

Friday Times

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JAMADA ALTHANI 10, 1440 AH | FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2019

4 Stigma of sexual abuse barrier for children in need of help

11 Israel hails common front with Arabs on Iran in Warsaw talks

45 Blazers run away to win, end Warriors' streak



History made as Al-Kharafi and Al-Bahar consortium takes equity stake in Boursa Kuwait

'First privatization of its kind in Kuwait'



Bader Al-Kharafi



Talal J Al-Bahar

KUWAIT: Al-Kharafi and Al-Bahar consortium have won the Kuwait Boursa privatization auction, taking a 44% equity stake in the local stock exchange at 237 fils per share. Bader Al-Kharafi is the official representa-

tive of the consortium.

"This groundbreaking investment will prove a milestone in the development and growth of Boursa," said Al-Kharafi. "The recent overhaul of the bourse and its listing as an

"This groundbreaking investment will prove a milestone in the development and growth of Boursa"

emerging market on several important international exchanges, including the FTSE and MSCI shows that Kuwait's stock exchange is an attractive destination for local and international investors."

Al-Kharafi added that auctioning the operator share creates an historic opportunity to develop the bourse through a comprehensive strategy under the umbrella of the Capital Markets Authority, which administered the auction in a highly professional manner.

The consortium includes National Investments Company, Boursa Athens, Al Oula Investment and Arzan Financial Group.

Speaking on the occasion, Al-Bahar Group Chairman Talal Jassem Al-Bahar expressed full optimism on winning the auction, noting that cooperating with the consortium members provides an excellent opportunity for private sector-led development.

A competing consortium led by Commercial Bank of Kuwait and including Boursa Madrid offered 138 fils per share.

Kuwait's Capital Markets Authority organized the auction. Since taking control of the stock exchange in 2016, the CMA has

introduced several measures to reform the country's capital market including implementing T+3 settlement, relaxing listing rules, delisting companies deemed unsuitable for public investment and segmenting the market with different disclosure requirements while at the same time planning an IPO for the bourse itself.

The remaining shares will be divided as follows: 50% will be offered in an IPO and 6% will go to the government, likely to the Public Institution for Social Security. The bourse is the oldest in the region, founded in 1983, and was among the top performers among stock exchanges in the region in 2018.



Bader Al-Kharafi and Khaled Al-Falah are seen at the moment of the deal's announcement.



Local

Calorie warning



Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

muna@kuwaittimes.net

Saudi authorities launched a public campaign a week ago, applying a new system that compels all food outlets and restaurants to specify the calorie count of their meals. All food places are required by law now to mark the number of calories on all their meals to enable the consumer to know how much fat, oil, salt, etc will enter their body. The new system includes restaurants, cafes and ice cream parlors.

This decision is wonderful as well as important to public health, especially for teenagers and children who often eat fast food that is usually filled with harmful fats. It is an excellent campaign and I hope to see the same in Kuwait too - we are in need of such campaigns for the benefit of the people.

According to Saudi daily Okaz, the authorities will levy a fine of 1,000 Saudi riyals on each entity that does not comply with this regulation. Local media indicated



Local media indicated that the fines could reach 10,000 riyals

that the fines could reach 10,000 riyals, as well as closing the violating facility and withdrawing its license. This is an important move, and I agree that the government should oblige restaurants and shops to publish this information and hand them a fine in case of noncompliance.

The Saudi health ministry in collaboration with the general directorate of health information and awareness had overseen many programs aimed at weight loss by reducing the amount of calories consumed by an individual, and even prepared a guide for restaurants and cafes to show them the proper means to put the calorie content on the list of meals and drinks.

The decision raises a question about how to calculate calories. Laboratory analysis is one way, but databases also help food establishments record the ingredients of the meals to determine the amount of calories they contain. There are also calorie calculation programs. A search in databases for specific food items is done to calculate the amount of calories, carbohydrates, fats and protein found in foods.

I think the process is easy, but needs efforts by the restaurant staff and management and perhaps the restaurant owner, who find it is easier to sell food without going into this process. Yet, I believe that the consumer needs to know how many calories are there in a cheeseburger, for example, and what fats do to the body.

The decision stipulates that the calorie count should be presented in a clear manner for each food item on the menu. I hope the ministry of health in Kuwait, along with relevant state bodies, adopts such an important campaign to educate the public and protect their lives.

PHOTO OF THE DAY



February is one of the most festive months in Kuwait as the whole nation comes together to celebrate the National & Liberation Day holidays by bedecking the country in flags, lights and other national color decorations. (File photo shows Kuwait's National Flag lifted by a military helicopter.)

An ideal marriage



IN MY VIEW

by Nejouad Al-Yagout

local@kuwaittimes.com

According to society, an ideal marriage for a woman like me would be to marry a male version of me (or my labels, for that matter). In other words: A Sunni; a Kuwaiti; someone from the same social standing as me (whatever that means); someone who shares my culture; someone of the opposite sex. A clone, basically, apart from the biological aspect!

Even though several of us locals hail from families where we are free to marry who we choose, and Sunnis and Shias often marry one another, and we have many cases of both men and women who marry foreigners, society still expects us to comply with its stipulations. If I decide to go against society, members of the community may still smile at me, even attend the wedding (especially if tons and tons of money is spent and a famous singer is thrown into the entertainment mix), but there will always be some relatives who, deep down inside, would feel let down or resent me for my rebelliousness. This is not just the case in Kuwait, but in most countries around the world, no matter how emancipated.

To be fair, as a writer and friend I admire reminded me recently, parents always want the best for their children. When children reach marrying age, parents would much prefer to see them marry someone who shares their culture and status because they think that is the best way to avoid future troubles. As she added, there

are many benefits to this; otherwise, people would not continue to preserve such a way of life.

But we also know that marrying outside our own culture has benefits, such as children embracing diverse backgrounds, expanding their horizons, and learning more than one language: a classic case of the best of both worlds. Marrying outside of one's financial status is also common, so should no longer be shunned either. Many wealthy men and women have married spouses who struggle financially, only to have the most successful of marriages. Yes, it is a risk, but it is also a risk to marry someone of one's same financial status.

And that is because marriage itself is a risk. There is always a chance of divorce, and we know now it has nothing to do with similarities or differences. What matters most is how much love is thrown into the equation when a marital union takes place. Love consists of respect, communication, not holding grudges, fidelity, loyalty, and companionship. These, among other lofty standards, are the true components of an ideal marriage.

The human being is a lover by nature, naturally inclined to follow the heart. It could be, conveniently, with someone of one's "kind." But, it also might not be. Love is too grand to be confined to boxes. And if the alarming divorce rate is anything to go by in our country, perhaps we need to take a closer look at whether the boxes need to be discarded altogether.

Kuwait Times

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STOP
CHILD ABUSE

Stigma of sexual abuse barrier for children in need of help

By Faten Omar

Early one morning, a mother and her daughter went to a tailor to get a new dress stitched. The tailor, while taking the measurements of the child, groped the little girl when her mother was not looking, and kept praising her “cuteness” and how beautiful she was. After leaving the shop, the mother remembered she had forgotten something in the shop and sent her daughter to get it. The tailor downed the shutter, pulled the girl under the counter and forced her to touch him inappropriately.

She could not understand something was wrong, but felt something was not right either. She tried to escape and squeezed her little body from under the not-fully-closed shutter. Running to her mother, she innocently asked: “Mom, I touched the tailor. What was this about?” The mother screamed at her, blaming her for what she had done and threatened her not to tell her father.

The girl, now an adult, told Kuwait Times that she was

sexually abused by the tailor when she was six years old. The incident she experienced as a child made her live in fear, and she couldn’t enter into a loving relationship. The woman, who preferred to remain anonymous, also said that she was shocked by the reaction of her mother. “After avoiding many relationships, I’m married now with two beautiful daughters. I warn them about how some people may take advantage of their ignorance and abuse them,” she added.

Local

Children victims of sexual abuse are often too young to know how to express what is happening and seek help. When not properly treated, this can result in a lifetime of fear and anxiety.

With childhood sexual abuse, victims are often too young to know how to express what is happening and seek help. When not properly treated, this can result in a lifetime of fear and anxiety. For the most part, boys and girls who are sexually abused respond in the same ways. They feel fear, confusion and sometimes anger. Both genders are at higher risk for mental health concerns including depression later in life and both may face stigma if they choose to report their abuse.

Dr Mona Al-Khawari, Director of the Child Protection Office at the Health Ministry, told Kuwait Times that the child protection office, which was affiliated with the ministry of health in 2017, has recorded 60 cases of sexual assault against children in Kuwait. She revealed there is a marked increase in the rate of reported cases of child abuse following the establishment of the office and due to an increase in the level of awareness among members of the community.

Khawari noted that some people are still ignorant about reporting sexual abuse of their child, and sometimes the community prefers to blame the victim. "This trauma may affect the personality of the child. The child will try to avoid the person they were abused by. Parents

will notice that their child will avoid a particular person or the child will become introverted. A psychologist is trained to treat sexually abused children by making them speak about their experience - by talking, drawing or with a representation of the incident using toys," she said.

Khawari cautioned that if the child does not get treatment, it may affect them when they grow up. "They will try to avoid physical contact of any kind. They may refuse marriage or tend to overprotect themselves and their loved ones from a similar situation. But it is never too late to get the right treatment for a better life. Parents should not trust anyone with their child. Unfortunately, most sexual assaults against children aged 4 to 12 are by relatives," she told Kuwait Times.

"We shouldn't have such stigma around it - but it also shouldn't be happening. As long as people dismiss it, disbelieve it and deny it, it creates a space for this to keep happening," she pointed out, adding that anyone can call the child protection office and the authorities will deal with the situation immediately.

The Child Protection Office was established in 2014 by specialized medical and security teams in government hospitals to ensure rapid response, intervention, evaluation and appropriate diagnosis and treatment to achieve the overall objectives of the office. The office's team covers all hospitals through specialized teams of pediatricians, nurses, social workers and psychologists, as well as an officer from the child protection office in the juvenile protection department, and a forensic doctor to speed up procedures and proper handling of various cases which fall within the functions of the child protection office.

Dr Amal Farwiz, a psychiatrist, confirmed that the effects of psychological and physical abuse are not temporary, but extend over the long term and affect most aspects of the child's life, including self-esteem as well as the ability to establish healthy relationships. "Sexual abuse incidents are usually repeated and most of them are not often reported for fear of the reputation of the victim when they grow up, or often because the victim has not informed their family in the first place," she said.

Farwiz stressed that parents should devote time to their children to ask them about their day's events, be present in their children's lives in a safe way, and ensure that there is always strong and understanding support. She explained the importance of talking to children about their bodies in a simple manner, pointing out that cases



Dr Mona Al-Khawari, Director of Child Protection Office in the Ministry of Health

of abuse are often by persons entrusted to care for the child, such as teachers or nannies. "It is very important to teach the child to say "no" in the right situations, and to teach them how to shout "no" if someone approaches them in a way that disturbs them."

Farwiz noted that warning signs of abuse could be pain in sensitive areas, presence of strange blood or liquids in a child's clothing, suffering from nightmares, crying, food rejection or behavioral change associated with fear and isolation, adding that if a child is sexually assaulted, they must be immediately referred to a psychologist. The healing process takes time and effort, but it promises results.



Dr Amal Farwiz, psychiatrist

Local



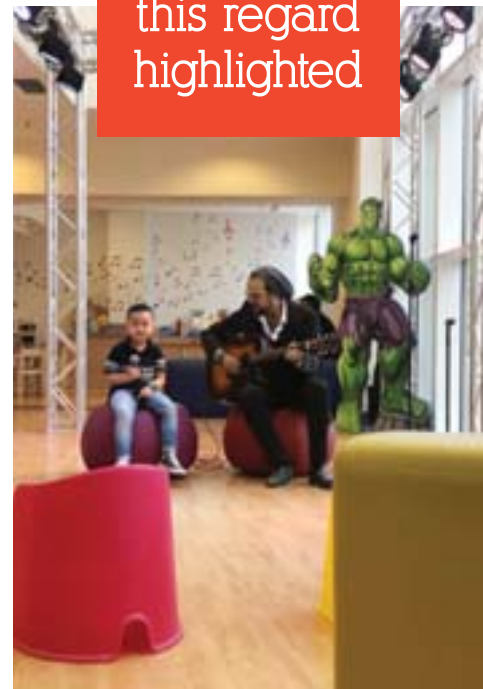
The National Bank of Kuwait's (NBK) Specialized Hospital for Children.



The Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice.



National efforts in this regard highlighted



Various activities held as part of NBK hospital's 'Dream To Be' program.

Kuwait marks INT'L CHILDHOOD CANCER DAY

The State of Kuwait marks today the International Childhood Cancer Day (ICCD) with various public and private entities launching initiatives and activities to spread awareness on this important matter. Various individuals spoke about the matter, highlighting Kuwait's national efforts in this regard, stressing the vitality of spreading information on how to prevent cancer and what are the best means to seek treatment for children afflicted by this deadly disease.

Director of the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) Specialized Hospital for Children Dr Maitham Husain affirmed that the hospital was proud to partake in marking the international day for childhood cancer, saying that it was crucial to spread hope in regards especially on the possibility of treating the disease especially amongst children. Children are normally diagnosed with cancer affecting the liver, nervous system, and the bones, pointed out Dr Husain who added that treatment might take around one to two years depending on the case. He added that treatments include chemotherapy, surgery, and radiotherapy, revealing that recent remedies include stem-cell treatment and immunotherapy.

In Kuwait, most children are suffering from leukemia with symptoms including high fever, decrease in white blood cells, lack of an appetite, and general unexplained fatigue, said Dr Husain who revealed that those under 16 years of age were general-

ferred to the NBK specialized hospital in case of cancer discovery. Cancer treatment for children in Kuwait is for free, stated Dr Husain who indicated that the NBK specialized hospital through its 'Dream To Be' program, in coordination with Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH), was eager to realize the ambitions of child cancer patients.

Strong cooperation

Meanwhile, Rasha Al-Hamad, head executive at Bayt (house) Abdullah Children's Hospice, said that her entity was providing multi-professional, specialist, pediatric palliative care and support to children with life limiting or life threatening illnesses who are resident in Kuwait, and their families. She affirmed that there was a strong cooperation between the NBK specialized hospital and Bayt Abdullah especially in the efforts for treating cancer. Bayt Abdullah also commends the strong cooperation provided by the Ministry of Health, which provides on-call physicians when asked by the hospice, said Al-Hamad.

Sheikha Saud, a mother of a cancer child patient, said that in the meantime that it was a painful experience to see one's child suffering from this fatal ailment; however, in their case, the doctors were coming with promising treatment results. She added that it was important to encourage the child to seek treatment even if it was taking its toll on them, indicating that she had to be strong for both of them so that they could vanquish this disease.

According to the ICCD, the child cancer day was first launched in 2002 with the annual event has generating the support of global networks and leading institutions including: the World Health Organization (WHO), International Society of Pediatric Oncology (SIOP), Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), St Jude Children's Research Hospital, International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), International Children's Palliative Care Network (ICPCN) and Caring and Living Among Neighbors (CLAN), among others. — KUNA



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Local

Speaker hosts envoys of Palestine, United States

Georgian-Kuwaiti Friendship Committee meet speaker, premier



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Kuwait Rami Tahboub. — KUNA photos



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman.

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem received yesterday Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Kuwait Rami Tahboub. He also hosted the US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman. Meanwhile, Ghanem met with

the visiting Chairman of the Georgian-Kuwaiti Parliamentary Friendship Committee at the Georgian Parliament, Archil Talakvadze, and the accompanying delegation. During the meeting, they discussed various issues, mainly means to promote and en-

hance bilateral parliamentary cooperation. The meeting was attended by head of the accompanying mission of honor MP Omar Abdulmohsen Al-Tabtabaie, MPs Mubarak Al-Harees and Nasser Al-Dosari, in addition to the Georgian Ambassador

Roland Biredze. Also yesterday, members of the Georgian-Kuwaiti Parliamentary Friendship Committee met with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Seif Palace. — KUNA

Child conference calls for laws to penalize molesters

KUWAIT: Participants in the first international child conference have recommended issuing legislations for penalizing culprits of child abuse. The convention was organized by World Organization for Protection of Children, in cooperation with the Faculty of Basic Education, and was held at headquarters of the Arab Planning Institute. The conferees have called for boosting public awareness of the society responsibility at this level, said Dr Nasser Al-Mnai, the WOPC Secretary General. They have noted that the business community and the private sector can play a role in promoting the society and supporting the vulnerable seg-

ments, namely the children. Moreover, they have urged Arab universities to activate their role in serving the society and backing up welfare associations, particularly in the childhood sphere. Children must be protected against emerging hazards, namely abduction, organs' trade, molestation, conscription during wars and compulsory marriage, they have also advised. Furthermore, they have urged for boosting the WOPC role and establishing a commission at the Arab League to follow up on child's affairs. The freshly concluded conference was themed 'Social, Psychological and Educational Protection of Children.' — KUNA

Restaurant worker's hand freed from machine

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Rescue forces at Mishref fire brigade were dispatched to a restaurant in the area to save a kitchen worker after his hand got stuck inside a meat mincing machine in a restaurant. Rescuers used special tools to free the Asian man's hand from the machine before he was rushed to hospital for further medical treatment, said security sources.

Ghazali road opening

Both sides of the Ghazali road stretching between Ghazali bridge and Jamal Abdul Nasser road will be opened today at dawn, the traffic department announced yesterday. Accordingly, the traffic department urged all road users to be careful and respect speed limits and traffic police instructions.



KUWAIT: Firefighters free a worker's hand after it became trapped in a machine inside a restaurant in Mishref.

630 non-Kuwaitis in leading teaching positions: Ministry

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: There are 630 non-Kuwaitis in leading teaching positions in various educational areas, according to statistics issued by the Ministry of Education (MOE) yesterday. The statistic also showed that MOE is committed to 'Kuwaitizing' those leading positions, with exceptions given to subjects where there is scarcity of Kuwaiti nominees, such as science and French language in the intermediate stage. MOE also explained that 90 percent of leading positions are now occupied by Kuwaitis.

Furthermore, the statistics showed that 1,810 Kuwaitis are on waiting lists to assume leading positions as heads of departments, school directors, assistant directors and supervisors. Sixty six percent of those are females (1,202) and only 34 percent are males (609), the statistics show.

Meanwhile, educational sources said that a number of private schools had been directly contacting Kuwait Municipality concerning some constructions, demolitions or expansions without referring to MOE's educational facilities sector, which is the only official body entitled to do so. "All private schools have to submit any such applications to MOE's educational facilities sector first," the sources stressed, noting that penal measures had been taken against some public schools that did the same.

In other news, a senior finance ministry official demanded re-arranging traffic movement at the southern area of the ministries' complex in Mirqab, downtown Kuwait City. In a letter addressed to Kuwait Municipality, assistant undersecretary for public services and the acting assistant undersecretary for administrative affairs Adel Al-Menae said that the ministry wishes to continue adapting all possible permanent and temporary solutions to help solve the problem of traffic congestions at the ministries complex and the surrounding areas.

Kuwaiti official's photo with Netanyahu draws ire back home

'Contradicts with Kuwait's stance against normalizing ties with Israel'

By A Saleh and Agencies

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti political movement strongly criticized a senior Kuwaiti government official for appearing in a group photo that also featured Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, taken while participating in an international conference on the Middle East.

"We highly condemn the appearance of Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah" in a group photo taken on the sidelines of the Peace and Security in the Middle East Conference in Warsaw, Poland, the Kuwait Progressive Movement (KPM) said in a statement yesterday. The conference had released the family photo which also featured, in addition to Jarallah and Netanyahu, Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz, US Vice President Mike Pence, Poland's President Andrzej Duda, and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, among other participants. KPM further stated that Jarallah's appearance in the group photo "contradicts with Kuwait's official and public stances on rejecting normalization with the Zionist enemy."

"KPM warns that such a step has its serious negative impact on the political and public levels," reads a statement issued by the group yesterday. It also speculated that the photo serves as a "trial balloon to drag Kuwaiti diplomacy into the swamps of normalization with the Zionist entity," and expressed total rejection to "such attempts to normalize relations with an enemy that continues to occupy Arab territories in Palestine, Golan Heights and parts of Lebanon."

"[Israel] continues to deny Palestinians' national rights, evade international resolutions concerning Jerusalem and the return of refugees, and imposes criminal suppression on Palestinians fighting the occupation," the statement added, urging all Kuwaiti powers to fight and condemn such attempts.

UN council visit

Meanwhile, Israel has told the UN Security Council that it opposes a planned visit by the top UN body to the Palestinian territories for a close-up look at the situation, Kuwait's ambassador said Wednesday. Kuwait and other council



WARSAW: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah (left) is seen in a group photo taken at the conference on Peace and Security in the Middle East in Warsaw on February 13, 2019. The photo also features Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz, US Vice President Mike Pence, Poland's President Andrzej Duda, Prime minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. — AFP

members proposed the visit to the occupied territories during a meeting last week on Israel's decision to end the international observer force in the West Bank city of Hebron.

During a closed-door meeting on Wednesday, the council president briefed members on talks held with Israel and the Palestinians on the proposal for a visit. "He said Israel categorically refused the council visit," Kuwait's Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi told reporters after the meeting. "They don't want to receive a visit by the Security Council" even though they are pre-

pared to welcome delegations from countries on the council, he added. "We expressed our regret that this visit will not take place because it has been raised many times by the council."

Israel opposes UN visit to Palestine



The Israeli mission did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The visit would have come at a tumultuous time: Israel is headed for elections in April and the United States is reportedly putting the finishing touches to its much-awaited peace proposals.

The Security Council has adopted several resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian peace

process that call for a two-state solution and holds monthly meetings on the conflict. Israel maintains that the UN body is biased in favor of the Palestinians. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited Israel and the Palestinian territories in August 2017 but the Security Council has never traveled on a mission to that region. In 1979, envoys from the top UN body went to Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt as part of a special mission. Over the past years, several proposals for a visit to Gaza and the occupied territories have been quashed by the United States, a veto-wielding member of the Security Council. The council later Wednesday traveled to Guinea-Bissau and Ivory Coast and is planning a trip to Mali in March. Last year, it made a high-profile visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh to meet with Rohingya refugees.

Kuwait continues to look for missing martyrs in Iraq

NEW YORK: A senior Kuwaiti diplomat affirmed that his country will continue the search for its missing martyrs in Iraq, praising the efforts of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in keeping this file on its agenda. The remarks were made by Kuwait's Permanent Representative at the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi, during the UNSC's

session on Iraq late Wednesday. The ambassador also applauded the UN's resolutions connected with the liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion in 1991.

Meanwhile, Otaibi hailed the efforts of the UN's mission in Iraq to achieve sustainable development in the country and meet the humanitarian needs of people. It is Kuwait's responsibility as a neighboring country to aid Iraq in overcoming hardships and security challenges, the Kuwaiti diplomat said. It is also the responsibility of the international community to cooperate in leading the country towards stability and security, he added.

In this context, Otaibi mentioned the initiative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to host the Kuwait

international conference for reconstruction of Iraq in February 2018. Speaking on the missing Kuwaitis in Iraq, the ambassador noted that this session comes in time of the 28th anniversary of Kuwait's Liberation Day. He added that the fate of our missing POWs in Iraq is still unknown and the bodies of our martyrs are still missing. He also noted the Iraqi cooperation in the matter, that led to identifying the remains of 236 out of 605 missing Kuwaitis. However, no new bodies had been identified since 2004, he added.

Otaibi called on the UN mission in Iraq to continue searching for the missing Kuwaitis and follow on procedures taken for Iraq to return Kuwait's stolen properties and national documents. Moreover, he affirmed Kuwait's full sup-



Mansour Al-Otaibi

port to Iraq in rebuilding the country, which was torn by the war with the so-called Islamic State (IS) in the past few years. — KUNA



Israel hails common front with the Arabs

Salvation House - where Hindus go to die



ISFAHAN: Iranians carry the coffins of victims of a suicide car bombing on a Revolutionary Guards bus in southeastern Iran the day before, upon their arrival at Badr airport in Isfahan, some 400 kilometers south of the capital Tehran. —AFP

27 Iran Revolutionary Guards killed

Rouhani accuses US and Israel of supporting 'terrorism'

TEHRAN: President Hassan Rouhani vowed revenge yesterday against the "mercenary group" behind a suicide bombing which killed 27 people in southeastern Iran and accused the US and Israel of supporting "terrorism". "We will certainly make this mercenary group pay for the blood of our martyrs," the official IRNA news agency quoted the Iranian president as saying in response to Wednesday's attack. "The main root of terrorism in the region is America and Zionists, and some oil-producing countries in the region also financially support the terrorists," he added. Rouhani was speaking at Tehran's Mehrabad Airport before leaving for the Russian resort of Sochi for a summit with his Russian and Turkish counterparts Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the future of war-battered Syria.

In comments reported by state television, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the attack's perpetrators were certainly linked to "the spying agencies of some regional and trans-regional countries." Wednesday's attack, which targeted a busload of Revolutionary Guards in the volatile southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, was one of the deadliest on Iranian security forces in years. It came just days

after Iran held more than a week of celebrations for the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, which overthrew the US-backed shah.

The troops killed belonged to the Guards' 14th Imam Hussein Division, the Tasnim news agency reported, listing their names and their ages, which ranged from 21 to 52. The bomber struck as the troops were returning from a patrol mission on the border with Pakistan, where Baluchi separatist and jihadist groups have rear bases, the Guards said in a statement. Sistan-Baluchistan is home to a large ethnic Baluchi community, who straddle the border and who, unlike most Iranians, who are Shiite Muslims, are mainly Sunni. A special farewell ceremony is planned for today evening and the funerals will follow tomorrow, Tasnim said.



Iran vows revenge on 'mercenaries'

terrorists" to use their soil to prepare attacks. "If this continues and they cannot stop the terrorists, it is clear-based on international law-that we have certain rights and will act upon them in due time," he said, without elaborating.

The attack came on the same day as the United States gathered some 60 countries in Poland for a conference on the Middle East and

Iran which it hoped would increase pressure on Tehran. Iran quickly linked the attack to the Warsaw conference, where supporters of the formerly armed opposition People's Mujahedeen plan a second day of protests. Dubbing the meeting the "WarsawCircus", Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said it was "no coincidence that Iran is hit by terror on the very day" that the talks began in the Polish capital.

"Especially when cohorts of same terrorists cheer it from Warsaw streets & support it with twitter bots? US seems to always make the same

wrong choices, but expect different results," Zarif wrote on Twitter. Wednesday's bombing was claimed by the jihadist Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice), which is blacklisted as a terrorist group by Iran, the SITE Intelligence Group reported. The group was formed in 2012 as a successor to Sunni extremist group Jundallah (Soldiers of God), which waged a deadly insurgency for a decade before being severely weakened by the capture and execution of its leader Abdolmalek Rigi by Tehran in 2010.

Sistan-Baluchistan has been hit by previous deadly attacks in recent months. On January 29, three members of an Iranian bomb squad sent to the scene of an explosion in provincial capital Zahedan were wounded when a second device blew up as they were trying to defuse it. And in early December, two people were killed and around 40 wounded in an attack in the strategic port city of Chabahar, on the province's Arabian Sea coast, which Zarif blamed on "foreign-backed terrorists". In October, Jaish al-Adl claimed responsibility for abducting 12 Iranian security personnel near the border, five of whom were later released and flown home after Pakistani intervention. — AFP

Warning to neighbors

Rouhani called on Iran's neighbors to assume their "legal responsibilities" and not allow "ter-

International

Israel hails common front with Arabs on Iran in Warsaw talks

Netanyahu, Oman's foreign minister meet one-on-one

WARSAW: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday hailed as a breakthrough a conference in Warsaw where he is standing side-by-side with Arab powers to confront Iran, hoping their common front can pave the way to greater normalization of relations. The United States initiated the two-day meeting in the Polish capital as it seeks to squeeze Iran, but the talks have drawn little interest from European powers which are deeply suspicious of President Donald Trump's intentions. But Netanyahu voiced delight after an opening dinner Wednesday night at Warsaw's Royal Castle where he spoke in the same room as top officials of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain—none of which recognize the Jewish state.

"In a room of some 60 foreign ministers representative of dozens of governments, an Israeli prime minister and the foreign ministers of the leading Arab countries stood together and spoke with unusual force, clarity and unity against the common threat of the Iranian regime," Netanyahu told reporters as he arrived for yesterday's main session at a football stadium. "I think this marks a change and important understanding of what threatens our future, what we need to do to secure it, and the possibility that cooperation will extend beyond security in every realm of life," he said. Netanyahu also met one-on-one with Oman's foreign minister, Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, after paying a rare visit to the sultanate last year. Israel only has diplomatic relations with two

Arab countries, neighboring Egypt and Jordan. But Gulf Arab leaders—especially Saudi Arabia's powerful, US-allied crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman—have increasingly put the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the back burner as they instead push to contain historic rival Iran.

Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and adviser, is taking part in the Warsaw conference where he will speak behind closed doors on the contours of a US peace proposal to be presented after Israeli elections in April. The Palestinian government is not attending and has called the conference an "American conspiracy". It is refusing US mediation after Trump in 2017 recognized bitterly contested Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Low interest elsewhere

Most European countries sent low-level representatives to Warsaw as they still support a deal negotiated under former president Barack Obama that constrained Iran's nuclear program in return for promises of sanctions relief. Trump called the deal "terrible" and has slapped sweeping sanctions back on Iran, seeking to curb the Shiite power's influence in regional hotspots Syria, Yemen and Iraq. The European Union has defied Trump by setting up a financial tool for European firms to skirt US sanctions and keep doing business in Iran, the Middle East's second most populous country.

Even host Poland—eager to please the United States as it worries about a resurgent Russia—has



WARSAW: Participants, including members of the Saudi delegation, arrive for a session at the conference on Peace and Security in the Middle east in Warsaw yesterday. — AFP

said that it backs the nuclear accord, with which UN inspectors say Iran is complying. Russian President Vladimir Putin has managed to divert the spotlight by holding a simultaneous summit in the resort of Sochi with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and their Turkish counterpart Recep

Tayyip Erdogan over the future of war-battered Syria. Also casting a cloud over the Warsaw talks, a suicide car bombing in southeastern Iran on Wednesday killed 27 troops of the elite Revolutionary Guards who were returning from patrol, according to the force.—AFP

Syria families flee IS holdout to dust and desperation

NEAR BAGHOUZ: The cry echoed across the chalk-dry Syrian plain: "Water!" Within seconds, the truck carrying a few dozen bottles was emptied by parched refugees who had spent the night out in the open. At least 300 women and children, mostly Iraqi, had slept amid the desert scrubs after escaping the Islamic State group's final redoubt of Baghouz in eastern Syria. A lucky few got tents, but the vast majority were spread out on cheap blankets provided to them by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), who also handed out the few cases of bottled water and some food. No humanitarian organizations were present at the location. "The kids were crying all night from the cold," said Fatima, an Iraqi woman from Baghdad who fled Baghouz with her four children, all under 15.

"This is the second night we sleep outside. There was so much bombing in Baghouz that it was safer for us to sleep in the open," she said. The displaced families were waiting to be processed by SDF members then transported by cargo truck six hours north to the Al-Hol displacement camp. "At least in a camp,

we'll have a tent," snapped Fatima. On Wednesday afternoon, as the sun was at its peak, the situation at the collection point was reaching fever pitch. Children with no shoes were plopped in the dirt, sliding small pebbles and sand in their mouths. One of them kept chewing on a plastic spoon.

Dirty nappies

The cracked earth all around them was littered with empty bottles and dirty nappies. An adolescent girl in a headscarf approached a boy her age who had been quick enough to grab a styrofoam container of rice and green peppers from the SDF truck. "Can you share?" she asked timidly as he scooped food into his mouth with his soot-covered palms. He waved her away and her thin face twisted into a silent sob. Food, safe drinking water and medication have been scarce for weeks in Baghouz as the SDF closes in on the final patch still held by IS.

Those who manage to flee say the jihadists have used them as human shields, hoarding food and blocking them from leaving.—AFP

Jaish al-Adl: Shadowy Sunni extremists on Iran-Pakistan border

TEHRAN: A suicide attack that killed 27 troops in Iran's restive southeast on Wednesday was claimed by Jaish al-Adl, a Sunni Muslim extremist group that only emerged seven years ago. Jaish al-Adl—Army of Justice in Arabic—is seen as the incarnation of Jundallah, or Soldiers of God, which began a bloody rebellion against the Islamic republic in 2000.

For a decade, Jundallah waged a deadly insurgency on civilians and officials in the restive southeast. Jundallah has been weakened since Iran executed its leader Abdolmalek Rigi in 2010 after capturing him in a dramatic operation. Rigi had been on a flight from Dubai to Kyrgyzstan that year when Iranian fighter jets intercepted the airliner he was travelling on and forced it to land before arresting him. Like its predecessor, Jaish al-Adl operates from bases in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan and neighboring Pakistan, where it gets support from ethnic Baluch tribes.

Sistan-Baluchestan province is home to a large community of minority Sunni Muslims who complain of discrimination in Shiite-dominated Iran. Jaish al-Adl was founded in 2012 by Salahuddin Farooqui, a militant known for his opposition to Iran's support for President Bashar al-Assad in Syria's civil war. Since then it has claimed responsibility for dozens of deadly bombings, ambushes and other attacks on Iranian security forces in the restive region, as well as abductions. Iran considers the organization—which it calls Jaish al-Zolm (Army of Injustice in Arabic) – a terrorist group supported by the United States and Israel as well as regional rivals Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Jaish al-Adl abducted 12 Iranian security personnel in October near the border with Pakistan, five of whom were later released and handed back to Iran by Islamabad. In October 2013, 14 Iranian guards were killed in an ambush near the border with Pakistan that Jaish al-Adl said it carried out in response "to the crimes of the Revolutionary Guards in Syria". Iran in retaliation said it executed 16 "rebels" and that its forces later killed four Jaish al-Adl militants near the frontier town of Mirjaveh. The following month, the public prosecutor for the city of Zabol, which lies near the Afghan border in Sistan-Baluchestan province, was gunned down in an assassination claimed by Jaish al-Adl. In February 2014, five Iranian soldiers were abducted and taken across the border from Iran into Pakistan, straining tensions between the two neighboring countries.—AFP

International

Israeli election: More 'King Bibi' or bye-bye King Bibi?

But corruption indictments loom for prime minister

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's face beams down from election billboards depicting him as a statesman, shaking hands with US President Donald Trump. Opponents portray him as a criminal. Even before he called an election for April 9, he was branded "CRIME MINISTER" in huge banners at protest rallies, a reference to three corruption investigations threatening his decade of political dominance. Love him or loathe him, the election is all about Netanyahu. Although the names of parties will be on ballot papers, the vote will amount to a referendum on Netanyahu in the shadow of his legal woes. If he wins, he will become Israel's longest-serving prime minister this summer.

"There's no central issue other than Netanyahu's reign and clean government - whether he remains prime minister and what the price is for corruption," said Tamar Hermann, a political science professor with the Israel Democracy Institute. Opinion polls show Netanyahu's Likud party is likely to win about 30 seats in the 120-member parliament, enough for the right-wing leader, now 69 and in his fourth term, to form the type of nationalist-religious coalition government he already heads.

He faces a strong challenge from former armed forces chief Benny Gantz. But Gantz's centrist Resilience party, which is second in opinion polls, would need to pursue groundbreaking political alliances to outstrip a right-wing bloc. In power since 2009, after a first stint as prime minister from 1996 to 1999, the man ardent supporters hail as "King Bibi" has struck a

chord with an electorate that has moved to the right and watched with delight as, under Trump, Washington lined up with many of Netanyahu's policies.

That has included US withdrawal from the international deal curbing Iran's nuclear program, Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the transfer of the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and a cut-off of US aid to the Palestinian Authority over its refusal to resume peace talks that collapsed in 2014. "He (Netanyahu) has brought us excellent achievements, he represents me with dignity. I feel like my country is flourishing because of him," said Ronit Levy, a 49-year-old insurance agent from the northern city of Afula who goes by the handle of "Ronit the Bibi'ite" on Twitter and Facebook. The sign on the giant city-centre billboards featuring Netanyahu and Trump says: "Netanyahu. In a different league."

Corruption cases

But in three corruption cases, Netanyahu is suspected of wrongfully accepting gifts from wealthy businessmen and dispensing favors in alleged bids for favorable coverage in an Israeli newspaper and a website. He has denied wrongdoing, saying he is a victim of a left-wing witch-hunt to topple him and that he has no intention of resigning. But his opponents are attacking his record and underlining the need for clean governance. In a speech that boosted his ratings on Jan. 29, Gantz said Israel's present leadership encouraged incitement, subversion and hatred, and

was so detached from the people that it had adopted "the mannerisms of a French royal house". "There was already a king who said: 'The State is me,' Gantz said, referring to King Louis XIV of France. "But no. Not here. No Israeli leader is a king. The state is not me. The state is you. The state is actually us. The state is all of us." Netanyahu's legal saga looks set to enter a new chapter soon. Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit could announce by the end of February whether he intends to file criminal charges, as police have recommended, in the three corruption investigations.

Indictment in court would await the outcome of pre-trial hearings in which Netanyahu would try to dissuade Mandelblit from filing formal charges. Those hearings would be unlikely to be wrapped up before the election, meaning voters would go to the polls aware that the attorney-general believes there is sufficient evidence to convict Netanyahu of criminal activity. "The mere notion that in Israel a prime minister can remain in office while under indictment is ridiculous," Gantz said.

Palestinian issue

Palestinian leaders have had little to say about the Israeli election, maintaining their traditional policy of watching quietly from the sidelines. They have already broken off contacts with the Trump administration, accusing it of pro-Israel bias. Any new Netanyahu government would be likely to include veteran allies opposed to the creation of a Palestinian

state. Comments last week by Gantz that Israel must find a way "not to have dominion over other people"—a reference to its continued occupation of the West Bank—won praise from a spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. "It's encouraging, if he succeeds and he sticks to this opinion," the spokesman, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, said.

Trump intends to present a long-awaited Israeli-Palestinian peace plan only after the election and has been trying to enlist the support of US Arab allies in the region. But expectations of a breakthrough are low. Another question looms for after the election: will coalition partners still stick with Netanyahu if Mandelblit, after a hearing, moves ahead with indictment? Knives are already out: former Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, an erstwhile political ally of Netanyahu, has predicted that right-wing parties now pledging their support would eventually turn on the Israeli leader.

Hermann, of the Israel Democracy Institute, said Netanyahu enjoys loyalty from his core supporters of lower-income Israelis who see him as their champion. Netanyahu's backers, many of them Jews with roots in the Middle East and North Africa, hold grudges against left-wing parties that once dominated Israeli politics, accusing them of maltreating immigrants from those regions. "It doesn't matter what he does, they don't expect him to conduct himself by the same moral standards that bind ordinary people," Hermann said. "You don't regard the king the same way you do a peasant." — Reuters

Russia to Turkey: You can't have 'Syria zone' without Assad consent

MOSCOW: Russia told Turkey yesterday it had no right to create a "safe zone" inside Syria unless it sought and received the consent of President Bashar al-Assad, signaling tensions as a three-way summit on the Syrian conflict began. President Vladimir Putin, one of Assad's closest allies, was hosting the summit in the Black Sea resort of Sochi to discuss the future of Syria with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.

All three countries have forces on the ground in Syria where they have coordinated their efforts despite sometimes differing priorities and interests. But a planned withdrawal of US forces from Syria, announced by President Donald Trump in December, has engendered new tensions between Moscow and Ankara in particular. Turkey wants to set up what it calls a safe zone in northeast Syria,

parts of which are now controlled by US forces, and for the area near the Turkish border to be cleared of the US-backed Kurdish YPG militia.

But, speaking ahead of the start of the Sochi summit on Syria, a Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said Ankara would need Assad's green light to create any safe zone inside Syrian borders. "The question of the presence of a military contingent acting on the authority of a third country on the territory of a sovereign country and especially Syria must be decided directly by Damascus," Maria Zakharova said in answer to a question about the Turkish safe zone plan. "That's our base position." But that is likely to be an unappealing prospect for Erdogan, who has called for Assad to step down after years of civil war that has shattered his country.

Idlib pressure

The Kremlin yesterday also made clear that its patience with Turkey over a joint deal to enforce a demilitarized zone in the northwestern Idlib region was running short. Moscow and Ankara brokered the deal in September, saying they wanted the region free of heavy weapons and jihadists. The agreement helped avert a government assault on the region, the last major bastion of Assad's opponents. But Moscow has since complained that Islamist militants who used to belong to the Nusra Front group are now in control there and wants military action to drive them out.

Ankara is less keen as it is concerned about po-



SOCHI: Russian President Vladimir Putin (center), Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (right) and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani pose prior to a trilateral meeting on Syria in the Black Sea resort of Sochi yesterday. — AFP

tential refugee flows from Idlib in the event of a military operation, and wants to retain its influence in a region on its border. It also does not want developments in Idlib to distract from its plan to set

up a safe zone in the northeast. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow wanted action on Idlib, referring to the "continued presence there of terrorist groups." — Reuters

International

Salvation House - where Hindus go to die

Cremation in the Ganges is an added spiritual bonus



VARANASI: Halkey Singh Raghuvansi, 85, lies on the floor as his wife Narmadi Devi, 75, touches his forehead after he arrived at Salvation House, known as a 'death hotel' for dying pilgrims, in Varanasi. — AFP photos



VARANASI: Ram Murti, the grandson of the late Halkey Singh Raghuvansi, shaved his head in preparation for his grandfather's cremation at Manikarnika Ghat, after he died at Salvation House.

VARANASI: They arrive in battered cars, on crutches and sometimes on a stretcher barely able to breathe—but salvation is close for thousands of Hindus who go to the holy city of Varanasi each year to die. Some end up in homes for the elderly overlooking the revered Ganges river where they eventually hope to be cremated but a few struggle to the Kashi Labh Mukti Bhawan, or Salvation House, which is reserved for those with only a few days to live. About 20 men and women each month come from around the world to finish their days at Varanasi's 'Death Hotel', a tired old red colonial-era building with 12 sparse concrete floor rooms. Hindus believe that dying in Varanasi re-

leases them from the eternal cycle of life and death reincarnation. Cremation in the Ganges is an added spiritual bonus. There used to be more guest houses like Mukti Bhawan, but the buildings have increasingly become regular hotels for tourists who bring more cash to the city where 24-hour cremations on the holy river are a huge draw. Bhairav Nath Shukla, who has been Mukti Bhawan's caretaker for more than four decades, said most of his residents pass away within a few days. Normally, two weeks is the limit for using a room. "There have been some exceptions. Some people were really sick but were still alive after more than a week," said Shukla, who

is often to be found in the courtyard in front of the entrance. "Sometimes we ask their family to take them home and come back again later. Sometimes we let them stay longer." Because of the growing development in Varanasi, Mukti Bhawan, which is run by a charity, no longer has a view of the river. But there is still no shortage of mainly poor people wanting to die there. Many have travelled thousands of kilometers (miles), sometimes taking a plane from a foreign country, or even just being put in the back of a car in an isolated Indian village. The residents pay about a dollar a day for their room and a fan. Daily prayers are led by an elderly "pandit" Hindu priest who also offers resi-

dents Ganges water, which is considered pure and holy by Hindus. For those with extra cash, a local Hindu choir can also be hired to perform holy songs for the ailing visitors. "All kinds of people from different backgrounds come here," said Shukla. "They come from the east, the south, remote northeast India and abroad. "Most come here with their family who pray and wait for the end." Shukla reckons more than 15,000 people have died at Mukti Bhawan and been taken to the Ganges for cremation since it opened in about 1908. And while Hindus maintain their undying belief in Varanasi's spiritual powers the Mukti Bhawan path to salvation has a bright future, he says. — AFP

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International

'Delta Avengers' vow to cripple economy if Buhari is re-elected

Election stampede's death toll hits 15

ABUJA: A militant group in Nigeria's oil-rich southern Niger Delta threatened yesterday to cripple Africa's top oil producer if President Muhammadu Buhari is re-elected in a vote due to be held tomorrow. The Niger Delta Avengers - who have been demanding a greater share of the oil revenue produced in the impoverished southern region - said in a statement they hoped to end Buhari's rule through elections and that opposition candidate Atiku Abubakar was their preferred choice for president. Buhari faces a tight contest against Abubakar, a business and ex-vice president, in tomorrow's elections in Nigeria, Africa's biggest democracy. The Niger Delta Avengers were behind a 2016 wave of violence that helped push Nigeria into recession.

The group warned that if Buhari is re-elected there would be "a perpetual recession for Nigeria" and that if elected, Abubakar should start a "restructuring of Nigeria" within six months to forestall further attacks in the Niger Delta. No substantial attacks have been carried out by any groups in the Delta region since January 2017. Attacks on pipelines and other facilities in the Niger Delta in 2016 cut Nigeria's crude output from a peak of 2.2 million barrels per day (mbpd) to near 1 mbpd - the lowest level seen in Africa's biggest economy in at least 30 years.

That, combined with low oil prices, pushed the OPEC member state into its first recession in a quarter of a century - crude sales make up two-thirds of government revenue and most of its foreign exchange. Buhari's government has held talks with the militants to address their grievances over poverty and oil pollution in the Delta for more than a year and this led

the group to halt attacks. Any resumption of attacks would renew pressure on Nigeria as it recovers from its worst recession in a generation. The country is also facing separatist movements in the southeast and Islamist militants in the northeast.

Election stampede

Meanwhile, fifteen people were killed in a stampede at an election campaign rally by President Muhammadu Buhari in southern Nigeria, health officials said Wednesday. In a separate incident on the campaign trail, jihadists in the northeast of the country attacked a convoy carrying a powerful state governor, killing four people. The deaths are the latest to overshadow Saturday's elections, in which Buhari is seeking a second, four-year term of office.

Kem-Daniel Elebiga, spokesman for the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital, said "a total of 15 bodies were brought in" on Tuesday. Three were men and the rest women, he added. Twelve injured people were also brought in, nine of whom remained in hospital Wednesday. "They are all responding well to treatment," said Elebiga. Police in Rivers state, of which Port Harcourt is the capital, earlier gave a toll of four dead and four injured, while Buhari's office said only that "several" people lost their lives.

Conflicting death tolls are not unusual in Nigeria, although the authorities often provide lower numbers. Local media and eyewitnesses said the stampede happened when panic broke out at the end of a rally held in the city's Adokiye Amiesimaka Stadium. Crowds tried to force their way through a locked exit. "Those from behind were pushing and putting pres-



PORT HARCOURT: A biker rides next to shoes and items lying on the ground in front of the main entrance of the Adokiye Amiesimaka Stadium where fifteen people were killed in a stampede during an election campaign rally. —AFP

sure on those in front, leading to some persons falling on the ground and being trampled upon," said journalist Egufe Yafugborhi, of the Vanguard newspaper.

Bloody aftermath

Blood-stained clothes, discarded shoes, and belongings remained strewn at the site Wednesday. Eyewitness Catherine Omokiniovo told AFP: "I was outside the gate selling popcorn when people started coming out. 'All of a sudden we started hearing cries of those who had fallen and could not

get up because they had been trapped. There was confusion everywhere.

"Over 20 bodies were taken away in ambulances," she said, adding one of the victims was a pregnant woman and another a woman whose wedding was just months away. Other witnesses gave a similar account. "The police blocked a section of the entrance with their vehicles, preventing free flow of movement after the rally," said one. In Rivers, police spokesman Nnamdi Omoni said an investigation has been opened to determine the cause of the stampede. —Agencies

13 die in bus accident in North Macedonia

SKOPJE: At least 13 people were killed and more than 30 others injured when a passenger bus overturned on a highway in North Macedonia on Wednesday, health minister said. Speaking to AFP, Minister Venko Filipce added that "the number of dead may increase because there are people in surgery and in critical condition" following the accident which happened around 20 kilometres (12 miles) from the capital Skopje. Around 50 people were on the bus. "Thirteen people were killed," Filipce told reporters. "There are more than 30 injured." Ilir Asani, head of the emergency centre at Skopje's main hospital, told local media that at least "five people were severely injured, including a pregnant woman".

A public prosecutor said it had launched a probe into the accident that occurred "when a bus of the company 'Durmo Tours'... crossed the barrier on the opposite side of the highway, then veered off the road and overturned near the village of Laskarci". Festim Rusani, 42, was on his way home to Tetovo when he saw the overturned bus. "I called ambulance and police immediately. With neighbours I helped three people to get out of the bus. But for the rest it was very difficult at first, they were all stuck under the bus," he told AFP. "There was this girl, young woman, alive while we were trying to help her, she was stuck... She lost her legs but she was still breathing. She died there. It was so traumatic," he added. —AFP

With armored vehicles and snipers, US seeks to deter Russia

ORZYSZ: With the Russian border little more than an hour away, the desolate grey sky burst open with an explosion of fire and a plume of smoke. If the scene evoked the Cold War, it was intentional. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo trekked Wednesday to the Polish town of Orzysz to witness NATO live-fire exercises in an unmistakable sign to Warsaw that the United States has its eye on Russia. Pompeo walked through drizzling rain with senior Polish officials over frozen soil and patches of snow to a reviewing stand as several hundred troops stood at attention.

Pompeo, a West Point graduate who served as a US Army cavalry officer in Germany when Poland was on the other side of the Iron Curtain, said little had changed except, he joked, that back then he was listening to cassette tapes of Van Halen. The US defense chief likened Orzysz, around 70 kilometres (45 miles) from Russia's Baltic Sea enclave of Kaliningrad, to divided Germany's infamous Fulda Gap — where NATO feared that Soviet tanks could penetrate its defenses.

"Today, the gap in which we stand occupies the same priority focus for NATO commanders that the Fulda Gap did back then — once again because of Russian aggression," Pompeo said in reference to the so-called Suwalki Gap. He said that the concern was not theoretical, denouncing Russian President Vladimir Putin for the 2014 annexation of the Crimean peninsula and ongoing support for separatists in Ukraine, as well as Moscow's war a decade earlier with Georgia. "We take seriously those concerns that Russia may one day try to open a front along a line right here," Pompeo said.

Simulated battle

Pompeo then advanced with senior Polish officials including Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz to observe exercises by troops from the five countries at the base - the United States, Poland, Britain, Croatia and Romania. Amid startling shots from rocket launchers, 20 troops sprinted from a corner for a display of hand-to-hand combat, simulating punching and kicking one another as if in the throes of battle. Pompeo watched with a smile as Bradley armored vehicles rolled by and a dozen soldiers jumped out before him and squatted with their rifles, shooting metallic targets in the shape of enemy bodies. A Polish officer provided a running, dispassionate narrative in precise English, explaining, "The snipers wait patiently for the enemy soldier to present the opportunity for the perfect shot."

Wooing the US

Putin has accused the United States of trying to contain Russia and has pledged to boost Moscow's own military, including by deploying nuclear-capable Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad. Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump has voiced admiration for Putin and mused that NATO - which considers an attack on any of its 30 members an attack on all - cheats the United States out of money.

Believing a permanent US presence would be the ultimate deterrent, Poland has offered to contribute to building a US base - which it has cheekily suggested could be called Fort Trump. Asked about a troop increase, Pompeo said the United States was "taking a look at it". NATO promised Russia in 1997 not to station significant forces in the former eastern bloc. As tensions have grown however, the alliance has instead rotated troops through front-line countries. Poland offered an additional sweetener on Wednesday. US Vice President Mike Pence, also in the country, said Warsaw would buy \$414 million worth of US mobile rocket launchers — good news for the transaction-minded Trump. —AFP

International

Sweden replaces China envoy in furore over dissident bookseller

Gui Minhai a Swedish citizen detained in China

STOCKHOLM: Sweden said yesterday it had replaced its ambassador to China after her “incorrect” handling of unauthorized meetings intended to help free dissident bookseller Gui Minhai. The Hong Kong-based, Swedish publisher of books critical of China’s communist leaders was abducted in Thailand in 2015 and later appeared in custody in mainland China.

His daughter Angela Gui said this week she had met ambassador Anna Lindstedt and two businessmen in Stockholm in January, where she was advised to keep quiet about her father’s case while negotiations were proceeding. Sweden’s Foreign Ministry said that was not an official meeting, and Lindstedt had now returned to Sweden with an interim envoy sent to Beijing during an inquiry. “Neither the Foreign Ministry nor the Foreign Minister were informed until after the event,” ministry spokesman Rasmus Eljanskog said in an emailed statement.

“As a consequence of the incorrect manner in which the said meetings were handled, we are now conducting an internal investigation.” Gui, 54, became a Swedish citizen after studying there in the 1980s. After the abduction, he was released in October 2017, but his whereabouts were unclear until January last year when his daughter said he was seized by Chinese agents on a Beijing-bound train in the presence of Swedish diplomats. China later confirmed it had detained him again. In her blog, Angela Gui said Lindstedt invited her to

Stockholm to meet two businessmen who could help secure her father’s release.

‘Outrageous scandal’

“The businessman said, ‘you care about Anna (Lindstedt), right? If you keep talking to the media it’ll damage her career. You don’t want her to come to any harm, do you?’”, she said in the post on blog portal Medium. “In order for this to happen (negotiations), I was told I needed to be quiet. I wasn’t to tell anyone about this, or say anything publicly about the case,” she added. “I’m not going to be quiet in exchange for ... an arbitrary promise that my father ‘might’ be released. Threats, verbal abuse, bribes, or flattery won’t change that.”

China’s Foreign Ministry declined comment, with spokeswoman Hua Chunying saying she knew nothing about Gui’s latest situation. On its website, China’s embassy in Stockholm said it had not authorized anyone to “engage” with Gui’s daughter. “The Chinese side handles the Gui Minhai case in accordance with law and legal procedure,” it said. Gui’s original abduction – along with four others in the Hong Kong book trade – fed worries about interference from Beijing despite guarantees of wide-ranging freedoms for the former British colony which returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

The four others have since returned to Hong Kong. The United States and European Union have urged Gui’s release. Sweden said it was continuing to seek Gui’s freedom, as Lindstedt

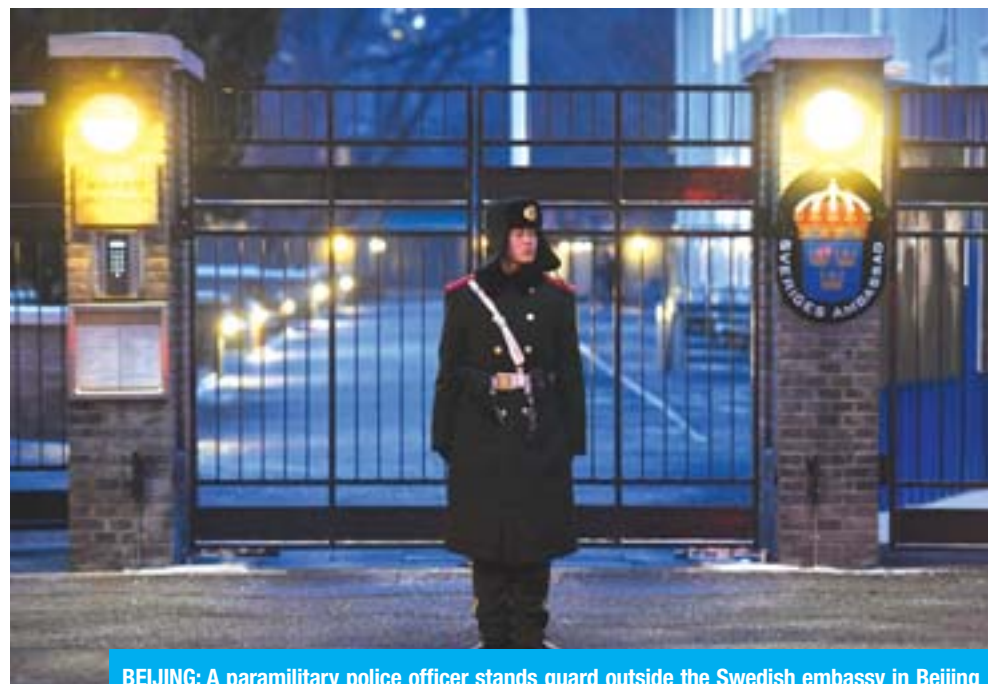
non-profit that chronicles firearms issues. More than 200 teen journalists banded together to profile the young victims for the report.

And with 37 mass shootings—those with at least four victims, not including the assailant—recorded already in the US this year, it is tempting to conclude that almost nothing has changed. The inertia on gun control endures despite the best efforts of the Parkland students, who rejected the usual outpourings of sympathy offered by politicians and launched a nationwide movement seeking tougher regulation on sales. “So many shootings have happened and you get ‘thoughts and prayers’ and then nothing happens,” said Ryan Servaites, who survived the shooting. “It’s an absolute shame that our government has done absolutely nothing about it. So you know, we’re fed up,” Servaites, 16 said.

‘Our childhood ended’

A month after the shooting, the student activists brought together hundreds of thousands of demonstrators in Washington, under the “March for Our Lives” banner. The teenagers toured 26 states, visiting schools and talking with lawmakers. They published a book, took part in an HBO documentary and, most importantly, caused state laws to be changed.

“In just 11 minutes, our childhood ended,” Hogg and Gonzalez wrote in November in *The Washington Post*. Florida is governed by Republicans and posed a major challenge for the



BEIJING: A paramilitary police officer stands guard outside the Swedish embassy in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

student activists. But they successfully pushed for passage of state laws opposed by the powerful US gun lobby, the National Rifle Association. Among other changes, a “red flag” law was passed allowing judges to order the seizure of guns from people deemed to be mentally unstable and the minimum age for purchasing a gun was raised to 21.

The sale and possession of devices known as bump stocks, which allow semi-automatic weapons to fire as fast as illegal machineguns, and which were used to such deadly effect in Las Vegas, were also banned. In December, President Donald Trump barred them at the national level. After Parkland, 26 states and US capital Washington approved 67 laws related to gun control, according to the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. In a report last December, the center said the movement for gun safety in America “experienced a tectonic shift in 2018.”

Big plans for 2019

Yet significant nationwide reform to slash gun deaths has largely eluded the activists, who have vowed to entrench their campaign in 2019. On Friday last week lawmakers from both parties presented Congress with a bill that would require universal background checks prior to gun purchases. Under current laws, licensed dealers must carry out background checks on would-be buyers, but loopholes allow people to avoid such checks if they buy from a private

seller, at gun shows or over the internet. Defenders of the Second Amendment to the US Constitution, which establishes the right to bear arms, will fight the bill.

The NRA said such a law would not dissuade criminals, who will always find some way to acquire a firearm. “These bills attack law-abiding gun owners by placing further burdens on gun ownership and use,” its website states. Tom Palmer, a gun rights supporting political scientist and vice president of free-market think tank Atlas Network, told the *Miami Herald* the two sides in the gun debate could not be more polarized. “The gun control people see their opponents as people who don’t care about human life, and the gun rights people see their opponents as people who don’t care about human freedom,” Palmer said.

Also worth noting: in a closely contested race for Florida’s governorship in last November’s mid-term elections, NRA-endorsed Republican Rick DeSantis beat Democrat Andrew Gillum, who backed stricter gun controls. Undeterred, a group of Parkland survivors launched a petition on Monday which, if it garners the almost 800,000 signatures needed, will trigger a referendum on banning military-style assault rifles in Florida. Meanwhile Nikolas Cruz, the defendant in the Parkland shooting, awaits his day in court. Prosecutors have said they will seek the death penalty on 17 counts of pre-meditated murder and 17 counts of attempted murder. — AFP

A year after US school massacre, gun control remains elusive

MIAMI: On Valentine’s Day of last year, a 19-year-old armed with a military-style assault rifle walked into his old high school in Parkland, Florida and slaughtered 17 people. That spasm in America’s epidemic of gun violence gave new impetus to the debate on controlling firearms, prompting marches across the country and a fresh round of hand-wringing in cable news studios. Many of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School survivors such as David Hogg and Emma Gonzalez remain national figures a year on—a testament to their tenacity in keeping the atrocity in the headlines—yet concrete reform has remained limited and local.

Meanwhile America risks becoming inured to the carnage: four months before Parkland a gunman killed 58 people at a festival in Las Vegas while, 16 months earlier, a massacre at a gay night club in Orlando left 49 dead. Nearly 1,200 children lost their lives to gun violence in the year since Parkland, according to a report from McClatchy newspapers and *The Trace*, a

International

‘Few have too much’: Pontiff condemns global inequality

Pope laments on the rate of extreme poverty

ROME: Pope Francis condemned unfair access to food around the world as “perverse” yesterday, saying it threatened disaster for humanity if not remedied. “Few have too much and many have little,” said the 81-year-old Argentine pontiff, who is one of the world’s most respected voices on issues of poverty and social justice. The Roman Catholic Church’s leader made his comments during a visit to the Rome-based UN Food and Agriculture Organization for a session of the governing council of its sister agency, the International Fund for Agricultural Development.

“Many do not have food and are adrift while the few are drowning in the superfluous,” said the pope, who has often backed UN targets to tackle hunger and climate change. “This perverse tendency of inequality is disastrous for the future of humanity.” In words echoing the complaints of grassroots protest movements around the world, Francis lamented that the rate of ex-

treame poverty reduction was slowing “while the concentration of riches in the hands of few is increasing”. In the pope’s home continent Latin America, the number of people in extreme poverty increased in 2017 to the highest in almost a decade despite improvements in social spending policies, another UN agency said last month.

“They live precarious situations: the air is flawed, the natural resources are depleted, the rivers polluted, the soil is acidified,” Francis said of the world’s most disadvantaged. “They do not have enough water for themselves or their crops, their sanitary infrastructures are very deficient, their housing scarce and defective.” Francis, who also met with indigenous representatives, said it was “paradoxical” that many of the more than 820 million people suffering hunger and malnutrition live in rural areas where most food is produced. The global exodus from rural to urban areas was worrying, he added. —



ROME: Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Jose Graziano da Silva (right) addresses the Governing Council of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a Rome-based United Nations agency, as Pope Francis (left) listens on yesterday in Rome. — AFP

US House rebukes President Trump on Saudi’s Yemen war

WASHINGTON: The US House voted overwhelmingly Wednesday to end American involvement in Saudi Arabia’s war effort in neighboring Yemen, dealing a rebuke to President Donald Trump and his alliance with Riyadh. The chamber voted 248 to 177 to approve historic legislation that would direct the president within 30 days to “remove United States armed forces from hostilities in or affecting the Republic of Yemen,” where a years-old conflict has killed thousands of civilians.

Eighteen Republicans joined all voting Democrats in supporting the measure, a striking curtailment of presidential war powers. The vote puts pressure on the Senate to act. The Senate easily passed a similar measure late last year condemning the administration’s defense of the Saudi kingdom, but it died as the last Congress ended with the then Republican-controlled House not bringing it to a vote. Today the House is under Democratic control, and the measure moved swiftly on the floor.

“With my resolution passing the House, we are closer than ever to ending our complicity in this humanitarian catastrophe,” House Democrat Ro Khanna, who has spent years opposing US military interventions, said on Twitter. And with Senator Bernie Sanders helping lead the way on the legislation in the Senate, Khanna said, “a War Powers Resolution will pass through both chambers of Congress for the first time in history.” Sanders, who is weighing a 2020 presidential run, applauded the House move. “The Senate must quickly pass this resolution and finally reassert Congress’ constitutional authority over war,” he said.

The resolution is a reminder that Congress was given the legal ability to compel the removal of US military forces, absent a formal declaration of war. Should the Senate pass the resolution, it could force Trump to issue the first veto of his tenure. Bipartisan anger has simmered in Congress since the murder last October of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi by commandos from Riyadh. The White House’s apparent embrace of Saudi Arabia and its Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has caused lawmakers on



US President Donald Trump

both sides of the political aisle to push back. Republicans notably have also registered their dissatisfaction over other foreign policy controversies, including the president’s plan to withdraw troops from Syria and Afghanistan.—AFP

White supremacist gets life for killing a black man in US

NEW YORK: A white man who killed a black man with a sword in the hopes of starting a race war was sentenced to life in prison without parole Wednesday in New York, multiple media accounts said. James Jackson, 30, a former US Army specialist, apologized for the slaying, before the State Supreme Court Justice Laura A Ward sentenced him to the maximum allowed under the law, the New York Times reported.

Last month, Jackson plead guilty to first-degree murder in furtherance of an act of terrorism, in the March 2017 death of Timothy Caughman, 66. He turned himself in at a police station after police circulated surveillance video of the killing. Jackson, of Baltimore, told detectives that he traveled to New York City because it is the US media capital and he believed that the killing would start a race war.

“The racial World War starts today,” Jackson wrote in a manifesto that included a swastika, the Times reported. “This political terrorist attack is a formal declaration of a global total war on the Negro races,” he wrote. Neither an attorney for Jackson nor state prosecutors were available for comment early Thursday. In January, Cyrus Vance, New York’s district attorney, said in a statement, “If you come here to kill New Yorkers in the name of white nationalism, you will be investigated, prosecuted, and incapacitated like the terrorist that you are.” Jackson served as an Army specialist until 2012 and was deployed in Afghanistan for nearly a year beginning in December 2010. He was awarded several medals for his conduct.— Reuters

International

Friday, February 15, 2019

Unrepentant British teen who joined IS 'wants to come home'

Begum expresses no regrets about joining jihadists

LONDON: An unrepentant British teenager who joined the Islamic State group in Syria said in an interview yesterday that she wants to come home, highlighting the challenge for Western governments on how to deal with returning jihadist supporters. Shamima Begum, who ran away from London with two school friends in 2015, spoke to The Times from a refugee camp where she had fled the collapse of the IS group's "caliphate" in eastern Syria.

Now 19, she expressed no regrets about joining the jihadists but said that two of her children were dead and she was now heavily pregnant. "I just could not endure any more," she told the newspaper. She added: "I was also frightened that the child I am about to give birth to would die like my other children if I stayed on. "So I fled the caliphate. Now all I want to do is come home to Britain."

Begum made headlines around the world when, aged just 15, she left to join the jihadists with friends from Bethnal Green in east London. Another girl from the same school had run away the year before. One girl, Kadiza Sultana, has been reported killed. Begum said the other two, Sharmeena Begum — no relation — and Amira Abase stayed on in Baghouz, where IS fighters are making their last stand to hold on to the proto-state they declared in 2014. "They were strong. I respect their decision," Begum said of her friends. She added: "I'm not the same silly little 15-year-old schoolgirl who ran away from Bethnal Green four years ago. And I don't regret coming here."

'Challenge for all of us'

The British authorities estimate around 900 Britons travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the conflict, of whom around 300-400 have since returned — and 40 have been prosecuted. As of last month, around 200 were believed to still be alive and in the region. Speaking to Sky News, Security Minister Ben Wallace said it was "worrying" that Begum had not expressed regret about going to Syria.

He also noted the difficulties faced by many governments of how to deal with those returning from abroad. "It is a challenge for all of us," he told BBC radio. "Some of them were groomed... when they were young but are now adults and some of them are hardened fighters. "We have successfully prosecuted a number of them in the last few years when they have come back and the others should expect the same if they return." The United States had said it is ready to help countries repatriate IS jihadists detained in Syria but that ultimately it is up to their home governments to come up with solutions.

Under new anti-terrorism legislation adopted in Britain this week, British nationals spending time in Syria face arrest and up to 10 years in prison on their return. The law toughens previous legislation that required authorities to prove returning nationals had engaged in terrorist activities while abroad. A lawyer who represented the families of Begum and her two friends four years ago, Tasnime Akunjee, told The Times he was "thankful she's alive". He noted that when they ran away, "there was an understanding that



LONDON: In this file photo, Renu Begum, eldest sister of missing British girl Shamima Begum, holds a picture of her sister while being interviewed by the media in central London. — AFP

as long as they had committed no further offence they will not be prosecuted and be come to seen as victims".

Begum married a Dutch fighter soon after arriving in Syria. "Mostly it was normal life in Raqqa, every now and then bombing and stuff,"

she told The Times. "But when I saw my first severed head in a bin it didn't faze me at all. It was from a captured fighter seized on the battlefield, an enemy of Islam. "I thought only of what he would have done to a Muslim woman if he had the chance."—AFP

US, Taliban to hold talks in Islamabad

KABUL: The Taliban said yesterday that its negotiators would meet US envoys for talks this month in Islamabad, and also sit down with Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan to discuss Afghanistan. While Islamabad did not immediately confirm the talks, Washington said it had "noted" the announcement, which comes after weeks of meetings between the US and Taliban officials. "We are not going to negotiate in public," a US State Department spokesperson told AFP, adding that the US had not received a formal invitation to any talks. "This is the beginning of a long process which we continue to work through private diplomatic channels." The announcement comes as America's chief negotiator tours the globe shoring up support for a peace process to end its longest war.

Zalmay Khalilzad, a former ambassador to Afghanistan, held extensive talks with the militants last month in Qatar, where the Taliban have an office. More talks are slated for later in February. The Taliban's statement said separate meetings would be held first on February 18 in Islamabad "by the formal invitation of the government of Pakistan". Talks in Doha would follow a week later on February 25, the statement read. Khalilzad is heading a large delegation on a tour of Belgium, Germany, Turkey, Qatar, Afghanistan and Pakistan to boost the peace process and bring all Afghan parties to the table.

He has expressed cautious hope for a deal before Afghan

presidential elections slated for July, but says the Taliban must come to the table with the Kabul government, which the insurgents consider a US puppet. President Ashraf Ghani—who has expressed frustration at being sidelined from recent talks—flew to Munich on Wednesday to attend an international security conference, his office said. The Taliban also announced a meeting with Prime Minister Khan in Islamabad for "comprehensive discussions" about bilateral affairs with Afghanistan. News reports in Pakistan last month had suggested Islamabad was open to hosting the next round of talks with the insurgents.

Souring ties

In January, as he travelled the region building support for the peace process, Khalilzad met Khan in Pakistan—one of just three countries that recognized the Taliban regime before their ousting by US-led forces in 2001. Pakistan's foreign ministry said in December that President Donald Trump, who is pushing to end the 17-year war in Afghanistan, wrote to Khan seeking Islamabad's support for peace efforts. Ties between Washington and Islamabad have soured recently. US officials have repeatedly accused Pakistan of turning a blind eye to, or even collaborating with, the Afghan Taliban, which launch attacks in Afghanistan from alleged havens along the border between the two countries. The White House believes that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency and other military bodies have long helped fund and arm the Taliban, and believe a Pakistani crackdown on the militants could be pivotal in deciding the outcome of the war. Pakistan has long denied the claims, saying thousands of its citizens have been killed in its long struggle with militancy.—AFP

Blast kills 18 soldiers in Indian Kashmir

NEW DELHI: At least 18 Indian soldiers were killed yesterday in the deadliest attack on government forces in Indian-administered Kashmir in more than two years, police said. They died when an improvised explosive device (IED) went off as a convoy of military vehicles drove on a highway some 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the main city of Srinagar. "An IED went off as a CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) convoy passed by," senior police officer Munir Ahmed Khan said.

"We have 12 CRPF fatalities. We are evacuating the injured from the site and don't have their number at the moment." The Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency put the death toll at 18. Local media reports said the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed Islamist group had claimed responsibility for the attack. A spokesman for the group said "the suicide attack" was carried out by Aadil Ahmad, alias Waqas Commando, in a statement sent to local newspapers. Unconfirmed photos showed the charred remains of at least one vehicle littered across the highway, alongside blue military buses.

It is the deadliest attack on Indian forces in that part of Kashmir since September 2016 when 19 soldiers were killed in a pre-dawn militant raid on the Uri army camp. India has an estimated 500,000 soldiers in Kashmir, which has been divided between India and Pakistan and riven by unrest since the end of British rule in 1947. Rebel groups have been fighting for an independent Kashmir, or a merger with Pakistan, since 1989. — Agencies

International

Poster couple - Vietnam-North Korean sweethearts lauded in summit run-up

An opportunity for Vietnam to boost its diplomatic gravitas

HANOI: A handkerchief, illicit letters and secret visits - the first three decades of love between a Vietnamese man and his North Korean sweetheart were counted out in stolen moments and small tokens of devotion. But now this love story is being lauded as an example of the two countries' amity in the lead-up to this month's much anticipated second summit between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Hanoi.

The communist state is thrilled to be hosting the high-profile event in Hanoi, an opportunity for Vietnam to boost its diplomatic gravitas on the world stage. But for the couple, their hopes for peace on the Korean peninsula also carry personal motivations. "I wish... we can go back for visits more easily," 69-year-old Vietnamese Pham Van Canh told AFP.

He first met his future wife Ri Yong Hui in 1971 at a Pyongyang fertiliser factory, where she was working. Canh was one of hundreds of Vietnamese sent to fellow communist nation North Korea to study how their country could rebuild after the devastating war with the US. "I asked others for her name, trying to meet her," he said. "At that time, both Vietnamese and North Koreans were not allowed to love each other."

His first token of affection was a handkerchief. Their courtship included secret visits to her hometown, which were cut short in 1973 when he had to return to Vietnam.

Canh gave Ri 20 envelopes with his mother's work address at the State Bank of Vietnam already written out so she could send letters, skirting North Korea's monitoring of correspondence. Still the couple sent only two or three letters a year to avoid notice. Mostly, they kept to safe subjects like health and work, in case the envelopes were opened by others. "We were in love and she had even told me to die together, to commit suicide. But I told her, 'We are in love, why die? Wait for me and I will come back.'" As the years ticked by, he kept an eye on the two countries' relationship, as Vietnam outpaced North Korea in economic growth.

Meanwhile, he set up a friendship club between the countries and organized fundraising to donate rice to the Korean peninsula as its leadership isolated itself from the outside world. He also appealed to Vietnam's Foreign Ministry, who brought the couple up in bilateral talks to their North Korean counterparts as "a humanitarian matter", he said. Then in 2002, Canh's efforts paid off. He was allowed to return to Pyongyang to hold a small wedding cere-



HANOI: Vietnamese man Pham Ngoc Canh, and his North Korean wife Ri Yong Hui walk holding hands in an alley outside their house in Hanoi. —AFP

mony and then take Ri back to Hanoi on the condition she remained a North Korean citizen. Today, 70-year-old Ri says she has a good life in Hanoi where she lives with Canh

in a modest apartment. But the couple have managed to visit Pyongyang only three times because of its isolation. "I always have my homeland on my mind," she said.—AFP

Crocodile mauls Indonesian to death in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR: An Indonesian man has been mauled to death by a crocodile in Malaysia, with his horrified nephew spotting the victim disappearing into a river during the attack, police said yesterday. Muh Tahir Majid Syam, 40, went missing while hunting for crabs with his nephew on Tuesday by a river in Sarawak state on jungle-clad Borneo island.

While looking for him, the younger man suddenly saw his uncle's head pop up above the water's surface before sinking again, deputy local police chief Mohamad Sabri Zainol told AFP. "(The nephew) was looking around, and then he saw his uncle's head in the water before being pulled back into the river," the police officer said. Muh Tahir's body was found Wednesday covered in bite marks, leading police to conclude he was likely killed by a saltwater crocodile. The victim was a migrant worker on a palm oil plantation, the official news agency Bernama reported. Many Indonesians work in the agricultural sector in relatively affluent Malaysia. Saltwater crocodiles are often sighted along rivers and by beaches in Malaysia's two states on Borneo, Sabah and Sarawak. Borneo is shared between Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei. The reptiles, which can grow up to seven metres (22 feet) long, have been blamed for a series of attacks in recent years in the area. Authorities in Sarawak began granting licences to hunt crocodiles in 2017 in a bid to reduce the number of attacks, according to local media.—AFP

Duterte critic freed on bail

MANILA: Philippine journalist Maria Ressa was freed on bail yesterday following an arrest that sparked international censure and allegations she is being targeted over her news site's criticism of President Rodrigo Duterte. Ressa, 55, spent a night in detention after authorities arrested the veteran reporter at her Manila office Wednesday in a sharp upping of government pressure on her and her website Rappler. The site and Ressa have been hit with tax evasion charges and now a libel case after clashing repeatedly with Duterte over his deadly crackdown on narcotics that has killed thousands.

"The message that the government is sending is very clear... be silent or you're next," an emotional Ressa told reporters outside a Manila court. She stumped up a bond of 100,000-pesos (\$1,900), the sixth time since December that she has paid bail on a government case. "I am appealing to you not to be silent, even if-and especially if-you're next," added Ressa, who was named a Time Magazine "Person of the Year" in 2018 for her journalism. International condemnation from dignitaries, press freedom and human rights groups has poured in since plainclothes agents appeared at Rappler to serve an arrest warrant.

Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland tweeted she was "deeply troubled" by Ressa's arrest Wednesday. "A free press is a bedrock of democracy. Canada reiterates its call for due process to be respected and for journalists to be free from harassment and intimidation," Freeland added. Former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, tweeted in support: "The arrest of journalist @mariaressa by the Philippine government is outrageous and must be condemned by all democratic nations."

Duterte attacks on media

The libel case against Ressa and former Rappler reporter Reynaldo Santos, Jr. stems from a 2012 report written about a businessman's alleged ties to a then-judge on the nation's top court. While investigators initially dismissed the businessman's 2017 complaint about the article, the case was subsequently forwarded to prosecutors for their consideration. The legal foundation of the case is a controversial law aiming to crack down on online offences ranging from harassment to child pornography.

Ressa's team has argued the legislation did not take effect until months after the story was published and is not retroactive, however the government has countered that it is fair game because the story was updated in 2014. "In essence in the contemplation of the law it is a new article because of the modification, republication," Markk Perete, spokesman for Department of Justice prosecutors, told AFP. "That is deemed as a new article." Rappler concedes the story was updated, but notes it was to fix a typo and no substantive changes were made.

Ressa's lawyer JJ Disini said he will formally ask the court within the week to dismiss the case as the publication and the modification were made more than a year ago. He argues the maximum period set by law for a legal action to be brought has already lapsed. "That's disincentive for people to speak out," Disini told reporters, "I think there would be grounds to raise these issues in the Supreme Court." The businessman who accused Rappler, Wilfredo Keng yesterday welcomed the charges as he said the website "destroyed my reputation and endangered my life".

Duterte spokesman Salvador Panelo rejected allegations the arrest had political motivations. "Maria Ressa's claim that this is an assault on freedom of expression or freedom of the press has no basis," Panelo told Manila's DWFM radio in an interview, adding it was not the president or his allies who brought the libel case.—AFP

Lifestyle

Friday Times

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Photo shows a shop selling heart shaped teddy bears for Valentines' day in Kuwait. — Photo By Yasser Al-Zayyat

Post-box love for lonely Britons on Valentine's Day

See Page 22



Armando Guevara works at Andromeda Studio 33 tattoo parlor in the East Village in New York. —AFP photos



Shaggy Johnsen poses outside at Andromeda Studio 33 tattoo parlor.

Face tattoos: A trend that is here to stay?

Face tattoos, once limited to only a very small group of people, have gained new popularity thanks to today's rappers—but some artists are reluctant to make such a permanent change to a client's appearance. In New York's East Village, some of the would-be customers entering tattoo parlors are still teenagers—some of them have never even had any body art, but nevertheless want to indelibly inscribe something on their face. "Of late, it has become a very big trend because of what they see on TV," said Armando Guevara, who mans the reception desk at Andromeda Studio 33, which also does piercings.

What young people are seeing on television are people like Grammy-nominated rapper Post Malone, the current poster boy of so-called mumble rap, also called SoundCloud rap or emo rap. The popular sub-genre is characterized by its trap beats and lyrics that often touch on mental health problems and their consequences—drugs, meds and lots of sex. Words are slurred and sometimes sung. From Malone to the controversial 21 Savage, Lil Uzi Vert and the late XXXTentacion, nearly all mumble rappers have face tattoo-breaking with their elders who had little interest in the look.

And when the Mondial du Tatouage, the World Tattoo Expo, opens in Paris today, the trend will certainly be on full display. Shaggy Johnsen, a 22-year-old New Yorker who had Bugs Bunny inked on his temple, admits he was influenced by his favorite rappers. "I'm an artist myself," Johnsen said, explaining he's a "freestyle" rapper. "It's all about how you promote your-



Adam Alonso, also known as Rex Reid poses in New York.



Twin poses outside at Andromeda Studio 33 tattoo parlor.

self—how you bring yourself out." Since getting face ink, Johnsen says he's only gotten positive reactions. "Everybody likes it," he said, adding that he loves cartoon characters, and he might next go for Tweety or the Tasmanian Devil.

Adam Alonso says face art is a "mask" that he can hide behind. "I've been hurt in the past so I don't want to be hurt no more so I keep a wall up so people on the streets won't even talk to me," the model and rapper told AFP. The word AGONY is written under his right eye in large ornate letters. Alonso insists the tattoos have not hurt him professionally. "People think that when you tattoo your face, you're not going to make money. But nothing's impossible. I still make money," he said. "It is to prove I can do the impossible and if I can do it, anyone can do it."

Guevara is not against face tattoos—he has several of them, including a huge one inspired by pre-Columbian art that covers about a quarter of his face. But he advises clients to be extra cautious before taking the leap. "If you're going to do something on your face that is permanent, think about it. Try it out," says the 40-something Guevara, who is of Nicaraguan descent. Every morning for months, he drew his planned tattoo onto his face, to get used to it and gauge reactions, before he went under the ink needle. Many younger customers do not realize the implications of what they are asking for, according to Guevara. —AFP

Meghan Markle hounded like Diana? Hardly, British papers say

Could Meghan Markle really face the same fate as Princess Diana? Britain's newspapers on Wednesday angrily challenged US actor George Clooney's claim that their treatment of Prince Harry's wife resembled the hounding of his late mother. Clooney, who attended the couple's wedding last year, on Tuesday stirred up a hornet's nest of discontent by accusing the London tabloids of giving the new Duchess of Sussex "a raw deal". "She's a woman who is seven months pregnant and she is being pursued and vilified and chased in the same way that Diana was," the Hollywood superstar told Australian magazine WHO during an interview in Los Angeles. "It's history repeating itself," Clooney warned. "And we've seen how that ends."

The ending Clooney referred to was the 1997 car crash in Paris in which Diana died along with Dodi Al-Fayed as they fled the paparazzi. The tragedy triggered mass public mourning in the UK and soul searching on the part of the press. It turned royal reporters into villains and forced the media to significantly alter its code of conduct. Pictures obtained through "persistent pursuit" were banned and a "reasonable expectation of privacy" had to be observed. The arrival in British public life last year of the mixed-race US actress put these new rules to the test with initially positive coverage slowly giving way to stories about "Duchess Difficult". Meghan, 37, was said to have been tough on staff, with tensions also reported between her and Prince William's wife Catherine.

Following months of unwanted publicity focused on rifts with her family, the Mail on Sunday also published a letter she wrote to her estranged father begging him to "stop lying" and "exploiting my relationship with my husband". "You're taking a letter from a daughter to a father and broadcasting it everywhere," Clooney fumed. "It's irresponsible." —AFP



Meghan, Duchess of Sussex arrives at the Natural History Museum in London. —AFP



Photos show Carpenter Ma Jiale working in an old building in Shanghai. —AFP photos

CARPENTER PRESERVES OLD SHANGHAI, ONE NAIL AT A TIME

Carpenter Ma Jiale has spent much of his working life lovingly repairing some of Shanghai's most attractive—if rather decrepit—historical buildings. The Chinese city is well known for its skyscrapers, but its pre-Communist days as a cosmopolitan trading hub has left a legacy of assorted architecture ranging from French-style villas to Edwardian mansions and Art Deco buildings. Authorities say they are committed to preserving the best of the old structures—and Ma is doing his part.

The 57-year-old grandfather cycles-old tools hanging from the handlebars—from job to job in a pocket of the northeast district of Hongkou. “If Shanghai only has skyscrapers, then it is not Shanghai any more,” said Ma, known affectionately in the neighborhood as “Master Ma”. “I am not saying modernization is not good, but historical buildings should be preserved,” he added. In a 2002 report, the World Bank described this part of Hongkou as a key historical site not just in Shanghai, but for China. Past residents included writers, a Communist Party leader from the late 1920s and, according to local legend, one of Mao Zedong's ex-wives.

‘Little Tokyo’

Recently Ma worked on a century-old house that from the outside would not look



out of place in a wealthy London suburb. Now divided into several rather ramshackle apartments, Ma said that Japanese used to live there—Hongkou was once known as “Little Tokyo”. Ma uses tools handed down by his predecessors because he fears that modern or electrical ones will damage the original features of the house. They include arched floor-to-ceiling front windows, high ceilings and a grandiose tiled fire place. There are no original drafts to work off so Ma uses his experience and instinct to make the new door frame fit with its surroundings of faded grandeur. “The meaning of my job is to pro-

tect historical buildings and pass on our craftsmanship,” said Ma. “What is made by machines is cold and lacks a human touch.”

Playing catch-up

Ma works for a state-owned property management company and proudly declares that he is a member of the ruling Communist Party. After the Communist takeover 70 years ago, political campaigns denouncing symbols of China's past “feudal” era consigned many properties to decay. The Shanghai government is playing catch-up but in recent years stepped up its efforts to protect and preserve historical buildings, Ma said. But in a country where people are often afraid of speaking out, Ma is open about what he feels is the inadequate upkeep of some of Shanghai's attractive old architecture.

“We just roughly repair windows, doors, floorboards, wooden frames,” said Ma, calling for more money to be directed to the preservation effort. “For decades Shanghai's historical buildings haven't been well protected. Small repairs from property management companies cannot solve the big problem,” he added.

Fears for future

There is another lingering worry. Ma will retire in three years and is eager to pass on his



decades of expertise—if only there were budding carpenters out there. In the neighborhood where he works, there are only four carpenters for a population of more than 10,000 residents, he said. That inadequate ratio is repeated across Shanghai, he added. A major reason is the pay—Ma works five days a week and earns about 5,000 yuan (\$750) a month, half the average salary in Shanghai. For comparison, the 50-square-metre (550 square feet) apartment he was working on recently sold for five million yuan putting it on a par with central London prices. —AFP



Carpenter Ma Jiale pushing his bicycle between jobs in Shanghai.

Love in the time of climate change - the Valentine's traditions under threat

As lovers around the world celebrate Valentine's Day on 14th of February, few will be thinking of the environment. Yet they may soon have to - from rising seas that could engulf the world's honeymoon island resorts to changing weather patterns hitting the vineyards of France's Champagne region, climate change poses a threat to many romantic traditions. Here are four that are in jeopardy.



1. Honeymoon Islands

Sandy golden beaches are a popular escape for honeymooning couples, but romantic destinations such as Bali and the Maldives are under threat from rising seas. Ocean warming is also causing coral bleaching and scientists say pollution and over-fishing could contribute to the loss of as much as 90 percent of global reefs by 2050. Plastic pollution is also affecting many island nations, with Vanuatu and the Seychelles introducing locally managed marine reserves or banning plastic bags and straws.

2. City of Love

Paris is the quintessential city of love. But in recent years the famous cityscape has been regularly shrouded in smog, prompting authorities to periodically ban traffic on the Champs Elysees. Almost 85 percent of the about 10 million people living in the greater Paris region were exposed to levels of pollution higher than national objectives in 2017, according to Airparif, a government monitoring body. Air pollution is responsible for 48,000 deaths a year across France, making it the nation's third biggest killer after smoking and alcohol consumption, according to a 2016 study by the French National Public Health agency.



3. Chocolate

As supermarket shelves groan under the weight of fancily wrapped boxes of chocolate ahead of Feb 14, it is hard to imagine the world could ever run out. Cocoa thrives in warmer weather but requires rainfall and shade to grow, and producers say deforestation and a changing climate are threatening world supplies. Mondelez International, the US confectionary company behind the Milka and Cadbury brands, has warned that cocoa-producing regions could become unsuitable for the crop in the next 30 years if urgent steps are not taken. That includes Ivory Coast and Ghana, which currently produce 60 percent of world cocoa output.

4. Venice

The floating Italian city famed for its romantic gondola rides and historic St Mark's Square is at risk from floods and storms exacerbated by climate change, say experts. Italy is building flood barriers to protect the fragile city, one of several UNESCO World Heritage sites in the Mediterranean region that are threatened by coastal erosion and flooding as oceans creep higher. The UN panel of climate scientists has projected that human emissions of greenhouse gases could cause sea levels to rise globally by as much as 59 cm (2 feet) by 2100. — Reuters



Post-box love for lonely Britons on Valentine's Day

Big-hearted Britons have penned thousands of uplifting messages to be delivered to single seniors on Valentine's Day in a project aimed at alleviating loneliness. The letters and cards were written in recent weeks and left in ten models of old-fashioned red post-boxes set up in locations across London and several other cities. Red Letter Days, a gift experience company which came up with the idea, will dispatch the messages to needy elderly recipients in selected care

homes during Thursday. "I said: 'You are loved, you are appreciated, you are cherished,'" Shivane Pattni, a 26-year-old marketing manager, told AFP after scribbling a note at a box in her central London workplace on Tuesday. "I think it's great," she added. "It's nice that someone's thinking of them."

The scheme is being run with the help of shared-office provider WeWork, which is hosting seven of the boxes in the lobbies of some of its locations. The company, which has more than 40,000 members in Britain, has been advertising the opportunity to workspace users through its app and in-house mailing list. Ross Grieve, WeWork's community director in Britain, said the response from members had been "incredible" since the boxes first went up two weeks ago, with several left overflowing by the volume of responses.

The project also has the support of the Campaign to End Loneliness, which estimates there are nine million lonely people in Britain—four million of them older people. "We really wanted to support this because it gets people thinking about the lonely and isolated people that might be in their life," said Daniel Pattison from the campaign. At the bustling WeWork hub near Holborn in central London, a steady trickle of wellwishers continued to stop by the red post-box this week to deposit messages. "It's a very great initiative," said Jamal Khan, 41, a tax consultant. "People need to know that they're loved... to appreciate that they're not alone." — AFP

Sick of Valentine's? Museum adds woes of war to litany of lost love

Fed up of red roses, choking on chocolates? Then ditch the Valentine's Day delirium for a dose of reality at Zagreb's Museum of Broken Relationships - expanded this year with bonds severed by war and all set to tour in Brexit-riven Britain. The Museum of Broken Relationships in the old town of the Croatian capital has exerted a strange pull since 2006 on tourists looking for a more offbeat experience. Its exhibits are donated by ordinary people who want to share what went wrong in their love stories, or those of relatives or friends. This year, it features the divorce of a Danish woman and her husband, a soldier who could not re-adapt to ordinary life after a tour of duty in Afghanistan - part of a whole new typology of trauma.

"We have eight thematic rooms related in some way to relationships falling apart, like family, sports, love stories in the busi-

ness environment," said Drazen Grubisic, one of the museum's founders. "A completely new topic is love relationships affected by war." Particularly poignant is a vinyl record made by a young German in 1942 who dreamt of becoming a singer. "It was a present for his girlfriend before he was sent to the war - where he was wounded in the throat and could not sing anymore," Grubisic said. They never married, but she kept the record until she died. Although mostly devoted to lamenting lost love, the museum also makes space for the disappointment of feeling abandoned or betrayed by one's homeland.

"We have the graduation diploma of a Croat who decided to leave it behind before moving to Ireland in search of a better life," Grubisic said. "He said it symbolized his break-up with a country that had failed to give him an opportunity to work." The theme of lost love is so universal that the museum's overflow ex-

hibits are often sent abroad, so far notching up 50 cities around the world. While in Turkey, the collection received the wedding gown of a woman whose fiancé had been killed in a militant attack in Istanbul.

This March, prompted by Brexit, "another form of broken relationship" that has split Britain down the middle as it seeks to quit the European Union, it is coming to York, in northern England.

Locals have been invited to contribute items in which "the divisions caused by war, religion and politics, will be told through individual stories that say something much more personal about how we all cope with falling out of love". — Reuters

Happy Valentine's Day



Photos shows a shop selling a heart shaped teddy bears for Valentine's day in Kuwait. — Photos By Yasser Al-Zayyat

Rocker Ryan Adams accused of abuse, sex misconduct

Alternative singer-songwriter Ryan Adams has been accused by several women of emotional abuse and exploiting his position as a career mentor as a means to obtain sex. An expose in The New York Times details a pattern of manipulative behavior from the 44-year-old Grammy-nominated artist, including testimony from performer Mandy Moore, his ex-wife. In one instance the paper—which interviewed more than half a dozen women and reviewed a trove of the US rocker's digital communications—describes Adams as sending graphic texts to a 14-year-old aspiring bass player and exposing himself on Skype. The paper said he continued the sexually provocative correspondence for months despite appearing to doubt that she was of age.

The country-influenced rocker—known for his strong personality—also allegedly presented women with opportunities to build their profiles while pursuing sex with them, turning angry and sometimes verbally abusive when rejected. Adams, who found fame as a solo artist in the 2000s thanks to his debut album “Heartbreaker,” apologized but denied the accusations

shortly after the story's publication, saying “to anyone I have ever hurt, however unintentionally, I apologize deeply and unreservedly.”

“But the picture that this article paints is upsettingly inaccurate,” he tweeted. “Some of its details are misrepresented; some are exaggerated; some are outright false. I would never have inappropriate interactions with someone I thought was underage. Period.” Adams' ex-wife Moore—who rose to celebrity as a pop star and now acts in the series “This Is Us”—said Adams belittled her career while engaging in a “destructive, manic sort of back and forth behavior.” “Music was a point of control for him,” she said. The music industry has been less impacted by the #MeToo movement and crusades against workplace harassment than industries including Hollywood and media. The allegations against Adams come amid renewed scrutiny of R&B superstar R Kelly, 52, whose career has flourished for decades despite accusations of child pornography, sex with minors, operating a sex cult and sexual battery. —AFP



In this file photo singer-songwriter Ryan Adams performs during SXSW in Austin, Texas. —AFP

‘Gagging’ law protecting Cuban culture draws artists’ ire

A law obliging Cuban artists to register with the ministry of culture has created controversy on the Caribbean island known for its spontaneous musical tradition. In the historic old town of Havana, tourists amble through the colorful cobbled streets serenaded by rumba and the sounds of “soperos”—amateur singers and musicians who can be found on almost every corner. These are the main targets of Decree 349 which bans artists from performing without official authorization, while also providing sanctions for sexist and vulgar language. The ruling socialist regime says this is to “protect culture.”

The decree was signed by President Miguel Diaz-Canel on April 20, one day after he replaced Raul Castro as the country's leader, but faced with the uproar it has caused he's since admitted the subject “should have been discussed more and better explained.” Yet that didn't stop it being signed into law in early December. Ten days away from a referendum on the new constitution, which includes a clause recognizing that artistic creation should be “free,” some artists have hit out at this “gagging decree,” while many more have criticized its lack of clarity. “It's not right to have a decree with gaps, that leaves room for doubt and lacks clarity or creates uncertainty,” popular singer Tony Avila told AFP. The 47-year-old's recent song “Mi casa.cu” created



A musician carries a double bass on his shoulder along a street of Havana. — AFP photos

waves in Cuba. It's about refurbishments needed in his house but many Cubans interpreted it as an ode to fixing what's wrong in the socialist country, which finds itself at a crossroads as it prepares to recognize the role of private enterprise.

‘Back to civility’

“We're going to apply it steadily until we reach a consensus,” said Culture Minister Alpidio Alonso on December 6, a day before the decree was signed into law. While the decree has an impact on all artists, it is widely expected to most affect musicians and music video producers. It will punish

those who exceed “sound and noise” limits, use national symbols in a disrespectful manner or “violate current norms and regulations in matters of cultural policy.” The question of cultural policy is an ominous one. Socialist revolutionary and late leader Fidel Castro defined it as such: “With the revolution, everything. Against the revolution, nothing.”

Like much of Latin America, in particular with the wave of reggaeton sweeping the region, Cuban music videos can contain offensive lyrics and multitudes of scantily clad women. “I think it's a good idea to try to go back to civility,” said Avila, although he said the decree was “a little incomplete.”

‘Pretentious’

Surrounded by 40-odd Lucas trophies—Cuba's highest honor for music videos—producer Joseph Ros is another skeptic. “When you talk about such subjective issues, it's very difficult and I think it's pretentious translating them into law,” said the 29-year-old. “It's a decree that claims something that is very difficult to control and depends a lot on human resources, on the person who at the end implements these measures.” The decree states that the diffusion and commercialization of artistic works must be approved and controlled “by the corresponding cultural institution.” —AFP



Cuban filmmaker and producer Joseph Ros, works at his studio in Havana.

US police under scrutiny after rapper shot dead in car

Police in northern California are conducting a probe following outrage over the fatal shooting of 21-year-old rapper Willie McCoy, who was found sleeping in his car outside a Taco Bell. According to the Vallejo Police Department, the February 6 shooting took place after employees at the fast-food outlet late that evening called to report a Mercedes parked in the drive-thru line with a man slumped over in the driver's seat. In a statement, police said officers responded to the call and as they approached the locked vehicle, they noticed that the driver was unresponsive and had a gun on his lap. They added that the car's transmission was in drive.

As police assessed the situation and tried to prevent the vehicle from moving forward, the statement said, things turned deadly. “The driver... suddenly began to move,” the police report said. “The officers told the driver to keep his hands visible, however the driver quickly reached for the handgun on his lap. “In fear for their own safety, the officers discharged their weapons at the driver.” It was unclear how many bullets were fired. McCoy was pronounced dead at the scene. His family has challenged the police version of events, describing the shooting as an “execution” and a clear case of racial profiling.

“There was no attempt to try to work out a peaceful solution,” Marc McCoy, Willie's older brother, told the Guardian. “The police's job is to arrest people who are breaking the law—not take the law into your own hands. You're not judge, jury and executioner ... We're never going to get over this.” McCoy's shooting follows a string of similar incidents of alleged police brutality in the US in recent years. And this is not the first time the Vallejo Police Department has come under scrutiny following complaints of excessive force. — AFP



Rapper Willie McCoy



Schoolchildren from Avrankou-Houeze school pose for a photo in front of the BloLab container at Avrankou city hall, in Avrankou, south of Benin. — AFP photos

Travelling classroom bridges digital divide in Benin republic

School was out, but on an afternoon in rural Benin, 11-year-old Ambroise rushed to a tree-shaded parking lot, his day's learning not yet done. Parked beneath the cola trees was a lorry trailer loaded with computers - the kind of technology that few students in the West African country had ever seen, much less touched.

Designed by BloLab, a non-profit group based in Benin's largest city Cotonou, the 13-metre (43-foot) trailer is powered by 12 solar panels and equipped with enough laptops to give rural students a chance to familiarize themselves with computers, which most families cannot afford. "When the teacher told us that we'd start having computer class again, I quickly finished my work because I was so happy," said Ambroise, from eastern Benin's Avrankou district. In his class of 48, only four pupils had even touched a computer before. Ambroise had used one at a photocopy shop, while the other three had a sibling who owned one.

A drop in the ocean

In Benin, the digital divide is not just a concept but a reality, said BloLab founder Medard Agbayazon. "In the towns, many people have technology, there are cybercafes. But in villages it is rare to find a computer or a smartphone," he said. Benin's internet penetration rate is just 42.2 percent, the Regulatory Authority for Electronic and Postal Communication said in a report last year. Among these, almost everyone (96 percent) used a mobile phone for accessing the web. These are the conditions which spawned the idea for a mo-

bile classroom furnished with desks as well as fans to ward off the tropical heat.

BloLab pays to rent a cab to tow the trailer, which was donated by Swiss-based charity African Puzzle. The classroom, which has visited two communities since last August, stays in one place for a month at a time, providing five two-hour computer skills classes per week, free of charge. It is a drop in the ocean for Avrankou, which has a population of 128,000 scattered around 59 villages served by 88 primary schools. "The idea isn't to make computer scientists, but just to make children want to use digital technology. It's a tool that can solve real problems in everyday life," Agbayazon said.

Repurposed jerrycans

As one group of pupils practices using a word processor on the trailer's laptops, another works in a corner of the town hall, learning to build computers in jerrycans with recycled components from obsolete machines or donated by businesses and charities in Cotonou. The students are already familiar with terms like "motherboard", "hard drive", and "power supply" from a previous lesson.

One of two trainers, Raoul Letchede, shows the kids the components they will use to assemble a makeshift computer in a 25-litre (6.6-gallon) yellow plastic container. These home-fashioned machines must be hooked up to a computer screen to work. "This lesson familiarizes them with the inside of a computer, demystifies how it works, and shows them that they can make their own even without much money,"



Schoolchildren from Avrankou-Houeze school attend a training in the BloLab container at Avrankou city hall.

Letchede said. One rule of the mobile classroom is that all the software used must be free to the public. "We have to promote this practice because we don't have the money here to buy the licences," said Agbayazon. "We don't want to encourage children to hack."

Learning continues

The approach impressed local official Apollinaire Oussou Lio on a recent visit to the class. "This is an opportunity to no longer be a slave to software from the big multinationals," Lio said, adding he would himself like to be more computer savvy. "I'd also like to be trained," he said,

citing a wish to learn to use geo-location to better preserve the surrounding forests.

Teacher Guillaume Gnonlonfoun is happy for his students. The school where he works has no computer, and he himself first used one at university. Many of Gnonlonfoun's colleagues have never used a PC, and the BloLab class is open to them as well. "These days, nothing can be done without digital technology," he said. "So that we don't end up being the illiterates of this millennium, it is essential that we have equipment." But until real computers arrive in the community, pupils and teachers will have no option but to build their own. —AFP



Schoolchildren from Avrankou-Houeze school attend a BloLab training at Avrankou city hall, in Avrankou, south of Benin.



Schoolchildren from Avrankou-Houeze school observe Raoul Letchede, a trainer for BloLab non-profit group, at Avrankou city hall.



Schoolchildren from Avrankou-Houeze school attend a training in the BloLab container.



Respawn's **'Apex Legends'** polishes the Battle Royale genre to a whole new shine

By Aakash Bakaya

So Respawn Entertainment has done something I thought would never happen - they got me interested in a Battle Royale. It wasn't easy I admit, pushing through the first couple hours of 'Apex Legends' is nothing but a slog. The guns look strange and it's unclear what they're actually good at while the character abilities all seem to be useless as apart as only one of them are actually explained to the player. On top of that, a balanced matchmaker is non-existent with it putting you in comps that range from hardened BR experts to absolute beginners.

But after pushing through these clumsy opening matches, I started to take in the UI and figure out the different weapons and items. Slowly everything started clicking into place. I forced-willed my squads to follow orders and did the same myself while understanding why most of my idiotic deaths were my entirely fault. Matches gradually got longer until finally, I actually won my first round in a Battle Royale ever. I say I but actually in 'Apex' it's the entire team that wins, even if they aren't alive to see the last body fall.

I can honestly say I never got Battle Royales. I've had fun with the few games of 'PUBG' I played when it initially came out on PC and I've played 'Fortnite' for a couple of weeks with friends but quickly got bored and dropped them. I liked the CS:GO version 'Blacksite' but it was more of a glorified mod filled with half-

baked ideas. I also tried the MOBA inspired take on BR in 'Battlerite' but even then I was done after a few games. They were simply too random, too erratic and I simply never found them fun on my own. The concept of a huge team deathmatch isn't strikingly new (Unreal 2004's Onslaught mode was glorious back in the day) but its explosive popularity isn't too hard to figure out.

Creative communications

The emphasis on team-play mixed with a reliance on individual skill is socially cathartic and it has hooked an audience of millions who have never played a proper multi-player game before. Also let's get something obvious out of the way - they are extremely easy to pick up. Of course skill-ceilings are generally high in a way every twitch-based shooter is but the concept of



Lifestyle | MixTape

shooting people in massively wide open maps is simple to grasp. 'Apex Legends' doesn't shy away from these concepts but instead refines them to a quality of polish both fans and non-fans of the genre have been asking for.

It is hard not to see how influential 'Overwatch' has been on 'Apex'. Everything from the characters to the art-style to the mechanics seems like something Blizzard would come up with when they were in their prime. The characters are most-definitely the stars of the game and they're quite a talkative bunch as well. I found their personalities in the menu screen and their general un-lockable voice lines extremely corny but in game they sound more distinctive and I love that they speak each individual call-out in their own unique manner. It's a great touch.

Each of the initial 8 characters comes with a mix of passive, active and ultimate ability that are not only really balanced but play really well-off each other in a number of unique ways. Bloodhound can track enemies trapped in a friendly smoke grenade from Bangalore while Gibraltar and Lifeline have flexible support abilities that complement each other without ever feeling like they are over-lapping too much. Being forced to play each game with two other people always might be a nightmare in most games but the integral character abilities and the fantastic ping system makes playing even with a group of strangers a fun and challenging experience.



member designated as the jumpmaster who controls where the team will land (you still have an option to detach from the group and land separately if you want). But the most important reason to stick with your squad is the ability to resurrect a fallen team member.

When you are killed, you drop a beacon (a Dog tag of sorts) that can be picked up by someone in your team. They only have a 90 second window to do so but once that's done a new cat-and-mouse mini-game will begin where they have to reach a respawn terminal which will return the dead member back into the fight. They won't have any equipment with they get back so it's balanced in that sense. The terminals themselves are smartly placed around the map as they are usually found in a wide open area, increasing the overall risk involved. The few times I managed to fight my way to a respawn terminal and get back a squad mate was some of the most exhilarating moments I've ever had in a Battle Royale.

Unfortunately any real innovations on the BR front here. Before I get to the negatives I want to briefly mention touch on the map. The backbone of any good Battle Royale, I can't quite say what makes an ideal BR map but variance and fun traversal are key. 'Kings Canyon' the first and only map at launch (Respawn have said there are more on the way) plays to the games strengths. You can zip line through wires, propel yourself even further with balloons and slide down hills almost indefinitely. There aren't that many locations but each one is nicely enclosed with obvious entrances but hard to reach exits. My gripe with it mainly lies in its lack of variety, both visually and in ways it forces gun fights. The visuals are bland and repetitive with only few standout areas like the marketplace or the bunker.

Shoot me again I ain't dead yet

Understanding the stale array guns is the first real obstacle to get over in 'Apex'. The majority are plain useless. Seriously if you see a 'Mozambique' on the floor just ignore it; your melee attacks are better. The same can be said for most of the 'light machineguns'.



All the weapons do feel great to shoot and if you're familiar with the gun play from Titanfall or Call of Duty then you'll be right at home here. But for as great as the shooting is, it still doesn't change the fact that hit registration is often obtuse and unpredictable. This affect is amplified when combined with the game's armor system.

Armor is divided into simple level 1-3 upgrade tiers but I'm not alone in believing that it needs slight adjustments at the moment. Level 1 armor barely stops anything while a player with level 3 armor is more tank than human. Time to kill (TTK) is always a tricky aspect to balance in shooters but it certainly feels a bit too long here. When you end up doing more than 500 plus damage in a gun fight without scoring a single kill you know something is slightly off.

Finally let me address the elephant in the room IE the fact that 'Apex Legends' is a free-to-play game published by EA, a company notorious for its shameless DLC and "macro-transaction" practices. No one is more surprised than me to report that both the content provided and the in-game currency model are both fine. Fine is as far I am willing to go in praise of it. Out of the 8 character line-up 2 are locked behind a pay-wall, unlocking one of them for free will take around 15-20 hours of game time if you're lucky. Respawn have already released a schedule for future content which includes characters, maps and other goodies but the price tag on the proposed 'season passes' are yet to be unveiled. Technically the game runs well on mid-tier PCs and I've only faced minor connection issues. I also hope to see more robust social features added as you can't even add players you've recently partied up with as friends.

'Apex Legends' fulfills its promise of providing a hungry player base a deep, polished and quite possibly the most entertaining Battle Royale available to date. For that Respawn Entertainment is to be applauded. They've propelled themselves to the forefront of an increasingly crowded genre and with such a great start - the ball is 100 percent in their court. I'm sure the ginks will be ironed out and the bare bone content at launch will be greatly expanded on but whether or not they retain the player base to see those changes through will be interesting to watch for. I'm still having a blast and with more friends hopping on, I can see the fun continuing for a good while longer.

The ping of champions

I've always found the middle-mouse button quite underrated. I usually end up key-binding important buttons to the mouse wheel simply because I find it so satisfying to click and maneuver with. I didn't need to do that here because Respawn has come up with a communication system that is so genius I am sure it will be copied to other shooters for many years to come.

The middle mouse button is your ping and you can ping to highlight pretty much about anything in the game. Want to tell a teammate about an armor pack you found? Just look at it, ping it and your character will inform your team. Spotted an open door or item box in the distant? Just ping it. This is just the surface of the system. Holding down the button opens a communication wheel with a good amount of other options to convey information to your team in a number of ways. It's simple, effective and a god-send for those uncomfortable with using in-game mics or those with language barriers.

Apart from the characters and the ping system, the last great addition Respawn brings to the Battle Royale table is ironically the new respawn system. The game pushes you to stay as a squad of three from the drop. You land together has three with one





For more streamlined chicken enchiladas, use a slow cooker

Chicken enchiladas offer a rich and complex combination of flavors and textures, but traditional cooking methods can be tedious. We wanted a more streamlined recipe for chicken enchiladas one that utilized our slow cooker to make the filling and that enabled the enchiladas to be quickly assembled and finished in the oven. First we created a simple but flavorful red chile sauce with onion, garlic, spices, and tomato sauce, then braised chicken thighs directly in the sauce, which both enhanced the flavor of the sauce and ensured moist, flavorful meat for our enchilada filling.

Monterey Jack cheese complemented the rich filling nicely, while canned jalapenos and fresh cilantro rounded out the flavors and provided tang and brightness. When it came time for assembly, we brushed the tortillas with oil and microwaved them to make them pliable. After experimenting with oven temperatures and times, we found that baking the assembled enchiladas covered for 15 minutes in a 450 F oven resulted in perfectly melted cheese, and the edges of the tortillas did not dry out in the process. Serve with sour cream, diced avocado, sliced radishes, shredded romaine lettuce, and lime wedges.

CHICKEN ENCHILADAS

Ingredients
Servings: 4-6

Cooking time: 4 to 5 hours on low
Slow cooker size: 4 to 7 quarts
1 onion, chopped fine
1/4 cup vegetable oil
3 tablespoons chili powder
3 garlic cloves, minced
2 teaspoons ground coriander
2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 (15-ounce) can tomato sauce
2 teaspoons sugar
1 pound boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed
Salt and pepper
8 ounces Monterey Jack cheese, shredded (2 cups)
1/2 cup minced fresh cilantro
1/4 cup jarred jalapenos, chopped
1 tablespoon lime juice
12 (6-inch) corn tortillas

Preparation

Microwave onion, 2 tablespoons oil, chili powder, garlic, coriander, and cumin in bowl, stirring occasionally, until onions are softened, about 5 minutes; transfer to slow cooker. Stir in tomato sauce and sugar. Season chicken with pepper and nestle into slow cooker. Cover and cook until chicken is tender, 4 to 5 hours on low.

Transfer chicken to cutting board, let cool slightly, then shred into bite-size pieces using 2 forks. Combine chicken, 3/4 cup sauce, 1 1/2 cups Monterey Jack, cilantro, jalapenos, and lime juice in bowl. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 F. Spread 3/4 cup sauce over bottom of 13-by-9-inch baking dish. Brush both sides of tortillas with remaining 2 tablespoons oil. Stack tortillas, wrap in damp dish towel, and place on plate; microwave until warm and pliable, about 1 minute.

Working with 1 warm tortilla at a time, spread 1/3 cup chicken filling across center of tortilla. Roll tortilla tightly around filling and place seam side down in baking dish; arrange enchiladas in 2 columns across width of dish. Pour remaining sauce over enchiladas to cover completely and sprinkle with remaining 1/2 cup Monterey Jack. Cover dish tightly with greased aluminum foil. Bake until enchiladas are heated through and cheese is melted, 15 to 20 minutes. Let cool for 5 minutes before serving.

Nutrition information per serving

460 calories; 227 calories from fat; 25 g fat (9 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 105 mg cholesterol; 1014 mg sodium; 30 g carbohydrate; 5 g fiber; 5 g sugar; 28 g protein.

Try this dimpled, chewy, herb-topped deep-dish focaccia

Centuries ago, focaccia began as a by-product: When bakers needed to gauge the heat of the wood-fired oven focaccia stems from focolare and means “fire-place” they would tear off a swatch of dough, flatten it, drizzle it with olive oil, and pop it into the hearth to bake as an edible oven thermometer.

As is traditional, our recipe starts with a sponge a mixture of flour, yeast, and water that ferments for at least 6 hours before it's added to the bulk dough. The sponge helped develop gluten (which gives breads structure and chew), depth of flavor, and a hint of tang.

Rather than knead the dough, we simply used a series of gentle folds, which developed the gluten structure further while also incorporating air for a tender interior crumb. (This method was also helpful because our dough was quite wet and therefore difficult to knead; the more hydrated a bread dough, the more open and bubbly its crumb a characteristic we were looking for in focaccia because steam bubbles form and expand more readily.)

Fruity olive oil is a requisite ingredient, but when we added it straight to the dough, it turned the bread dense and cakelike. Instead, we baked the bread in cake pans coated with a couple tablespoons of oil. Be sure to reduce the temperature immediately after putting the loaves in the oven.

ROSEMARY FOCACCIA

Ingredients

Servings: 12-16 (Makes two 9-inch round loaves)

Start to finish: 4 1/2 hours plus 6 hours fermenting time

Sponge:

1/2 cup (2 1/2 ounces) all-purpose flour
1/3 cup water, room temperature
1/4 teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast

Dough:

2 1/2 cups (12 1/2 ounces) all-purpose flour
1 1/4 cups water, room temperature
1 teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary

Preparation

For the sponge: Stir all ingredients in large bowl with wooden spoon until well combined. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature until sponge has risen and begins to collapse, about 6 hours (sponge can sit at room temperature for up to 24 hours).

For the dough: Stir flour, water, and yeast into sponge with wooden spoon until well combined. Cover bowl tightly with plastic and let dough rest for 15 minutes.

Stir 2 teaspoons salt into dough with wooden spoon until thoroughly incorporated, about 1 minute. Cover bowl tightly with plastic and let dough rest for 30 minutes. Using greased bowl scraper (or rubber spatula), fold dough over itself by gently lifting and folding edge of dough toward middle. Turn bowl 45 degrees and fold dough again; repeat turning bowl and folding dough 6 more times (total of 8 folds). Cover tightly with plastic and let rise for 30 minutes. Repeat folding and rising. Fold dough again, then cover bowl tightly with plastic and let dough rise until nearly doubled in size, 30 minutes to 1 hour.

One hour before baking, adjust oven rack to upper-middle position, place baking stone on rack, and heat oven to 500 F. Coat two 9-inch round cake pans with 2 tablespoons oil each. Sprinkle each pan with 1/2 teaspoon salt. Transfer dough to

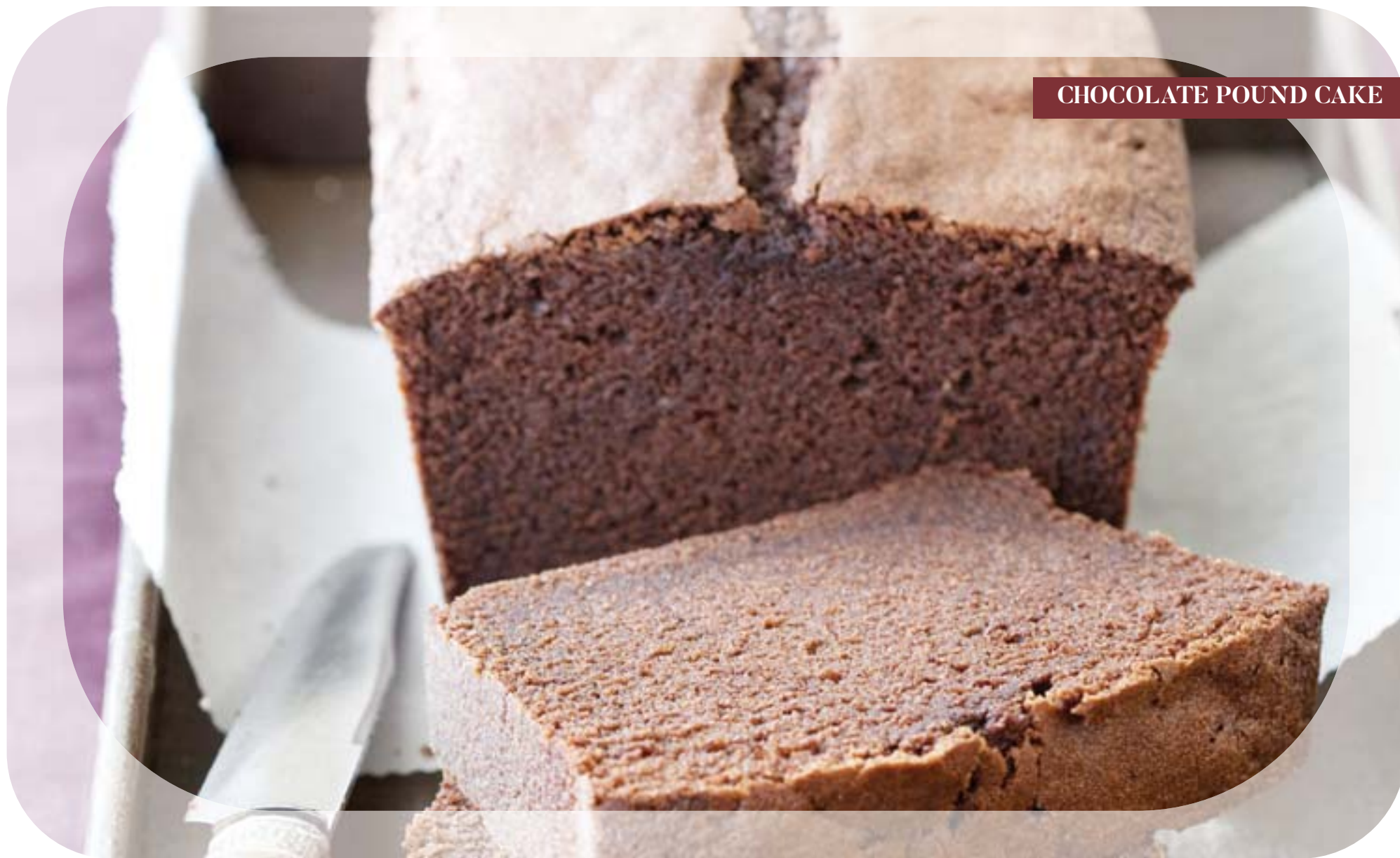


lightly floured counter and dust top with flour. Divide dough in half and cover loosely with greased plastic. Working with 1 piece of dough at a time (keep remaining piece covered), shape into 5-inch round by gently tucking under edges. Place dough rounds seam side up in prepared pans, coat bottoms and sides with oil, then flip rounds over. Cover loosely with greased plastic and let dough rest for 5 minutes.

Using your fingertips, gently press each dough round into corners of pan, taking care not to tear dough. (If dough resists stretching, let it relax for 5 to 10 minutes before trying to stretch it again.) Using fork, poke surface of dough 25 to

30 times, popping any large bubbles. Sprinkle 1 tablespoon rosemary evenly over top of each loaf, cover loosely with greased plastic, and let dough rest until slightly bubbly, about 10 minutes.

Place pans on baking stone and reduce oven temperature to 450 F. Bake until tops are golden brown, 25 to 30 minutes, rotating pans halfway through baking. Let loaves cool in pans for 5 minutes. Remove loaves from pans and transfer to wire rack. Brush tops with any oil remaining in pans and let cool for 30 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature.



Retrofit the classic pound cake to make it ultra-chocolatey

We love pound cake and we love chocolate, but the combination is often a disappointment. That's because most recipes simply add chocolate to a standard pound cake recipe, which mars its finely tuned texture and usually produces lackluster chocolate flavor.

We wanted to retrofit classic pound cake to make it ultra-chocolatey without compromising its hallmark velvety-soft crumb. For deep chocolate flavor we used mostly Dutch-processed cocoa powder, which incorporated seamlessly into the batter; a couple ounces of milk chocolate added richness without interfering with the cake's texture.

We bloomed both the cocoa and the bar chocolate in hot water to maximize their impact. For an accurate measurement of boiling water, bring a full kettle of water to a boil and then measure out the desired amount. The test kitchen's preferred loaf pan measures 8 1/2-by-4 1/2 inches; if you use a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan, start checking for doneness 5 minutes early.

CHOCOLATE POUND CAKE

Servings: 8

Start to finish: 1 hour, 45 minutes

1 cup (5 ounces) all-purpose flour
 1 teaspoon salt
 3/4 cup (2 1/4 ounces) Dutch-processed cocoa powder
 2 ounces milk chocolate, chopped fine
 1/3 cup boiling water
 16 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 16 pieces and softened
 1 cup (7 ounces) granulated sugar
 1/4 cup packed (1 3/4 ounces) light brown sugar
 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
 5 large eggs, room temperature

Preparation

Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 325 F. Grease and flour 8 1/2-by-4 1/2-inch loaf pan. Whisk flour and salt together in bowl. Place cocoa and chocolate in bowl. Pour boiling water over cocoa mixture and stir until chocolate is melted and no dry streaks of cocoa remain. Let mixture cool for 5 minutes.

Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat butter, granulated sugar, brown sugar, vanilla, and cocoa mixture on

medium-high speed until fluffy, 2 to 3 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, and beat until combined. Reduce speed to low and add flour mixture in 3 additions, scraping down bowl as needed, until just combined (batter may look slightly curdled). Give batter final stir by hand.

Transfer batter to prepared pan and gently tap pan on counter to release air bubbles. Bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 1 hour to 1 hour 10 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking. Let cake cool in pan on wire rack for 10 minutes. Remove cake from pan and let cool completely on rack, about 2 hours. Serve. (Cake can be stored at room temperature for up to 3 days or frozen for up to 1 month; defrost cake at room temperature.)

Nutrition information per serving

499 calories; 256 calories from fat; 29 g fat (17 g saturated; 1 g trans fats); 197 mg cholesterol; 343 mg sodium; 53 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 36 g sugar; 8 g protein.

Comic

Word Search

Types of Music 1

Find and circle all of the different types of music that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 14 letters spell an additional type of music.

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

- | | | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| ACAPPELLA | CHRISTMAS | HIP HOP | PSYCHEDELIC |
| ACID ROCK | CLASSIC ROCK | INDIAN | PUNK |
| ACOUSTIC | DANCE | INDIE | ROCKABILLY |
| AMBIENT | DISCO | JAZZ | SAMBA |
| AVANT-GARDE | ELECTRONICA | LATIN MUSIC | SOUL |
| BIG BAND | FLAMENCO | LOUNGE | TANGO |
| BLUEGRASS | FOLK | MERENGUE | WALTZ |
| BROADWAY | GANGSTA RAP | MEXICAN | WORLD |
| CABARET | GOTHIC | NEW WAVE | |
| CHORAL | HEAVY METAL | POLKA | |

Yesterday's Solution

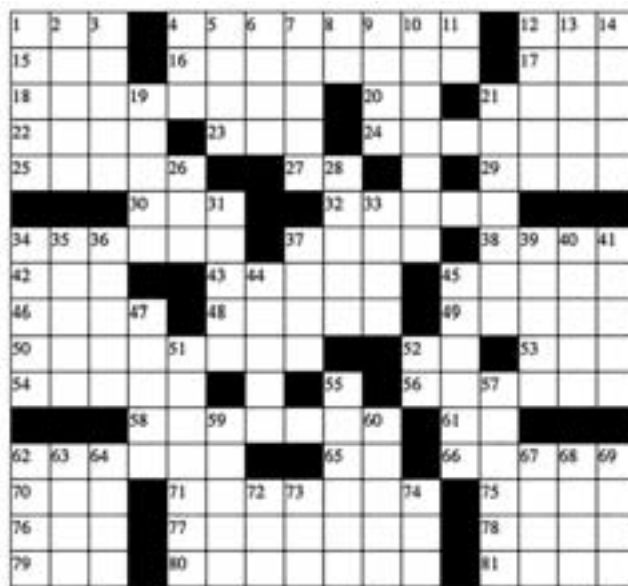
Trees

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

- | | | | |
|--------------|------------|--------------|-------------|
| APPLE | CEDAR | LINDEN | POPULAR |
| APRICOT | CHERRY | LONDON PLANE | REDWOOD |
| ASH | CHESTNUT | MAPLE | RUBBER TREE |
| ASPEN | COTTONWOOD | NECTARINE | SEQUOIA |
| ARBORVITAE | ELM | OAK | SPRUCE |
| BALD CYPRESS | FIR | PALM | SYCAMORE |
| BEECH | GINKGO | PEACH | TULIPTREE |
| BIRCH | GOLDENRAIN | PEAR | WALNUT |
| BOXWOOD | HAZELNUT | PECAN | WITCHHAZEL |
| BUCKEYE | HEMLOCK | PLUM | WILLOW |
| BUTTERNUT | HONEYLOC | PINE | YELLOWWOOD |
| CATALPA | LARCH | | |

The hidden sentence is: A SOCIETY GROWS GREAT WHEN OLD MEN PLANT TREES WHOSE SHADE THEY KNOW THEY SHALL NEVER SIT IN

Crossword 2137



ACROSS

- Nut of any of several trees of the genus *Corylus*.
- Italian anatomist who was the first to use a microscope to study anatomy and was among the first to recognize cells in animals (1628-1694).
- A solution containing a phosphate buffer.
- The rate at which red blood cells settle out in a tube of blood under standardized conditions.
- Trees and shrubs having berries or drupes or capsules as fruits.
- A broad flat muscle on either side of the back.
- Locked in by ice.
- A state in east central United States.
- Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
- (informal) Roused to anger.
- Being ahead of time or need.
- A unit of dry measure used in Egypt.
- A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
- (archaic or Scottish) Faithful and true.
- A former agency (from 1946 to 1974) that was responsible for research into atomic energy and its peacetime uses in the United States.
- Virus parasitic in bacteria.
- An ancient Greek city famous for military prowess.
- A tool for tamping (e.g., for tamping tobacco into a pipe bowl or a charge into a drill hole etc.).
- A large cask especially one holding a volume equivalent to 2 butts or 252 gals.
- A territory in southwestern Germany formerly ruled by the counts palatine.
- The biblical name for ancient Syria.
- Any of various large keen-sighted diurnal birds of prey noted for their broad wings and strong soaring flight.
- A tie in tennis or table tennis that requires winning two successive points to win the game.
- Systematic investigation to establish facts.
- The network in the reticular formation that serves an alerting or arousal function.
- Show a response or a reaction to something.
- Type genus of the Danaidae.
- Of or relating to the heart.
- A hard gray lustrous metallic element that is highly corrosion-resistant.
- A Greek island west of Greece.
- An intensely radioactive metallic element that occurs in minute amounts in uranium ores.
- The principal evil jinni in Islamic mythology.
- The cry made by sheep.
- The great hall in ancient Persian palaces.
- Remove from office.
- The most common computer memory which can be used by programs to perform necessary tasks while the computer is on.
- A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
- Look at with amorous intentions.
- A chronic skin disease occurring primarily in women between the ages of 20 and 40.
- Genus of beetles whose grubs feed mainly on roots of plants.
- Being precisely fitting and right.

DOWN

- Tropical American trees with palmately compound leaves and showy bell-shaped flowers.
- An annual award by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for achievements in motion picture production and performance.
- Food made from dough of flour or meal and usually raised with yeast or baking powder and then baked.
- The sound made by a cow or bull.
- A white crystalline double sulfate of aluminum.
- A Russian river.
- A genus of Ploceidae.
- Being nine more than ninety.
- Footwear usually with wooden soles.
- A small railroad car propelled by hand or by a small motor.
- That is to say.
- Having a horizontal surface in which no part is higher or lower than another.
- An indehiscent fruit derived from a single ovary having one or many seeds within a fleshy wall or pericarp.
- French romantic writer (1766-1817).
- Tired to the point of exhaustion.
- The range of colour characteristic of a particular artist or painting or school of art".
- The money risked on a gamble.
- A fragment broken off from the edge or face of stone or ore and having at least one thin edge.
- Any of numerous plants of the genus *Capparis*.
- Atmospheric moisture or dust or smoke that causes reduced visibility.
- Food prepared by cooking and straining or processed in a blender.
- Squash bugs.
- The eleventh month of the Hindu calendar.
- (Zoroastrianism) Title for benevolent deities.
- A Portuguese province on the south coast of China and two islands in the South China Sea.
- Newspaper writers and photographers.
- Having a face or facing especially of a specified kind or number.
- (biology) Of unlike parts or organs.
- Joint capital (with Riyadh) of Saudi Arabia.
- A member of an Indian people formerly living along the Gulf coast of Louisiana and Texas.
- A public promotion of some product or service.
- A percussion instrument consisting of a pair of hollow pieces of wood or bone (usually held between the thumb and fingers) that are made to click together (as by Spanish dancers) in rhythm with the dance.
- Small tree of dry open parts of southern Africa having erect angled branches suggesting candelabra.
- Cause to ripen.
- (astronomy) An indistinct surface feature of Mars once thought to be a system of channels.
- An official language of the Republic of South Africa.
- Stable gear consisting of either of two curved supports that are attached to the collar of a draft horse and that hold the traces.
- A racing sled for one or two people.
- A small island.
- A rapid bustling commotion.
- Lacking in light.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

Yesterday's Solution

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

Daily SuDoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

TV Listings



01:40 Boone: The Bounty Hunter
 03:25 The Space Between Us
 05:40 Megan Leavey
 07:45 Boone: The Bounty Hunter
 09:25 The Quiet Hour
 11:05 The Space Between Us
 13:15 Overdrive
 14:55 Star Trek Beyond
 17:00 Transformers: The Last Knight
 19:35 Flight World War II
 21:05 Sleepless
 22:45 We Still Steal The Old Way



00:50 How Sharks Hunt
 01:45 North Woods Law
 02:40 Intruders
 03:35 How Not To Become Shark Bait
 04:25 How Sharks Hunt
 05:15 North Woods Law
 06:02 Wildest Islands
 06:49 Pit Bulls & Parolees
 07:36 Meet The Sloths
 08:00 Meet The Penguins
 08:25 Wildest Indochina
 09:15 Wildest Indochina
 12:00 Wildest Islands
 12:55 Wildest Islands
 13:50 How Not To Become Shark Bait
 14:45 Dr. Dee: Alaska Vet
 15:40 Scaled
 16:35 Intruders
 17:30 O'shea's Big Adventure
 18:25 Animal Cops Phoenix
 19:20 Shark After Dark
 20:15 The Vet Life
 21:10 Amanda To The Rescue
 22:05 Wildest Islands
 23:00 Intruders
 23:55 Pit Bulls & Parolees



00:20 Our Girl
 01:20 Holby City
 02:15 Hold The Sunset
 02:45 The Level
 03:35 Doctors
 04:05 Doctors
 04:35 Doctors
 05:05 Death In Paradise
 06:00 Doctors
 06:30 EastEnders
 07:00 I Want My Wife Back
 07:30 The Detectivists
 08:00 Doctor Who
 08:55 Death In Paradise
 09:50 Father Brown
 10:40 Hold The Sunset
 11:10 Doctors
 11:45 Doctors
 12:15 EastEnders
 12:45 Holby City
 13:45 Casualty
 14:35 Hold The Sunset
 15:10 Father Brown
 16:00 Doctors
 18:30 Agatha Raisin
 19:20 Agatha Raisin
 20:10 Our Girl
 21:05 Line Of Duty
 21:55 Press
 23:00 Father Brown
 23:45 Doctors



00:00 Homicide Hunter
 01:00 Surviving R Kelly
 02:00 Homicide: Hours To Kill
 02:55 Homicide: Hours To Kill
 03:50 Crimes That Shook Britain
 04:45 Evil Up Close
 05:30 I Killed My BFF
 06:15 Cold Case Files
 07:00 Homicide Hunter
 08:00 It Takes A Killer
 08:20 The First 48
 09:05 Robbie Coltrane's Critical

Evidence
 09:50 Homicide Hunter
 10:35 Crimes That Shook Britain
 11:30 Crimes That Shook Britain
 12:25 The First 48
 13:20 Evil Up Close
 14:15 Secrets Of The Morgue
 15:10 It Takes A Killer
 15:40 It Takes A Killer
 16:05 Homicide Hunter
 17:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
 18:00 Evil Up Close
 19:00 I Killed My BFF
 20:00 Cold Case Files
 21:00 Homicide Hunter
 22:00 Police Patrol
 22:30 Police Patrol
 23:00 Surviving R Kelly



00:05 John Oliver's New York Stand Up Show
 00:30 South Park
 00:55 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
 01:25 This Is Not Happening
 01:50 John Oliver's New York Stand Up Show
 02:12 John Oliver's New York Stand Up Show
 02:35 South Park
 03:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
 03:30 South Park
 03:55 South Park
 04:20 Bondi Ink.
 05:10 Catch A Contractor
 06:00 The Dude Perfect Show
 06:25 The Dude Perfect Show
 06:50 Punk'd (Bet)
 07:15 Punk'd (Bet)
 07:40 Intruders
 08:30 Bondi Ink.
 09:20 Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders: Making The Team
 10:10 Disaster Date
 12:15 Workaholics
 14:20 Friends
 16:48 Impractical Jokers
 18:00 Comedy Central Presents Comedy 3alwagaf
 18:29 Comedy Central Presents Comedy 3alwagaf
 18:55 Takeshis Castle Thailand
 19:20 Takeshis Castle Thailand
 19:45 Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders: Making The Team
 20:35 Barely Famous
 21:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
 21:30 Patrice O'Neal: The Elephant In The Room
 22:25 Comedy Central Stand Up Presents
 22:50 Tosh.0
 23:15 Tosh.0
 23:40 Bo Burnham: Words Words Words



00:30 Xploration Outer Space
 01:20 Pick A Puppy
 01:45 Pick A Puppy
 02:10 Dick 'n' Dom Go Wild
 03:00 Tethered
 03:50 How It's Made
 04:40 Weather Gone Viral
 05:30 Xploration Outer Space
 06:20 Kids Do The Craziest Things
 07:00 Mysteries At The Museum
 07:50 Tethered
 08:40 How It's Made
 09:30 Kids Do The Craziest Things
 10:20 Pick A Puppy
 11:10 Dick 'n' Dom Go Wild
 12:00 Mysteries At The Museum
 12:50 Weather Gone Viral
 13:40 Xploration Outer Space
 14:30 How It's Made
 15:20 Kids Do The Craziest Things
 16:10 Xtreme Waterparks
 17:00 Pick A Puppy
 17:50 Dick 'n' Dom Go Wild
 18:40 Breaking Magic
 19:30 Deception With Keith Barry
 20:20 The Carbonaro Effect
 21:10 Tethered
 22:00 How It's Made
 22:50 Xtreme Waterparks
 23:40 Deception With Keith Barry



00:50 Scene Of The Crime With Tony Harris
 01:45 Kiss Of Death
 02:40 Primal Instinct
 03:35 Bride Killa
 04:30 Reasonable Doubt
 05:25 Evil Talks: Chilling Confessions
 06:20 Murder In The Heartland
 07:10 I Almost Got Away With It
 08:00 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
 08:25 Southern Fried Homicide
 09:15 Blood Relatives
 10:10 Evil Talks: Chilling Confessions
 11:05 Betrayed
 12:00 Diabolical: Deadly Love
 12:55 Southern Fried Homicide
 13:50 I Almost Got Away With It
 14:45 Evil Talks: Chilling Confessions
 15:40 Murder In The Heartland
 16:35 Reasonable Doubt
 17:30 Southern Fried Homicide
 18:25 Blood Relatives
 19:20 I Almost Got Away With It
 20:15 Evil Talks: Chilling Confessions
 21:10 Murder In The Heartland
 22:05 Village Of The Damned
 23:00 Dead Of Winter
 23:55 Welcome To Killer Town



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

18:15 Stuck In The Middle
 18:40 Bizaardvark
 19:05 K.C. Undercover
 19:30 Bunk'd
 19:55 Descendants Wicked World
 20:00 Raven's Home
 20:25 Liv And Maddie
 20:50 K.C. Undercover
 21:15 Disney Mickey Mouse
 21:20 A.N.T. Farm
 21:45 Bizaardvark
 22:10 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
 22:35 Stuck In The Middle
 23:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
 23:25 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
 23:50 Lolirock



00:00 PJ Masks
 00:30 The Lion Guard
 01:00 Sofia The First
 01:25 Minnie's Bow-Toons
 01:30 Henry Hugglemonster
 02:00 PJ Masks
 02:50 The Hive
 03:00 Zou
 03:15 Zou
 03:30 Henry Hugglemonster
 04:20 The Hive
 04:40 Zou
 05:25 The Hive
 05:45 Henry Hugglemonster
 06:30 Minnie's Bow-Toons
 06:35 The Hive
 06:45 PJ Masks
 07:55 Minnie's Bow-Toons
 08:00 Disney Muppet Babies
 08:20 Paprika
 08:30 Paprika
 08:40 PJ Masks
 09:00 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
 09:15 Puppy Dog Pals
 09:30 Vampirina
 09:45 Fancy Nancy
 10:00 Sofia The First
 10:30 Elena Of Avalor
 11:00 Mission Force One
 11:15 Mission Force One
 11:30 PJ Masks
 12:00 Disney Muppet Babies
 12:15 Disney Muppet Babies
 12:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
 13:00 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
 13:30 PJ Masks: Luna Girl Special
 14:30 PJ Masks
 15:30 Mission Force One
 15:45 Mission Force One
 16:00 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
 16:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
 17:00 Disney Muppet Babies
 17:15 Disney Muppet Babies
 17:30 Elena Of Avalor
 18:00 Puppy Dog Pals
 18:25 Trulli Tales Character Shorts
 18:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
 19:00 Fancy Nancy
 19:30 Vampirina
 20:00 PJ Masks
 20:30 The Lion Guard
 21:00 Sofia The First
 21:25 Trulli Tales Character Shorts
 21:30 Elena Of Avalor
 22:00 Puppy Dog Pals
 22:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
 23:00 Fancy Nancy
 23:30 Vampirina



00:15 Bear Grylls: Born Survivor
 01:05 Impossible Engineering
 01:50 Mythbusters Jr.
 02:35 What On Earth?
 03:20 Misfit Garage
 04:05 Misfit Garage
 04:50 How Do They Do It?
 05:15 How Do They Do It?
 05:35 Container Wars
 06:00 Storage Wars Canada

06:20 Container Wars
 06:45 Bear Grylls: Born Survivor
 07:35 Deadliest Catch
 08:20 Gold Rush
 09:10 Alaska: The Last Frontier
 09:55 Alaskan Bush People
 10:45 How Do They Do It?
 11:10 How Do They Do It?
 11:30 Misfit Garage
 12:20 Misfit Garage
 13:05 Storage Wars Canada
 13:30 Container Wars
 13:55 Alaskan Bush People
 14:40 Alaska: The Last Frontier
 15:30 Blue Hole
 16:15 Wheeler Dealers
 17:05 Alaska: The Last Frontier
 17:50 Gold Rush
 18:40 How Do They Do It?
 19:05 How Do They Do It?
 19:25 Misfit Garage
 20:15 Misfit Garage
 21:00 Sticker Shock
 21:50 Wheeler Dealers
 22:40 Twin Turbos
 23:30 Deadliest Catch



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

08:00 E! News: Daily Pop
 08:55 Botched
 11:40 E! News
 12:35 Very Cavallari
 13:30 Live From The Red Carpet
 15:20 E! News: Daily Pop
 16:15 Botched
 19:00 E! News
 20:00 Botched
 21:00 Botched
 22:00 Model Squad
 23:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry



00:10 Culinary Genius
 01:00 Emmerdale
 01:30 Coronation Street
 02:00 Coronation Street
 02:30 The Chase
 03:25 Happy Hour With Olly Murs
 04:20 Big Star's Little Star
 05:15 Don't Tell The Bride
 06:15 Culinary Genius
 07:10 The Chase
 08:05 Happy Hour With Olly Murs
 09:00 Big Star's Little Star
 09:55 Don't Tell The Bride
 10:55 Culinary Genius
 11:50 The Chase
 12:45 Emmerdale
 13:15 Emmerdale
 13:45 Coronation Street
 14:15 Culinary Genius
 15:10 The Chase
 16:00 Dancing On Ice
 17:50 Don't Tell The Bride
 18:50 Emmerdale
 19:15 Emmerdale
 19:45 Coronation Street
 20:10 The Chase
 21:00 Dancing On Ice
 22:50 Emmerdale
 23:15 Emmerdale
 23:40 Coronation Street



00:30 Weapons At War
 01:15 Ancient Aliens
 02:00 Ancient Impossible
 02:45 Engineering Disasters
 03:30 UFO Hunters
 04:15 Ancient Aliens
 05:00 The Universe
 05:45 Ancient Aliens
 06:30 The Lost Evidence
 07:15 Weapons At War
 08:00 Ancient Impossible
 08:45 Engineering Disasters
 09:30 UFO Hunters
 10:15 Ancient Aliens
 11:00 The Universe
 11:45 The Lost Evidence
 12:30 Weapons At War
 13:15 Ancient Aliens
 14:00 Ancient Impossible
 14:45 Engineering Disasters
 15:30 UFO Hunters
 16:15 Ancient Aliens
 17:00 The Universe
 17:45 The Lost Evidence
 18:30 Weapons At War
 19:15 Ancient Aliens
 20:00 Ancient Top 10
 20:45 Engineering Disasters
 21:30 UFO Hunters
 22:15 Ancient Aliens
 23:00 Stan Lee's Superhumans
 23:45 The Lost Evidence



00:20 Mountain Men
 01:05 Navy Seals: America's Secret Warriors
 02:35 Brothers In Arms
 03:25 Project Impossible
 04:15 American Pickers Best Of
 07:30 Forged In Fire
 08:15 Project Impossible
 11:15 Mountain Men
 15:00 Big Easy Motors
 17:15 Detroit Steel
 18:45 American Pickers Best Of
 20:15 Fifth Gear



01:00 Botched
 02:00 E! News
 03:00 Famously Single
 04:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians

Stars



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Your ruling planet, Mars, is creating a desire for security now that is making you work harder than ever. You want all the comforts and you're not going to let anyone stand in your way to build those comforts. This can cause some upsets and hurt feelings from other's perspective while around you. Aries, you don't like to hurt people purposefully but you tend to ring that bell right now without realizing it. You might find you're having to put out emotional fires with those for which you care. Walk easy as you can in your relationships.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

On this Valentines Day you want to work, really work. You can see that hard work now will mean better for you later. The need to feel secure and get ahead is all that's on your mind. Keep in mind though that if you push others too hard, you'll meet a stone wall that won't be moved. You have to understand that not everyone is in the same mental and physical space as you. Walk softly. Working through the setbacks will still help you to achieve and appreciate.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You should receive some type award or monetary compensation for a job well done. And you're thinking of your job today more than anything else. You can see what more you can do to make your work long-lasting and greater. Perhaps this is because you're going into a new line of work that you've wanted to attain for some time, Gemini. Others recognize your abilities to create from nothing from looking at your past work experiences. You make a lasting impression on all those you're around.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Keep the depressed mood away today by giving attention to the manner in which you can realize the stability and home you desire. Think about and make the plans you need to achieve foundational goals. Now is not the time to change jobs or make any vast changes. Now is the time to decide what is best for you and your family, Cancer. A new pet shouldn't be added now but you can plan for it. Pets, like children, are for life. Spend time with those you love this evening and then spend time to yourself, for you.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Creating firm foundations at home and work are high on your mental list today. Put your nose to the grindstone and work away. Your efforts will be noticed and help is at hand. Perhaps you need to meet with a person who can help you in your effort to save for your future as well. Make today count for you Leo. Love is not as passionate at the moment as it has been in the past but it's a staid, constructive love that will be around for ages if you allow it. It takes two or more if you're a lion on the savannah. Be happy with the one.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Don't allow others to get you into a politically motivated argument especially at work. There is an agenda. Steady, patient and solid are your keywords now. You want to build a legacy for those you love or at the very least make your name known in the work world. Longevity is your thought now on building the most secure foundation for your future and that includes money, Virgo. Work hard now and use your intelligence to build that heritage.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Though you want to party with friends you are at an impasse because you also want to create strong foundations for your life. It isn't easy to be between two feelings that are tempted to tear you emotionally apart. Building home and family life is most pressing though. With that comes the fact that in order to make house and home better, you have to work. Job means more now and you really apply yourself in order to get ahead, Libra. Making the most of what you've got will keep you working hard now.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You are driven to go after what you been considering. "Katy bar the door," from anything preventing access to what you want. This could be a hard time for those trying to communicate with you unless you wish to listen to them. You have a few things on your mind and want to accomplish those events and acts before they get away. Scorpio, you're in a nurturing not really mothering, mood which doesn't pop up often. That takes some love on your part. Beware of getting in too deeply. Think and decide what's best for you.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Back to your usual senses today. You want to build strong foundations, give the love you desire back, make a castle against the storms. What you want is security in all it's forms. That's easy go with your status quo. You have that now. Change isn't what you really want right now, Sagittarius. You want people who know and understand you and who want what's best for you. Give good advice to someone asking today. It may be your boss or your best friend. Work looks better now.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Looking towards your financial future which is also a huge part of your life is most important to you today. Creating money and more in your life is your driving force. You feel you're right on the verge of accomplishing what you desire for life, Capricorn, and you want to make this feeling grow. You seek out others who've done what you're trying to complete and keep now in your particular work field. Communication with others now is considered work too. Take that time with happiness so that you can create the life you need. Learn how others have succeeded and how they've stayed on top.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Your manner may not be as warm and fuzzy as most of your coworkers are used to seeing. You have reason for this. You're looking for more in your life and want to make the most of any decisions you decide upon now. The drive to arrive at security or at least a long-lasting career you can enjoy is uppermost in your mind. Everything else except those you love are in the background as you make your decision, Aquarius. You plod on like the tortoise did when racing the rabbit looking each step over and thinking that you can step out on your own. Take your time. Rome wasn't built in a day.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

It seems you have a greater appreciation for things of value. You could find this to be a time of great material gain for you. Being more materialistic than usual may be your minds way of rewarding you for all the hard work you do. As someone who always seems to put others first, there comes a time you have to remember to spoil and reward yourself. Even if you only spend small amounts, or take time for short trips, you need to remember to take care of yourself first. You don't want to find yourself resenting others and feeling a sense of being used up.

Country Codes

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

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Department: Heart & Vascular Center

Telephone: 1830003 Ext: 2400
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- ◆ Treatment of Irritable Bowel Symptoms
- ◆ Colonoscopy & Gastroscopy
- ◆ Stomach Balloon Insertion & removal
- ◆ Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
- ◆ Gallstones & Abdominal Hernias Surgery

◆ Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
◆ Laparoscopic mini bypass
◆ Transanal minimally Invasive surgery

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

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

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American Airlines	22087425	Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
	22087426	British Airways	22425635
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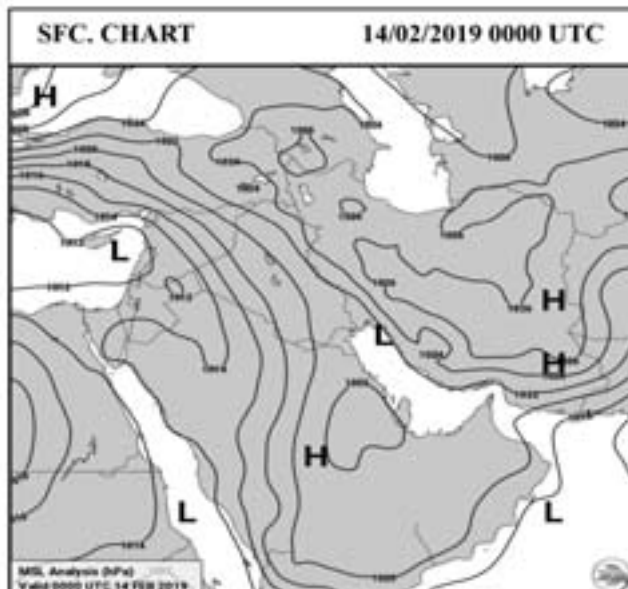
Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair and Partly cloudy with light to moderate variable wind to south easterly wind, with speed of 08 - 32 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Cool and Partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening gradually south easterly wind, with speed of 15 - 40 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain later on.

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

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	20 °C	12 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	21 °C	10 °C
ABDALY	21 °C	07 °C
BUBYAN	-- °C	-- °C
JAHRRA	21 °C	11 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	20 °C	11 °C
SALMIYAH	19 °C	14 °C
AHMADI	19 °C	14 °C
NUWAISIB	20 °C	11 °C
WAFRA	20 °C	08 °C
SALMY	19 °C	10 °C



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	02/15	Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered light rain	23 °C	14 °C	SE	20 - 50 km/h
Saturday	02/16	Partly cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	20 °C	14 °C	NE-NW	15 - 40 km/h
Sunday	02/17	Fair	21 °C	08 °C	NW-VRB	08 - 30 km/h
Monday	02/18	Fair and some high clouds will appear	21 °C	08 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:08
Sunrise	06:28
Zuhr	12:02
Asr	15:12
Sunset	17:36
Isha	18:54

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	00 °C
MIN. Temp.	00 °C
MAX. RH	00 %
MIN. RH	00 %
MAX. Wind	N 00 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

LOST

My Original Marks Certificate and Migration Certificate of Senior Secondary Examination of Year 2018, Roll No. 9104164 issued by CBSE has been actually lost. Walid Mohammed, holder of Passport No. BN0813411, Fahaheel, Block 10, Building No.

10, Al Ahnaf Bin Quas Street,
Kuwait / 66260751 & 69941055.
(C 5444)
11-2-2019

EMERGENCY

☎ 112

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

Business

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2019

39 US and China seek deal to prevent trade-war escalation



40 US taxpayers face bitter surprise after Trump's tax cuts



41 Renault profits plunge in first annual earnings since Ghosn arrest



HAMBURG: In this file photo the giant Airbus A380 aircraft flies over the Airbus plant in the northern town of Hamburg-Finkenwerder, during its first flight in Germany. —AFP

Airbus pulls plug on A380 superjumbo

Airbus to cease deliveries in 2021; Emirates reduces order by 39 planes

PARIS: European aerospace giant Airbus said yesterday it would end production of the A380 superjumbo, the double-decker jet which earned plaudits from passengers but failed to win over enough airlines to justify its massive costs. The firm said it would stop deliveries in 2021 of the A380, which has been in operation for more than a decade, after Dubai-based carrier Emirates reduced its total order of the model by 39 planes.

It marks an ignominious end to a bold bet on how millions of people would travel in the future, as airlines struggled to fill a plane capable of carrying anywhere from 500 to 850 people. "Following a review of its operations, and in light of developments in aircraft and engine technologies, Emirates is reducing its A380 order book from 162 to 123 aircraft," Airbus said in a statement. "As a consequence and given the lack of order backlog with other airlines, Airbus will cease deliveries of the A380 in 2021."

Airbus had been forced to slow A380 production in recent years before warning in January 2018 that the program could be scrapped if no new orders came in. Just days after this announcement, the company appeared to get a lifeline with the latest Emirates deal, but last month Airbus admitted the airline might now be reconsidering. In yesterday's statement Airbus said it would deliver the last 14 A380s to Emirates over the next two years, adding that the airline had ordered 70 smaller planes from the manufacturer.

Emirates' decision means Airbus has "no substantial A380 backlog and hence no basis to sustain production, despite all our sales efforts with other airlines in recent years", Airbus Chief Executive Officer Tom Enders was quoted in the statement as saying. Airbus also posted its earnings for 2018 on Thursday, reporting a rise of 29 percent in net profit to 3 billion euros. The company said it would deliver between 880 and

890 new commercial planes this year, adding that it was allocating 436 million euros to the A400M military transport program.

Turbulent history

The plane's demise echoed that of the supersonic Concorde built by Airbus's British and French precursors, a technological feat of the 1970s which never managed to prove its commercial viability. Airbus had faced skepticism over the A380's future since the 1990s, when it began to envision a competitor to the hugely popular 747 from US archrival Boeing. The conglomerate, long held up as a shining example of pan-European industrial cooperation, suffered a series of costly delays before the A380's first commercial flight by Singapore Airlines in 2007.

Production problems and cost overruns in the billions of euros continued to plague the project, forcing Airbus to report its first-ever annual loss for the 2006 financial year. Airbus

stood by the A380 even after it was slammed by the global financial crisis of 2007, when airlines started having second thoughts about owning huge planes that were profitable only when filled to the brim. Boeing by contrast pointedly dismissed Airbus's theory that airlines wanted huge transporters serving a handful of global hubs and focused instead on its midsize 787 Dreamliner.

That bet has paid off, with more than 1,100 Dreamliners ordered since it entered service in 2011, compared with just over 320 A380s. Top managers and key shareholders were suspected of selling shares in Airbus's parent company shortly before the superjumbo's production problems were made public, though no one was ever convicted. Pledges to get the A380 program back on track were unable to avoid further delays, even as a series of safety scares raised questions among potential clients, including long-targeted Chinese airlines. —AFP

Business

Shares, oil at 3-month highs but no love for euro

China exports, imports easily beat forecasts

LONDON: Optimism about US-China trade talks and bumper earnings lifted European shares to a three-month high on yesterday, though news that Germany only dodged recession by the narrowest of margins left the euro feeling unloved. Markets were generally in a cautious mood as investors hung on for any hint of progress in the tariff talks amid reports the White House could extend the deadline for a deal.

Stocks extended gains regardless. Strong results from Nestle, drug-maker AstraZeneca and plane giant Airbus lifted the pan-European STOXX 600 0.5 percent to put it on course for its fourth day of gains and best week since early November. "Cupid continues to shoot out bullish arrows across financial markets with last week's blip almost forgotten about for now," Deutsche Bank said in a morning note.

The euro did not share the feeling however. It struggled near a three-month low as data showed Germany's economy stalled in the fourth quarter, with fallout from global trade disputes and Brexit threatening to derail a decade-long expansion in Europe's eco-

nomie powerhouse. A US proposal of stiff new sanctions on Russian banks and oil and gas firms sent shares in Moscow tumbling more than 2 percent and ignited rouble FX volatility gauges.

On China, President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that trade talks were "going along very well" and, with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer in China, investors had been daring to hope for good news. Bloomberg said Trump was considering pushing back the March 1 deadline for higher tariffs on Chinese goods by 60 days.

But expectations have been disappointed before, the reaction in Asian share markets was guarded.

Shanghai blue chips closed broadly flat, having jumped 2 percent on Wednesday to levels last seen in late September. MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan eased 0.15 percent, though that was off a peak last seen in early October.

Japan's Nikkei touched its highest this year as a weakening yen boosted export stocks. The

“ Trade talks going along very well ”



NEW YORK: A trader works ahead of the closing bell on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in New York City. —AFP

Australian dollar, often used as a liquid proxy for China risks, gained 0.4 percent to \$0.7114 and S&P 500 futures added 0.15 percent.

The Aussie dollar had already got a small lift when Chinese trade data handily beat expectations in a welcome relief for the global economy. Beijing reported exports rose 9.1 percent in January from a year earlier, confounding forecasts

of a fall, while imports dipped by a surprisingly slight 1.5 percent. The recent improvement in risk appetite undermined the safe haven yen and propelled the dollar to its best levels of the year so far at 111.05. The subdued European data pushed long-term market inflation expectations to new lows, while putting downward pressure on bond yields in the bloc. —Reuters

Belgium tax break for BP, others, upheld by EU court

LUXEMBOURG: BP, BASF and more than 30 other multinationals stand to benefit after EU judges overturned an order demanding Belgium revoke a tax break. The European Commission failed to prove that the Belgian tax break constituted aid, said the ruling by the General Court, the lower branch of the Court of Justice in Luxembourg. "The Commission wrongly considered that the Belgian system relating to the excess profit of multinational companies constituted an aid scheme," it said.

The ruling marks a setback for the EU's crackdown on tax avoidance by multinationals, a drive led by Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager. The European Commission in 2016 had ordered Belgium to recover some 700 million euros from companies which benefited from the scheme. In addition to BP and BASF, Wabco, Cellio, Atlas Copco and Belgacom (now Proximus) benefited from the tax break. Belgium and US manufacturer Magnetrol had challenged the Commission in cases filed with the General Court. It's possible that the Commission will now pursue individual cases in the Belgian tax break case, according to one lawyer. "The Commission can take a new decision qualifying each individual case," said Jacques Derenne, a partner at law firm Sheppard Mullin.

Elsewhere the European Commission's crackdown on large companies avoiding tax has seen it order Ireland to recover some 13 billion euros from iPhone maker Apple. Luxembourg was instructed to claw back 250 million euros from Amazon, about 120 million euros from France's Engie and up to 30 million euros from Fiat Chrysler. —Reuters

Zain offers Range Rover Evoque 2019 to campaign winners

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the offering of five Range Rover Evoque 2019 mega prizes as part of its latest promotional campaign entitled "All Zainers are Winners". Throughout the campaign, Zain offers all its postpaid and prepaid customers with instant prizes on the occasion of Kuwait's national celebrations in February.

Zain recently unveiled the Range Rover Evoque 2019 as a mega prize of the final draw in its "All Zainers are Winners" campaign. Today the company unveils its latest surprise by offering four more additional Range Rover Evoque 2019 mega prizes, increasing the total number of the campaign's mega prizes to five instead of one. Zain takes this opportunity to invite its valued customers to the campaign's first event on February 15, 2019, at Marina Mall, where the company prepared many exciting activities, competitions, and valuable prizes to the event's visitors. Zain's new campaign, which continues until the February 28, offers valuable instant prizes to all prepaid and postpaid customers, including free minutes, free Internet GBs, free bonus credit, and many more. To be eligible for one of the instant prizes, prepaid customers can simply recharge their lines with KD 5 or more, while postpaid customers can simply pay their bills through one of Zain's digital channels (Zain's website, Zain app, or Zain Connect portal) with KD 5 or more. Customers will receive their gift instantly as soon as they pay/recharge.

All Zain prepaid and postpaid customers have a chance to win one of five Range Rover Evoque 2019 mega prizes during the final draw to be held at the end of the campaign. Every customer will receive one point for each KD 1 paid/recharged during the campaign period, and they can simply check their current accumulated points/chances balance by dialing *2526#. The more points a customer has, the more chances they will have for winning one of the mega prizes. Zain is keen on sharing the joys of Kuwait's national festivities with all its customers through launching the biggest promotional campaigns refreshed with the most wonderful offer-



ings during February of every year. At this celebrated time of year, the company is always committed to launching unique promotional campaigns with the best offerings to celebrate this much cherished occasion along with its customer base, considered the biggest in Kuwait.

Zain has long considered itself a key partner of the Kuwaiti society, especially in such national celebrations. The company launched this exciting campaign to show its commitment in sharing the joys of Kuwait as a leading national company, and will spare no efforts in being an integral part of the many occasions that are of interest to the local community. By launching this exciting limited time promotional campaign, Zain continues to reinforce its leadership position and its pledge in offering the best services and offers to meet customers' professional and personal telecommunications needs.

Zain always aspires to new levels of excellence in all services it offers to its customers. Through the launch of this new campaign, Zain affirms its continuous efforts in meeting customers' needs and aspirations, and deliver its promise to offering the best services and latest technologies. The company constantly looks at ways to improve the experience of its customers, including providing them with the latest solutions to better serve their needs through the biggest and most advanced network in Kuwait.

Business

US and China seek deal to prevent trade-war escalation

China faces pressure from slowing economic growth

BEIJING: US and Chinese negotiators on yesterday kicked off two days of high-level talks that President Donald Trump says could decide whether he escalates the bruising tariff battle between the world's two biggest economies. Trump indicated this week he was open to extending a trade truce beyond March 1 depending on progress in Beijing. He is considering pushing the deadline back an additional 60 days, Bloomberg News reported, citing sources.

In December he postponed plans to sharply hike tariffs on \$200 billion of Chinese imports to allow more time for negotiation. The two economic superpowers have already imposed duties on more than \$360 billion in two-way trade, which has weighed on their manufacturing sectors and shaken global financial markets. US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin are meeting with China's top economic czar Liu He, seeking to build on progress made in Washington last month.

We are "looking forward to discussions today", Mnuchin said as he left his hotel yesterday morning for the talks. Expectations for a trade deal have grown as China faces pressure from slowing economic growth, and as swooning global markets pose a challenge to Trump and his economic advisors. Data released yesterday in China showed its trade surplus with the US—a major source of anger within the Trump administration—narrowed in January to \$27.3 billion,

even as its American imports plunged 41 percent for the month from a year earlier. Last year the surplus hit a record \$323.3 billion. China's total imports also sank for the month, pointing to weak demand amid slowing economic growth.

Trump-Xi meeting

Chinese President Xi Jinping plans to meet with the US officials in Beijing this week, a report in the South China Morning Post said Wednesday, bolstering hopes for the talks and world markets. Trump also has said he expects to meet with Xi "at some point" to clinch a trade deal. Trump told reporters in the Oval Office on Wednesday that preliminary talks in Beijing were "going along very well," Bloomberg reported. "They're showing us tremendous respect," he added.

"Markets will continue to watch-and react-closely to the ups and downs of the negotiations," said Trey McArver of Trivium Research. "But Sino-US relations are all about the two leaders, and it will ultimately be up to Xi and Trump to come to a deal-or not," he wrote Wednesday in a newsletter. The two sides said major progress was made in talks last month in Washington, but a wide gulf remains on some issues.

The US is demanding far-reaching changes to Chinese practices that it says are unfair, including theft of US technology and intellectual property, and myriad barriers that foreign companies face in the Chinese domestic market. Bei-



LIANYUNGANG: This drone image shows cars unloaded from trucks, center, before being loaded onto a ship at the port in Lianyungang in China's eastern Jiangsu province. — AFP

jing has offered to boost its purchases of US goods but is widely expected to resist calls for major changes to its industrial policies such as slashing government subsidies. The International

Monetary Fund warned on Sunday of a possible global economic "storm" as world growth forecasts dip, citing the US-China trade row as a key pivot point. — AFP

Venezuela: Another black eye for Chinese economic diplomacy

BEIJING: China and Venezuela seemed like natural bedfellows: one is the planet's top crude-oil importer and the other possesses the world's largest reserves. But Venezuela's descent into crisis—with President Nicolas Maduro and self-proclaimed leader Juan Guaido vying for control as the economy unravels—has highlighted the gamble inherent in China's \$60 billion investment in the South American nation.

Over the past decade Beijing has extended vast amounts of credit to Caracas for oil shipments and infrastructure deals, in what China has touted as a "mutually beneficial" relationship. Yet Venezuela is wracked by recession and hyperinflation while millions of people are suffering from shortages of basic necessities such as food and medicine—and vital oil production has dropped to a three-decade low.

"Venezuela's story is an important one," said Margaret Myers, director of the Asia & Latin America Program at the Inter-American Dialogue, a US-based think tank. "Other countries in the region commonly reference Venezuela as a cautionary tale when determining how best to engage with China." The situation also shines more unflattering light on Beijing's \$1 trillion "Belt and Road" project, a Chinese initiative to offer loans or investment in infrastructure and other projects across a range of countries.

Critics say the project saddles countries with debt that they cannot repay, increasing China's influence over them. "By playing such a central role in Venezuela, China has provided evidence for the US government's argument that Beijing's financing worsens



Nicolas Maduro

corruption and ensnares emerging-market borrowers in a debt trap," said Benjamin Gedan, senior advisor at the Wilson Center's Latin American Program.

Missing funds

China began lending to Venezuela more than a decade ago, reaching a peak in 2010 when state-backed China Development Bank offered \$20 billion in soft loans, according to Chinese official news agency Xinhua. That same year, Venezuela's then-leader Hugo Chavez announced a \$16 billion investment package from China involving multiple energy deals as he leveraged the country's oil wealth for financing. Increasing oil shipments to China also fulfilled a political goal of the socialist Chavez—reducing the nation's reliance on US purchases of its oil. But in the chaos after the 2013 death of Chavez—who was succeeded by his anointed successor Maduro—followed a year later by the cratering of world oil prices, Venezuela is buried under about \$150 billion in external debt, of which roughly \$20 billion is Chinese.

Instead of working more with other international financial institutions and oil firms and adhering to their best practices, Venezuela's leadership essentially rejected them and turned to Russia and China instead, said Matt Ferchen, a scholar with the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy. China facilitated "poor decision-making on the part of Venezuela, especially in the aftermath of the financial crisis... when Venezuela may have been forced to go in a different direction," he said. "Chinese loans to Venezuela have had few conditions and little accountability," said Myers of the Inter-American Dialogue, which she said speeds up lending but can lead to the abuse of funds. —AFP

France's unemployment rate falls to lowest level since 2009

PARIS: France's jobless rate fell to 8.8 percent in the final three months of last year, its lowest level since 2009, the INSEE statistics institute said yesterday. It was a 0.3 point decline from the previous quarter, and came despite economic disruptions since the "yellow vest" anti-government protests against President Emmanuel Macron erupted last November. Excluding French overseas territories where unemployment tends to be higher, the jobless rate stood at 8.5 percent for metropolitan France, or 2.47 million unemployed, a drop of 90,000 from the previous quarter.

The unemployment rate dropped just 0.1 percent over the whole of 2018, frustratingly slowly for Macron, who was elected in May 2017 on a pledge to bring unemployment down to seven percent by 2022. In his first major policy move of his pro-business reform agenda, Macron eased labor laws to make it easier to hire and fire workers, something long sought by many French employers.

The government is also engaged in talks with employers and trade unions to reduce the number of short-term contracts, which have exploded over the past 20 years. Speaking on France Info radio, Labor Minister Muriel Penicaud welcomed the unemployment drop, saying that "employers, especially small firms, are no longer afraid to hire." "We have grown so used to mass unemployment in France that sometimes we just think we should give up. — AFP

Business

US taxpayers face bitter surprise after Trump's tax cuts

Unhappy taxpayers vent on Twitter using '#GOPTaxscam'

WASHINGTON: Some taxpayers are getting a bitter surprise this year as their usual annual tax refunds have shrunk-or turned into tax bills-even though President Donald Trump loudly promised the largest tax cut "in American history." And with tax season underway, thousands of unhappy taxpayers have been venting their displeasure on Twitter, using hashtags like #GOPTaxscam, and some threatened not to vote for Trump again.

"Lowest refund I have ever had and I am 50 yrs old. No wall and now this tax reform sucks too!" a woman going by "Speziale-Matheny" wrote from the crucial political swing state of Florida. "Starting to doubt Trump. I voted for him and trusted him too." During the year, American wage earners see a portion of each paycheck withheld as income tax, and many then receive a refund the following year if they have overpaid the federal government. That cash boost is eagerly awaited each year-and used to help pay off debt or make large purchases.

But the 2017 tax overhaul-which Republicans promoted as a boon to the middle class-meant many workers paid less in taxes during the year reducing the amount withheld, a change which may have gone unnoticed. And the reform also cut some popular deductions, sometimes resulting in thinner refunds or even unexpected tax bills. Early data from the US In-

ternal Revenue Service show that refunds so far this year are 8.4 percent lower than 2018 payouts on average, falling to \$1,865 from \$2,035.

However, many millions more taxpayers will be filing tax returns by the annual April 15 deadline, meaning this figure could change. Mark Mazur, assistant treasury secretary for tax policy under former President Barack Obama, told AFP the negative reaction was "understandable."

"People focused on the amount of the refund but that's not the same as their tax liability, the amount of tax they pay for the year," he said. Because of

lower withholding during the year, some taxpayers have in effect already seen the benefit of the tax cut in their higher paychecks, said Mazur, who is vice president at the Urban Institute. About five percent of taxpayers — 7.5 million people-will in fact see a tax increase, while about 80 percent

should pay less, he said.

'Angry, disappointed and betrayed'

The IRS on Wednesday said taxpayers who suddenly found they owe taxes could pay their bill in installments and apply for a waiver of penalties normally imposed for failing to pay by the deadline. "The IRS understands there were many changes that affected people last year, and the new penalty waiver



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump speaks at the Major County Sheriffs and Major Cities Chiefs Association Joint Conference in Washington, DC. —AFP

will help taxpayers who inadvertently had too little tax withheld," IRS Commissioner Chuck Rettig said in a statement.

A key change of the 2017 tax reform is that it limited federal deductions for certain state and local taxes, such as real estate taxes. As a result, many homeowners in states with higher property taxes will owe more to the federal government. Neil Frankel, a New York accountant, told AFP people were feeling "angry, disappointed and betrayed." "I sympathize with them. The new tax law's withholding tables were

incorrect and misleading. A complete shenanigan," he added.

"Since my clients are mostly professionals, I don't really hear any screaming," he said. "However, I do hear long diatribes on hatred for the US government." Last year, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin invited taxpayers to use an online calculator to estimate their tax payments and determine if they should modify their withholding amount. This week the Treasury Department said media reports on the lower refunds were "misleading." —AFP

Sibanye to cut 6,000 jobs at S African gold mines

JOHANNESBURG: South African gold mining giant Sibanye-Stillwater announced plans yesterday to shed more than 6,000 jobs, or 10 percent of its workforce, from underperforming gold mines. The company is one of the biggest employers in the South African mining industry, and job cuts are politically sensitive ahead of May general elections in a country where more than a quarter of the workforce are unemployed.

Sibanye-Stillwater said five shafts at its Beatrix and Driefontein operations made financial losses last year despite efforts to turn things around. It has therefore initiated the process to lay off 5,870 full-time and 800 casual workers. "Contemplating potential restructuring of this nature is never taken lightly," said the company's CEO Neal Froneman. "Our best attempts to address the ongoing losses at these operations, have however been unsuccessful and sustaining these losses may threaten the viability of our other operations," he said.

The targeted workers are employed at Beatrix mine, in the central Free State province, and at Driefontein, north of the economic hub Johannesburg. Mineral Resources Minister Gwede Mantashe urged talks to save as many jobs as possible. Gold was for many decades the backbone of South Africa's economy, but production has declined sharply due to depletion of reserves. —AFP

'Black eye' for German economy as it flirts with recession

BERLIN: Germany's economy stalled in the final quarter of last year, just skirting recession as fallout from global trade disputes and Brexit put the brakes on a decade of expansion amid signs that exports will stay subdued for the time being. Gross domestic product in Europe's biggest economy was unchanged for the quarter, the Federal Statistics Office said yesterday. That was below the 0.1 percent growth forecast in a Reuters poll and the 0.2 percent expansion achieved by the euro zone as a whole.

"Germany got away with a black eye," DekaBank economist Andreas Scheuerle said. Many of the country's traditionally export-focused large companies have been hit hard by a cooling global economy and trade disputes triggered by U.S. President Donald Trump. They also face taking a hit if Britain's exit from the European Union next month is a disorderly one. Steel-to-elevators group Thyssenkrupp on Tuesday warned of a darkening economic backdrop, signaling tough times for its capital goods business as it works through a major restructuring and major car markets go into reverse.

The Economy Ministry said indicators suggested that exports would be subdued in the coming months but that a construction boom was likely to continue and private consumption will remain strong. "Solid domestic drivers and fiscal stimulus are providing some support at the beginning of the year," the ministry added. With the German economy having shrunk 0.2

percent in the third quarter a second consecutive quarter of contraction would have met the definition of a recession.

It escaped that by a hairsbreadth but grew just 1.5 percent in 2018, its weakest annual rate in five years. Growth is forecast to shrink further to 1 percent this year, and the country faces a budget shortfall of around 25 billion euros by 2023. Yesterday's data left the euro struggling near a three-month low. Fallout from the trade disputes and Brexit are weighing on business confidence, which fell for the fifth consecutive month in January. "A hard Brexit doesn't help anyone," Achim Wambach, president of the ZEW economic institute, told Reuters. "I think the negotiating parties see it that way too and will come to a solution." Forecasts of around 1 percent growth this year were "realistic", he added.

Policy pivot

Morale is being depressed by weaker demand for German goods and services in China, the euro zone and emerging markets. Furthermore, the government is concerned that technological innovation and the acquisition of German industrial know-how by foreign companies could erode the manufacturing base on which much of its wealth is built.

Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said last week the government might take stakes in key domestic companies to prevent foreign takeovers - a shift in policy he said was needed to safeguard Germany's prosperity. With German growth stalling, the European Central Bank is likely put off plans to normalize policy, economists say, and is more likely to provide additional stimulus rather than scaling it back further.

"The upside from today's data is that it can hardly get worse," ING economist Carsten Brzeski said. "Economic fundamentals remain solid, and from here on, chances of a rebound are still much higher than chances of yet another disappointment." —Reuters

Business

Renault profits plunge in first annual earnings since Ghosn arrest

Renault, Nissan, Mitsubishi Motors seek to smoothen relations

PARIS: Renault profits fell sharply last year, the French automaker said yesterday, releasing its first annual results since the shock arrest in Japan of former boss Carlos Ghosn. Meanwhile, Renault's new chairman Jean-Dominique Senard, elected after Ghosn resigned, arrived in Japan yesterday for talks with partner Nissan in a bid to smooth relations which grew strained under Ghosn's leadership.

Renault's net profit for 2018 plunged 37 percent from a record 5.1 billion euros the previous year, hit by shrinking profits at Nissan and changes in exchange rates in some emerging countries. "This decline came mainly from Nissan's contribution, down 1.282 billion, which notably benefited in 2017 from a one-off gain of 1.021 billion," Renault said in a statement. Nissan on Tuesday slashed its full-year forecast as its nine-month net profit dropped 45 percent. The results came as Renault, Nissan and the third partner in their alliance, Mitsubishi Motors, seek to turn the page after Ghosn's arrest in Tokyo in November.



Nissan slashes full-year forecast

partner by sales in an alliance that Ghosn built into the world's top-selling auto group. Last month he resigned as CEO of Renault, having already been stripped of his chairman titles at Nissan and Mitsubishi. He has been in a detention centre in Tokyo for three months with little prospect of release before a trial that could take months to materialize.

Renault's new chairman Senard, who is to have a series of talks with top Nissan officials, told reporters before leaving for Japan he intended to "re-establish confidence, transparency and loyalty" between the partners. He is due to join Nissan's board in April, but the question of overall chairmanship of the Nissan-Renault group remains a bone of contention, with the Japanese

fearing conflicts of interest and anxious to avoid any hegemonic rule by another Ghosn-like figure. Senard, quoted by Kyodo news agency on arriving in Japan, said it was "too early" to discuss the joint chairmanship.

Record sales

Renault last month announced record sales of 3.9 million vehicles in 2018. Operating margins fell 6.3 percent to 3.61 billion euros, or 6.3 percent of revenues. "In 2018, Groupe Renault

Restore confidence

Ghosn is accused of under-reporting millions of dollars in salary as head of Nissan, the biggest



TOKYO: Newly appointed Renault CEO Jean-Dominique Senard, right, speaks to journalists upon his arrival at Haneda International airport in Tokyo. —AFP

maintained its strong performance, despite the business environment deterioration," said Thierry Bollore, Ghosn's successor as CEO. "The commercial and financial results demonstrate the Group's resilience and its rapid adaptation to a more challenging environment. This performance is the result of a clear strategy, increasingly

stringent execution and the efforts of all Group employees".

In 2019, the group said "both the global and European market are expected to be stable compared to 2018," and Renault aimed to increase revenues and achieve an operating margin of around 6.0 percent. —AFP

Gilded world of French heritage rocked by auditor report

PARIS: One of France's most historic institutions has hit back after state auditors eviscerated it as "sclerotic" and accused "moonlighting" staff of only working a third of the year. The Mobilier National, which was set up in the 17th century to decorate royal palaces and still restores and supplies fine furniture and tapestries for the Elysee Palace and Versailles, needs to be "radically reformed", a report by the auditors said.

National audit office inspectors, which found large quantities of alcohol in Mobilier National's workshops, said staff were often absent and used tools and equipment to "moonlight" on their own projects. Officials of the venerable body, whose gilded handmade furniture costs a fortune, were not able to say precisely where 7,800 objects it was supposed to be looking after were—one tenth of its inventory. This left "a very large part of the collections exposed to the risk of theft," their report warned.

But staff have hotly disputed the allegations, saying auditors picked out the actions of a few to blacken the whole institution. They also questioned the bitter "war of the glues" which the report said was wracking the body, with traditionalist conservators sticking with animal-based glues used since the 18th century, while those making new objects tend to go for modern vinyl-based ones.

A botched restoration of a Louis XVI's "Vaudreuil" armchair worth one million euros (\$1.1 million) wiped hundreds of thousands of euros off its value, the report published last week added. Only

25 newly designed objects have been created in the past seven years, when previously an average of 20 a year were made, it said.

Grotesque errors

But the Mobilier National's director and senior conservators have hit back strongly, denouncing "grave and grotesque factual errors" in the report which they said they found insulting. They deplored how the report had "highlighted two or three cases, which already had been identified and sanctioned, to heap opprobrium on the 350 people" who work for the organization.

Director Herve Lemoine said the inspectors had come to the "amazing conclusion" that many staff were paid nearly twice what they actually were. He told AFP that it was "not true" that staff worked only 30 hours a week. "Another grotesque mistake is that they only worked 120 days (a year). Obviously they work much more than that. They only counted the hours of restoration that were billed to (various public) administrations," Lemoine added. Instead he blamed chronic under-investment for the body's woes. The Mobilier National, which includes the Gobelins Manufactory in Paris which holds the world's biggest collection of tapestries, "had only a third of the administrative and support staff we need to do our job properly restoring and creating furniture for official residences," he insisted.

French soft power

"If we are so useless why has the national audit office ordered two tapestries from us?" demanded Helene Bersani, head of Mobilier National's textiles department. Cerille Fauchoux, the head of the carpentry department, told AFP that he found the audit office's criticism "hard to swallow", and that he was fearful that the institution's future was "being sealed on false accusations". He said that what the audit office had dubbed the "war of the glues" was a part of a "normal discussion between experts". —AFP

EU to keep closer eye on Chinese takeover moves

BRUSSELS: The EU took a major step yesterday towards tightening its scrutiny of foreign takeovers in strategic sectors like communications and artificial intelligence amid concern about investment by China. Under a proposal adopted by the European Parliament, EU countries would supply information on foreign investment to other members if public order or security are concerned. "We must defend Europe's strategic interests," European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker said as he welcomed the vote passing in the assembly in Strasbourg, France.

"And for that we need scrutiny over purchases by foreign companies that target Europe's strategic assets," Juncker said, while insisting Europe will remain open to investment. The parliament said it now expects European Union countries on March 5 to endorse the rules it adopted by 500 votes for, 49 against and 56 abstentions. They would take effect 18 months later. They aim to protect sectors like energy, transport, communications, data, space and finance as well as technologies such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence and robotics. European Parliament negotiators added sectors such as water, health, defense, media, biotechnology and food security. The European Commission, the 28-nation EU's executive arm, has pushed for screening such sectors for more than a year amid growing alarm over China's investments. —AFP

Sports

IAAF hits back at Semenya to be classed as 'biological male'

Niyonsaba and Wambui face questions about their testosterone levels

LONDON: The IAAF is to argue that Olympic women's 800m champion Caster Semenya should be classified as a "biological male" and forced to take testosterone suppressants if she is to compete in women's competition, according to reports late Wednesday.

Ahead of a landmark hearing at the Court of Arbitration (CAS) next week, The Times said that the IAAF will contest Semenya and other athletes with "differences of sexual development" (DSD) should only be able to compete with lower testosterone levels to ensure a level playing field.

However, the IAAF hit back at the "biological male" claims on Wednesday. "The IAAF is not classifying any DSD athlete as male. To the contrary, we accept their legal sex without question, and permit them to compete in the female category," the IAAF said in a statement. "However if a DSD athlete has testes and male levels of testosterone, they get the same increases in bone and muscle size and strength and increases in haemoglobin that a male gets when they go through puberty, which is what gives men such a performance advantage over women.

"Therefore, to preserve fair competition in

the female category, it is necessary to require DSD athletes to reduce their testosterone down to female levels before they compete at international level."

Semenya, along with South Africa's athletics association, is challenging the IAAF's new eligibility rules that would oblige DSD runners in women's middle-distance races to have significantly reduced levels of testosterone for the previous six months.

As well as Semenya, the silver and bronze medallists of the 800m at the Rio Olympics, Francine Niyonsaba of Burundi and Kenya's Margaret Wambui, have also faced questions about their testosterone levels.

"If the CAS rules that legal recognition as female is sufficient to qualify for the female category of competition, and the IAAF is not permitted to require athletes of female legal sex who have testes and consequently male levels of testosterone to reduce those levels down to the female range, then DSD and transgender athletes will dominate the podiums and prize money in sport," Jonathan Taylor, the IAAF's London-based lawyer told The Times.

"Women with normal female testosterone levels will not have any chance to win." —AFP



Caster Semenya

Ariya struggles as Ewart Shadoff, Hsu lead Australian Open

ADELAIDE: Top-ranked Ariya Jutanugarn struggled on day one of the Australian Open yesterday with England's Jodi Ewart Shadoff and Taiwan's Hsu Wei-ling seizing the early lead.

The Thai world number one, 2018's standout player, carded two double bogeys and two bogeys to be well down the field with a four-over-par 76, leaving her 11 adrift of the leaders. Ewart Shadoff and Hsu both shot 65s to be two clear of a group of three including veteran Karrie Webb, who has 41 wins to her name.

New Zealand's former world number one Lydia Ko and Australian Minjee Lee, ranked seven, are four strokes further back in the LPGA Tour event at the Grange Golf Club in Adelaide, alongside France's Celine Boutier who won last week's Vic Open.

"To get off to a good start is always nice. I played really steady today," Ewart Shadoff, a seven-year LPGA Tour player, said after her bogey-free round. "It was perfect conditions. I hit some close shots and holed some good putts. Overall I just hit the ball well." Ewart Shadoff is ranked 59th in the world and has made steady improvement in recent years without winning a tournament as a professional. Hsu is also looking for her maiden LPGA title after collecting a career-high four top-10 finishes last year.

She put herself well in contention with eight birdies, offset by a single bogey in her first round of the year. "Everything today was perfect, the driver, the iron shots but especially the putting," she said. —AFP

Tiger takes aim at Riviera with WGC-Mexico on horizon

LOS ANGELES: Tiger Woods says there's "no secret" to playing Riviera Country Club, but it's just not something he's done well over the years. "There's no secret to this golf course, it's right there in front of you," the 14-time major champion said Wednesday as he prepared to tee it up in the Genesis Open, the US PGA Tour event he hosts for the benefit of his TGR Foundation.

Woods made his first PGA Tour start as a 16-year-old at Riviera in 1992, playing on a sponsor's exemption and missing the cut. He has gone on to amass 80 US PGA Tour titles, but in 11 prior appearances he has never lifted the trophy at the course he played so often as a youngster.

"Hopefully I can finally play this golf course well," said Woods, who despite his lack of success remains a fan of the classic course tucked into Pacific Palisades west of downtown Los Angeles. "I love playing this golf course," he said. "There's no faking it around this golf course, especially if the greens are up to speed like they are right now.

"It puts such a premium on putting the golf ball in play and hitting the ball high. "You've got to hit the ball high into any of these greens and really control your spin and put the ball in the right spots."

Woods will be making his second start of 2019, after a tie for 20th at the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines. In the intervening two weeks, Woods said, he's been working on hitting the ball high, not only to prepare for Riviera but also for next week's WGC-Mexico Championship in Mexico City.

Woods will play the limited field tournament for the first time since 2014, when the event was held in Miami. "I'm playing next week," Woods confirmed Wednesday after his pro-am round at Riviera.

"Beyond that, I haven't really decided on what I'm going to be doing. I made the decision yesterday to add Mexico to my schedule, and obviously the Florida swing gets very complicated. So I'm leaving that open-ended right now."

But even if Woods hasn't ironed out all the details of his buildup to the Masters in April, he is in a "very different position" to February of last year, when he was taking his first steps in a comeback from spinal fusion surgery with no clear idea of just how far he could go.

"I know what my body can and cannot do," said Woods, who lifted the Tour Championship title in Atlanta in September and comes into this week ranked 13th in the world.

Adding to the feeling of optimism, three of this year's major championship courses—Augusta National, PGA Championship venue Bethpage Black and US Open site Pebble Beach—have yielded six of Woods's 14 major titles.

As he did last year at Riviera, Woods will play the first two rounds with Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy and Justin Thomas. McIlroy admitted last year that the hubbub surrounding Woods wore on him. —AFP

'Brutal' derbies beckon as Super Rugby becomes World Cup trial

Three-conference southern hemisphere club championship kicks off today

WELLINGTON: Springbok lock Lood de Jager expects "more brutal than usual" clashes to be at the core of the 2019 Super Rugby season, as it becomes a 21-week trial for the World Cup. The 15-team, three-conference southern hemisphere club championship kicks off today when the Waikato Chiefs host the Otago Highlanders.

As the competition plays out through to the final on July 6, bubbling beneath the surface is an intriguing sub-plot. Coaches must weigh the pressure to manage the workload of likely World Cup players, and the 2018 leading players cannot assume they will still be in demand when the World Cup starts in September.

"Reputations count for little in this context," the Northern Bulls lock De Jager told SARugbymag.com.za. "How many times have we seen a young guy forcing his way into the national set-up and playing a big role at the World Cup? You just can't take anything for granted."

The local derbies in each conference are typically ferocious affairs but De Jager is relishing the fact they will be tougher than ever this year. "They will be more brutal than usual in the lead-up to the World Cup. It will be like World Cup trials this season. I'm looking forward to it."

The Canterbury Crusaders, who play the Auckland Blues on Saturday, are bidding for a third successive title under coach Scott "Razor" Robertson, who has an impressive 34-3 record from two years with the All Blacks-laden side.

In 23 years of Super Rugby, the Crusaders have been victorious nine times and they are aiming for 10 with most of last year's squad, with the notable absentee being the retired Wyatt Crockett.

But a need to ease the workload on their galaxy of stars—Kieran Read and Sam White-lock will miss the first month—is one reason why the Crusaders have only once won the championship in a World Cup year, and that was back in 1999.

The Chiefs, with X-factor players Damian McKenzie and Brodie Retallick, will be without the inspirational Sam Cane for at least 12 weeks as he recovers from a serious neck injury, while the Wellington Hurricanes need to plug the gaps left by Brad Shields and Julian Savea.

The Auckland Blues have long been under-achievers and have pinned their hopes this year on replacing coach Tana Umaga with former long-serving Crusader Leon MacDonald, and uniting blockbuster midfield pair Sonny Bill Williams and 36-year-old Ma'a Nonu—who has returned after three years in France.

The Highlanders, who have relied on heroic defence to compensate for a lack of ball-winning ability, have beefed up their pack with the inclusion of the 2.04-metre (6ft 8in), 128-kilogramme (282lb) giant lock Pari Pari Parkinson.

The Golden Lions, runners-up in the last three seasons, are again seen as the biggest threat from South Africa despite tight forwards Jacques van Rooyen, Ruan Dreyer and Franco



Lood de Jager

Mostert heading to Europe.

But Coastal Sharks coach Robert du Preez summed up his frustrations after several modest seasons by saying that with the talent at his disposal "we are running out of excuses. We have to succeed this year".

The Bulls have bolstered signed two old hands: 32-year-old back-row forward Duane Vermeulen and hooker Schalk Brits, 37. The Waratahs rate as Australia's brightest hope with Ashley Adam-Cooper and Karmichael

Hunt joining Bernard Foley, Kurtley Beale and Israel Folau in a first-class backline.

The enigmatic Quade Cooper adds punch to the Melbourne Rebels after moving from the Queensland Reds, where he was frozen out last season by coach Brad Thorne. The Jaguares, the Argentina Pumas under another name, have Gonzalo Quesada as new coach and a new captain in Jeronimo de la Fuente but have lost backline general Nicolas Sanchez to Stade Francais. —AFP

Stroll ready to take a lead role in the family F1 business

TORONTO: Lance Stroll may be the favoured son at Racing Point, the Formula One team his billionaire father Lawrence bought last year, but the Canadian will still have to deliver the goods for the family business.

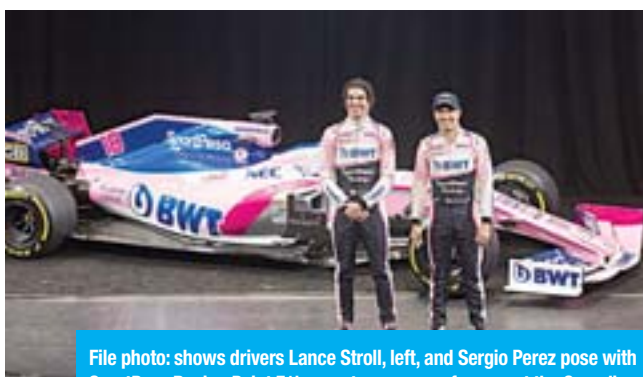
The 20-year-old driver, a veteran of two seasons with Williams, cannot expect an easy ride from Mexican team mate Sergio Perez either. The pairing of the boss's son with the 29-year-old veteran who was with the Silverstone-based team in their previous incarnation as Force India, could be both intriguing and potentially explosive this season.

Stroll, who has long chafed at the suggestion his progress owes much to parental cash, told Reuters at a team livery launch on Wednesday that he was ready to roll his sleeves up for his new team.

"It's a family business. He (Lawrence Stroll) has put me on the turf and I have to get my hands dirty," he said. "I'm not kicking my feet up in my chair, I am going to be hustling and it is a great opportunity for me as a racing driver, a big stepping stone in my career."

"It's a great opportunity for my father and the Stroll family, we are putting our heart and soul into Racing Point. He has been in my corner since day one and to be working alongside him is an amazing opportunity."

With a Canadian owner, a Canadian driver and several Canadian sponsors, Racing Point made history at the Canadian



File photo: shows drivers Lance Stroll, left, and Sergio Perez pose with SportPesa Racing Point F1's car at a press conference at the Canadian International AutoShow.

International Autoshow on Wednesday as the first Formula One team to launch in North America.

While the relationship between Perez and Stroll was nowhere near as frosty as the brutal winter weather outside, there was an undeniable chill as the elephant in the auditorium was addressed.

During a question and answer session both drivers were asked if they looked forward to being in a competitive car against each other. When the time for pictures came, a photographer setting up the photo suggested: "Lance pretend you like him."

That triggered a great laugh from the crowd, along with an uncomfortable shuffle and smile from the two drivers. When pushed, Stroll offered the Mexican some small platitudes. Perez, who has made 155 Grand Prix starts and reached the podium eight times, was more direct. —Reuters

Sunwolves face Super Rugby crunch as World Cup looms

TOKYO: Japan's Sunwolves take a woeful track record into their fourth Super Rugby season with the growing threat of extinction hanging over the Tokyo-based franchise.

Head coach Tony Brown, assistant to Japan boss Jamie Joseph last campaign, will have to perform a delicate balancing act with a bloated squad built largely to cater for the national team's World Cup preparations.

The Sunwolves face South Africa's Coastal Sharks this weekend in their opening game aiming for just their seventh victory after three chastening seasons in the southern hemisphere's elite competition. Brown is expected to rotate liberally in the run-up to the World Cup in Japan later this year with Brave Blossoms in particular likely to be used with extreme care.

But the New Zealander will be under extreme pressure to deliver results with the Sunwolves facing an uncertain future as Super Rugby bosses prepare to meet in March to discuss the competition's future format.

Critics have called for the Sunwolves to be kicked out, pointing to their poor record and the fact they rely so heavily on imports—with players from New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Fiji, Tonga, Georgia and South Korea having pulled on the red shirt. —AFP

Sports

Greece's Tsitsipas 'loses to himself' in Rotterdam exit

Wawrinka powers into Rotterdam quarter-finals

ROTTERDAM: Rising Greek star Stefanos Tsitsipas said he "lost to himself" after suffering a shock defeat at the ATP event in Rotterdam by Bosnian Damir Dzumhur on Wednesday. The 20-year-old, who dumped out Roger Federer en route to the Australian Open semi-finals last month, saved two match points late in the third set but still slumped to a 6-4, 1-6, 7-5 loss.

It was Dzumhur's first win since October after a run of four straight defeats, and Tsitsipas was left frustrated by an erratic display. "I lost to myself, not to him," said the world number 12.

"He fools you, waits for you to make mistakes. He stands eight metres behind the baseline and plays with your strengths. He played nothing crazy or special, but you don't get any rhythm with him.

"The momentum was on my side but he kept putting the ball into the court and running." Tsitsipas was seeded third at the Ahoy Arena, but has now lost three of his last four matches after following his Melbourne last-four thrashing by Rafael Nadal with a quarter-final exit at the hands of Gael Monfils in Sofia last week.

Stan Wawrinka, the 2015 champion, ended a three-match losing run against Milos Raonic as he defeated the fourth-seeded Canadian 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) to reach the last eight. Wawrinka, ranked 68th after spending last season recovering and rehabbing from two 2017 knee operations, is fast gaining momentum in 2019.

The 33-year-old Swiss saved the only break point he faced while holding big server Raonic

to a relatively modest 15 aces. "I was moving much better in this match than some of the others against him," said the three-time Grand Slam title winner.

"This was my best match in many months. Some of my losses this season were close calls. I'm trying to push myself, I'm looking for results." Wawrinka will play his second quarter-final of the season after Doha when he takes on Denis Shapovalov after the Canadian teenager beat former champion Tomas Berdych 6-4, 6-3,

'KEPT MY LEVEL'

Earlier on Wednesday, Jo-Wilfried Tsonga continued his strong form with a 6-1, 6-4 defeat of Italy's Thomas Fabbiano. The Frenchman, who missed seven months of last season after knee surgery, continued his momentum after winning last weekend's tournament in Montpellier.

Tsonga, ranked 140th, spent just 66 minutes in dispatching qualifier Fabbiano. The former Australian Open finalist, 33, was pleased with his showing as he won his 10th match from 12 since the start of the year.

"I played well in the first set and kept my level in the second," he said. "My opponent raised (his) in the second but I held on." Tsonga next plays Dutch wildcard Tallon Griekspoor, who knocked out second seed Karen Khachanov on Tuesday and admitted he does not know much about the 211th-ranked home hope.

"I really don't know about him, but we will work on it," Tsonga said. Russian fifth seed



ROTTERDAM: Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas plays a forehand return to Bosnia's Damir Dzumhur during their men's singles match on day three of the ABN AMRO World Tennis Tournament in Rotterdam on Wednesday. — AFP

Daniil Medvedev won his opening match of the week, beating France's Jeremy Chardy 7-6 (7/2), 6-2. Hungarian Marton Fucsovics put out 2016 Rotterdam champion Martin Klizan 7-6 (7/4), 6-4. Like Tsonga, Medvedev, who turned 23 on

Monday, also arrived in the Netherlands after winning a title, having claimed his fourth ATP tournament win in Sofia. Monfils reached the quarter-finals on Wednesday at the expense of Italy's Andreas Seppi, 4-6, 6-1, 6-3. — AFP

Injured Sharapova out of Indian Wells

LOS ANGELES: Maria Sharapova has withdrawn from next month's WTA Indian Wells Open after failing to overcome a right shoulder injury, tournament organisers said Wednesday. The 31-year-old Russian star has been struggling with a right shoulder problem which forced her withdrawal from the Saint Petersburg tournament last month.

Organisers of the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells announced on Wednesday the same problem had prompted her withdrawal from the March 4-17 event in California. Sharapova's place in the main draw will be taken by Germany's Mona Barthel, organisers said.

Sharapova has been struggling back to top fitness since watching from the sidelines during her 15-month doping ban that ended in 2017. The former world number one missed out on a place in the Australian Open quarter-finals last month, but insisted she still believes she can increase her tally of five Slam titles. — AFP



Maria Sharapova

Hazlewood confident of being fit for WCup

SYDNEY: Australian pace spearhead Josh Hazlewood said yesterday he was confident of being fit for the World Cup, with scans this week set to determine when he can make a comeback. The vice-captain missed Australia's two recent Tests against Sri Lanka with a back injury and has also been ruled out of their upcoming one-day tours against India and Pakistan.

Cricket Australia physiotherapist David Beakley previously said he was suffering an early stage stress fracture, similar to one that sidelined him for six months last year. Hazlewood told reporters he was targeting World Cup warm-up games for his return, with a follow-up scan on Friday set to shed more light on his progress.

"I think we'll know a lot more after tomorrow, to be honest. Hopefully in the coming weeks we'll start working through it," he said. "Hopefully it's going along to plan. "Everything feels fine so training's coming along nicely, progressing every week. I think we'll just work back from the World Cup really and make sure everything's right for that, which gives me plenty of time."

Australia play their first World Cup group game against Afghanistan on June 1, with three practice matches scheduled at home against New Zealand in May. Fellow fast bowler Mitchell Starc is also struggling with injury after suffering a "substantial" muscle tear in the final Test against Sri Lanka. He has been ruled out of the India series, with his availability for Pakistan not yet known. — AFP

Russell lifts Brooklyn Nets over Cavaliers in 3 OTs

Blazers run away to win, end Warriors' streak

CLEVELAND: D'Angelo Russell took over in the third overtime, scoring 14 of his 36 points, and the short-handed Brooklyn Nets outlasted the host Cleveland Cavaliers for a wild 148-139 victory on Wednesday. Russell began the game by missing 10 of his first 11 shots, but he was 6 of 6 in the third overtime and finished 13 of 30 from the floor. After the Nets forced a third overtime on a buzzer-beating 3-pointer by DeMarre Carroll, Russell made a handful of plays to help the Nets snap a four-game road losing streak in their last game before the All-Star break. Cleveland's Jordan Clarkson scored a game-high 42 points, hitting 7 of 17 3-point attempts.

BUCKS 106, PACERS 97

Giannis Antetokounmpo produced 33 points, 19 rebounds and 11 assists for his fifth triple-double of the season as Milwaukee rallied for a victory over Indiana in Indianapolis. Malcolm Brogdon scored 17 points and Kris Middleton added 15 as Milwaukee won for the 14th time in its past 16 games. The Bucks (43-14) own the best record in the NBA heading into the All-Star break. Bojan Bogdanovic scored 20 points for the Pacers, who had a six-game winning streak halted. Domantas Sabonis recorded 14 points and nine rebounds.

NUGGETS 120, KINGS 118

Nikola Jokic had 20 points, 18 rebounds and 11 assists, and he tipped in his own miss with 0.3 seconds left to give host Denver a win over Sacramento. Paul Millsap finished with 25 points and 13 rebounds, and Isaiah Thomas scored eight points in 13 minutes during his Denver debut. The Nuggets won despite coach Michael Malone and guard Malik Beasley being ejected. Beasley finished with 21 points before getting tossed. Buddy Hield had 25 points and Harrison Barnes finished with 19 points and 11 rebounds for the Kings.

TRAIL BLAZERS 129, WARRIORS 107

Damian Lillard scored 29 points and Portland used a late 16-0 run to blow away visiting Golden State. Jake Layman added 17 points off the bench as eight players scored in double figures for the Trail Blazers, who snapped Golden State's five-game win streak. Kevin Durant and Stephen Curry each scored 32 points for the Warriors, who had won 16 of their previous 17 contests. Golden State played without center DeMarcus Cousins and key reserves Andre Iguodala and Shaun Livingston to give them some rest.

CELTICS 118, PISTONS 110

Jayson Tatum led six Boston players in double figures with 19 points as the home team ended Detroit's four-game winning streak. Gordon Hayward contributed 18 points and eight assists, while Al Horford supplied 17 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists. Jaylen Brown had 17 points and seven rebounds, Marcus Smart added 16 points and five assists, and Marcus Morris chipped in 11 points. Blake Griffin led Detroit with 32 points, eight rebounds and five assists. Andre Drummond had 21 points, 17 rebounds and four steals for the Pistons.

TIMBERWOLVES 121, ROCKETS 111

Jeff Teague produced a double-double while Karl-Anthony Towns led a dominant performance in the paint by Minnesota, which used a balanced scoring attack to thwart James Harden and Houston in Minneapolis. Rookie Josh Okogie provided a spark by scoring 16 points and playing energetic defense on Harden, who still extended his streak of 30-point games to 31 with 42 points, matching Wilt Chamberlain for the second-longest streak in NBA history. Harden has recorded 22 40-point games this season. Teague paced seven Timberwolves in double figures with 27 points and added a game-high 12 assists. Towns paired 25 points with a team-best nine rebounds. Chris Paul added 16 points and eight assists for Houston while Kenneth Faried chipped in 12 points and 11 rebounds.

HEAT 112, MAVERICKS 101

Dwyane Wade played his final game at long-time nemesis Dallas and made it a memorable one with a game-high 22 points, and Miami rode a dominant third quarter to a victory. Wade, 37, led the Heat past the Mavs in the 2006 NBA Finals. Five years later, Dallas and Dirk Nowitzki repaid Wade by winning the Finals in six games on Miami's home floor. After Wednesday's game, Nowitzki, who is also nearing the end of his career, exchanged jerseys with Wade. Nowitzki, 40, who has yet to officially announce that this, his 21st season, will be his last, finished with 12 points in 17 minutes, but he was nowhere near his efficiency level of seasons past, shooting 5 of 14 from the floor and just 2 of 10 from beyond the 3-point arc.

76ERS 126, KNICKS 111

New York erased much of a 26-point, third-quarter deficit but could not complete the comeback against visiting Philadelphia, which extended the Knicks' franchise-record, single-season losing streak. The Knicks have dropped 18 straight, two shy of the franchise's all-time record, a 20-game streak that spanned the 1984-85 and 1985-86 seasons. The skid is the longest in the NBA since the Memphis Grizzlies dropped 19 straight last season. Joel Embiid led Philadelphia with 26 points and 14 rebounds. Tobias Harris scored 25 points, his top total in four games since being acquired by the 76ers on Feb. 6. Allonzo Trier scored 19 points to lead an impressive performance by Knicks reserves, who accounted for 74 points.

RAPTORS 129, WIZARDS 120

Pascal Siakam scored 19 of his career-best 44 points in the third quarter and grabbed 10 rebounds as Toronto defeated visiting Washington and entered the All-Star break with a six-game winning streak. The Raptors trailed by as many as 12 points in the third quarter but scored 44 points in the period to take a 10-point lead entering the fourth. OG Anunoby had 10 points in the third quarter and finished with a career-best 22 points for Toronto, which was without Kawhi Leonard because of a sore left knee. Bradley Beal led Washington with 28 points and 11 assists, Jeff Green added 23 points, and Jabari Parker had 22 points and nine rebounds.



PORTLAND: Klay Thompson #11 of the Golden State Warriors shoots the ball against the Portland Trail Blazers on Wednesday at the Moda Center in Portland, Oregon. — AFP

BULLS 122, GRIZZLIES 110

Otto Porter Jr. scored a career-high 37 points on 16-for-20 shooting, and Chicago pulled away for a win over visiting Memphis. Robin Lopez contributed a season-high 25 points on 10-for-15 shooting for the Bulls, who won for only the fourth time in their past 22 games. Lauri Markkanen finished with 21 points and 10 rebounds for his eighth double-double in the past nine games. Memphis lost for the second consecutive game after falling short by one point to the San Antonio Spurs on Tuesday night. Avery Bradley led the Grizzlies in scoring for a second consecutive

contest as he finished with 15 points on 7-for-12 shooting.

CLIPPERS 134, SUNS 107

Lou Williams scored 17 of his game-high 30 points in the first half as Los Angeles built a big lead on visiting Phoenix and coasted to a victory. The win was the Clippers' 12th straight over the Suns dating to April 2016. Phoenix, led by Kelly Oubre Jr. with a season-high 28 points, lost its 15th in a row and has dropped 11 straight on the road. Los Angeles scored its second-most points of the season, with Danilo Gallinari contributing 20 and Montrezl Harrell adding 19. — Reuters

NBA results/standings

Minnesota 121, Houston 111; Portland 129, Golden State 107; LA Clippers 134, Phoenix 107; Dallas 101, Miami 112; Boston 118, Detroit 110; New York 111, Philadelphia 126; Toronto 129, Washington 120; Denver 120, Sacramento 118; Chicago 122, Memphis 110; Cleveland 139, Brooklyn 148 (OT); Indiana 97, Milwaukee 106.

Eastern Conference

	W	L	PCT	GB
Milwaukee	43	14	0.754	-
Toronto	43	16	0.729	1
Indiana	38	20	0.655	5.5
Boston	37	21	0.638	6.5
Philadelphia	37	21	0.638	6.5
Brooklyn	30	29	0.508	14
Charlotte	27	29	0.482	15.5
Miami	26	30	0.464	16.5
Detroit	26	30	0.464	16.5
Orlando	26	32	0.448	17.5
Washington	24	34	0.414	19.5
Atlanta	19	38	0.333	24
Chicago	14	44	0.241	29.5
Cleveland	12	46	0.207	31.5
New York	10	47	0.175	33

Western Conference

Golden State	41	16	0.719	-
Denver	39	18	0.684	2
Oklahoma City	37	19	0.661	3.5
Portland	34	23	0.596	7
Houston	33	24	0.579	8
Utah	32	25	0.561	9
San Antonio	33	26	0.559	9
LA Clippers	32	27	0.542	10
Sacramento	30	27	0.526	11
LA Lakers	28	29	0.491	13
Minnesota	27	30	0.474	14
Dallas	26	31	0.456	15
New Orleans	25	33	0.431	16.5
Memphis	23	36	0.390	19
Phoenix	11	48	0.186	31

Sports

Bayern banking on Neuer for final Liverpool tune-up

Kovac and Bayern target ninth league win in 10 outings

BERLIN: Bayern Munich hope to have star goalkeeper Manuel Neuer back for today's Bundesliga game at strugglers Augsburg, their final tune-up before next week's crunch Champions League clash away to Liverpool.

Neuer, 32, has sat out Bayern's last three games with a thumb injury but is set to prove his fitness at Augsburg ahead of Tuesday's last 16, first leg against Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool at Anfield. "Manuel has not had any negative reaction, so he's an option for Friday again," Bayern head coach Niko Kovac said on Wednesday. Neuer is confident he will face Liverpool, telling ESPN: "I think I'll be between the posts. I am doing well, it's not so bad." However, Kovac is wary of rushing him back too soon, especially given Neuer's history after fracturing his foot twice in quick succession in 2017 which saw him miss most of last season. "Manuel is an ambitious goalkeeper," said Kovac of the 2014 World Cup winner. "It was his decision alone to not play in certain games - the player always has the last word and in this case, Manuel is ready."

Kovac has virtually a full-strength squad to choose from at Augsburg with only Arjen Robben and Corentin Tolisso still sidelined by injury. Second-placed Bayern's 3-1 home win against Schalke last weekend trimmed the gap to five points behind Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund,

who threw away a three-goal lead in a 3-3 draw with Hoffenheim.

Kovac and Bayern will target a ninth league win in 10 outings at Augsburg to maintain the pressure on Dortmund, who play bottom side Nuremberg away on Monday.

NO EASING UP AT AUGSBURG

Augsburg, who have recruited ex-Arsenal and Germany goalkeeper Jens Lehmann as assistant coach, were hammered 4-0 by Werder Bremen at the weekend to leave them just above the relegation places.

"The league title will be won in defence, I'd hope we win the game on Friday and, if possible, prevent them from scoring," said Kovac. "We have no reason to spare anyone in Augsburg."

"We have enough time to recover and we don't want to underestimate the game, because this is a chance to really get into the Bundesliga race." This game is important to create a bit of atmosphere," added Kovac. Liverpool will host Bayern having had 10 days off since their last match, Saturday's 3-0 home win over Bournemouth, but Kovac says their opponents' break could be an advantage for the Germans.

"We are playing against Liverpool who were in the final last year and have spent a bit more money than we have," said Kovac, referring to



MUNICH: File photo shows Bayern Munich's German midfielder Leon Goretzka wave to the fans in front of his former team mates after the German first division Bundesliga football match, Bayern Munich v Schalke 04 on February 9, 2018 in Munich, southern Germany. — AFP

Liverpool's high-profile signings of goalkeeper Alisson, and midfielders Naby Keita and Fabinho. "It's two top teams - little things, and a bit of luck,

will decide the game. "It's no bad thing if Liverpool get a few days' rest - it'll mean they will lose their rhythm." — AFP

Returning Dembele primed to inject urgency back into stumbling Barca

BARCELONA: Barcelona's seemingly unstoppable march to a 26th La Liga title has slowed with two consecutive draws but Ousmane Dembele can return them to full speed when he makes his first start in four weeks against Real Valladolid tomorrow.

While the Catalans have been sweating on the fitness of Lionel Messi, who has completed their last two league games despite some discomfort in his thigh, the absence of Dembele has been felt just as keenly.

The France forward had put his disciplinary problems aside in the last two months, carving up opponents with his unpredictable dribbles and forming a profitable trident with Messi and Luis Suarez. His progress, however, was cut short by an ankle injury against Leganes on Jan. 20.

Without Dembele, Barca saw an eight-game winning run interrupted by a 2-2 draw at home to Valencia, and a 1-1 stalemate in a Copa del Rey semi-final first leg against Real Madrid.

He came on for 15 minutes against Athletic

Bilbao, where Barca drew 0-0, with Suarez saying the team's attackers suffered from a lack of communication.

Barca's record signing Philippe Coutinho has filled in for Dembele but has failed to dovetail with his fellow South Americans, Suarez in particular, who thrives off the space the Frenchman's rampaging runs create for him. With a resurgent Real Madrid closing a gap of 10 points two games ago down to six and emerging as a late threat to Barca's title ambitions, Dembele's return to full fitness could hardly come at a more urgent time.

After facing 15th-place Valladolid, Barca face four consecutive tricky away games which could define their season, taking on Olympique Lyonnais in a Champions League last-16 first leg next week before visiting fourth-placed Sevilla.

They then visit Real for the second leg of the Copa del Rey semi-final before returning to the Santiago Bernabeu for a league fixture which could have a huge say in the destination of the title.

Real, who have won their last five league games and earned a 2-1 victory at Ajax Amsterdam in the Champions League on Wednesday, play at home on Sunday against a free-falling Girona side who last won in the league in November.

Atletico Madrid meanwhile visit struggling Rayo Vallecano, plotting their recovery from consecutive defeats to Real Betis and Real which have seen them drop to third, seven points from Barca. — Reuters

Gattuso finally finds Milan he was looking for

MILAN: After a year of ups and downs, and flirting with the sack on several occasions, coach Gennaro Gattuso finally appears to have found the AC Milan he was looking for. The seven-times European champions have spent the last month in the Serie A top four, where they need to finish to qualify for the Champions League next season, and are unbeaten in eight league and cup games.

In particular, the winter signings of Polish striker Krzysztof Piatek and Brazilian midfielder Lucas Paqueta have given Milan a cutting edge they badly needed. Piatek has scored four goals in as many appearances since his move from Genoa and Paqueta has brought some spark to a previously underperforming midfield.

Tiemoue Bakayoko has settled well after a slow start following his loan move from Chelsea, and with Lucas Biglia returning after a three-month injury layoff, Gattuso now has to decide who to leave out.

"If it's a problem, we'll solve it," said Gattuso, a former fiery midfielder who had never coached a Serie A team before he was

handed the job in November 2017. "Biglia needs time to find his form. Bakayoko is an unusual deep-lying playmaker... he used to choose the wrong passes but now he takes men on, can force his way past opponents and create chances."

Hakan Calhanoglu is another who has pleased Gattuso in midfield even though the Turkish free kick specialist has yet to score a Serie A goal this season. "You have to look at what he does in the ninety minutes, I expect a lot more quality from him but he runs miles, holds the position and gives quality with Paqueta," said Gattuso.

It is all very different from December when Milan went four Serie A games without scoring and Gattuso's future was the subject of daily speculation. But there is still a long way to go. Although they are fourth with 39 points, Atlanta, AS Roma and Lazio are lurking one point behind while Torino (34 points) and Sampdoria (33) are also in the running for a top-four finish.

On Saturday, they visit a rampant Atalanta side who, like Milan, are unbeaten in eight games and have already beaten Inter Milan 4-1 in the league and Juventus 3-0 in the Coppa Italia at the Stadio Atleti Azzurri d'Italia.

"For many years we've reached the spring and Milan have been outside the race for the Champions League but we need to break that trend and fight hard to be in a strong position when the final weeks arrive," said Gattuso.—Reuters

Sports

Asensio and VAR help Madrid snatch victory against Ajax

Ajax have not beaten Madrid in 24 years

AMSTERDAM: Real Madrid needed a late winner from Marco Asensio and VAR's debut in the Champions League to beat a spirited Ajax 2-1 in the first leg of the last 16 on Wednesday.

Ajax have not beaten Madrid in 24 years and thought they were on their way at the Johan Cruyff Arena when Nicolas Tagliafico headed home after a Thibaut Courtois error.

But referee Damir Skomina judged Dusan Tadic to be offside upon review and Madrid showed no pity on their youthful opponents, Karim Benzema and Asensio scoring two precious away goals in the second half.

Hakim Ziyech's equaliser at least keeps Ajax in touch heading into the second leg at the Santiago Bernabeu but Asensio's 87th-minute winner was a sucker-punch in a match the Dutch team had largely dominated.

Their ruled out opener will only add to the sense of what might have been and it was no surprise to see a cluster of red and white shirts surrounding the officials at the final whistle.

VAR has been introduced to the Champions League for the first time in this year's knock-out stages and leaflets were distributed to the media before kick-off, one of the points explaining how reviews should only be for "clear and obvious mistakes". UEFA later tweeted Ajax's goal was "correctly overturned for offside" but Tadic's intervention on Courtois was minimal and it seemed generous to deem it enough for a call to be reversed.

"We can't see the replay," Madrid coach Santiago Solari said. "We have to be confident in

what the referees say." "I saw it," said Ajax's Erik ten Hag. "In my opinion it was not offside and I don't see it as a foul on the goalkeeper either."

Still, there was more than an hour to play and Ajax were twice too easily undone on the counter-attack. Frenkie de Jong, who will join Barcelona in the summer, and Matthijs de Ligt, who could follow him, were each dealt a lesson in the ruthlessness of top European football.

It was put to Solari afterwards that Ajax had deserved more. "That is your opinion—we had to work, to suffer, to create," he said. "You have to survive the pressure sometimes. These things are part of the game too." Gareth Bale was reinstated to the Madrid starting line-up but there was no place for Marcelo, who missed his first Champions League knock-out game in four years. Ajax fans had put on an impressive display of fireworks late on Tuesday night outside the Spanish team's hotel and perhaps it paid off because a drowsy Madrid were run ragged in the first half. Tadic had the first chance as Sergio Reguilon's poor pass was headed into his path, a sliced finish beating Courtois' right hand but not the post.

The best opportunity fell to the excellent Donny van de Beek, after the ball was shifted along the line like a rugby move until the midfielder was left spare six yards out. Courtois saved with his legs. Hero one minute, villain the next, Courtois then fumbled De Ligt's header from the corner and Tagliafico headed in. There was no protest from Courtois but Skomina pointed to his earpiece. Tadic, who had brushed



AMSTERDAM: Ajax's Argentine defender Nicolas Tagliafico (C) scores a goal which will be rejected after VAR deliberation during the UEFA Champions league round of 16 first leg football match between Ajax Amsterdam and Real Madrid at the Johan Cruyff Arena on Wednesday. — AFP

past the Belgian as the header looped in, was ruled offside.

The crowd jeered at half-time and Benzema compounded their misery soon after. It was a goal to sum up Madrid's resurgence in recent weeks as Luka Modric flicked a ball for Vinicius Junior to race after. He tore past one, jinked in-

side two more and teed up Benzema, who found the top corner. Ajax refused to fade. David Neres and Tadic both went close before Neres skipped free down the left and crossed for Ziyech to slide in the equaliser. Madrid wanted a free-kick for a foul on Lucas Vazquez in the build-up but this time the goal stood. —AFP

Spurs boss hails Spurs 'heroes' after Dortmund triumph

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino saluted his Tottenham "heroes" as they took a huge step towards reaching the Champions League quarter-finals with a 3-0 win over Borussia Dortmund in the last 16 first leg on Wednesday.

Pochettino's side had been under the cosh as Dortmund dominated the first half at Wembley, but Hugo Lloris kept them level with a series of fine saves.

That set the stage for a sublime second half from Tottenham, who were sparked into life by a fine finish from South Korea forward Son Heung-min.

Son's fourth goal in his last four appearances took him to 16 for the season, but none have been as priceless as this one. Tottenham defender Jan Vertonghen capped his own powerful performance when he swept in their second goal in the closing stages and substitute Fernando Llorente's late third put the seal on a remarkable result.

Insisting his players deserved all the

praise after emerging from a gruelling schedule with their best result of the season, Pochettino said: "I want to congratulate my players one more time. It was a fantastic game, a massive effort.

"My players are heroes. They deserve a lot of praise for the effort they are doing this season. It is amazing."

Although Tottenham still have to survive the second leg at Signal Iduna Park on March 5, they have a golden opportunity to reach the Champions League quarter-finals for the first time since 2011.

"3-0 is a very good result but it is only the first leg. When you have a team in front of you like Dortmund you need to respect them," Pochettino said.

It was an especially impressive success for Pochettino given he was without the injured Harry Kane, Dele Alli, Danny Rose and Ben Davies.

Pochettino devised a clever game-plan that eventually frustrated Dortmund and secured Tottenham's first ever Champions

League knockout-round win at home.

With Rose and Davies sidelined, Pochettino deployed centre-back Vertonghen out of position at left wing-back and switched to a three-man defence that stifled the Bundesliga leaders. "It is my job to prepare the strategy. Maybe today everyone will say it was a fantastic decision. If it was a different result, people might say I'm the worst coach in the world," he said.

"The first half was very difficult. We didn't feel the confidence to play. "We were a little bit lucky because when Son scored it was a massive boost to our confidence." Dortmund boss Lucien Favre bemoaned his team's collapse, saying: "The start of the second half we gave it away.

"We should have got the ball forward rather than played from the back for their first goal. That was a gift. "After that we played a bit too hastily. The pressing was intensive from Tottenham." — AFP

Ronaldo on bench

MILAN: Cristiano Ronaldo is set for a rare start on the bench as Juventus host struggling Frosinone today looking to pull 14 points clear in Serie A with an eye towards next week's Champions League trip to Atletico Madrid.

Portuguese star Ronaldo brought his tally to 20 goals for Juventus in all competitions last weekend in a 3-0 win over Sassuolo. But the 34-year-old will start on the bench for just the second time this season before the former Real Madrid player returns to the Spanish capital next week. Paulo Dybala returns to the starting line-up, forming an attacking trident alongside Mario Mandzukic and Federico Bernardeschi. Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri's defensive problems have been eased with trio Andrea Barzagli, Leonardo Bonucci and Giorgio Chiellini back training.

Juventus captain Chiellini is expected to return today. Second-placed Napoli dropped points last weekend with a goalless draw against Fiorentina and face a potentially tricky test at home against Torino. Walter Mazzarri's Torino are four points off the Europa League places. Napoli will be without midfielder Marek Hamsik for the first time since the former skipper having sealed his move to Chinese Super League club Dalian Yifang.

Lorenzo Insigne takes on the captain's role and insisted motivation remained high despite Juventus' charge towards an eighth consecutive league title. "Juventus haven't sapped our motivation, we knew it would be hard to keep up with them," said Insigne. "We know they're a great team, but we're no worse than them. "The championship is still long. We left some points on the road that we deserved, but we certainly do not give up." — AFP



Injured Sharapova out of Indian Wells

See Page 44