also probably the least likely of those four possible outcomes. —Reuters

US trade deficit for November falls as imports decline

WASHINGTON: The US trade deficit narrowed sharply in November amid declines in imports of cellphones and petroleum products. The Commerce Department said yesterday the trade deficit dropped 11.5 percent to \$49.3 billion. The trade gap had increased for five straight months. Data for October was revised to show the deficit rising to \$55.7 billion instead of the previously reported \$55.5 billion. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the trade deficit would fall to \$54.0 billion in November. The release of the report was delayed by a recently ended five-week partial shutdown of the federal government.

The politically sensitive goods trade deficit with China fell to \$37.9 billion in November from \$43.1 billion in October. The overall trade deficit has remained elevated despite the Trump administration's "America First" policies, which have led Washington to impose tariffs on a range of imported goods from China, sparking a trade

war with Beijing.

The United States has also slapped duties on imported steel, aluminum, solar panels and washing machines. When adjusted for inflation, the goods trade deficit decreased \$7.5 billion to \$80.8 billion in November. The drop in the so-called real trade deficit led some economists to believe that trade probably made a small contribution to gross domestic product in the fourth quarter.

The release of the fourth-quarter GDP report has been delayed by the government shutdown, which ended on Jan. 25 after President Donald Trump and Congress agreed to temporary government funding, without money for his US-Mexico border wall. Trade subtracted 1.99 percentage points from GDP growth in the July-September quarter. Growth estimates for the fourth quarter are around a 2.5 percent annualized rate. The economy grew at a 3.4 percent pace in the third quarter. — Reuters

Business

GM reports strong profits on good sales of pricier vehicles

Earnings in Q4 2018 reach \$2.0 billion

NEW YORK: General Motors reported better-than-expected quarterly profits yesterday following cost-cutting moves and strong sales of some higher-priced vehicles in the United States and China.

Earnings in the fourth quarter came in at \$2.0 billion, compared with a loss of \$5.2 billion in the year-ago period due to a large one-time accounting item tied to US tax reform.

Revenues rose 1.8 percent to \$38.4 billion. GM's sales volume actually fell in both North America and China, the two most important markets. But the effect was offset by strong-sales of higher-priced trucks in the United States. In China, the automaker notched strong sales of the luxury Cadillac line despite a 25.4 percent dive in overall vehicle sales in the country.

"GM delivered another strong year of earnings in a highly volatile environment in 2018," Chief Executive Mary Barra said in a statement. "We will continue to make bold decisions to lead the transformation of this industry and drive significant shareholder value."

Chief Financial Officer Dhivya Suryadevara said the results followed a "flawless" launch of trucks in the United States and pledged a continued "intense focus on costs."

GM lowered some production in China in the fourth quarter and is ratcheting back output further

in the first quarter. Suryadevara said there were some "early signs of stabilization" in the Chinese economy following weakness and that the company still planned 20 new launches in China in the second half of this year.

The automaker offered an update on its staffing since announcing a giant cost-cutting plan in November that involved shuttering seven plants, including five in North America.

Of 2,800 US hourly employees affected by the announcement, 1,200 were eligible to retire. Nearly 950 workers from locations in Michigan and Ohio have accepted transfer opportunities to other GM locations in the US, the company said. Employees from two other plants will "have transfer opportunities closer to their end of production dates," GM said in a document appended to earnings.

The reorganization will also result in involuntary layoffs to about 4,000 GM salaried workers, a person familiar with the matter told AFP last week.

The company announced a bonus of up to \$10,750 for more than 46,500 US hourly employees following the results. "When GM delivers good business results, our eligible hourly employees share in the company's success," Barra said. "To build on our performance, we must continue working together to deliver strong safety, quality and productivity results." —AFP



DETROIT: In this file photo, Mary Barra (right), the Chairwoman and CEO of General Motors Company, talks to the press after Cadillac's new XT6 crossover was revealed at the Garden Theater at the 2019 Detroit Auto Show in Detroit. —AFP

Indonesia's GDP growth resilient in 2018, but risks loom

JAKARTA: Indonesia posted better than forecast GDP growth in the October-December quarter and for the full-year, but the outlook in 2019 looks less rosy as Southeast Asia's largest economy braces for elections and likely spillover from US-China trade frictions.

Consumption, investment and government spending lifted gross domestic product in the final quarter of 2018 by 5.18 percent from a year earlier, a tick faster than the third quarter and also ahead of the 5.11 percent forecast in a Reuters poll. Full-year 2018 growth was 5.17 percent, beating the poll's 5.15 percent prediction and marking a third year of a pick-up after the pace dropped to 4.88 percent in 2015. The rupiah strengthened slightly after the data, while the stock market and bond prices went up.

While last year's growth was the best since 2013, it missed the government's 5.4 percent target and the 7 percent President Joko Widodo had pledged to reach when campaigning for election in 2014.

The GDP data is the last before Indonesians go to the polls on April 17. Widodo is seeking a second five-year term and once again faces former general Prabowo Subianto, who has accused his administration of economic mismanagement. In his first term, Widodo has been credited with building new infrastructure across the archipelago, controlling inflation and helping retain economic stability despite bouts of capital outflows tied to tighter monetary policy in the United States.

But he also froze fuel and electricity tariffs in 2018 to support purchasing power, a policy credited by analysts for underpinning domestic consumption but also denting his reform credentials.

This year, Widodo may face an even tougher job propping up growth with net exports contracting in the last three quarters, said Josua Pardede, an economist with Bank Permata in Jakarta. "It's a challenge to push net export performance up amid the (US-China) trade war and China's economic slowdown," he said, predicting the economy would grow around 5.1-5.2 percent this year. —Reuters

Mercedes-Benz Kuwait concludes participation in GulfRun Car Show

KUWAIT: Mercedes-Benz Kuwait, represented by its new authorized general distributor, Al Mulla Automobiles Company, concluded its participation in the "GulfRun" Car Show, which was held at Murouj-Sahara from January 31st till February 2nd. Al Mulla Automobiles Company took this opportunity to showcase the Mercedes-AMG G 63 and the Mercedes-AMG GLE 43 Coupe from Mercedes-Benz and to share with its fans a thrilling AMG experience at the "GulfRun" Car Show.

Mercedes-Benz Kuwait showcased the new Mercedes-AMG G 63 which has gone through the biggest change in its history while remaining true to its proven qualities. The G 63's powerful drive system, AMG transmission and AMG Ride Control suspension highlights its position as a leader in the performance off-road category. Mercedes-Benz Kuwait also showcased the Mercedes-AMG GLE 43 Coupe, which has the contemporary luxury of a Mercedes-Benz, the presence of an SUV, along with the dynamism and agility of a Coupe.

Michael Ruehle, Divisional General Manager, at Al Mulla Automobiles Company stated: "We were delighted to participate in the "GulfRun" Car show in its 11th edition, the event has come a long way since its inception and is now considered one of the biggest events of the year. We were happy to have this opportunity to engage with our Mercedes-Benz customers and fans and present them with an opportunity to get a closer look at the Mercedes-AMG G 63 and the Mercedes-AMG GLE 43 Coupe. On behalf of Al Mulla Automobiles Company I would like to thank the organizers and our guests for making it such a success and we look forward to participating in future editions."

"GulfRun" was established in 2005 by a group of young Kuwaitis who have shown a passion for the automotive world. It has since been transformed into a full season of activities related to motor sports, including 24-hour World Series Karting Race, and a cars' show.



European air passenger and freight growth slows in 2018

LONDON: Growth in passenger numbers at European airports slowed in 2018 and freight traffic decelerated sharply, airport association ACI Europe

said yesterday, adding that uncertainty over the global economy and Brexit could hinder numbers this year too.

Passenger growth in Europe slowed to 6.1 percent in 2018 from 8.5 percent in 2017, which had been the quickest growth since 2004. Freight traffic declined much more sharply, from 8.4 percent growth in 2017 to 1.8 percent last year, with drops in traffic in November and December.

"The trend of decreasing freight traffic is hard to ignore. It reflects weakening economic data and contraction forces at play, not just in Europe but

around the world. These will ultimately translate into lower passenger demand," Olivier Jankovec, Director General of ACI Europe, said.

"Adding to that, volatile oil prices, labor cost pressures and more consolidation should also lead airlines to be more cautious with capacity expansion. So pressures on passenger traffic are likely to come both from the demand and supply sides in 2019."

Jankovec also said Brexit uncertainty was the "top immediate risk", with ACI Europe's figures ahead showing that British airports were among the weakest for passenger growth. —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

Table with exchange rates for Al-Muzaini Exchange Co. covering European & American countries, Asian countries, GCC countries, and Arab countries.

Table with exchange rates for Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd. covering Rate for Transfer and Selling Rate for various currencies.

Table with exchange rates for Turkish Lira and Singapore dollars.

Table with exchange rates for Bahrain Exchange Company WLL, categorized by CURRENCY (Europe, Australasia, America, Asia).

Table with exchange rates for Hong Kong Dollar, Indian Rupee, Indonesian Rupiah, Japanese Yen, Korean Won, Malaysian Ringgit, Nepalese Rupee, Pakistani Rupee, Philippine Peso, Singapore Dollar, Sri Lankan Rupee, Taiwan, Thai Baht, Vietnamese Dong, and Arab currencies.

Business

KFH reports KD 227.4m in net profit for 2018

23.5% increase in net profit; BoD declares 20% cash dividends and 10% bonus shares

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Chairman, Hamad Abdulmohsen Al-Marzouq, said that KFH has, by the grace of Allah, realized a net profit of KD 227.4 million for the year 2018 for KFH shareholders compared to KD 184.2 million last year i.e. an increase of 23.5 percent.



Hamad Al-Marzouq

Total financing income reached KD 862.1 million, i.e. an increase of 16.4 percent compared to last year. Net financing income reached KD 527.3 million, i.e. an increase of 18.5 percent over the last year. Net operating income increased to reach KD 453.5 million, i.e. a growth of 11.1 percent over the last year.

KFH continued its strategy of focusing on cost optimization and maximizing revenues, where total operating expenses decreased by KD 12.6 million i.e. a drop of 4.1 percent over the same period last year. Cost to income ratio dropped for the fourth year in a row to reach 39.2 percent for the current year, compared to 42.8 percent for the last year. Earnings per share for 2018 reached 36.36 fils compared to 29.46 fils in 2017 i.e. an increase of 23.4 percent.

KFH distributions for the year 2018 were as follows: 3.125 percent for "Al-Khumasiya" investment deposit, 2.625 percent for "Al-Mustamera" investment deposit, 2.1 percent for "Al-Sedra" investment deposit, 2.5 percent for the 12-month Dimah investment deposit, 2.3 percent for the 6-month Dimah investment deposit and 2.125 percent for long term investment plans and 1.25 percent for saving investment account.

The Board of Directors has proposed 20 percent cash dividends to shareholders and 10 percent bonus shares subject to general assembly and concerned authorities' approval.

Total assets increased to reach KD 17.770 billion, i.e. an increase of KD 412.3 million or 2.4 percent compared to 2017. Financing portfolio increased to reach KD 9.385 billion, i.e. an increase of KD 169 million or 1.8 percent compared to 2017.

Depositors' accounts increased to reach KD 11.780 billion, i.e. an increase of KD 183.6 million or 1.6 percent compared to 2017. Shareholders' equity increased to reach KD 1.894 billion i.e. an increase of KD 21.7 million or 1.2 percent compared to 2017.

KFH's capital adequacy ratio (CAR) reached 17.47 percent, (after the proposed dividends) i.e. higher than the required limit

of 15 percent, thus reiterating the strength of KFH financial position.

Al-Marzouq said: "In line with the set plans and the overall performance of the Group, growth in 2018 profits have been achieved despite the challenges posed by the markets and economic developments locally and internationally. KFH is consistently progressing towards achieving sustainable profitability by focusing on operating profits from core banking activities, matching revenues from local and foreign markets. KFH has been able to maintain the diversity of profitability, while breaking new grounds and rolling out, innovative and competitive products. Last year, we achieved great success on all levels, demonstrated by our financial indicators and qualitative achievements, not to mention the professional performance adhering to the banking system regulations and Sharia principles, in accordance with the strategies and plans of KFH".

He added that the profit indices calculated on an annual basis indicate that most of the results of KFH have been increased, most notably the return on assets, return on equity, return on capital, as well as earnings per share and total operating income. KFH has been able to maintain profitability rates achieved in 2017 and increased them in 2018, despite the adoption of new standards with strict financial reporting controls, notably IFRS 9. Accordingly, the results confirm our potential and what we can achieve in the

future. KFH will work to maintain a stable growth rate, implementing a prudent policy, enhancing precautionary provisions and its solid financial position.

Al-Marzouq pointed out that: "2018 objectives focused on achieving progress by improving internal efficiency, rationalizing spending, offering new innovative products, applying the highest standards of quality and governance, and adopting financial technology". He considered that KFH's success in achieving the previous objectives represents a pivotal shift in its strategy towards implementing its strategic vision and strengthening its position to be the strongest and most influential financial institution locally and internationally.

He stressed that the major reforms implemented at the organizational and operational levels have led to strengthening the Bank's leadership in the market while improving its internal capabilities, such as the development of banking technology and technical infrastructure to keep pace with "e-banking" through a variety of competing and integrated products. KFH invests heavily in human resources by insuring flexible and professional structure of expertise, and attracting and empowering the promising human cadres. In addition, KFH succeeded in expanding its branch network, developing the e-service channels, improving the credit risk management to ensure the quality of assets. These developments have resulted in a reduction in the rate of non-performing facilities to the lowest levels. The results of the stress tests proved the ability to withstand shocks in credit, market and liquidity risks, according to a wide range of scenarios backed by sound banking practices.

Al-Marzouq said: "Spending on building IT platforms, infrastructure investment, and the front end of technology has characterized KFH's business and activities in 2018, which we can call the "FinTech Year". KFH succeeded in providing 20 high-tech banking services, most of which are unique in Kuwait, and has established a competitive position in the banking sector. KFH culminated its efforts to operate in Ishbiliya its first fully-automated 24/7 e-branch with an advanced and wide range of technical devices and self-service tools under the title "KFH-Go". The e-branch provides more than 30 services representing about 80 percent of the services provided by the traditional branch. Also, KFH launched its

Chatbot service in cooperation with Microsoft, to improve interaction with customers who can use this service through different KFH channels such as KFH.com and the mobile app KFHonline. KFH launched a centralized SWIFT network system for global payments at the group level. For the first time in Kuwait, KFH launched Visa Checkout to facilitate fast and secure online purchases. Along with developing the other ATMs, it also launched the mini branch XTM. Moreover, the bank offered seven new services on the XTM, some of which are the first to be offered domestically, including QR cardless withdrawals with the possibility of updating the information, activating the new and renewed debit cards and changing the PIN. The Bank introduced a fast cross-border transfer service (KFH Xpress) and an instant remittance service using RippleNet.

Al-Marzouq explained that technology has become the engine of banking services and their main arena of future growth. He expressed his confidence that there are three major pillars which are the internet and its growing use, smart phones and their expanding reach and banking services that are keeping up with both. These pillars will be the major driver of the development of banking and the shedding of its conventional concepts and forms in the future. He pointed out that KFH is seriously aiming at embracing Artificial Intelligence and robotics in banking transactions and operations with a view to boosting productivity and cutting costs. KFH has signed agreements with world famous agencies the results of which will become tangible this year.

Al-Marzouq added that 2019 will witness a strengthening of KFH's competitiveness which is already increasing in the local and international markets, a goal which is in line with the ongoing efforts to realize sustainable profits and focus on the customer. He stressed that excellence of customer service, innovative Islamic financing and improvement in the level of operations and risk management will maintain the bank's legacy and its reputation as the largest, most trust-worthy Islamic bank and the most capable of offering shareholders and depositors the highest returns and the best services.

He noted that cementing KFH's position in the Kuwaiti retail market follows the completion of several major projects such as the restructuring of the investment portfolio,

defining targeted markets, products and economic sectors, as well as the type of business management and gearing capabilities towards increasing KFH share in large and medium sectors through financing macro projects and developing its role in small projects.


Al-Marzouq added that the positive results of these initiatives impacted the performance of the Group units, their contribution to profits as well as the increased cooperation, coordination and exchange of experience among KFH subsidiaries in Malaysia, Turkey, Bahrain and Germany in order to realize their integration, restructuring of activities, and to consolidate the foundations of regional expansion and improve brand value.

He added: KFH has maintained its credit rating with a stable outlook including the Group's ability to grow, confront challenges and pressures and meet its commitments. The Bank has also won 22 awards from illustrious international agencies, indicating appreciation in several aspects and confirming its ranking as the safest Islamic Bank.


Al-Marzouq expressed his confidence in the ability of the banking sector to play a major role in supporting the development plan in line with the government commitment to continue its capital spending and project offerings which would support the private sector and create economic diversification. He noted that the domestic banking sector remains in a position of strength aided by abundant provisions along with sufficient capitalization, increased net profits, high liquidity levels and operational efficiency. All these will be tested in 2019 when the potential of banks for growth and ability to attract and operate funds will be tested under expected challenges in the operational environment and in the regional and world economic and geopolitical shifts as well as oil-price volatility.

Al-Marzouq affirmed that the Kuwaiti banking sector will be able to improve the level of banking services to compete at the global level, thanks to its banking figures, the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK), the Capital Market Authority (CMA) and other regulatory authorities.

He also thanked shareholders and customers for their support and trust in KFH operations and activities and valued highly the efforts and excellent performance of the executive management and staff.



بيت التمويل الكويتي
Kuwait Finance House



Praise be to Allah 2018 Results

		2018	2017	%
Net Profit for Shareholders	"KD Million"	227.41	184.16	23.5
Earnings per Share	"Fils"	36.36	29.46	23.4
Net Financing Income	"KD Million"	527.27	444.85	18.5
Total Operating Expenses	"KD Million"	292.46	305.02	(4.1)
Net Operating Income	"KD Million"	453.55	408.26	11.1
Total Assets	"KD Billion"	17.770	17.358	2.4
Financing Receivables	"KD Billion"	9.385	9.216	1.8
Depositors' Accounts	"KD Billion"	11.780	11.597	1.6
Total Shareholders' Equity	"KD Billion"	1.894	1.872	1.2

To Investors

KFH Board of Directors is pleased to inform the investors that it has been resolved to distribute profits corresponding for the financial year ended 31st Dec.2018 as follows:

	2018	2017
Investment Deposits "Al-Khumasiya"	3.125%	2.625%
Investment Deposits "Al-Mustamera"	2.625%	2.250%
Investment Deposits "Al-Sedra"	2.100%	1.950%
Investment Deposits "Al-Dimah" 12 Months	2.500%	2.000%
Investment Deposits "Al-Dimah" 6 Months	2.300%	1.875%
Long Term Investment Plans	2.125%	1.930%
Investment Saving Account	1.250%	1.000%

Profits will be credited to their bank accounts.

To Shareholders

KFH Board of Directors is pleased to inform the shareholders that it has been resolved to distribute profits corresponding for financial year ended 31st Dec.2018 as follows:

	2018	2017
Cash Dividends	20%	17%
Bonus Shares	10%	10%

This recommendation is subject to the approval of General Assembly and other regulatory entities.

kfh.com 180 3333

Business

NBK Capital 'wins Best Performance Award' for Al-Watani Equity Fund

Honor from 'Mena Fund Manager' at Dubai First Place Awards

KUWAIT: NBK Capital Company, the leading asset management company, has been awarded the best three-year deal by Mena Fund Manager.

It was registered at the Dubai First Place Awards on January 29, 2019, in the presence of leading asset management and investment professionals in the region.

Al-Watani GCC Equity Fund invests mainly in GCC equities and has an active strategic approach of asset allocation, best long-term returns and risk reduction in the GCC stock markets.

"The ability of NBK Capital Company to win the prestigious awards is due to our constant efforts to develop our customers' resources through excellence in offering unique and diversified investment solutions, high quality private services and devising strategies," said Dr Husayn Shahrur, Managing Director of the MENA Asset Management Department at NBK Capital. Innovative investment that suits the needs of our customers and which has the potential to grow and achieve rewarding financial returns.

Shahrur added: "The success of the Al-Watani

NBK CAPITAL

GCC Equity Fund is a testament to the team's professionalism and the successful strategy of the Fund, which focuses on careful stock study and good long-term returns." Shahrur said: "that the award will be a tribute to the company's recent awards and similar awards, which are a milestone in the continuous growth and growth of NBK Capital and an indication of the efficiency of its policy of continuously focusing on achieving the highest standards of service and performance.

Shahrur added: "The good performance of our funds is a result of the Group's long-term strategy that focuses on stocks with potential operating growth and good fundamentals while ignoring speculative stocks". Shahrur concluded his statement by thanking the Asset Management team, whose efforts and hard work have resulted in positive results.



AUB re-launches Al-Hassad Islamic account with a new package



KUWAIT: AUB's Al-Hassad Islamic account is the very first draw account in Islamic banking in Kuwait that has touched and sometimes reshaped the lives of thousands lucky winners. In their ongoing efforts to ensure best in class products and services to their our customers, AUB has refreshed this rewarding prize draw account to be even more impactful in fulfilling customer aspirations.

The key feature of Al-Hassad is that it provides Ahli United Bank customer's with the most number of chances to win. Over a 12 month period, we have over 850 prizes which is more than double any other Bank in Kuwait offers. In its new package, Al-Hassad Islamic Account presents a broader variety of rewards compared to past years: the biggest pool of prizes in Kuwait, wherein customers can now participate in the draw to win 21 weekly prizes comprised of a grand prize of KD 10,000, 20 prizes of KD 1,000 each in addition the monthly draw to win a prize of KD 100,000.

The refreshed Al-Hassad Islamic Account presents also four quarterly mega prizes of KD 250,000 that will help the lucky winners achieve their dreams and aspirations. One powerful new aspect of the Al-Hassad Islamic Account is the prize draws on the holy occasion of both Eid ul Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, when the winning customers will receive the eid prizes of KD 100,000 each. May the Eid always bring prosperity and blessings to the Islamic nation.

In addition to the highly attractive package of the prizes, there will be the annual expected profits on, which makes the Al-Hassad account a useful tool: for family and other savings, both for the short term and for the longer term - a fact which well appreciated by a large multitude of new and old customers.

To be eligible to participate in the draw, the customer should have a minimum balance of KD 100, whereby the customer has two chances to participate, with a maximum of 30,000 chances per draw, in addition to annual profits for all participants. Every KD 50 invested for at least 15 days entitles the customer to one chance in the each draw. The longer the customer keeps his balance the bigger the changes of participation in the draw. Draws are held every Wednesday at AUB Kuwait or AUB Bahrain depending on the draw plan.

On the occasion of the re-launch of the new version of Al-Hassad Account, Ranjan Sen, General Manager of Retail Banking Services at Ahli United Bank said: "AUB has a proud history of being the very first bank in this great country. Over the years we have proudly participated in and contributed to the growth of Kuwait's economy and in the process have supported and helped a myriad customers in Kuwait meet their dreams and aspirations. The Al-Hassad account always enabled our customers to do just that - and today, we have taken another big step in responding to what our customers want and need by refreshing the Al-Hassad Islamic offering".

Sen added: "Ahli United Bank is proud to re-launch Al-Hassad Islamic Saving Account in a new, more sophisticated version designed both to reward our existing customers for the trust they have placed in the Bank as well as to attract new customers and promote the culture of saving within all segments of Kuwaiti society.

The launch of the new Al-Hassad follows the launch of Afaaq savings account in 2018 which also provided another avenue to support a savings culture in Kuwait. Over the coming months, Ahli United Bank will be launching a number of enhancements to our customer experience and we look forward to sharing these soon.

Huawei Experience Store a platform for information sharing: Jiao

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Gene Jiao, President of Huawei CBG, Middle East and Africa met with local media during the opening ceremony of the first Huawei Experience Store in Kuwait at the Avenues Mall located in Phase 4, Electra on Saturday and gave the following comments:

Kuwait Times: What is the difference between this new shop and the previous ones?

Jiao: This is the first Huawei experience store in Kuwait. The other previous stores have different concept that is dedicated for that retailer. This store is for the new retailer, with information sharing platform. It's not just a shop selling products, but it's a real communication performer.

KT: What services does this store provide for the customers?

Jiao: We deliver many lectures and seminars here, as Huawei is a technology company and we have so many technologies. These include providing information on 5G, artificial intelligence, or other topics, which the customer is not familiar with. They call the shop and we provide them dedicated course or lectures provided by experts here.

KT: What about the market share of Huawei in Kuwait?

Jiao: Since 2015 Huawei is the second fully licensed company in Kuwait. Huawei keeps serving the clients in Kuwait with latest technology, and we provide smart devices. We need to explain for the clients what exactly is the internet over technologies and what the artificial intelligence means for the consumer. To know it, please visit this store. Technology is a tool, and we wish that



all society of Kuwait uses this tool to make the life more creative.

KT: Where do you rank the Kuwaiti market among others?

Jiao: The Porsche design Huawei red color Mate 20 RS is the most expensive phone, and outside of China it's only available in the GCC region, as this region is very important for us. And of course, Kuwait is very important part of it. In other countries they only have black version. So, we are keen to deliver our most advanced items to Kuwait and the GCC. We appeared as the second in market share of the Kuwaiti market according to some surveys conducted.



KUWAIT: Gene Jiao speaks during the opening ceremony of the first Huawei Experience Store in Kuwait at the Avenues. —Photos by Joseph Shagra

Unlimited roaming Internet with Ooredoo passport during February

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait announced the launch of its latest promotional campaign on the occasion of Kuwait's national celebrations in February. Customers will be able to enjoy the Ooredoo Passport unlimited monthly pack for KD 20 over a 30-day period when they subscribe during the month of February that can be used in over 60 countries. It is worth mentioning that the price of the Ooredoo Passport Unlimited Monthly Pack will go back to its original price of KD 39

per month after the offer ends at the end of the month.

The Ooredoo Passport Unlimited package gives customers exclusive unlimited roaming Internet to keep up with the customers' mode of usage for mobile internet, as it is the main tool for sharing videos, pictures and audio clips with loved ones on various social media channels such as Instagram and Snapchat.

Commenting on the launch of the offer, Ooredoo Kuwait issued a statement saying that the service is aimed to enrich the experience of the telecom service provider's customers and meet their expectations, taking in mind the lifestyle of the company's global-oriented customer base. The offer also reiterates Ooredoo's commitment to helping customers enjoy the internet, especially since mobile internet is an essential part of everyday use to many customers.

The Ooredoo Passport Unlimited Monthly Pack can be conveniently activated and auto-renewed through the 'Roaming Bundles' section of the company's My Ooredoo smartphone app.



South Africa seeks innovation as declining mines add to job crisis

CAPE TOWN: Much of South Africa's wealth is built on its mines, but the sector is shedding jobs fast—setting the government a tough task to tackle record national unemployment ahead of this year's election. At this week's annual Mining Indaba, the world's largest mining conference, in Cape Town the question of how to exploit deposits and create jobs has been one of the talking points among mining firms, investors, trade unions and government figures.

"One thing we must understand about mining is that it is a depleting resource. Mining is not like Coca-Cola where you just mix water and syrup," Mines Minister Gwede Mantashe said as he opened the four-day event.

"In mining, there's a deposit, it is finite

and you mine it until the end. You are not going to create jobs in the same plant.

"(But) you can create an environment for growth of foreign investment, and I think we are doing that."

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, a wealthy former trade union leader and mining executive, came to power a year ago vowing to improve the country's investment climate after the scandal-tainted rule of his predecessor Jacob Zuma.

"We will not be able to meaningfully reduce unemployment and poverty without increased investment particularly in... mining," Ramaphosa told the conference. At their peak in the late 1980s, South Africa's mines employed about 760,000 people, according to government figures, with the number dropping to just over 450,000 last year. The ruling African National Congress (ANC) party could be punished in the May elections as unemployment sits at record highs of near 28 percent.

New deposits?

Mantashe optimistically suggested that new deposits and new technology offered hope for miners in mineral-rich South Africa, which has a long history of gold, dia-

mond, platinum, coal and manganese exploration. "Our hope is that as we discover new deposits, there will be interested investors because when those investors open those new mines then you will absorb jobs that are lost somewhere else," he said.

"The question of technological change in the industry is a new factor.

"We are not going to create the same type of jobs, the likelihood is that we are going to create new types of jobs. "The industry... must position itself to be part of change."

The department of mineral resources said 11 new mining licenses had been granted last year and those would also contribute to job creation. Analysts painted a less rosy picture for the sector, which has hemorrhaged jobs due to weakened commodity prices and rising operational and labor costs. "We believe the key factors are increased mining complexity (depth, quality) and labor union demands," Renaissance Capital's mining analyst Johann Pretorius said. "South Africa has significant unexploited resources, but the labor is uncompetitively expensive.

"Largely as a result of our expensive labor, we believe our precious metal sector

may shrink over the next decade."

Investment obstacles

Pretorius added that major blocks on investment included regulatory uncertainty, and security of tenure after Ramaphosa backed forced land redistribution. The policy of "expropriation without compensation" is aimed at tackling apartheid-era inequality and attracting landless black voters, but has alarmed many foreign investors. Underlining the challenges, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) announced it would hold a national day of protest on February 13, calling on its 1.6 million members to down tools. "The strike will be about fighting against the ongoing job losses that are taking place across all the sectors of the economy," the union said.

South Africa has been moving towards integrating automated systems into mine operations—fueling fears that new technology will further strip away at workforce numbers. But John Welborn, CEO of Australia's Resolute Mining company, called on the industry to embrace technology as a creator of jobs. "I don't believe that it is as big an issue as people imagine," he said. —AFP

NBK engages customers in latest digital services at the Avenues



As part of its ongoing investments in providing advanced and safe technologies and services, the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is engaging with customers in an activation held at The Avenues Phase 2 until February 9, 2019, during which the bank focuses on presenting the latest digital banking services it has designed to serve the various needs of its customers.

First launched on February 6, 2019, in the presence of members of the press and NBK's management, the ongoing activation provides customers with a live presentation of the services that benefit their lifestyles. A draw will be held on Saturday for customers of NBK who took part of the activation for a chance to win one of two smartwatches.

Speaking of the activation and the services of the Bank, Mohammed Al Othman, General Manager of the Consumer Banking Group, said: "NBK is committed to offering technologically-advanced services that are safe for our customers. These services are constantly introduced and updated on the NBK Mobile Banking App aimed at providing convenient and secure services that enable customers to complete their banking transactions quickly and easily without the need to visit their nearest branch or during their travels."

Al Othman added: "We wanted to present these services on a one-to-one basis to allow customers to test these services and be familiarized with them. Of course, we took the opportunity to also reward our customers, giving them the chance to win a smart-

watch by visiting our booth until February 9, 2019, where they can inquire about how to enter the draw.

Al Othman further expanded on the services saying: "We gave customers an introduction to new services and enhancements made to our NBK Mobile Banking App, ATMs and CDMs. Customers can take advantage of services such as card-less withdrawals thanks to the NBK Tap and Pay Debit Card or any other card that provides the feature, all to ensure an easy and enjoyable banking experience."

One of the enhancements is the NBK Swift Tracking service through which customers can track their money transfers conveniently anytime, anywhere by simply logging in to the NBK Mobile Banking App and clicking on the account statement history to view the status of their transfer. NBK also launched the standing orders service through the NBK Mobile Banking App that will allow customers to establish a monthly standing order through the App to make automatic recurring transfers, in addition to making amendments or deleting these standing orders.

The NBK Mobile Banking App also features the e-Payments Service to make electronic payments for purchases at a large number of local and international companies such as telecoms, retail facilities, entertainment and more. As for the NBK Quick Pay, NBK provides its customers with an easy way to receive or transfer amounts from and to friends, or make payments for bills immediately even on weekends or public holidays.



And for the first time in Kuwait, NBK lets its customers activate their dormant accounts instantly and at their convenience. This is done by logging in to the NBK Mobile Banking App and selecting the "Dormant Account Activation" feature under "Self Services".

Customers can also update their phone number or email address through the NBK Mobile Banking App saving the trip to the branch. The NBK Mobile Banking App is a safe method to manage accounts. Customers can conveniently open a new account, view transactions made on accounts and credit cards, check their NBK Miles Points and NBK Rewards Program Points, pay outstanding credit cards receivables, pay bills online, find the nearest branch, ATMs or CDMs in Kuwait, as well as submit an account statement request, checkbook and other requests.

In addition to these features, NBK Mobile Banking is a great companion while travelling as it allows customers to manage their cards, increase their monthly transfer limit, and update their contact details. NBK strives to provide integrated and advanced banking solutions to its customers, and continues to expand its product and service offering and provides easy and secure payment solutions that meet the needs and requirements of customers.

NBK continues to introduce innovative and the newest technology solutions to meet the needs of customers, having partnered with RippleNet to offer customers a fast, safe and convenient cross border payments service, and making NBK the first bank in Kuwait to join the growing network of RippleNet globally.



Draw winners to win smart watches



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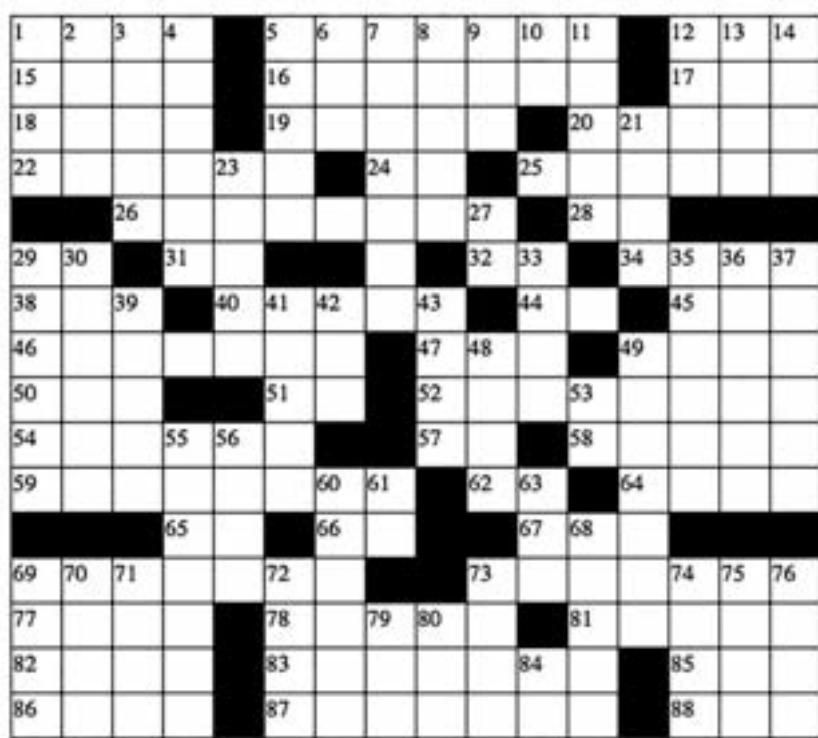
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Stars

CROSSWORD 2130



- ACROSS**
- According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
 - (informal) Roused to anger.
 - Fallow deer.
 - A genus of herb having only one known species.
 - An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
 - A blue dye obtained from plants or made synthetically.
 - Place in a line or arrange so as to be parallel.
 - (of complexion) Blemished by imperfections of the skin.
 - Remove offensive capability from.
 - Before noon.
 - A South American river.
 - A headline with the top line flush left and succeeding lines indented to the right.
 - A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
 - A soft white precious univalent metallic element having the highest electrical and thermal conductivity of any metal.
 - A radioactive element of the actinide series.
 - A small pellet fired from an air rifle or BB gun.
 - Mentally or physically infirm with age.
 - An anxiety disorder characterized by chronic free-floating anxiety and such symptoms as tension or sweating or trembling of light-headedness or irritability etc that has lasted for more than six months.
 - Of or relating to or characteristic of Asia or the peoples of Asia or their languages or culture.
 - A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali metal group.
 - Airtight sealed metal container for food or drink or paint etc.
 - A member of a North American people formerly living in the Colorado river valley in Arizona.
 - Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
 - A legal document codifying the result of deliberations of a committee or society or legislative body.
 - A hard malleable ductile silvery metallic element that is resistant to corrosion.
 - Someone who communicates by signals.
 - A member of the lowest or worker Hindu caste.
 - A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
 - A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
 - Weapon consisting of a fighting ax.
 - An official prosecutor for a judicial district.
 - A republic in the Middle East in western Asia.
 - A ductile gray metallic element of the lanthanide series.
 - The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
 - Alternative names for the body of a human being.
 - (Norse mythology) One of the Aesir.
 - A river that rises in northeastern Turkey (near the source of the Euphrates) and flows generally eastward through Armenia to the Caspian Sea.
 - (Hindu) A manner of sitting (as in the practice of Yoga).
 - A fence formed by a row of closely planted shrubs or bushes.
 - Being three more than fifty.
 - United States golfer who was first to win all four major golf tournaments (1902-1999).
- DOWN**
- (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
 - A Lotiish language.
 - Not functioning properly.
 - When dried yields a hard substance used e.g. in golf balls.
 - A painful and involuntary muscular contraction.
 - Aromatic bulb used as seasoning.
 - Type genus of the Sciaenidae.
 - The 18th letter of the Greek alphabet.
 - A hotel providing overnight lodging for travelers.
 - A rare polyvalent metallic element of the platinum group.
 - (Old Testament) The second patriarch.
 - Tropical Asian starlings.
 - Chief port of Yemen.
 - An informal term for a father.
 - A steep rugged rock or cliff.
 - A summary that repeats the substance of a longer discussion.
 - A logarithmic unit of sound intensity.
 - A cowboy of the South American pampas.
 - (informal) Exceptionally good.
 - Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (trade names Acular and Toradol) that is administered only intramuscularly.
 - Soft blue-gray mineral.
 - A kind of heavy jacket ('windcheater' is a British term).
 - An item of factual information derived from measurement or research.
 - The capital and largest city of Yemen.
 - Being one more than two.
 - An independent agency of the United States government responsible for aviation and spaceflight.
 - A formal association of people with similar interests.
 - Large family of important mostly marine food fishes.
 - A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
 - Small long-bodied short-legged German breed of dog having a short sleek coat and long drooping ears.
 - Fertility goddess in ancient Greek mythology.
 - The capital and largest city of Poland.
 - A unit of information equal to 1024 bytes.
 - A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
 - Type genus of Ochnaceae.
 - Plants with sword-shaped leaves and erect stalks bearing bright-colored flowers composed of three petals and three drooping sepals.
 - (aeronautical) Pertaining to the tail section of a plane.
 - Danish philologist whose work on Old Norse pioneered in the field of comparative linguistics (1787-1832).
 - Empty rhetoric or insincere or exaggerated talk.
 - Designer drug designed to have the effects of amphetamines (it floods the brain with serotonin) but to avoid the drug laws.
 - Advanced in years.
 - Scottish philosopher of common sense who opposed the ideas of David Hume (1710-1796).
 - A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
 - (British) Your grandmother.
 - (Akkadian) God of wisdom.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Today is a day for holding on to your money. Think and put off any major economic decisions for a few days. You're not thinking as clearly as you have in the past. You've a few cobwebs in the brain today. Aries. Take heart, that will change soon. Draw your friends and family close. Security is the name of the game for you now. Stick to what you know for sure and do what you need to keep the farm running until the cows come home, so to speak. You've got this.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You're entering a period of time where learning is your master. Books, educational television, the Internet give you great solace because you yearn to educate yourself. Travel is in your near future but not because you want to see the scenery. It might need be a historical vacation so that you can learn about past society's laws and their influence on our current situation. Thinking over your beliefs is another topic you tackle today. Taurus. Dive in and research with gusto. A new part of your life is emerging.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Don't be surprised if you're not called into a meeting of the minds at work. Be careful of getting too excited about an idea, trying to express it to the group and through that idea causing dissension in the workplace. If you're loud people stop listening to your ideas and you have good ones. Remember when you get emotional, which could happen today, Gemini, you give up control you wish to keep to another. Remind yourself to stay calm. Things could be a little tense at home and work too. This is a day of understanding, yours.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You desire to help others as well as yourself now. Perhaps working with a charity, as a sideline which may become a full-time job, is in order. You have perfect timing while speaking with others about your desires and any work-related items on which you're working. People get you and they want to help. Cancer. Anything you touch in your job turns to gold, Midas. You're thinking of your life, what it has been and where you are in the present. You're even looking into the future to try to make life what you need. This is a good day for that. Have dinner with a loved one and discuss any changes that need to be made.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

This isn't the best time for you to decide to try something new in any part of your life. Let the status quo remain right now. Give it a couple of days before you put your efforts into changing. You might find that those who have always believed in your methods are now bucking the system they've loved and telling you about it. Verbal fights might ensue and is not something you want, Leo. On the other hand, you might find that someone who hasn't been there for you in the past is now. What a confusing day. Try to find happiness and quiet love at home now.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

At work you're invited to lead a group on a new work experience or to help with an old in a leadership position. Your superiors have noted your good work ethic and love your conventional thought process. You have a knack for getting your ideas across without problems to those with whom you're communicating. Family time is better now and you receive a warm welcome at home. Take someone you love out to dinner and enjoy a good time with family and friends, Virgo. The days are getting better. Finally, you know you're back.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You're motivated to improve your life in all aspects today. Work is especially important to you and your assertive in your attempts to make it better. Someone in authority might see this as disrespectful to their thoughts and might take you to task for it. Don't let what one person thinks destroy your need for better. Keep on keeping on, Libra. You appreciate and even invite your responsibilities as the manner in which to achieve your goals. You may even be looking for another career right now. That may be the best opportunity at this time.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Today you feel as if you're walking in water at the office. Nothing seems to be going right and people seem to be avoiding you. This isn't your usual state of affairs but today you need to ride out the storm, so to speak. This is going to last a short time and you'll be right back in the thick of things. Others will seek you out for your quiet, great advice and you'll realize your intelligence once more. Eat a nice dinner with loved ones but don't expect them to give you much attention either, Scorpio. What's more, don't think you're at fault.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Though you might not feel as if you're not succeeding now at the job, work as hard as you possibly can. Now is the time to achieve your desires. You have good, clear ideas and know how to put them to use even though you think you're two steps behind. You're not, Sagittarius. You've got it going on. Use those abilities to communicate and create. Moreover, others believe you can help them as well. There is an excitement people who care for you feel being around you now. They think all things are possible and they're right. Make those material gains now.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Your need to be respected in the workplace and in your community is heightened now with good reason. You're logical, able to look your work over and to find new less strenuous methods for completing that work. You like everything in its place and a place for everything. You should be feeling on top of the world now, Capricorn. Your usual attempt to keep your money growing and safe might be a problem today. You find yourself with an overwhelming desire to be a spendthrift too. The world isn't right in your mind now because you're battling opposite desires. Thankfully, this sensation is short-lived. Practice restraint.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Today you'll be helping everyone else. You might decide a career in counseling is your next specialty, but, truthfully, you enjoy helping coworkers, friends and family. There might be some odd requests but you're up to it. Your usual thought processes are still working expertly but you're having some issues with dwelling on the past. Your life is moving on and you're becoming aware of it. You may need to think about financial and other issues happening when you're older. Get your life together too, Aquarius. It's good to support others but help yourself too.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Live, laugh, and love. We see this saying everywhere we turn. This is the motto of your day. Your wit and sense of humor attracts others to you today. You are a ray of sunshine in the lives of many. A positive attitude is the only attitude to have. Others admire this about you and are drawn to you. This is an excellent time to present new ideas to others and perhaps ask someone to come on board concerning your most recent venture. Share the wealth and surround yourself with like-minded supportive people.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Thanksgiving (U.S.)

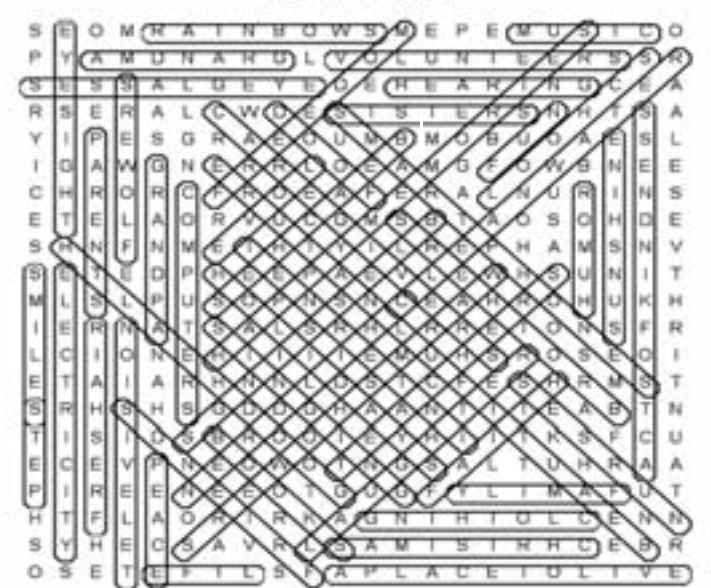
Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 26 letters spell a popular Thanksgiving Day event.



- ANNUAL
- AUTUMN
- CELEBRATION
- CORN
- CRANBERRY
- FAMILY
- FEAST
- FESTIVAL
- FOOD
- FOOTBALL
- FRIENDS
- GATHERING
- GRAVY
- HARVEST
- HOLIDAY
- LONG WEEKEND
- MASHED POTATOES
- MEAL
- NOVEMBER
- PARADE
- PILGRIMS
- PLYMOUTH
- PUMPKIN PIE
- RELATIVES
- REUNION
- SQUASH
- STUFFING
- SWEET POTATO
- THURSDAY
- TRADITION
- TRAVEL
- TURKEY
- WAMPANOAG
- YAMS

Yesterday's Solution

Thankful For...



- ACTS OF KINDNESS
- A PLACE TO LIVE
- BEACHES
- BEAUTIFUL NATURE
- BLESSINGS
- BOOKS
- BROTHERS
- CARE GIVERS
- CHILDREN
- CHRISTMAS
- CLEAN WATER
- CLOTHING
- COMPUTERS
- ELECTRICITY
- EYEGLASSES
- FAITH
- FAMILY
- FLOWERS
- FOOD
- FREEDOM
- FRESH AIR
- FRIENDS
- FUN
- GOOD HEALTH
- GRANDMA
- GRANDPA
- HAPPY MEMORIES
- HEARING
- HOLIDAYS
- HUMOR
- INTERNET
- LAUGHTER
- LIFE
- LOVE
- MUSIC
- NURSES
- PARENTS
- PEACE
- PETS
- RAINBOWS
- SCHOOL
- SINGING
- SISTERS
- SMART PHONES
- SMILES
- SUNSHINE
- TEACHERS
- TELEVISION
- VOLUNTEERS
- WARM SHOWERS

The hidden message is: SOME PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS GRUMBLING BECAUSE ROSES HAVE THORNS; I AM THANKFUL THAT THORNS HAVE ROSES.

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



Lifestyle

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2019



A woman walks under leafless trees in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. — AFP

Liam Neeson denies racism after admitting hunt for black men

Hollywood star Liam Neeson insisted on Tuesday he was "not racist" after confessing that he once set out to attack a random black man after a friend of his told him she had been raped. "I'm not a racist," Neeson said on ABC News, while admitting he had felt a "primal urge to lash out" about 40 years ago after hearing from his close friend that she had been attacked by a black man. The 66-year-old star of "Schindler's List" triggered an international backlash by sharing his story in an interview with British newspaper The Independent this week. In damage limitation mode on ABC's "Good Morning America," the Northern Irish actor expanded on the incident, which he said left him shocked at himself.



In this file photo Irish actor Liam Neeson arrives at the premiere of 'Widows' at the Toronto International Film Festival in Toronto, Ontario. — AFP

"I went out deliberately into black areas in the city, looking to be set upon so that I could unleash physical violence," Neeson recalled. "I did it four, maybe four or five, times until I caught myself and it really shocked me, this primal urge." While he says no violence ultimately occurred, Neeson said he sought help from a Catholic priest, spoke to friends, and walked for hours to rid himself of the episode.

But he also insisted race was not the driving factor behind his actions. "If she had said an Irish or a Scot or a Brit or a Lithuanian, I know it would have had the same effect," he told ABC. "I was trying to show honor and stand up for my dear friend in this terrible

medieval fashion." By way of explanation, he pointed to his experience growing up in Northern Ireland, at the time locked in a deadly cycle of sectarian violence pitting Catholics against Protestants. Neeson first revealed the incident to The Independent in an interview to promote his new thriller "Cold Pursuit," about a father seeking revenge after his son is murdered by a drug gang.

In the bombshell interview, he spoke of "hoping some black bastard would come out of a pub and have a go at me about something, you know? So that I could... kill him." Neeson's acting career has spanned five decades, and included a star turn in the 2008 hit "Taken"—about a former CIA agent trying to track down his kidnapped daughter. With his own revelations now threatening to derail his career, Neeson pleaded for his story to be taken as part of a broader, honest debate on race relations. "We all pretend we're all politically correct," he said. "Sometimes you scratch the surface and discover this racism and bigotry, and it's there."

'Deserves a medal'

Many of the reactions were unequivocally damning. Charles Blow, an African American columnist for The New York Times, asked on Twitter if a black actor could have got away with the same thing: "Could Will Smith confess to stalking the streets of Los Angeles for a whole week searching for random white men to kill and get a pass?" Kovie Biakolo, an African American editor at the BuzzFeed news site, noted a similarity between Neeson's desire for violent confrontation with a black man and George Zimmerman's killing of an unarmed black teenager, Trayvon Martin, in Florida in 2012. "Today is Trayvon's birthday and I had a thought: What's the distance between Liam Neeson and George Zimmerman? It gave me pause," she wrote on Twitter.

Some voices praised Neeson for his candor, however. Former England footballer John Barnes, who suffered racist abuse during his career, said the actor "deserves a medal" for speaking honestly. Barnes, who is black, told Sky News that Neeson responded in the way he did because "this is what society has shown him, that black people do, Muslims do this is what society has wrongly shown him. This is what the media have wrongly portrayed to him." —AFP

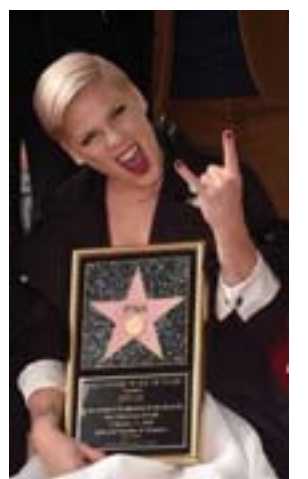
Singer Pink honored with Hollywood Walk of Fame star

Pop singer Pink was honored on Tuesday with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, telling fans gathered for the event that it was "surreal" to receive the award. "I feel like I'm dreaming and if anyone pinches me, I'm gonna punch them in the left eyebrow," the Grammy-nominated singer said at the ceremony, surrounded by her husband and two children. "I feel like a lot of people probably only thought I would make it to the walk of fame, but here I am," the 39-year-old singer-songwriter added.

Pink, whose real name is Alecia Moore, reflected on her beginnings in the music industry, paying tribute to her father who, she said, encouraged her to pursue her dreams. "Today for me is a celebration of something that my dad taught me and that is — to thine own self be true," she said. "There is a power in believing in yourself, there is a power in not giving up on life and not giving up on yourself," she added. Pink has received 20 Grammy nominations and three wins over her career. On Sunday, she will be vying for another Grammy for best pop vocal album for "Beautiful Trauma."

Since her debut in 2000, she has released seven studio albums and has sold more than 50 million records. Ellen DeGeneres, who spoke at Tuesday's ceremony and who uses a Pink song for her daytime talk show, described the singer as "a badass rock star" and a person who has remained true to herself. "Even though she is a huge international star, she is the most normal grounded person that you will ever meet," DeGeneres said.

Pink got her start in the music business as a member of the girl group Choice and her career took off after that. She released her first solo album "Can't Take Me Home" in 2000, with the record certified double-platinum in the United States. She received her first Grammy in 2002 for "Lady Marmalade," which was the soundtrack for the film "Moulin Rouge." Her two other Grammys were for best female rock vocal performance for "Trouble" in 2004 and in 2011 she shared the award for best pop collaboration with vocals for the song "Imagine." — AFP



Pink attends a ceremony honoring her with the 2,656th star on The Hollywood Walk Of Fame.



Recording artist Pink poses with her husband Carey and two children on her Hollywood Walk of Fame Star. — AFP photos



Keri Kenney-Silver, Pink and Ellen Degeneres attend a ceremony honoring Pink with the 2,656th star on The Hollywood Walk Of Fame.



Foo Fighters launch their own one-day rock school

Foo Fighters are launching their own rock school in the UK - for one day only. Dave Grohl and co have announced 'Rocksteady: Just PLAY Foo Fighters', a free live music education experience, which will enable young budding musicians to learn how to play parts of the 'Learn to Fly' hitmakers' hits in just half an hour. The event will take place on February 16 at Rocksteady Music School venues in Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Manchester, Northampton, Nottingham, Portsmouth, Guildford, Kingston and Romford. Anyone aged five to 16, of all capabilities, can take part. On top of experiencing what it's like to play in a rock band, the kids will be entered into a prize draw to win exclusive merchandise including t-shirts, vinyl albums and signed drumsticks by the band. Rocksteady's CEO, Scott Monks said: "If you can help a young person feel like a rockstar for a day you can inspire them into a lifelong love of making music and you can't get much more inspirational than the Fools! "One of the exciting things about this event is that it is for everyone, regardless of ability. If you've ever dreamed of playing in a band or trying a new instrument, make sure you come along and get involved - it's going to be an unforgettable day for everyone." The experience is based on Dave's two-part documentary 'PLAY', featuring a 23-minute composition inspired by his kids. The 50-year-old rocker teamed up with his 'Sound

City' and 'Sonic Highways' collaborator, Mark Monroe, on the project last August, to celebrate the rewards and challenges faced with learning to play a musical instrument. The former Nirvana drummer - who has daughters Violet, 12, Harper, nine, and four-year-old Ophelia with wife Jordyn Blum - explained: "Watching my kids start to play music and learn to sing or play drums, it brings me back to the time when I was their age listening to albums, learning from listening ... and when I take my kids to the place where they take their lessons, I see these rooms full of children that are really pushing themselves to figure this out. "And even now, as a 49-year-old man, I'm still trying to figure it out ... it's not something that you ever truly master. "You're always chasing the next challenge, and you're always trying to find a way to improve on what you've learned." The first part of the film discussed the art of playing an instrument and featured behind the scenes footage of the recording and shooting of the performance. The 'Monkey Wrench' hitmaker's 23-minute "one-man-band" titular instrumental is then played, with Grohl playing all seven instruments on the track, kicking off with the drums, guitar, bass, keyboards, and so on. Each was recorded for 23 minutes per instrument and if Dave felt he had made a mistake, he would begin the recording again.

REDKNAPP WORKING ON COMEBACK ALBUM

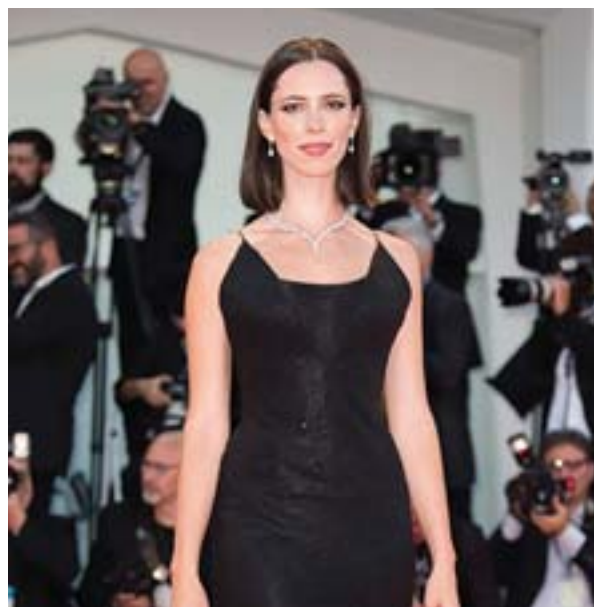
Louise Redknapp is working on her first solo album in 19 years. The former Eternal star took to her Instagram profile recently to invite fans to join her mailing list to keep tabs on the progress of her first record since 2000's 'Elbow Beach'. Alongside the clip, she wrote: "Don't forget to swipe up if you want to join my new mailing list and find out more about the new album." The 44-year-old star found fame in the 90s alongside sisters Vernie and Easter Bennett and Kelle Bryan in the R&B quartet and the group had a string of hits including 'Stay', 'Oh Baby L...' and 'Just A Step From Heaven' and a UK number two album with 'Always & Forever' as a four-piece. Louise left in Eternal in 1995 to launch a successful solo career, releasing three studio albums, 1996's 'Naked', 1997's 'Woman In Me' and 'Elbow Beach'. Louise - who inked a record deal with Warner/Chappell UK last year - also took to her Instagram Stories to host a mini Q&A with her fans about the album, and she revealed her dream duet would be Sam Smith. She said: "I would have to say Sam Smith because he's just got such an amazing voice and I love his album." The '2 Faced' hitmaker also said she'd jump at the chance to collaborate with Kylie Minogue. She said: "So if I could do a duet with Kylie, it would be a dream come true, I am like proper fangirling over Kylie, I love her." Though Louise hasn't released a record since 2000, she has had a number of compilations, with the last being 2002's 'Finest Moments'. In 2003, the former 'Strictly Come Dancing' star released the charity double A-side single 'Pandora's Kiss/Don't Give Up', which charted at number five in the UK, and raised money for the



Tickled Pink campaign for Breast Cancer Care. 'Don't Give Up' was released as a single available only in Asda supermarkets. Meanwhile 2019 didn't get off to a great start for Louise, as she was rushed to hospital after suffering a nasty fall, which left her with deep gashes on her chin and a fractured wrist. This meant she had to temporarily take time off from playing Violet Newstead in Dolly Parton's West End musical '9 to 5'. However, she is now back to herself and working hard at her new music.

Larson became a powerful woman on Captain Marvel

Brie Larson believes her fitness training for 'Captain Marvel' broke boundaries of what it means to be a woman. The 29-year-old actress endured nine months of intense exercise for her role as Carol Danvers - a former US Air Force fighter pilot who turns into one of the galaxy's mightiest heroes - in the upcoming Marvel Cinematic Universe movie and she eventually got to a point where she was able to lift over 225 pounds and hip-thrust over 400 pounds. Despite her physical transformation, the 'Room' actress insisted that the film "is not really going to look very different" because of her new found strength, although she felt it was "meaningful" for a woman to be muscular and able to "own [her] body". In an interview with InStyle, she said: "The movie is not really going to look any different with the fact that I can actually lift 225 pounds. It doesn't matter to anyone else, but it did to me. Breaking that boundary of what it means for a woman to be muscular and strong and own your body and use it as a tool, that felt meaningful." The '21 Jump Street' actress went on to explain that she accepted the titular role was because of her character's own sense of humanity and ability to "atone" for her mistakes. She said: "She didn't apologize for herself, I felt like that was a really valuable trait because she is incredibly flawed and makes a lot of mistakes?...and has to ask to atone for them, and that is super valuable. She's not ever shrinking herself down." Brie added that the opportunity to play the first female superhero to have a stand-alone film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe was the perfect way to incorporate activism into her work. She said: "The movie was the biggest and best opportunity I could have ever asked for; it was, like, my superpower. "This could be my form of activism: doing a film that can play all over the world and be in more places than I can be physically."



Rebecca Hall to star in horror The Night House

Rebecca Hall is set to star in independent horror 'The Night House'. The 36-year-old actress will lead the cast of the new film helmed by 'The Ritual' director David Bruckner and produced by David S. Goyer, best known for penning 'The Dark Knight' trilogy, and Keith Levine for their Phantom Four production company. The film, written by Ben Collins and Luke Piotrowski, will center on a widow who begins to uncover her recently deceased husband's disturbing secrets and is scheduled to shoot in May. Anton is launching the project at this week's European Film Market (EFM) in Berlin while their EVP Acquisitions & Co-Productions John Zois will oversee the project. Rebecca is now in production on Warner Bros' monster blockbuster 'Godzilla vs. Kong' which is slated for a May 2020 release and she is soon set to begin work on 'Passing', a film which she adapted from Nella Larsen's 1920s Harlem Renaissance novel that, and is making her directorial debut on. The star's credits include 'Teen Spirit', 'The Gift' and 'Holmes and Watson' where she appears alongside comedy duo Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly and previously admitted that starring in the movie is the realization of a long-held ambition. Rebecca explained: "I'm a big believer in trying to do a lot of different genres and different types of things as an actor. "I think it makes you stronger as an actor. I have really, for a long time, wanted to do some quite extreme comedy, not just more like drama-comedy." — Bang Showbiz



Perry to perform Parton tribute at Grammy awards

Katy Perry and Kacey Musgraves are to perform a Dolly Parton tribute at the 2019 Grammy Awards next week. The '9 to 5' hitmaker will take to the stage to perform new music from her album 'Dumplin'', and the bash will also have a special tribute segment that will feature Perry, Musgraves, Little Big Town and Maren Morris singing a medley of the music legend's country hits. Taking to Twitter on Tuesday, Musgraves wrote: "D O L L Y dream come true, fully materialized* (sic)" Dolly - who is an eight-time Grammy Award winner - will receive the 2019 MusiCares Person Of The Year prize at the 61st Annual Grammy Awards. This year's nominees include Cardi B, Camila Cabello, Post Malone and Shawn Mendes, who are also set to perform. Best Album ['Dirty Computer'] and Music Video ['Pynk'] nominee Janelle Mon?e, country stars Musgraves, who has four nods, and Dan + Shay, who received a nomination for Best Country Duo/Group Performance, will also hit the stage at the ceremony, which will be hosted by Alicia Keys. Hip hop superstar Kendrick Lamar is nominated for the most gongs this year, with eight nods to his name, with Drake close behind with seven, and Boi-1da and Brandi received six nominations each. Lady Gaga, Childish Gambino, Maren, newcomer H.E.R. and producer Soufwave all have five nominations along with Cardi.



Bring Me The Horizon add While She Sleeps and more to APE bill

Bring Me The Horizon will be joined by While She Sleeps and Architects at All Points East. The 'medicine' hitmakers are hosting their own line-up at the music extravaganza at Victoria Park in Hackney, London, on May 31, and they've added fellow Sheffield band While She Sleeps, metalcore titans Architects, heavy rockers Employed To Serve and the former Crystal Castles frontwoman Alice Glass to their varied bill. Oli Sykes and co commented: "We are extremely excited to announce the next round of acts on our very special day at all points east festival. Many of the bands are great friends of ours and we can't wait to come together to play at Victoria Park." Sean Long of WSS - who achieved a top 10 album with 'You Are We' in 2017, and will release the follow-up 'SO WHAT?' this March - commented: "The line-up is clearly next level. We can't wait to bring the Sleeps show to Victoria Park and prove we're meant to be there." They join previously announced guests, Run The Jewels, Nothing But Thieves, IDLES, Scarlxrd and Yonaka. Bring Me The Horizon's mainstream success continues as their genre-hopping LP 'amo' - which features a collaboration with pop star Grimes - gave them their first number one in the UK last week. The likes of The Strokes, Chemical Brothers, Christine and the Queens, James Blake and Bon Iver are also set to perform at APE, which runs between May 24 and June 4.



Saara Aalto to pen songs with Faye Tozer

Saaara Aalto is set to write songs with Steps star Faye Tozer. The Finnish pop star - who shot to fame after becoming a finalist on 'The X Factor' in 2016 - supported the 'Tragedy' hitmakers on their tour last summer, and now she has revealed she is planning to hit the studio with the 43-year-old star once she is finished with 'Dancing on Ice' after they hit it off at the shows. Saara told The Sun newspaper's Bizarre column: "On the tour we became friends and we are planning to do something together. "She really wanted to write with me so hopefully that can happen in the near future. "We were going to do it during the tour and we were really excited but then 'Strictly' happened for Faye and then 'Dancing On Ice' for me ... so hopefully after that." The 31-year-old singer - who recently released her powerful music video for 'Dance Like Nobody's Watching', which tells the story of a transgender dancer - didn't say whether the material they plan to work on will be for herself or a new Steps record. However, the latter are planning a follow-up to their 2017 comeback LP 'Tears on the Dancefloor' for 2020. Claire Richards - who completes the band along with Ian 'H' Watkins, Lee Latchford-Evans and Lisa Scott-Lee - launched her solo career last year and released her debut solo LP 'My Wildest Dreams' this month, and she said fans will have to wait until next year before they release new music and go on tour again. She said: "Steps are back together and we are going to record a new album this summer. I think it will probably be out in spring 2020, and hopefully there will be a tour next year as well. "It's not easy but we've all got incredible partners and families. "We're not the only people in the world with

children and families, and the kids love it. "While they're at an age they still enjoy it and we're young enough, we're grabbing every opportunity with both hands." As for Saara, she released her first album on Warner Music, 'Wild Wild Wonderland', last year.



Lifestyle | Features



A worker for a non-governmental organization (NGO) walking in a durian plantation in Raub, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.



This picture shows durian trees protected by netting planted across bare hillsides in Raub, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.

Chinese hunger for 'world's smelliest fruit' threatens Malaysian forests

Soaring demand for durians in China is being blamed for a new wave of deforestation in Malaysia with environmentalists warning vast amounts of jungle is being cleared to make way for massive plantations of the spiky, pungent fruit. Grown across tropical Southeast Asia, the durian is hailed as the "king of fruits" by fans, who liken its creamy texture and intense aroma to blue cheese. But detractors say durians stink of sewage and stale vomit. The strong smell means many hotels across the region have banned guests from bringing them to rooms, while Singapore does not allow the fruit on its subway system.

murky and filled with trunks and branches from logging, runs close by.

A sign outside the plantation said it was run by Ample Harvest Produce but company staff refused to comment when contacted about the loss of trees in the area. PEKA said the land's status was changed by the local government to allow logging, but local authorities did not respond to requests for comment.

Love at first bite

In a Beijing mall some 4,000 kilometers (2,500 miles) away, a stall named "Little Fruit Captain" is doing a brisk trade selling Malaysian durians. Shop manager Wang Tao said his customers "fall in love" with durians from Malaysia due to their particularly sweet taste, often preferring them to those from rival exporters, such as Thailand. He imports frozen durians from a facility in Malaysia and sells them in plastic containers or in other forms—a kind of baked dessert, in ice cream or fried up as crisps.

Customers are kept up to date about the shop's stock via the WeChat messaging app. "I first tried durian as a child and acquired a taste for it," said university student Liu Zelun, who visits the shop once a week for her durian fix. "Thai durians have a stronger flavor and you tend to get sick of it after a while, but not the ones that I buy from here." The most popular variety—and one of the most expensive—is Musang King, known for its thick, golden flesh. A single Musang King was on sale at the Beijing stall for 800 yuan (\$120), several times more expensive than in Malaysia. "Our customers aren't concerned about the prices, they just want the best," said Wang.

Palm oil down, durian up

With the price of key Malaysian export palm oil, used in everyday goods around the world from soap to margarine, in a seemingly inexorable decline, farmers are increasingly turning to durians. The government has backed the expansion of the industry, hoping to cash in on growing demand from the world's second-biggest economy. The value of durian shipments from Malaysia to China in the first eight months of 2018 hit 7.4 million ringgit (\$1.8 million), more than double the value in the same period of 2017, according to the agriculture ministry in Kuala Lumpur.



A durian plantation in Raub, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. — AFP photos

Malaysia hopes a deal struck in August to pave the way for the export of whole, frozen durians to China will boost shipments, and are aiming to more than double production to 443,000 tons by 2030. Previously, Malaysian durians could only be shipped to China in pulp and paste form. Despite the looming production boom, the agriculture ministry insisted plantations will expand slowly and said it was encouraging growers to use existing orchards and revive unproductive trees. "Deforestation for new areas is not encouraged," Agriculture Minister Salahuddin Ayub told AFP in a statement, adding that if trees were logged for plantations, strict environmental rules must be followed.

In the northeastern state of Kelantan, tribespeo-

ple last year set up blockades to stop a company from logging their ancestral lands to set up a Musang King plantation. The central government has taken up their cause, suing the state government for failing to uphold their land rights. But environmentalists warn the overall picture is bleak. Durian cultivation is "driving yet more deforestation and biodiversity loss in Malaysia," said environmental group Rimba, warning it was leading to "destruction of critical habitat for wide-ranging animals such as tigers, elephants, primates, and hornbills." — AFP

This deforestation for planting of durians is in preparation to meet that demand'

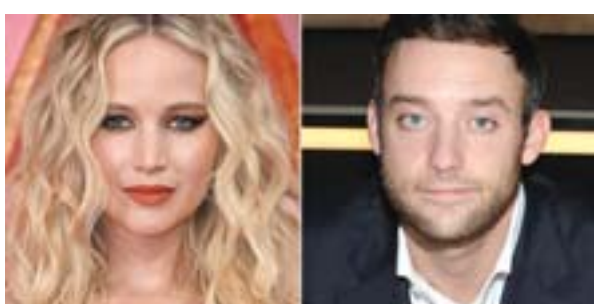
Nevertheless, they are a hit in China, and the increase in demand has prompted exporters to vie for a bigger share of the burgeoning market. Growers in Malaysia are increasingly shifting from small orchards to industrial-scale operations—a trend that environmentalists warn presents a new threat to rainforests already challenged by loggers and palm oil plantations. "Right now durians are gaining a lot of attention from the Chinese market," said Sophie Tann, from environmental protection group PEKA, which has studied land clearances to make way for the fruit.

"This deforestation for planting of durians is in preparation to meet that demand." In the jungle-clad district of Raub in central Malaysia, swathes of rainforest have recently been chopped down to make way for a new plantation, with durian seedlings protected by netting planted across bare hillsides. The plantation is next to an area of protected forest, which is home to a kaleidoscope of animals from monkeys to exotic birds. A river, now

Actress Jennifer Lawrence is engaged to art gallery director

Oscar winning actress Jennifer Lawrence, one of the most popular film stars in the world, is engaged to her boyfriend, an art gallery director, multiple media outlets reported Tuesday. Her future husband is Cooke Maroney, 34, her representative confirmed to People Magazine, the publication reported on its website. Lawrence 28, was spotted wearing a "massive ring" and enjoying what appeared to be a celebratory dinner with Maroney at a French restaurant in New York City recently, according to Page Six, which reports on celebrities.

She won the Oscar as best actress for her role in the 2012 romantic comedy "Silver Linings Playbook." Also known for her role as the heroine archer Katniss Everdene in the blockbuster "Hunger Games" film series, Lawrence has been nominated for three other Oscars for her roles in "Winter's Bone," "American Hustle" and "Joy." Maroney is an art gallery director at the Gladstone Gallery in New York, USA Today reported. Neither her manager or a spokesperson with her public relations firm were immediately available for comment early yesterday. Telephone calls to Maroney's art gallery were not immediately returned. No date for the nuptials have been announced. — Reuters



Jennifer Lawrence and Cooke Maroney



It's official, Oscars will take place without a host

The upcoming Academy Awards, the biggest night in Hollywood, will take place this year without a host for the first time in three decades, organizers said Tuesday. "We can confirm that there will be no host," a spokesperson from the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences told AFP without elaborating. The Academy was left hostless after actor and comedian Kevin Hart pulled out of the gig in December following a backlash on social media over homophobic tweets he made several years ago resurfaced. Gala organizers who have been struggling to overcome a steady decline in viewership scrambled to find a replacement but finally settled for a ceremony with no emcee.

Industry insiders said the producers of the 91st Academy Awards on February 24 plan to try out a new format with a selection of Hollywood A-listers introducing various segments. The last time the Oscars went without a host was in 1989, when actor Rob Lowe was raked over the coals for his musical duet with Snow White. In recent years, several other hosts have also come under criticism.

Actor Neil Patrick Harris got rumbled over his 2015 effort and said he would never do it again. James Franco and Anne Hathaway were a dud in 2011. The previous two Oscars have been hosted by late night funnyman Jimmy Kimmel. Comedian Chris Rock emceed in 2005 and 2016, and TV talk show host Ellen DeGeneres hosted in 2007 and 2014. — AFP

No fooling crafty crows on best plants for tool-making

Like master artisans selecting the finest raw materials for their showpiece designs, New Caledonian crows identify the best plants for fashioning hunting hooks from among myriad shrubs in the forest undergrowth, researchers said yesterday. The notoriously bright birds—one of the few animals apart from humans known to manufacture their own tools—use leaves and plant stems to create an array of utensils they then wield to forage for bugs in the ground or prise prey out of deadwood.

"If you imagine these birds live in dry forest, so there's a lot of paperbark trees, different shrubs and bushes," said Barbara Klump, research fellow at the Centre for Biological Diversity, University of St Andrews in Scotland, told AFP. "The question is how do they recognize the right material? There are so many options in the forest and they clearly have a specific idea of what they want." Klump and the team from St Andrews carried out a string of tests on the crows, using types of plant with near-identical leaves native to the Pacific archipelago.

Previous studies showed that the crafty crows prefer a particular species of flowering plant, which has a robust but malleable stem that they fashion into hooks. In Klump's study, published in the journal Royal Society Biology Letters, crows were shown their preferred plant next to a similar-looking one in the lab. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the crows knew the difference and frequently opted to approach their

preferred material.

In a subsequent test the leaves were removed from both plants and replaced with those of a third plant. But the crows weren't fooled, once again plumping for their favorite shrub. "The general idea we had is that they would look for the leaves because they are more conspicuous and maybe then they would look at the stems as a second step," said Klump. "They did recognize the leaves, but this really showed us that the stem is the main thing they focus on. They are very picky."

The crows of New Caledonia—a French territory around 1,500 kilometers (900 miles) east of Australia—have impressed ornithologists for decades with their ingenious use of tools to wrinkle out hard-to-reach prey. While debate persists over whether their skill-set is inherited or "learned" through social interaction, Klump said she had no qualms about labeling the birds smart. "They are really well adapted to their environment and they have clearly evolved traits of tool use and picking these specific plants—that tells us much about how they interact with their environment," she said. "Clearly, they are intelligent in that they can solve a lot of problems." — AFP



Muslim Shiite clerics study at the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute in the holy city of Qom.



Muslim Shiite clerics study at the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute in the holy city of Qom.



The Massoumeh shrine is pictured in the holy city of Qom.

City of Qom: Iranian blend of revolution and modernity



Iranians visit the house of the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in the holy city of Qom.

In the religious capital of Iran, the Islamic revolution still holds a powerful sway even as once-unthinkable signs of modernity creep into the city of Qom to challenge the faithful. Qom, a couple of hours drive south of Tehran, is one of Shiite Islam's holiest sites, home to dozens of seminaries and many of its most prominent clerics, known as "sources of emulation". It was here that the first tremors of the Islamic revolution were felt, back in 1963, when a rising star of the clerical establishment, Ruhollah Khomeini, made a fiery speech attacking the shah over his US-backed reform program. A year later, Ayatollah Khomeini gave another speech from his home against the granting of diplomatic immunity to US military personnel—which he said reduced "the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog".

Khomeini was sent into exile, but the uprising he set in motion would lead to his triumphant return in February 1979, the toppling of the shah and the establishment of the Islamic republic. Today, his home and the peaceful courtyard where he delivered that sermon remain untouched. "There's no doubt he had a strong charisma, but the main thing was that he spoke to everyone the same," said Mohammad Yazdi, a former student of Khomeini who now



An Iranian man stands at his shop in the holy city of Qom.



An Iranian woman walks past a jewelry shop in the holy city of Qom.

runs the house. "He was always polite. If anyone asked him a question on his way to the mosque, he would stop and answer them."

An evolving city

While the house remains the same, the city around it has seen immense change, with the appearance of overpasses and high-rise buildings that were once anathema to a religious establishment who said they would violate the privacy of adjacent houses. Hip new boutiques display life-size female mannequins in flashy evening dresses that would have attracted police attention just a few years ago. Some of Qom's real-life women can also be seen in tighter and more colourful clothes, even if the religiously-preferred black "chador" cloak remains the most common form of attire.

For Mehdi Aboutalebi, a cleric and doctor of political science at the influential Imam Khomeini Educational Research Institute in Qom, these societal changes are inevitable. "There is a wave coming and it will be hard to stop it," he told AFP. "This is natural... with satellite TV and internet being easily accessible, Western modernity is entering the country more and more, that's why Qom looks different from a few years ago," he said. But that doesn't mean Islam has lost its appeal, he added, and indeed the holy shrine at the center of Qom still holds sway over daily life—its call to prayer heard throughout the city.

"Many of these changes you see are only on the surface. The depth of the religious identity of the society is still intact," Aboutalebi said. The revolution also helped establish Iran on the world map, says a colleague at the research center, Ebrahim Hosseini, who is also the Friday prayers leader in the city of Saveh. "The most important effect was that Muslims and Iranians found an identity in

the world. So much so that now even the president of the United States feels obliged to congratulate Iranians on Eid-ul-Fitr (the holiday at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan) or Nowrooz (the Iranian new year)," he said.

Battle over communication

Lately, however, the biggest social change has been the spread of internet communications, challenging the traditional control of the pulpit and the clerics over information and the interpretation of current events. Ayatollah Khomeini was able to use the unparalleled network of mosques and religious centers across Iran to spread his message and mobilize the masses. Today, the authorities are fighting a losing battle against social media—in part because they are divided over whether or not to introduce stringent China-style controls.

The result has been half-hearted measures, with sites like Twitter, YouTube and Telegram officially banned, but easily accessible through free privacy software and used by almost the entire political establishment. For ardent supporters of the revolution like Aboutalebi, it is better to engage in these new media than try to suppress them. "A new generation (of revolutionaries) has strongly entered cyberspace. They have gone into universities and are using it as a point of contact with the people. They have set up their own film festivals to honor movies that highlight revolutionary and religious thought," he said. "The religious segment is not sitting idly by so that other groups can become the main point of reference for the people," Aboutalebi said. — AFP



A Muslim Shiite cleric walks past the house of the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in the holy city of Qom.



Visitors walk near the Massoumeh shrine in the holy city of Qom, 130 kilometers south of the capital Tehran. — AFP photos



Visitors walk in the holy city of Qom.

What's On



Holiday Inn Kuwait, Salmiya in cooperation with Chinese Association in Kuwait celebrated the Chinese New Year on February 3, 2019, at Tang chao Chinese Restaurant at Holiday Inn Kuwait, Salmiya. — Photos by Joseph Sharga

Marina Hotel Kuwait receives medals at HORECA Kuwait 2019

Marina Hotel Kuwait recently participated in HORECA Kuwait 2019, the largest international trade show for hotels, restaurants, catering, food and hospitality services in the region. During the event, there was a culinary art show, where chefs from several hotels, restaurants and cafes in Kuwait participated in various exciting competitions to showcase their astonishing skills. The competitions were evaluated by international judges from Europe, Middle East and the Far East.

Marina Hotel chefs took part in various display competitions in which they won several medals including one gold medal in six-course set dinner menu, one silver medal in plated dessert presentation, one silver medal in Asian cuisine, and a bronze medal in the Arabic cold and hot appetizer. Housekeeping department



has also participated in some competitions and won 1 gold medal and 1 bronze medal.

Marina Hotel Kuwait General Manager, Nabil Hammoud strongly praised the HORECA Kuwait comprehensive exhibition covering the hospitality, catering and food industry sectors in Kuwait and GCC. He noted that HORECA is a very popular event that takes place every year and provides a golden opportunity to exchange expertise and build future business

opportunities.

On the occasion of winning awards this year, he said: "Besides being talented, our chefs are very ambitious which makes them strive to succeed and deliver. We are very proud of their achievement and will continue to empower them to bring their best selves." In partnership with the leading Lebanese company Hospitality Services and Leaders Group, HORECA Exhibition is held annually in Kuwait.

South African Embassy, Kuwait Cricket hosts Nelson Mandela T-10 Memorial Championship

The South African Embassy in partnership with Kuwait Cricket, the official governing body of Cricket in the State of Kuwait, will host the Nelson Mandela T-10 Memorial Championship on February 8, 2019, at the Doha Entertainment City Cricket Ground. The Nelson Mandela Cricket Tournament is aimed at honouring the humanitarian values and centenary celebrations of the late former President of South Africa.

Nelson Mandela strongly believed in the power of sport to facilitate social cohesion and national reconciliation as reflected in one of his major quotes when he said: "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to the youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair."

Notably, the Nelson Mandela Memorial Championship coincides with the festive month of February in Kuwait during which we all celebrate the National and Liberation days of the State of Kuwait under the able leadership of the Global Humanitarian Leader His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Kuwait Cricket is an associate member of the International Cricket Council and a full member of the Asian Cricket Council and an affiliate of the Kuwait Olympic Committee. The association was founded in 1996. In 1946 the first cricket game was played in Kuwait in Magwa between employees of the Kuwait Oil Company and employees of contracting companies. Cricket is a one of the fastest developing sports in Kuwait.

The Nelson Mandela championship seeks to contribute to the promotion and growth of cricket in Kuwait. The South African Embassy and Kuwait Cricket invites all the sports loving people of Kuwait to come and enjoy an action packed day cricket and entertainment at the Doha Entertainment City Cricket Ground. The format of the Nelson Mandela T-10 Memorial Championship will be as follows:

- T 10 Match 1: Kuwait U16 A vs Kuwait U16 B - 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm
- T 10 Match 2: Kuwait Women's A vs Kuwait Women's B - 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm
- T 10 Match 3: Embassies/Diplomats Team vs Kuwait Cricket Officials - 3:30 pm - 5:00 pm
- T 10 Match 4: Kuwait U19 A vs Kuwait U19 B - 5:00 pm - 6:30 pm
- T 10 Match 5: Kuwait Men's A vs Kuwait Men's B - 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm
- Presentation Ceremony: 8:00 to 8:30 pm



Delegations from International Women Group (IWG) visited the Women Cultural and Social Society where they were acquainted with Al-Bustan Nursery for special needs children and participated in a few activities along with the children. — Photos by Joseph Sharga

NSS Kuwait celebrates Mannam Jayanthi

Nair Service Society (NSS) Kuwait celebrated Mannam Jayanthi for the 18th consecutive year on January 25, 2019, at Nottingham British School, Abbassiya. The celebration was to commemorate the 142nd birth anniversary of Bharath Kesari Mannathu Padmanabhan, a social reformer, freedom fighter and founder of the Nair Service Society. Famous Vedic scholar and great orator from Kerala Acharyasri Rajesh, chief guest of the event, inaugurated the function.

The inaugural speech by Acharyasri Rajesh kept the audience captivated with his profound knowledge in Vedas coupled with his great oratory skills. The meeting was presided over by Prasad Padmanabhan, President of Nair Service Society Kuwait. Deepthi, Vanitha Samajam Convener; Sunil Menon, Patron and Jignesh, Janam TV delivered felicitation speeches. Various other prominent Indians, media representatives and other Association office bearers attended the function.

The celebrations went on with cultural extravaganza by musical fusion concerts by Rajesh Cherthalla and six other artists. The program commenced with prayer songs, thalapoli and dances by NSS Vanitha Samajam and Balasamajam members. The event started sharp 5 pm and ended by 10.30 pm. A souvenir was released on the occasion by delivering the first copy by Acharyasri Rajesh to Green Spring Co Finance Manager Guna Prasad Nair.



In the annual award ceremony, Mannam Jayanthi Gold Medals and Mannam Puruskarams for outstanding academic performances for students of Class XII and X were also presented by Acharyasri Rajesh. Sreeja Pradeepkumar and Vinayan Mangalasseri were also honored during the function. The function was well coordinated by NSS program team members headed by Radhakrishnan Nair, Anieesh Nair and Jayakumar. Sajith C Nair, General Secretary, delivered the welcome speech and Harikumar, Treasurer, rendered the vote of thanks.

INVITATION

A winner is a dreamer who never gives up

START TIME: 1:00PM

KUWAIT CRICKET IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE SOUTH AFRICAN EMBASSY PRESENTS
NELSON MANDELA T-10 MEMORIAL CHAMPIONSHIP
CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF MADIBA

Date: 8th February 2019, Friday
Venue: Doha Entertainment City Cricket Ground

T-10 Match 1: Kuwait U-16 A vs Kuwait U-16 B - Time: 1:00pm - 2:30pm
T-10 Match 2: Kuwait Women's A vs Kuwait Women's B - Time: 2:00pm - 3:30pm
T-10 Match 3: Embassies Diplomats vs Kuwait Cricket Officials - Time: 3:30pm - 5:00pm
T-10 Match 4: Kuwait U-19 A vs Kuwait U-19 B - Time: 5:00pm - 6:30pm
T-10 Match 5: Kuwait Men's A vs Kuwait Men's B - Time: 6:30pm - 8:00pm

PRESENTATION CEREMONY: 8 - 8:30PM

WWW.KUWAIT-CRICKET.COM

Pompeo reassures allies of US commitment to fight IS



WASHINGTON: Participants pose for a family photo at the Meeting of the Ministers of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS at the Department of State in Washington yesterday. — AFP

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said yesterday that the United States remained committed to permanently destroying the Islamic State group despite pulling forces from Syria, as he asked concerned allies to do more. Pompeo offered assurances as top officials from 79 countries met in Washington on how to move ahead in the fight against the Islamic State movement, also known as ISIS, after President Donald Trump's sudden decision in December to remove all 2,000 troops from Syria.

"America will continue to lead in giving those who would destroy us no quarter," Pompeo said. "We ask each of your countries to stand with us and, through our efforts and God's help, the day will come when the permanent defeat of ISIS is a reality," he said.

Pompeo, one of Trump's most stalwart defenders, described the troop withdrawal as "essentially a tactical change" as extremists scatter around the world. "It is not a change in the mission," Pompeo said, adding "our fight will not necessarily always be military-led". "We are entering an era of decentralized jihad so we must be nimble in our approach as well," he said.

Trump pullout

Trump, who was to address the conference at the

State Department later yesterday, stunned many allies by ordering the troop pullout, although the US military has slowed down the pace of the exit. In his annual State of the Union address to Congress on Tuesday night, Trump renewed his pledge to avoid "endless wars" and said that nearly all of the once vast territory held by the "bloodthirsty monsters" in the Islamic State group had been taken back.

But Trump's own intelligence chief has warned that the Islamic State group, whose once-mighty stronghold in Syria is down to a narrow sliver of territory, would try to stage a comeback with a troop withdrawal. Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats told Congress last week that the Islamic State group still commands thousands of fighters in Iraq and Syria.

Hoping to avoid the worst outcomes, Pompeo asked US partners to step up intelligence-sharing and also to make up a \$350 million shortfall in a fund intended to bring stability to Iraq. "Now is the time for all of us, not just America, to put our money where our mouth is," Pompeo said. He also renewed calls on countries to take back foreign fighters - a sensitive issue for allies such as France and Britain which see little upside to bringing home hardened extremists, including militants behind videotaped beheadings that has sickened viewers around the world.

"Members of this coalition must be willing to take back foreign terrorist fighters, prosecute them and punish them," Pompeo said. The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, who were at the forefront of the battle that crushed the Islamic State's self-styled "caliphate", have warned that they may no longer be able to guard prisons housing foreign militants after the US withdrawal if Turkey attacks.

Turkey - whose foreign minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, is taking part in the Washington talks - has been one of the few countries to cheer Trump's withdrawal. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who spoke to Trump before the pullout orders, has vowed to crush the Kurdish fighters in Syria, linking them to separatists at home. The talks in Washington are expected to look more closely at a proposal for a buffer zone on the Syria-Turkish border aimed at averting conflict.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed Al-Hakim, speaking after Pompeo, called on countries to help expose Islamic State "sleepers" in Iraq and restore stability. Pompeo said despite progress in fighting Islamic State in Iraq, the group retained a strong presence in that country and was trying to mount a clandestine insurgency. "The coalition must continue to support the government of Iraq in its efforts to secure the liberated

areas of that country," Pompeo said. "Mr Foreign Minister, we're with you," he told Hakim.

Earlier this week, Trump said it was important to keep a US military presence in Iraq so that Washington could keep a close eye on Iran, according to a CBS interview aired on Sunday. However, Iraqi President Barham Salih said on Monday that Trump did not ask Iraq's permission for US troops stationed there to "watch Iran". The United States and Iran are Iraq's two biggest allies. Yesterday, Hakim, apparently responding to Trump's comment, called on countries to show full "respect for the territorial integrity of Iraq and for all operations to take place with the knowledge of Iraq, and in consultations with Iraqi security forces."

Yesterday's remarks echoed a warning on Tuesday from a top US general, who said Islamic State would pose an enduring threat following the planned withdrawal. Army General Joseph Votel, head of a US military command that oversees troops in the Middle East and Afghanistan, said the militant group retained leaders, fighters, facilitators and resources that would fuel a menacing insurgency. "We do have to keep pressure on this network... They have the ability of coming back together if we don't," Votel told a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing. — Agencies



NICOSIA: A child visits 'Dinosaurs of the Ocean', an interactive exhibition of robotic extinct creatures in real-life size, in the Cypriot capital yesterday. — AFP

6 MPs walk out as Assembly declares...

Continued from Page 1

In other business, the Assembly rejected a report by its health and labor committee which said the merger between the Public Manpower Authority and the Manpower and Government Reconstruction Program, which tries to convince Kuwaitis to join the private sector, was illegal. But the Assembly rejected the report, which means the merger will continue. During the debate, MPs said the merger will discourage Kuwaiti citizens from joining the private sector.

Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel hailed the merger as a step in the right direction and based on reports by the Audit Bureau.

The integration is in line with technical reports by the Audit Bureau recommending the merger as well as on the

basis of the "sustainable development document", she said, noting that some government authorities have similar jurisdictions and must be combined. The manpower program is not a government apparatus or establishment - it is rather a sector within the Civil Service Commission, and this is what necessitated placing it under the umbrella of manpower authority, Aqeel explained.

Meanwhile, the interior ministry announced yesterday that registration of National Assembly by-election candidates for the second and third electoral districts will open from today until Feb 16. In a press release, it said application forms are available at the elections affairs department. Registration is open in accordance with article 23 of law 35 of 1962 that deals with the election of National Assembly members. Citizens are invited to participate in the elections in the second and third electoral districts as published by the interior ministry in the official gazette (Kuwait Today) no. 1430. The statement said the requirements include the applicant to be a Kuwaiti citizen over the age of 30, be fluent in Arabic, have a clean criminal record and be in good standing with the law.

humans, the ministry of health has alerted all hospitals and relevant departments to keep watch and brace for any emergency in the future," Qattan said. She asked everyone to keep away from birds or animals, particularly dead ones, and report to the health departments any cases of mass bird deaths, adding the ministry is in contact with relevant international organizations to follow up the situation. — KUNA

99.9% accuracy at AIDS clinic...

Continued from Page 1

"Although there is no evidence linking the virus to

UAE denies Briton held for wearing Qatar football shirt

LONDON: The United Arab Emirates embassy in London denied yesterday reports that a British man was arrested in the country for wearing a Qatar football shirt, saying he was in fact held for wasting police time. It said Ali Essa Ahmed, described as a dual Sudanese-British citizen, last month reported to police that "he had been harassed and beaten up by UAE national football fans for cheering the Qatar team", at the Asian Cup finals. The UAE, along with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt, cut all ties with Qatar in June 2017 over allegations that the energy-rich state supports extremists.

The embassy said police took Ahmed to hospital "where a doctor who examined him concluded that his injuries were inconsistent with his account of events and appeared to be self-inflicted". As a result, on Jan 24, "Mr Ahmed was

charged with wasting police time and making false statements", the embassy said. "We are advised he has since admitted those offences and will now be processed through the UAE courts," said a statement posted online.

It said the British embassy in UAE had been contacted and "due process has been followed", adding that Ahmed speaks Arabic "and fully understands the situation he has put himself in". "He was categorically not arrested for wearing a Qatar football shirt. This is instead an instance of a person seeking media attention and wasting police time."

The Guardian newspaper reported that the man, named as Ali Issa Ahmad, 26, had travelled to the UAE for a holiday and attended an Asian Cup match between Qatar and Iraq on Jan 22, where he wore a Qatar shirt. The Foreign Office in London said: "We are providing assistance to a British man arrested in the UAE, and are in touch with the local authorities."

It was not immediately clear what punishment Ahmad could face if found guilty. Qatar's side was supported by thousands of Omanis in the Asian Cup final, which Qatar won. They wore Qatar scarves and shirts. Qatar were also supported throughout the tournament by a South Korean woman and a Chinese man who dressed in the colors of the Qatar flag. —Agencies

Trump calls for unity in State of...

Continued from Page 1

continuously by applause from the Republicans, was to announce a new, more inclusive presidential tone ahead of Trump's 2020 reelection bid.

The problem is that in two years of his administration Trump has driven an already polarized country into bitter, even violent debate over almost every aspect of politics. The divide was stark from the moment Trump entered the House of Representatives chamber, with Republicans scrambling to shake his hands, but most Democrats keeping out of the way. And the moment Trump swung onto his favorite topic of building a wall on the Mexican border to stop an "onslaught" of illegal immigrants, Democrats angrily shook their heads. A decision by Democrat women to wear white, in honor of the early 20th century suffragette movement, was seen as a visual rebuke of Trump.

After the speech, Senior House Democrat Steny Hoyer declared that Trump "leaned on falsehoods and fear to obscure the reality of a presidency lacking in leadership and harmful to America's future".

The president's single-minded drive - and failure - to get congressional funding for that wall is at the heart of the political dysfunction his speech claimed to be trying to resolve.

Democrats say that Trump's warnings about illegal immigrant murderers amount to political fear mongering and they refuse to authorize the money. The resulting standoff has turned what might have been a relatively minor funding debate into an existential test of political strength in the buildup to 2020. In December, Trump took revenge on Congress by triggering a crippling five-week partial shutdown of government.

Democratic House speaker Nancy Pelosi, who was seated behind Trump for the State of the Union, exacted her own reprisal by forcing the speech to be delayed by a week. Things could soon escalate, with Trump

threatening to renew the shutdown or declare a national emergency so that he can bypass Congress and give himself power to take military funds for his project. "I will get it built," he said firmly, to cheers from Republicans and silence from Democrats.

Trump's claims to foreign policy successes are not necessarily endorsed even in his own party. He repeated in the speech that he wants US troops to pull out from long-running wars, such as Afghanistan and Syria as soon as possible. "Constructive" talks with the Taleban guerrillas have "accelerated," he said in an notably upbeat assessment. There were cheers but the withdrawal promises have been criticized by some in the security services and many Republicans, who fear a loss of American influence on the world stage.

Trump likewise gave an update on his plan for a second summit with reclusive North Korea's Kim, whom he is trying to persuade to give up nuclear weapons. "As part of a bold new diplomacy, we continue our historic push for peace on the Korean peninsula." Closer to home, he dialed up the pressure on Venezuela's leftist leader Nicolas Maduro, saying "we stand with the Venezuelan people in their noble quest for freedom." Opposition leader Juan Guaido's envoy to Washington was among the top guests invited to attend the speech.

Trump's speech began by recalling US triumphs in World War II and space exploration. It ended with an oratorical flourish, declaring "this is the time to reignite the American imagination. This is the time to search for the tallest summit and to set our sights on the brightest star". But it was clear that political foes in Washington were not persuaded. "It will take more than a speech to paper over President Trump's consistent view that the only obligation he has is to his political base," Democratic Senator Michael Bennet tweeted.

Lloyd Doggett, a Democrat congressman, said that Trump's speechwriters could not change the reality of the current White House. "The centerpiece of this speech was fear about a phony border crisis. There's no path forward to avoid more chaos," he said. "It is less important how Trump reads a teleprompter one night of the year than the other 364 days of Twitter-fueled mayhem that threaten our union." — AFP

Sports

In-form Italy's speed skier Paris rocks to claim world super-G gold

France's Johan Clarey tied for silver with Austrian Vincent Kriechmayr

ARE: In-form Italian speed skier Dominik Paris beat a host of high-class rivals including Norwegian Aksel Lund Svindal to claim super-G gold at the World Ski Championships yesterday. Paris, whose only previous world medal was a downhill silver in Schladming in 2013, timed 1min 24.20sec down the 2.2km-long Olympia course in bitterly cold conditions as the race lived up to its billing as one of the most unpredictable at these championships.

The 29-year-old, a massive heavy metal fan whose inspiration is American band Pantera, had arrived in Are, Sweden, in prime form having notched up three World Cup victories this season - the Bormio speed double and the famed Kitzbuehel downhill for a third time - along with three other podium finishes.

France's Johan Clarey, 38, tied for silver with Austrian Vincent Kriechmayr, just 0.09sec off Paris' winning time. The men's super-G was touted as one of most open disciplines in Sweden, with five different winners on the World Cup circuit this season and a host of podium finishers capable of pushing for a medal.

The now-injured Austrian Max Franz won in Beaver Creek, Norwegian Kjetil Jansrud in Lake Louise, Svindal in Val Gardena, Paris in Bormio and Germany's Josef Ferstl in Kitzbuehel.

But Kriechmayr heads the World Cup standings ahead of teammate Matthias Mayer, with Norwegian Aleksander Aamodt Kilde in fourth.

SVINDAL HEARTBREAK

Despite the open field, there was heartbreak for Norwegian colossus Svindal, however, who finished in 1.25:12 (+0.92). "Tough day on the course today," Svindal said on Instagram. "Not what I was hoping for... Now aiming for one grande finale on Saturday. The downhill is on!!!"

Svindal, who is to retire after Are, has five world titles to his name, but never the super-G.

After triumphing in the downhill (2007, 2013), combined (2009, 2011) and giant slalom (2007), hopes were high that the popular Norwegian could strike another gold as part of a perfect farewell from the pistes.

But it was not to be, and the 34-year-old was left punching his thighs and shaking his be-helmeted head in frustration as he raced through the finish line in front of a large partisan Nordic crowd.

Svindal's teammate Jansrud, the 2014 Olympic champion and 2017 silver medallist, had to miss Kitzbuehel after breaking two fingers, but with his hand strapped up, he bravely came down the Are course to finish 1.18sec off Paris.

Austria's reigning Olympic champion Mayer skied out on the demanding, hard-packed course with initial cloud cover that offered a flat light before lifting to hand a huge advantage to later runners. Mayer's compatriot Hannes Reichelt, who won 2015 world super-G gold and 2011 silver, also went out. — AFP



ARE: Both second placed France's Johan Clarey (L) and Austria's Vincent Kriechmayr and winner Italy's Dominik Paris (C) celebrate during the flowers ceremony after the men's Super G event of the 2019 FIS Alpine Ski World Championships at the National Arena in Are, Sweden, yesterday. — AFP

I'm no Tom Brady, says too-old Vonn after super-G crash

ARE: Lindsey Vonn admitted to thoughts of being "too old for this" as she slid out of Tuesday's world championship super-G race, adding however that she dreaded missing the adrenaline ski racing gave her as she heads into retirement.

Vonn, in flat light caused by cloud cover in Are, Sweden, hit a lip of a roll that propelled her forward. The 34-year-old landed heavily and slid with force into the safety nettings in a race won by her younger teammate Mikaela Shiffrin.

"I've got a bit of a shiner," Vonn said. "I feel like I've been hit by an 18-wheeler, but other than that I'm great! My knees are the same as they were before the race. I think my neck's going to be sore. I got the wind knocked out of me, my ribs are oddly sore. It'll be fine, Sunday'll be great," she said in reference to the blue riband downhill, a race she won last year on this same slope in Are. Vonn added: "My immediate thought was 'what the hell, why am I in the fence again?' "It was like 'Why am I here, I'm too old for this!'"

Medical staff were quickly on the scene to help Vonn get gingerly back to her feet, to applause from the crowd around the finish line.

Her involvement in the race was all too brief. No sooner had the commentator announced that Vonn had form on the hill, having won two world silver medals there in 2007, than her skis kicked back off the rise to groans from the crowd.

Race leader Mikaela Shiffrin was shown on the big screen television clutching her head as her US teammate, who is just four wins short of Ingemar Stenmark's World Cup record of 86, slid out at pace into the bright red netting.

Vonn will bow out after these championships after 19 illustrious seasons that have seen her scoop a record 20 crystal globes, including four overall titles. She is also the 2010 Olympic downhill champion, and won the world speed double in Val d'Isere in 2009.



ARE: US' Lindsey Vonn reacts as she arrives after falling in the finish area during women's Super G event of the 2019 FIS Alpine Ski World Championships at the National Arena in Are, Sweden, on Tuesday. —AFP

As injuries continued to take their toll, Vonn announced last week that she would retire after Are, while not for one second regretting her sporting choices. "I love what I do," she said, before adding: "As much as I love winning, I love going fast even more. I love the thrill of competition. I love downhill because I love pushing myself, I love pushing the limits, I love the adrenaline."

"Downhill is not a healthy sport, people crash all the time, every day. In Garmisch three people (were ruled) out for the rest of the season. "If you want to be healthy, then you should probably do another sport. Me, I've done it and pushed the limits as long as I can, I just can't push the limits anymore. It doesn't mean it's not worth the risk, I take that risk head on."

Vonn insisted she was no Tom Brady, the quarterback who won a record sixth Super Bowl with the New England Patriots on Sunday at the age of 41. "I've come back from way too many injuries and I'm just not able

to do it," she said. "Not everyone can be Tom Brady and keep winning the Super Bowl for a million times."

"If you look at all the injuries I've had, winning in five events, it's really something amazing and I'm proud of it no matter if I got 82 or 87 (World Cup wins). I wish I could have got it but not at the risk of the rest of my life. "I'm not sad about it, I've accepted it. It's time to enjoy it and have some fun and then party." Vonn also revealed that she will undergo a knee operation after she hangs up her racing suit, the seventh surgery of her career.

"I'm scr...!" she joked. "I've known that for three years now. It's only a matter of time. The analogy I was given was, I only have a certain amount of steps left. "I've run out of steps at this point. I know I'll have pain for the rest of my life but I wouldn't change it... I've got no cartilage, no meniscus, I got rods and plates and screws. There's a lot going on. My head is still good. That's all I need at my point!" — AFP

Estonian kid Kelly ready to light up freestyle ski worlds

PARK CITY: Fresh from winning three medals at the Winter X-Games, Estonia's 16-year-old freestyle ski sensation Kelly Sildaru is looking to take the World Championships by storm this week.

The Tallinn native became the first person to leave the X-Games in Colorado in January having won three medals in one weekend in events where the slightest slip generally means you miss the podium.

Apart from missing her mum, the waif-like wunderkid told AFP she is confident and focused at the Freestyle World Championships in Utah running to February 10, saying the organisation suits her temperament.

"At the X-Games, the schedule was really tight. It won't be that tight here," she said. "I'm skiing seven days in a row or something. At the X-Games, I did four or five days. "It takes more time here, but it's not so tight. It will be easier for my body."

Competing on skis, rather than in the equivalent events for snowboard, Sildaru is down for the slopestyle, where a string of obstacles such as handrails and bumps are negotiated and awarded marks by judges, and the half-pipe, notable for its aerial acrobatics.

Sildaru's father Tonis is both her coach and manager and accompanies his daughter everywhere. He pulled her out of Saturday's big air, complaining that the ramp was too slow and the landing area dangerous. That decision follows on from concern about her safety after Sildaru missed her Winter Olympic debut in Pyeongchang, South Korea, last year, because of a knee injury. "I was really sad about that, but I tried to keep a positive vibe. I knew that if I worked hard I'd get back on skis faster," she said.—AFP

Piste queens Vonn and Shiffrin, never the twain shall meet

ARE: Newly crowned world super-G champion Mikaela Shiffrin has been tipped to break all of skiing's records by outgoing teammate and long-established star of the slopes Lindsey Vonn. Shiffrin added super-G gold to her three consecutive slalom titles when she raced to victory at the world championships in Are, Sweden, on Tuesday.

With just three super-G victories among her 56 World Cup wins, her performance on the hard-packed Swedish slopes shows just how much all-round talent the 23-year-old has. "I wish her all the best for the future, I think she's going to break all the records," said the 34-year-old Vonn, the most successful women's skier of all time, but who crashed out of the super-G.

"There's kind of no point me breaking them, because she's going to break them anyway!" Vonn will hang up her skin-tight catsuit after the Are worlds with 82 World Cup victories to her name, four short of Swedish icon Ingemar Stenmark's record.

While Vonn will bow out at Sunday's downhill, Shiffrin finally took the decision about what other events she might go for, opting to skip both the alpine combined and downhill. "Downhill is far too much for me to manage," she said, having won only one downhill in her

career, in Lake Louise in 2017.

"This whole season has been a balancing act in racing all disciplines. "I don't want to be greedy here." Shiffrin added that the switch from her strongest, more technical events like slalom and giant slalom to the speed disciplines took some getting used to.

"I hadn't skied at speed since Cortina," she said. "So I had to adjust my mental gauge to how fast it is. "I was quite nervous in the starting gate, and my coach was like 'Remember this is fun'. "It was the perfect thing to say because I was able to do that."

ENJOY SUCCESS

Vonn admitted to spending very little time with her younger teammate, also counselling that she should not forget to toast victory. "It's fun to see," she said of Shiffrin. "She's obviously incredibly talented. She approaches skiing in a much different way than most, or maybe everyone."

"It's very methodical and technical, kind of the opposite to me, but that's why she's had so much success." Vonn added: "I just wish her continued success and I think most importantly health and happiness because you also have to enjoy that success, otherwise it's not so much fun."



ARE: Gold medalist US' Mikaela Shiffrin poses during the medal ceremony of the women's Super G event of the 2019 FIS Alpine Ski World Championships in Are, Sweden, on Tuesday. — AFP

"We have respect for each other. It's kind of different, she has got her team and she has her own thing going on and I have mine. "We don't work together, I don't see her very often. She's never training with us. I honestly don't know her very well—there's not many people I don't know. "It's kind of interesting that I don't know her very well." Turning to

her farewell to top-class ski racing, Vonn said she hoped Stenmark would be present for the downhill. "I think he was planning to come up a little bit later, but I'm going to try to convince him to come up a little bit earlier," she said. "I think having my last race with him being there would be the best farewell I could have." —AFP

Roux set to step up for Ireland in must-win Scotland clash

LONDON: Quinn Roux was not included in Ireland's Six Nations squad when coach Joe Schmidt announced his initial 38-man selection last month, but the Connacht lock is now set to assume a pivotal role in their must-win encounter with Scotland on Saturday.

Called into group after injuries to Iain Henderson and Tadhg Beirne, Roux has moved further up the pecking order after Devin Toner was ruled out with an ankle injury in their opening round defeat by England in Dublin.

Connacht's Ultan Dillane is also part of the Irish squad but Roux remains the favourite to make his first Six Nations start after a third championship appearance off the bench against England.

"Quinn has really stepped up in terms of calling the lineouts, leading the team and on the field, he's slotting in when he's had to pretty well," Ireland scrum coach Greg Feek told reporters.

"Quinn did really well at the weekend, he came on and put a couple of big hits in. He's been leading the lineout in Connacht this year, he's really progressed there and matured as a player."

"He's good in the scrum and mauling. As a tight forward he ticks a lot of the boxes. Luckily for us, we have good depth there at the moment."

A defeat at the first hurdle of the tournament comes as a reality check for some of the players in the Irish dressing room. For Bundee Aki, Jacob Stockdale, James Ryan, Joey Carbery and Jordan Larmour, it was their second loss on the international stage, while it was a first for Andrew Porter and John Cooney.— Reuters

Sports

Seifert stars as New Zealand inflict India's worst T20 defeat

It was one of those complete performances that you do search for: Kane

SCOREBOARD

Completed scoreboard in the first Twenty20 international between New Zealand and India in Wellington yesterday.

New Zealand	
T. Seifert b Ahmed	84
C. Munro c Shankar b K. Pandya	34
K. Williamson c H. Pandya b Chahal	34
D. Mitchell c Karthik b H. Pandya	8
R. Taylor c Ahmed b Kumar	23
C. de Grandhomme c sub (Siraj) b H. Pandya	3
M. Santner not out	7
S. Kuggeleijn not out	20
Extras: (lb 1, wd 5)	6
Total: (for 6 wickets: 20 overs)	219
Fall of wickets: 1-86 (Munro), 2-134 (Seifert), 3-164 (Mitchell), 4-164 (Williamson), 5-189 (de Grandhomme), 6-191 (Taylor)	
Bowling: Kumar 4-0-47-1 (2w), Ahmed 4-0-48-1, K. Pandya 4-0-37-1, H. Pandya 4-0-51-2 (3w), Chahal 4-0-35-1.	

India	
R. Sharma c Ferguson b Southee	1
S. Dhawan b Ferguson	29
V. Shankar c de Grandhomme b Santner	27
R. Pant b Santner	4
MS Dhoni c Ferguson b Southee	39
K. Karthik c Southee b Sodhi	5
H. Pandya c Mitchell b Sodhi	4
K. Pandya c Seifert b Southee	20
B. Kumar c Seifert b Ferguson	1
Y. Chahal b Mitchell	1
K. Ahmed	1
Extras: (lb 3, wd 3, nb 1)	7
Total: (all out: 19.2 overs)	139
Fall of wickets: 1-18 (Sharma), 2-51 (Dhawan), 3-64 (Pant), 4-65 (Shankar), 5-72 (Karthik), 6-77 (H. Pandya), 7-129 (K. Pandya), 8-132 (Kumar), 9-136 (Dhoni), 10-139 (Chahal)	
Bowling: Southee 4-0-17-3, Kuggeleijn 2-0-34-0, Ferguson 4-0-22-2, Santner 4-0-24-2, Mitchell 2.2-0-13-1 (1nb), Sodhi 3-0-26-2 (3w).	
Result: New Zealand won by 80 runs	

WELLINGTON: India crashed to their worst ever Twenty20 defeat as an aggressive 84 by Tim Seifert set New Zealand up for an 80-run win in Wellington yesterday. "It was one of those complete performances that you do search for," beamed New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson, happy to see his side bounce back from the drubbing inflicted by India in the recent one-day international series.

The explosive 86-run opening partnership off 50 deliveries by Seifert and Colin Munro laid the foundations for New Zealand to build their third highest T20 total of 219-6. India were all out in reply for 139 with four balls remaining, in only the eighth time they have failed to bat through a 20-over innings.

Their previous worst defeat was by 49 runs to Australia at Bridgetown in 2010. India captain Rohit Sharma could not hide his disappointment, having elected to bowl when he won the toss because chasing a target is his side's strong suit.

"We were outplayed in all three departments," he said. "We have chased targets of 200 (plus) before and that's probably the reason we played with eight batsmen. "As a team we have always chased down targets and we believe that whatever target is set in front of us we can do it."

He added: "We were confident of getting that target. It's a small ground. We just needed that one big partnership which we failed to do." Seifert, whose previous best innings in eight T20 internationals was an unbeaten 14 on debut, gave New Zealand a flying start alongside Munro, who fell for 34 off 20.

Seifert had a life on 71 when dropped on the boundary by Dinesh Karthik and added a further 13 runs before he was bowled by Khaleel Ahmed. His 43-ball innings included seven fours and six sixes.

Williamson added 34 to the New Zealand cause and there were enterprising cameos late in the innings from Ross Taylor with 23 off 14 and an unbeaten 20 from



WELLINGTON: New Zealand's captain Kane Williamson plays a shot during the first Twenty20 cricket match between New Zealand and India in Wellington yesterday. — AFP

seven deliveries by Scott Kuggeleijn. Faced with batting at 11 an over, India faltered from the start when Sharma went for one.

Shikhar Dhawan blazed a quick 29 until he was bowled by Lockie Ferguson and his dismissal ignited a collapse of five wickets for 26 runs in 33 deliveries. MS Dhoni and Krunal Pandya arrested the slide with a

52-run partnership before the last three wickets fell for 10 runs.

Tim Southee, who was dropped for the last three ODIs against India, marked his return to the side with three for 17 off his four overs. The second T20 in the three-match series is in Auckland on Friday. India won the preceding ODI series 4-1. —AFP

Tuch's shootout goal gives Vegas win at Tampa Bay

TAMPA BAY: Alex Tuch scored in the third round of the shootout as the visiting Vegas Golden Knights rallied from a 2-0 deficit to snap a franchise-record four-game regular-season losing streak with a 3-2 shootout victory at Tampa Bay on Tuesday night. Tuch circled in from the right side and then deked Lightning goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy and beat him with a forehand shot just inside the right post for the game-winner. Cody Eakin and Valentin Zykov each scored goals for Vegas. Marc-Andre Fleury finished with 24 saves and also stopped a Brayden Point shootout attempt to pick up his league-leading 28th victory. Point and Mathieu Joseph scored goals and Steven Stamkos had two assists for Tampa Bay, which had a two-game winning streak snapped. Vasilevskiy finished with 35 saves, including a highlight-reel, no-stick diving block of a Max Pacioretty shot late in the third period to get the game into overtime.

BRUINS 3, ISLANDERS 1

Patrice Bergeron, playing in his 1,000th NHL game, scored the first and last goals for the Boston, which fended off visiting New York. Peter Cehlarik scored the game-winning goal early in the third period for the Bruins, who have won two straight following a three-game losing streak. Goalie Tuukka Rask made 28 saves. Jordan Eberle scored for the Islanders, who had their eight-game points streak snapped. Goalie Robin Lehner recorded 24 saves.

BLACKHAWKS 6, OILERS 2

Patrick Kane and Dominik Kubalik each had a goal and an assist, and Chicago scored five goals in the third period to rally for a win at Edmonton. Erik Gustafsson, John Hayden, Dylan Strome and Drake Caggliola also scored for the Blackhawks. Chicago has won five games in a row, which is its best streak of the season. Leon Draisaitl scored twice in a losing effort for Edmonton, which is winless in its past six. Connor McDavid collected a pair of assists for the Oilers.

BLUE JACKETS 6, AVALANCHE 3

Pierre-Luc Dubois had two goals, Josh Anderson and Alexander Wennberg scored 1:42 apart midway through the third period and Columbus downed Colorado at Denver. Wennberg also had an assist, and Oliver Bjorkstrand and Cam Atkinson also scored for Columbus. Sergei Bobrovsky had 27 saves for the Blue Jackets. Nikita Zadorov, Samuel Girard and Erik Johnson had goals, and Philipp Grubauer stopped 31 shots for Colorado, which has lost four in a row.

SABRES 5, WILD 4 (SO)

Sam Reinhart scored the only shootout goal, carrying Buffalo over visiting Minnesota. Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark stopped Victor Rask and Jason Zucker in the shootout before Reinhart's shot went off the blocker of Wild goalie Devan Dubnyk and trickled in to open the third round. Reinhart also had a regulation goal and an assist. Ullmark had 41 saves in the win, and Dubnyk stopped 35 shots.

HURRICANES 4, PENGUINS 0

Goaltender Curtis McElhinney stopped all 23 shots he faced to backstop visiting Carolina in a shutout of Pittsburgh. It was McElhinney's ninth career shutout, first of the season and first in his career against Pittsburgh. Jordan Martinook, Brett Pesce, Micheal Ferland and Andrei Svechnikov scored for the Hurricanes.



DENVER: Josh Anderson #77 of the Columbus Blue Jackets scores a goal against goalie Philipp Grubauer #31 of the Colorado Avalanche in the third period at the Pepsi Center on Tuesday in Denver, Colorado. — AFP

CAPITALS 3, CANUCKS 2

T.J. Oshie, Brett Connolly and Jakob Vrana each scored a goal as Washington edged visiting Vancouver. Washington, trying to rebound from a seven-game losing streak, has now won two of its past three games. The Canucks lost for the second consecutive night, receiving goals from Markus Granlund and Elias Pettersson. There were a few emotional moments early when the Capitals played a video tribute to faceoff specialist Jay Beagle, now with Vancouver, who helped Washington win the Stanley Cup last spring. Beagle played 10 years with the Capitals.

CANADIENS 4, DUCKS 1

Brendan Gallagher had two goals and an assist, and host Montreal cruised past struggling Anaheim. Jonathan Drouin matched his career high with three assists. Jesperi Kotkaniemi and Phillip Danault also scored goals and Carey Price made 24 saves for the Canadiens, who improved to 7-1-1 since Jan 12. Ryan Getzlaf scored for the Ducks, who have been outscored 27-6 in their five-game losing streak. Chad Johnson made 28 saves for Anaheim.

PREDATORS 5, COYOTES 2

Roman Josi collected a goal and two assists as host Nashville skated to victory over Arizona. Ryan Ellis and Calle Jarnkrok each scored and set up a goal, and Filip Forsberg ended Nashville's pronounced power-play drought to highlight his team's three-goal second period. The Predators entered the game mired in an 0-for-31 skid on the power play. Vinnie Hinostroza scored his fifth goal in six contests, and Derek Stepan also tallied for the Coyotes, who have dropped four in a row to conclude their six-game road trip with a 2-3-1 mark. Calvin Pickard turned aside 42 shots in the loss.

SHARKS 3, JETS 2 (OT)

Joe Pavelski scored the game-winning goal while

short-handed as San Jose twice erased deficits en route to an overtime victory at Winnipeg. While the Sharks were down a man for the second time during the overtime period, Pavelski took a feed from Brent Burns during a two-on-one rush and buried his 29th goal of the season at 2:49 of the extra frame. The Sharks, who have won three straight, got 25 saves from goalie Martin Jones in a back-and-forth game. Connor Hellebuyck made 35 saves, 15 of them in the third period, for the Jets, who couldn't find a win on a night their head coach, Paul Maurice, was behind the bench for his 1,500th game.

KINGS 5, DEVILS 1

Tyler Toffoli scored a pair of goals 35 seconds apart as visiting Los Angeles opened the third period with a flurry of scoring to down New Jersey. Ilya Kovalchuk, who was booed heavily, also scored a third-period goal in his return to New Jersey. Kovalchuk played four seasons with the Devils before "retiring" from the NHL following the 2012-13 season in order to play again in his native Russia. Kovalchuk returned to the NHL this season. The Kings scored three goals in the first 1:52 of the third period, with both of Toffoli's goals coming in the opening 1:07. Dion Phaneuf also got into the mix, with his first goal of the season less than two minutes after the second intermission.

BLUES 3, PANTHERS 2

St. Louis rallied from a two-goal, third-period deficit to claim victory over Florida at Sunrise, Fla. Vince Dunn scored the go-ahead goal with 3:53 left in the third period, clanging his shot in off the left post. Colton Parayko and Ryan O'Reilly also scored for the Blues, and backup goalie Jordan Binnington made 22 saves to earn his third straight win. Rookie Henrik Borgstrom and captain Aleksander Barkov scored for the Panthers, both on the power play. Backup goalie James Reimer took the loss, making 31 saves. — Reuters

Australia to manage return of Smith, Warner

SYDNEY: Steve Smith and David Warner will not be rushed back into the Australia side as soon as their bans expire next month but coach Justin Langer thinks it would be "crazy" not to include them in the World Cup squad.

The former Test captain and vice-captain, Australia's best two batsmen, will become eligible for state and international cricket on March 29 after serving one-year bans for their part in the Newlands ball-tampering scandal.

The prospective return of both has been complicated by elbow injuries with Smith's more serious problem requiring major surgery and likely to sideline him right up to the expiration of his ban.

Coach Langer, who will prepare sides for both the World Cup defence and Ashes tour over the next few months, said the timing of their international returns would depend both on the injuries and also on how much cricket they were able to play.

"They're going to need to get some cricket before coming back into the squad. It's all part of the management. We'll have to wait and see," he said. "We know it's been a tough time for them, it's been a tough time for Australian cricket, but we know the ... integration has been going for the last nine or ten months ... it's getting closer, isn't it? And that'll be a continued process."

"It's about how much cricket they get to play between now and then. They'll find opportunities. We'll find opportunities."

"We're talking about two great players, we're not talking about two really good players," he added. "Two great players who on paper we'd be crazy not to have them in the team." —Reuters

Windies president calls for slow over rate policy to be modified

LONDON: The International Cricket Council (ICC) should modify its policy for slow over rates, Cricket West Indies president Dave Cameron said on Tuesday. Speaking in the wake of the suspension of captain Jason Holder from the third test against England starting in St. Lucia on Saturday, Cameron questioned whether the player's absence was good for cricket.

Holder is the number one ranked all-rounder in the world. West Indies won the second test by 10 wickets in less than three days, for an unassailable 2-0 series lead, but Holder's subsequent suspension dampened the celebratory mood.

"We will, of course, abide by the ICC ruling, but we have to wonder if such punitive action at a pivotal stage of the series is good for cricket," Cameron said in a statement. "What a shame if the series is remembered not for the sparkling play of the reinvigorated West Indies players but for a crippling decision made by a rule that ought to be modified."

Cameron did not specify exactly what modification he favoured, and he is not arguing the letter of the law. Holder was suspended because he was deemed responsible for West Indies' slow over rate. The team was two overs short of its required minimum target for the match.

It is the second time Holder has been suspended. Critics argue that forcing the team's captain to sit out is exactly what test cricket does not need in its struggle to stay relevant in the Caribbean. —Reuters

Sports

Flu-hit Dortmund crash out of German Cup on penalties to Bremen

Bayer Leverkusen slump to 2-1 defeat at second-division Heidenheim

BERLIN: Flu-hit Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund crashed out of the German Cup on Tuesday, losing a penalty shoot-out at home to Werder Bremen following a 3-3 draw after extra time. Goalkeeper Jiri Pavlenka was Bremen's hero in the shoot-out as he saved Dortmund's opening attempts from Paco Alcacer and Maximilian Philipp as Bremen won the last-16 tie 4-2 on penalties.

It finished 1-1 over 90 minutes after Dortmund captain Marco Reus rifled home a direct free-kick to cancel out an early goal by Bremen's Milot Rashica. The game exploded into life with four goals in extra time as Bremen twice equalised, through substitutes Claudio Pizarro and Martin Harnik, to force penalties after Chelsea-bound Christian Pulisic and Achraf Hakimi had scored for Dortmund.

"It's a bitter defeat," admitted Dortmund striker Mario Goetze. "We shouldn't have conceded two equalisers in extra time and then to lose on penalties is really tough." Peru veteran Pizarro, who turns 41 in October, was delighted with his 56th German Cup goal.

"That will have done us good - we deserved to go through," beamed the former Chelsea and Bayern Munich striker. Flu meant Dortmund were without England winger Jadon Sancho and defender Lukasz Piszczek, as well as first-choice goalkeeper Roman Burki and his back-up, Swiss international Marwin Hitz.

It meant third-choice keeper Eric Oelschlaegel made his Dortmund debut against Bremen, the club he left last June after six years. The 23-year-old was beaten after just five minutes when Rashica stabbed home a Max Kruse free-kick to stun the sell-out crowd of 80,500. Dortmund equalised just before the half-time break when Reus fired home a superb direct free-kick for his

17th goal of the season. Both sides had chances late in the second half as Oelschlaegel made a superb one-handed save from a Kruse free-kick. Dortmund midfielder Thomas Delaney then hit the crossbar with the 90 minutes up.

Pulisic looked to have settled the matter by netting just before the end of the first period of extra time after dribbling through the away defence. Bremen came back with Pizarro knocking the ball home at the second attempt in a goal-mouth scramble to make it 2-2 on 108 minutes. Dortmund regained the lead when defender Achraf Hakimi finished off a move he started on 113 minutes, but Harnik levelled the score in the 119th minute before Pavlenka's heroics in the shoot-out.

Bayern Munich face Hertha Berlin away today having lost their last two games at the Olympic Stadium—crashing 2-0 in the Bundesliga last September and losing May's German Cup final 3-1 to Eintracht Frankfurt.

Germany goalkeeper Manuel Neuer is expected to be back in the Bayern goal wearing a plastic cast after suffering a thumb injury last week.

Earlier on Tuesday Bayer Leverkusen, who pulled off a shock 3-1 win over Bayern last Saturday, were another big name casualty as they slumped to a 2-1 defeat at second-division Heidenheim. Germany winger Julian Brandt gave Leverkusen the lead, but after Heidenheim striker Nikola Dovedan equalised, midfielder Maurice Multhaup hit the winner 18 minutes from time after previously hitting the bar. Hamburg were another second-division club to boot a Bundesliga club out of the last 16 when 20-year-old Turkey international Berkay Ozcan scored their second-half winner in a 1-0 victory over Nuremberg. —AFP



DORTMUND: Dortmund's French defender Abdou Diallo (R) and Bremen's German midfielder Maximilian Eggestein vie for the ball during the German Cup (DFB Pokal) last 16 football match BVB Borussia Dortmund v Werder Bremen in Dortmund, western Germany. — AFP

Kuwaiti Jiu-Jitsu player, Abdullah Al-Anjeri honoured

KUWAIT: The Palestinian Ambassador to Kuwait, Rami Tahboub yesterday honored Kuwaiti Jiu-Jitsu player, Abdullah Waleed Al-Anjeri, who had withdrawn from the world championship held in Los Angeles after refusing to fight an Israeli player and stating that Jerusalem is more important than all championships.

A special reception was held in Al-Anjeri's honor where Tahboub honored and

thanked him for such a profound attitude that reflects Kuwaitis' love to Palestine and its people and dedication to the Palestinian cause. Speaking at the reception on behalf of his son who is currently in USA for studies, Dr Waleed Al-Anjeri, the champ's father, thanked ambassador Tahboub and expressed his own wish to pray in Al-Aqsa mosque one day after liberating it from occupation.



7th Asian Youth Training camp concludes

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Seventh Asian Youth Training Camp (Air Pistol) concluded at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex, under the supervision of Asian Shooting Confederation in cooperation with Kuwait Shooting Sport Club. Shooters from 19 Asian countries, in the presence of President of ASC Sheikh Ali bin Abdallah Al Khalifa, and President of Arab and Kuwait Shooting Federations Eng. Duaij Al-Otaibi.

The camp was attended by Korean lecturer Kim Al Huan, and Turkish Coach Ivac Zozsk in addition to Kuwait Shooting Sport Club Technical Director Jasni Shaan, who lectured on the game and the latest amendments on the game's international laws.

Eng Duaij Al-Otaibi welcomed the President of ASC in Kuwait, adding that Kuwait is proud to organize such activities especially that the camp coincides with the start of HH the Amir International Grand Prix.

Al-Otaibi said KSSC is keen on caring for youth and juniors to polish their skills to maintain the success of the game and continue winning championship.

Meanwhile Kuwait Shooting Federation organized a course for shotgun referees in which Kuwaiti referees and two Omanis participated.



Kuwait Martyrs Mini Goal tourney

KUWAIT: Seif Al-Dawlah and Khalid Al-Mudhaf schools qualified for the third Kuwait Martyrs Mini Goal tournament during the play offs of the capital education zone with 12 teams participating.

Also Ibn Zahar and Jaafar bin Abi Talib schools from Mubarak Al-Kabeer also participated following strong

competition with other teams.

Sheikh Ahmad Al-Farisi, Ibn Asaker (Ahmadi), Ibn Tufail, Zeid bin Ali (Farwaniya), Mulla Hassan Al-Kandary, Saeed bin Al-Aas (Hawally) schools qualified.

The number of schools that qualified so far is 12, as the tournament is being held under the patronage of Al-Shaheed office of the Amiri Diwan.

The general coordinator of the tournament Hassan Al-Khawaja said the qualifiers that were held in the sixth governorates qualified two teams from each.

The final tournament will be held at Martyr Fahad Al-Ahmad in Daeya from Feb 10 until Feb 12.



Guardiola gearing up for 'terrible' fixture congestion

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola believes the demands of challenging for four trophies throughout February will take even more of a toll on his side than the famous demands of fixture congestion in December.

City are still in with the chance of completing a historic quadruple of the Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup, but Guardiola is concerned at the intense physical demands that will place on his squad.

A run of seven games across the four competitions in February is not quite as demanding a schedule as the nine matches they faced during December, three of which City lost. However, Guardiola suggested that with more at stake this month, the task facing his squad is even tougher.

After beating Arsenal in the Premier League last weekend to start the month, City can go top of the table when they visit Everton on Wednesday before hosting Chelsea on Sunday. Then comes an FA Cup fifth-round tie, the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie away at Schalke and the League Cup final against Chelsea on February 24.

"When I was abroad and before I came here, everyone talked about December," Guardiola said on Tuesday. "But when Boxing Day was finished and I saw the schedule (for February), I said 'but this is worse'. Even worse. That is true.

"If you are out of more competitions it is more comfortable. February is tougher than December. January brings the Carabao (League) Cup and FA Cup with teams from the Championship and League One - with all respect it is different.

"Now we have Chelsea and they can prepare all week and we know how well Maurizio Sarri will prepare for the game. "We have Schalke and the final of Carabao Cup and Premier League. It is what it is but it is nice and I prefer to be there."

Guardiola has some experience of being involved in a tight title race while contending in six competitions as Barcelona manager when they beat Real Madrid to win La Liga in 2009-10.

And he is torn over the pros and cons of the mental fatigue caused by fixture congestion against the extra motivation of creating history. "In some ways, it's a problem in terms of how many games you have and the mental effort needed to be consistent in every single competition. You know when you lose one game you can lose that competition," he added.

"It demands a lot of stress and you need a little bit of a break. But at the same time, when you arrive after this month in March from my experience, and the days are longer, your training sessions are in better conditions, the sun is here, you see the end of the season is closer, the pitch is in better condition, you can take a coffee outside and in that situation you are in four competitions - wow, it's an extra plus.

"Then you realise: 'Wow, we can do something special.' But we are not right now in that position because this month is terrible, in terms of the fact that every game is a final and we have to wait."

Victory at Goodison Park will take City above Liverpool at the top of the table on goal difference and Guardiola believes that could be what separates the sides come the end of the season.

"The first message is to win the game and the second one is that if you can score, score and if you can avoid to concede, do it," he added. "The Premier League could go to goal difference, I agree. We are not going to say to the guys that today we have to win 5-0. I never said that. First you have to win the game and then second try (to score more), because it can happen." — AFP

Live		Matches on TV	
		(Local Timings)	
SPAIN COPA DEL REY			
Real Betis v Valencia C.F	23:00		
beIN Sports			
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE			
SS Lazio v Empoli	22:30		
beIN Sports			

Marseille earn first home win

MARSEILLE: Marseille won for the first time at home since November as they beat Bordeaux 1-0 behind closed doors in Ligue 1 on Tuesday. The fixture was played at an empty Stade Velodrome as the hosts were punished by the French football league (LFP) for crowd trouble during the January defeat to Lille.

The home side's Europa League tie against Eintracht Frankfurt in September was also played in an empty Velodrome due to supporter behaviour.

Coach Rudi Garcia was absent from the touchline after he was suspended for two matches by the LFP for his behaviour towards the referee after the Lille clash.

Garcia complained about the lack of fans in the 60,000 capacity ground.

"It's bad, these matches behind closed doors are horrible. I said it the first time and it was horrible again this time," he said.—AFP

25 In-form Italy's speed skier Paris rocks to claim world super-G gold



26 Seifert stars as New Zealand inflict India's worst T20 defeat



27 Flu-hit Dortmund crash out of German Cup on penalties to Bremen



George, Westbrook power Thunder

Balanced Celtics stop Cavs for fifth straight victory



OKLAHOMA CITY: Paul George #13 of the Oklahoma City Thunder shoots the ball against the Orlando Magic on Tuesday at the Chesapeake Energy Arena in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. — AFP

OKLAHOMA CITY: Paul George scored 39 points, and Russell Westbrook's triple-double streak continued as the host Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Orlando Magic 132-122 on Tuesday night. Orlando led by 12 early in the third quarter, but the Thunder outscored the Magic 31-13 over the final nine minutes of the quarter and led 111-97 three minutes into the fourth.

Westbrook finished with 16 points, 15 rebounds and 16 assists, clinching his seventh consecutive triple-double by the end of the third quarter. It's the third such streak in Westbrook's career. Only Wilt Chamberlain, Oscar Robertson and Michael Jordan have had at least seven consecutive triple-doubles. Chamberlain holds the NBA record with nine in a row.

Terrence Ross had 26 points off the bench to lead Orlando, while Evan Fournier added 25.

CLIPPERS 117, HORNETS 115

Tobias Harris scored 34 points and hit a driving 8-footer with 4.3 seconds remaining, and Los Angeles rallied from a 20-point, third-quarter deficit to stun host Charlotte. Harris drove the lane after the Clippers inbounded with the score tied 115-115, and he pulled up and hit the jumper over Kemba Walker. Marvin Williams then missed a potentially winning 3-pointer for the Hornets at the buzzer. Walker led the Hornets with 32 points.

CELTICS 103, CAVALIERS 96

Jayson Tatum scored 25 points and Gordon Hayward scored 18 points off the bench to lead Boston to a win at Cleveland. Marcus Smart added 17 points and Jaylen Brown 13 and seven rebounds for Boston, which won its fifth straight game. Rookie Collin Sexton led the Cavaliers with 27 points. Alec Burks added 21 points for Cleveland, which lost for the eighth time in 10 tries.

RAPTORS 119, 76ERS 107

Kawhi Leonard scored 24 points, Kyle Lowry and Serge Ibaka added 20 apiece, and Toronto won at Philadelphia. Ibaka also contributed 10 rebounds, and Pascal Siakam had 16 points for the Raptors, who improved to 17-11 on the road this season. Joel Embiid led the Sixers with 37 points and 13 rebounds for his league-best 44th double-double this season. Ben Simmons added 20 points and Jimmy Butler had 18 for the Sixers, who lost for just the sixth time in 27 home games this season.

GRIZZLIES 108, TIMBERWOLVES 106

Mike Conley recorded 25 points, nine assists and three steals amid increased trade speculation, and Memphis posted a victory over visiting Minnesota. Justin Holiday (17 points, nine rebounds) made two free throws with 0.1 seconds left to give the Grizzlies their second straight victory after they lost 17 of their previous 19 games. Jaren Jackson Jr. added 23 points, and Ivan Rabb scored a career-high 19 points and matched his season best of 11 rebounds for Memphis. Karl-Anthony Towns registered 26 points and 18 rebounds, and Dario Saric added 22 points for Minnesota, which has lost four of its last five games.

PISTONS 105, KNICKS 92

Blake Griffin totaled 29 points, eight assists and six rebounds, and Detroit never trailed in a victory over New York, which saw its home losing streak reach 15 games. Griffin helped the Pistons win for only the 11th time in their last 33 games, and they won consecutive games for just the second time since then. Reggie Bullock hit five 3-pointers and added 19 points for Detroit before postgame reports indicated he was about to be traded to the Los Angeles Lakers. Dennis Smith Jr. led the Knicks with 25 points.

PACERS 136, LAKERS 94

Bojan Bogdanovic bombed in four of Indiana's 19 3-pointers in a rout of Los Angeles at Indianapolis. The Pacers captured their third victory in a row after a four-game losing streak. Engulfed in Anthony Davis trade rumors, the Lakers lost their second straight. Connecting on 4-for-10 on 3-pointers, Bogdanovic led seven Pacers in double figures with a game-high 24 points. Myles Turner chipped in with 22 points. Returning from a one-game absence, LeBron James had 18 points, seven rebounds and nine assists.

HEAT 118, TRAIL BLAZERS 108

Hassan Whiteside collected 28 points and 11 rebounds as visiting Miami took down Portland. Dwyane Wade came off the bench for 22 points and nine rebounds, and Josh Richardson scored 18 points for the Heat, who ended a three-game losing streak. CJ McCollum scored 33 points, and Jake Layman added a career-high 25 points with eight rebounds for the Trail Blazers, who saw their eight-game home winning streak end. — Reuters

NBA results/standings

Philadelphia 107, Toronto 119; Portland 108, Miami 118; New York 92, Detroit 105; Memphis 108, Minnesota 106; Oklahoma City 132, Orlando 122; Charlotte 115, LA Clippers 117; Cleveland 96, Boston 103; Indiana 136, LA Lakers 94.

Eastern Conference				Western Conference					
W	L	PCT	GB						
Milwaukee	39	13	0.750	-	Golden State	37	15	0.712	-
Toronto	39	16	0.709	1.5	Denver	37	16	0.698	0.5
Boston	35	19	0.648	5	Oklahoma City	34	19	0.642	3.5
Indiana	35	19	0.648	5	Portland	32	21	0.604	5.5
Philadelphia	34	20	0.630	6	Houston	31	22	0.585	6.5
Brooklyn	28	27	0.509	12.5	San Antonio	32	23	0.582	6.5
Charlotte	26	27	0.491	13.5	Utah	30	24	0.556	8
Miami	25	27	0.481	14	LA Clippers	30	25	0.545	8.5
Detroit	24	29	0.453	15.5	Sacramento	28	25	0.528	9.5
Washington	22	31	0.415	17.5	LA Lakers	27	27	0.500	11
Orlando	22	32	0.407	18	Minnesota	25	28	0.472	12.5
Atlanta	18	35	0.340	21.5	Dallas	24	28	0.462	13
Chicago	12	41	0.226	27.5	New Orleans	23	31	0.426	15
Cleveland	11	43	0.204	29	Memphis	22	33	0.400	16.5
New York	10	43	0.189	29.5	Phoenix	11	44	0.200	27.5

Infantino sole candidate for FIFA presidency

LAUSANNE: FIFA president Gianni Infantino is set to serve a second term after world football's governing body said yesterday he would be the only candidate for June's vote. The 48-year-old has been in charge of FIFA since February 2016, after succeeding the disgraced Sepp Blatter following the corruption scandal which rocked the organisation.

The election will take place on June 5 in Paris ahead of the women's World Cup. Former Tottenham defender Ramon Vega had announced his intention to stand against Infantino, but failed to garner the required support of five of FIFA's 211 member federations.

Infantino has introduced plans to increase the World Cup from 32 teams to 48 from 2026, with the possibility to bring forward the expansion to the 2022 edition in Qatar. A decision is expected to be taken next March after a study into the feasibility of holding an extended tournament in the Gulf state.

Michel Platini's former right-hand man at UEFA is also hoping for an enlarged, 24-team Club World Cup from 2021. UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin of Slovenia, who will be re-elected today also as the sole candidate, is opposed to the idea. — AFP



Gianni Infantino