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Pompeo 'optimistic' both Syrian Kurds, Turkey can be protected

US begins withdrawing gear from Syria, but not troops

6 killed in horrific crash



KUWAIT: The wreckage of an SUV and taxi are seen after they collided.

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate's PR department said six people were killed and five others were injured in a head-on collision between an SUV and a taxi on Road 500 lead-

ing to Wafra farms. Those in the taxi - all expats - were killed, while those in the SUV - a Kuwaiti family - were injured. Nuwaiseeb fire center firemen rushed to the scene, and the bodies of the deceased were recovered by forensics.

ABU DHABI: Washington's top diplomat said yesterday he was "optimistic" a way could be found to protect Syrian Kurds while allowing Turks to "defend their country from terrorists" following a US pullout from Syria. "We are confident we can achieve an outcome that achieves both of those," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told journalists in Abu Dhabi. The Gulf emirate is his latest stop in a regional tour aimed at reassuring allies after a shock December announcement by President Donald Trump that US troops would be withdrawn from Syria.

Pompeo's remarks follow tensions between the US and Turkey over the fate of Washington's Syrian Kurdish allies in the fight against Islamic State group militants. Turkey had reacted angrily to suggestions that Trump's plan to withdraw troops was conditional on the safety of the US-backed Kurdish fighters, seen by the Turkish government as terrorists. US-led operations against IS in Syria have been spearheaded on the ground by the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces.

Ankara sees the backbone of that alliance, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG),



ABU DHABI: Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan speaks with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo during a meeting at Al-Shati Palace in the UAE capital yesterday. — AFP

as a terrorist group linked to the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) which has fought a decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state. Pompeo said that Washington recognized "the Turkish people's right and

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Young Saudi teen arrives in Canada to official welcome

TORONTO: A young Saudi woman who caused a sensation by defying her family and seeking asylum abroad was welcomed with open arms in Toronto yesterday at the end of an exhausting international odyssey. Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland greeted Rahaf Mohammed Al-Qunun, 18, after she landed in Toronto, wearing a blue ball cap and a gray hoodie emblazoned in red with the word "CANADA". Smiling broadly, she posed for photographers with Freeland at her side, but made no statement. "She had a pretty long journey and is exhausted and prefers not to take questions for the moment," Freeland said.

Qunun captured the world's attention with a trail of Twitter posts that ignited a #SaveRahaf movement as she fled what she said was an abusive family in ultraconservative Saudi Arabia. Thai authorities backed down on an attempt to deport her after she arrived in Bangkok on a

flight from Kuwait a week ago, turning her over to the UN's refugee agency instead. Then on Friday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made the surprise announcement that Canada would take her in.

The move is sure to further strain Canada's relations with the kingdom. That relationship went sideways last August over Ottawa's rights criticism of Saudi Arabia, prompting Riyadh to expel the Canadian ambassador and sever all trade and investment ties in protest. Canada also sparked fury in Riyadh by demanding the "immediate release" of jailed rights campaigners, including Samar Badawi, the sister of jailed blogger Raif Badawi, whose family lives in Quebec.

Qunun's attempt to flee Saudi Arabia was embraced by rights groups as a beacon of defiance against repression. "Ms Al-Qunun's plight has captured the world's attention over the past few days, providing a glimpse into the precarious situation of millions of refugees worldwide," said Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). "Refugee protection today is often under threat and cannot always be assured, but in this instance international refugee law and overriding values of humanity have prevailed."

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TORONTO: Saudi asylum seeker Rahaf Mohammed Al-Qunun smiles as she is introduced to the media at Toronto Pearson International Airport alongside Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland (right) yesterday. — AFP

Trump promises citizenship path for skilled workers

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Friday he would make it easier for top-skilled workers to stay in the United States and become citizens, offering uncharacteristic praise for immigrants' contributions. Trump pledged to reform coveted H-1B visas, for which three-quarters of applicants are from India, most of them in the technology sector. "H-1B (sic) holders in the United States can rest assured that changes are soon coming which will bring both simplicity and certainty to your stay, including a potential path to citizenship," Trump said on Twitter. "We want to encourage talented and highly skilled people to pursue career options in the US."

It was unclear what Trump meant by a "potential path to citizenship" for H-1B visa holders, who already are eligible to be sponsored by employers for legal permanent residency, which would then make them eligible to become US citizens. When asked about Trump's tweet, US Citizenship and Immigration Services spokesman Michael Bars provided a statement about a formal proposal in December for changes to the H-1B process, which are likely to become final later this year.

The proposal is designed to increase by 5,340, or 16 percent, the number of H-1B beneficiaries who hold advanced degrees from American universities. It would also streamline the application process with a new electronic registration system. "These proposed regulatory changes would help ensure more of the best and brightest workers from around the world come to America under the H-1B program," Bars said.

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Govt shutdown becomes longest in US history

WASHINGTON: The partial US government shutdown entered a record 22nd day yesterday, as President Donald Trump remains steadfast in his demand for \$5.7 billion to build a Mexico border wall and Democrats in Congress determined to refuse the funds. The president issued a series of tweets yesterday in an effort to defend his stance and goad Democrats to return to Washington and end what he called "the massive humani-

tarian crisis at our Southern Border".

"Democrats could solve the Shutdown in 15 minutes!" he said in one tweet, adding in another, "We will be out for a long time unless the Democrats come back from their 'vacations' and get back to work. I am in the White House ready to sign!" But most lawmakers left town on Friday and will not return before tomorrow, leaving little chance for any solution to the stalemate before then.

The impasse has paralyzed Washington - its impact felt increasingly around the country - with the president retaliating by refusing to sign off on budgets for swaths of government departments unrelated to the dispute. As a result, 800,000 federal

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WASHINGTON: A US Park police officer rides a horse past the US Treasury during the 22nd day of the US government shutdown yesterday. — AFP

2 firefighters, tourist killed in Paris blast

PARIS: A powerful gas explosion tore through a building in central Paris yesterday, killing two firefighters and a Spanish woman, injuring dozens of people and badly damaging nearby apartments, officials said. Around 200 firefighters were mobilized to battle the fire that broke out after the blast and evacuate victims and residents in the area. Interior Minister Christophe Castaner told reporters at the scene. The explosion came with the city on edge during the latest "yellow vest" anti-government

demonstrations, which have often degenerated into violence and vandalism in Paris and other cities in recent weeks.

Cars were overturned by the blast and glass and rubble was strewn across large swathes of the street after the explosion gutted the lower part of the building. Dozens of residents were treated by rescue workers on the street. "I was sleeping and was woken up by the blast wave," Claire Sallavaud, who lives on the Rue de Trevisse where the explosion occurred, told AFP. "All the windows in the apartment exploded, doors were blown off their hinges, I had to walk on the door to leave the room, all the kids were panicking, they couldn't get out of their room."

"Firefighters advised us to leave but the elevator shaft had been blown

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PARIS: Firefighters extinguish a fire after an explosion at a bakery yesterday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait hosts Strategic Dialogue session with US on Tuesday

Pompeo's Kuwait visit to witness defense, security, economic-related deals



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo



Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah



US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman



Kuwait's assistant foreign minister for the Americas Reem Al-Khaled

KUWAIT: Kuwait hosts on Tuesday the 3rd Kuwait-US Strategic Dialogue Session, to be co-chaired by the two countries' foreign ministers, with aim of further cementing relations and cooperation to new levels. The previous Strategic Dialogue sessions were held in the US in 2016 and 2017, during which the two countries signed cooperation agreements and memoranda of understandings (MoUs) over security, counter-terrorism, economy, trade, education, oil, custom and consular affairs, raising to 23 number of deals between the two countries.

This year's session will be co-chaired by Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The strategic dialogue will set a roadmap for cooperation between Kuwait and the US for the next 25 years in different fields. Trade exchange amounted to \$4 billion and Kuwait was investing \$400 billion in the US. Kuwait and the US are also important players in the counter-terrorism efforts as well as in the global fight against the so-called Islamic State (IS).

Continuous work

The two countries seek, through strategic dialogue, to boost cooperation and coordination over regional and international issues, US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman said. The dialogue is a foundation for "our con-

tinuous work" and was supported by the leaderships in the two countries, he added. Since the strategic dialogue was established in October 2016, said Silverman, work groups began implementing cooperation means in defense, trade, security, investment, consular affairs and education.



Yemen, Syria, Iran on meetings' agenda

Relations between the Kuwaiti and American armies are excellent, he said, and the US commitment to defending Kuwait's security was firm.

Silverman said the US was providing technical support for Kuwait army and security forces. He added US and Kuwaiti military personnel were working together on training of Kuwait armed forces. America is the second largest exporter of goods and services to Kuwait, said

Silverman. The US, he affirmed, welcomed His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's initiatives aimed at maintaining security of Kuwait, as well as achieving security and stability in the region. Kuwait also played a key role in regional issues, he said, hosting donor conferences for Syria and an international meeting for the reconstruction of Iraq last February.

Silverman also noted Kuwait's leading humanitarian role in the region and the world. The US delegation to the strategic dialogue will exchange views over pressing regional challenges including Yemen, Syria and Iran, said Silverman, in addition to bolstering counter-terrorism cooperation and coordination within the UN Security Council. Among authorities taking part in the dialogue from Kuwait are Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, Defense and Higher Education, Directorate General for Civil Aviation, Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion authority (KDIPA), Kuwait Investment Authority, National Security Bureau, Directorate of Custom, and Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA).

Agreements

Meanwhile, a Kuwaiti official said that signing an agreement to boost their ongoing Strategic Dialogue and others in defense, security and economic affairs will be on the agenda of Pompeo's visit to Kuwait. During his past

trip to Washington in September, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah signed numerous deals illustrating the two countries' intent to further cement their relationship, according to Reem Al-Khaled, Kuwait's assistant foreign minister for the Americas. In Kuwait, a meeting for Pompeo with His Highness is scheduled, whereby, along with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the three will discuss developments on issues of mutual significance, added Khaled.

The talks will also present an opportunity to delve into several regional and global matters, namely the Gulf dispute, relations between Gulf states and Iran and the situations in Syria, Yemen and Libya. About the Strategic Dialogue, currently in its third annual session, this will include the usual topics of defense, education, economics, consulate and customs affairs, civil aviation and cyber security - with the matters of trade and scientific research introduced to the fold for the very first time. The Kuwaiti official also pointed out that five working groups, stemming from the dialogue, have been meeting on several occasions during the year. One of these will host businesspersons and companies at an economic and investment forum jointly organized by the Kuwaiti and US chambers of commerce, both of whom are expected to sign a memorandum of understanding aimed at boosting economic relations. — KUNA

Kuwait calls on DRC parties to practice restraint

NEW YORK: The State of Kuwait called on parties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to practice restraint and composure to prevent more loss in human lives in the south-central African country. In a speech to a UNSC meeting on the Congo, Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN headquarters in New York Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi said that the members of the council had followed the developments in the DRC since planning the elections on November 5, 2017 and executing it on December 30, 2018. The elections process saw a setback of a sort with the burning of some 8,000 electronic voting machines on December 13, 2018.

Despite the odds, the DRC government managed to hold an election with the support of the African Union and other entities, said Al-Otaibi who commended the government for its efforts. The elections — which were legislative, municipal, and Presidential — saw a wide-scale participation from the Congolese people as well as a variety of parties in the country, said the Kuwaiti diplomat, adding that the people of the DRC should not slide into chaos, which may ruin everything that the people worked for. He added that the 38 million Congolese who went out to vote must safeguard their country and fend off any attempt to ignite riots and armed conflicts.

The priority should be towards addressing the humanitarian situation in the DRC with the spread of Cholera and Ebola in areas where conflict prevent people from receiving proper medical attention, said the Ambassador who indicated that according to WHO statistics on December 22, 2018, some 326 cases out of 563 Ebola patients have died. — KUNA



NEW YORK: Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN headquarters in New York Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi speaks during a UNSC meeting on the Congo. — KUNA

No Kuwaiti casualties among Paris blast victims

PARIS: Kuwait's Ambassador in Paris Sami Al-Sulaiman confirmed yesterday that there were no Kuwaiti nationals among the injured in the explosion at a bakery in the center of the capital. Sulaiman said that the embassy contacted the French authorities immediately after the accident to make sure there were no Kuwaitis among the wounded. He expressed the Kuwaiti leadership's wishes for speedy recovery of the injured, urging Kuwaitis present in Paris to stay away from the scene, to be vigilant and to contact the embassy in case of any emergency.



Ambassador Sami Al-Sulaiman

A strong blast occurred in the capital Paris, which killed and wounded a number of people and shattered glass of surrounding shops. Police said gas leak at a bakery in the Ninth arrondissement caused a fire and the powerful explosion. — KUNA

KUWAIT: The Ambassador of France to Kuwait Marie Masdupuy hosted a reception on the occasion of the visit of Regional Director of Atout France in the Middle East Karim Mekachera, for the launch of the Arabic version of the official website of tourism in France 'France.fr.' Diplomats and media persons attended the event, which took place at the ambassador's residence over the weekend. — Photos by Joseph Shagra

Local

Architects call for saving Sawaber, turning landmark into urban development building

Team leads tour at historic site ahead of planned demolition



KUWAIT: The gatherers pose for a group picture outside Al-Sawaber complex yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Participants in a gathering to protest the planned demolition of Al-Sawaber complex.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: A gathering to walk, talk and envision Kuwait's most recognizable and historic landmarks - the residential Al-Sawaber complex - was held in Sharq yesterday. The walking tour was organized by 'Save Al-Sawaber' to talk about the history of the complex, which may soon become a memory after it is demolished.



Mohammad Al-Jassar



Zahra Ali Baba

demolished, the team is proposing that the complex be rehabilitated and regenerated as a mixed-use urban development building while maintaining elements of the original character and structure," he said. "The demolition of the complex will result in a large amount of waste. Building waste often includes concrete, metal, glass, plastic, wood, asphalt, bricks and more. Not only does this pollute the land and the air, but the transportation required to remove such waste has a major impact on the environment as well. This is why most countries levy a tax on demolishing buildings to encourage investors to revive them and protect the environment," said Jassar.

"Sawaber is very valuable to the heritage of Kuwait. It also stands as a symbol of a very important era in the history of the modern state of Kuwait. It represents the 20th century buildings of the city," said Architect Zahra Ali Baba, Chairwoman of the Chapter of Docomomo International, which is dedicated to the



The residential Al-Sawaber complex in Sharq.

advocacy and conservation of modern heritage in Kuwait. "Sawaber was a neighborhood where all families lived and knew each other, but in multistoried buildings. The complex is a modern heritage building of cultural and historical significance, but the project has now been marked for demolition," she noted.

The government has used various means to empty the complex of residents in order to have it demolished. Fourteen families have refused to move and they're still in their apartments, but most of the

tenants have left. Some were offered an apartment in Northwest Sulaibikhat, while others were offered financial compensation.

The complex was built in 1981, designed by famed architect and urban planner Arthur Erickson. Al-Sawaber represents a distinct architectural, economic and cultural period in Kuwaiti history. One of the first complexes in the country, it is located on approximately 245,000 square meters of prime real estate property in the heart of Kuwait's financial district. The

GCC states plan to link power grid with Ethiopia

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states will sign an agreement today with the Ethiopian government to start a feasibility study on electrical grids linkage of GCC states and Ethiopia as part of a four-year cooperation agreement. In this regard, GCC Interconnection Authority's CEO Ahmed Ali Al-Ibrahim said GCC states have great hopes for this agreement, since Ethiopia owns huge water resources that could be used in generating electricity to be later exported to GCC states.

Ibrahim said Ethiopia's hydropower is cheap and easy to use, while Ethiopia needs such projects to provide GCC states with electricity during peak consumption hours. He added that GCC interconnection had saved \$220 million for GCC states to bring the

total profits since launching the project in 2011 to \$2.5 billion. He also expected saving \$30 billion over the next 22 years.

Ibrahim added that southern Iraq will be connected to the GCC grid this year to provide it with 500 megawatts pending further connection with central and northern Iraq. Meanwhile, Ibrahim said that an agreement to import electricity from Europe during the summer and exporting electricity to it during winter is still being studied.

Oil sector engineers

Statistics issued by the oil minister's office showed citizens with oil and chemical engineering degrees working for Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and its subsidiaries form 84 percent of the total workforce, while expats only 16 percent - ie 2,021 Kuwaitis and 329 expats. Statistics also showed KPC and its subsidiaries recruited 412 Kuwaiti engineers over the past three years, adding that the corporation has a five-year plan to hire a total of 749 Kuwaiti engineers by the end of the plan.

Rain damage

Well-informed sources at the Ministry of Public Works said that the committee investigating the recent

rain damage crisis will report to Minister Jenan Bushehri within two weeks. The sources added that the committee is scheduled to conclude its investigations by Jan 31, but remarked it is keen on getting the job done as soon as possible. The sources explained that the committee had questioned the companies executing the projects which witnessed problems during the rain except for five that failed to send their representatives despite being notified.

Price lists

Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Services Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan stressed that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) is about to finish a project to electronically monitor prices, adding that the program will provide consumers with weekly price lists of around 500 items on sale at various outlets so that they can compare and select the best outlets. Roudhan added some goods and services, such as restaurant and water delivery services, domestic labor recruitment and gas cylinders are subject to pricing and that MoCI will launch 24/7 inspection campaigns at various co-ops and outlets. Roudhan said all stores and commercial companies have been compelled to display prices clearly on posters.



KUWAIT: Damage on the car's interior left by the fire.

Car burns in mall parking, no injuries

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Ardhiya and Industrial Shuwaikh fire stations responded to a call about a fire in a vehicle in a mall's parking lot. Firefighters managed to put out the fire and prevent the flames from spreading to other vehicles. No injuries were reported.

Separately, Kuwait Municipality

announced that the Mubarak Al-Kabeer emergency team made several achievements during Dec 2018 as part of the campaign "Contact Us", aiming at removing all encroachments on state property, street ads, roaming vendors and other violations. It said inspections resulted in issuing 55 violations and removal of 350 ads of various sizes that were placed at random in streets and squares.



KUWAIT: Undersecretary of Kuwait National Guard Lt Gen Hashem Al-Refale honored a drug prevention team which included members of the national guard and the Interior Ministry. The team recently conducted an 'early drug detection' campaign as part of partnership in this field between Kuwait National Guard and the Interior Ministry.



Marrying a foreigner

local spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzal

Muna@kuwaittimes.net



It is well known that the Kuwaiti nationality law has defined the terms and regulations of granting Kuwaiti nationality. This matter is under the discretion of the ministry of interior or as a security authority in the state. This issue has several facets, from legal to humane, and I would like to take up the matter as a Kuwaiti citizen. It seems that most of the talk is always about the children of the Kuwaiti man who gets married to a non-Kuwaiti, but little is mentioned about this non-Kuwaiti woman and her rights as a wife, or the potential complications that such marriages may face.

This issue has always been argumentative between supporters and opponents and the conditions related to naturalization of this woman in case she wants to get Kuwaiti nationality. Some of the conditions in the law are known to all - the first requirement for obtaining Kuwaiti nationality is that the person must be born in Kuwait or abroad to a Kuwaiti father. So obtaining Kuwaiti nationality will be a normal matter through official channels. This applies to all children regardless of the number of wives or their nationalities.

Other conditions for getting Kuwaiti citizenship include providing the country with great and exceptional services. There are other conditions too, but I don't want to dwell on them today because I would like to focus on the naturalization of non-Kuwaiti women who marry Kuwaitis. I am not against the marriage of any Kuwaiti man to a non-Kuwaiti woman, as it is a private decision. But I hope any man who wants to marry a non-Kuwaiti explains to her the situation - good or bad - especially in case of divorce or death or separation, because frankness and honesty is needed to protect her rights as a human and a wife, if not a mother.

Article 8 of the nationality law stipulates that the marriage of a foreign woman to a Kuwaiti will not allow her to become Kuwaiti unless she declares to interior minister her desire to obtain nationality. This condition requires that they continue their marriage for at least five years from the date of declaring their desire to obtain citizenship.

For years, it was necessary to submit a request to declare the desire as a condition for the wife to obtain Kuwaiti nationality and a period of five years of marriage. A proposal was raised by the National Assembly aimed at canceling the declaration of the desire as a condition for the wife to get Kuwaiti nationality. But I think the desire of the wife is a must - maybe she has no interest.

The government allows a Kuwaiti husband to naturalize his foreign wife after five years of marriage, while the old time limit for Kuwaiti citizenship was 20 years. I think this matter was an issue between supporters and opponents for many years. I see that the decision to marry any national is personal, but a man is obliged to take care of his wife and protect her legal status in the country, especially in the case of having children, because after all she is the mother. Kids will always need their mother regardless of her nationality, their age or status of marriage.

There is another matter issue - polygamy. Parliamentary proposals on the humanitarian aspect focused on allowing Kuwaitis to naturalize more than one wife in case of having multiple wives. However, the response of the interior ministry to these proposals confirmed its rejection out of concern of exploitation by men who may misuse this to naturalize foreign women for money, as well as the impact on the marriage rates of Kuwaiti women.

Some who are against mixed marriage rely on their views about some cases of women who married citizens, and when they got Kuwaiti nationality, forced them to divorce and leave the children. Some of these wives had children from former spouses, so they brought them to Kuwait to live under their sponsorship, while some returned to their former husbands and brought them to Kuwait. I think these cases are possible scenarios, but not for everyone.

I think naturalization of a foreign wife should depend on the time period and the consent of the competent security authorities, as well as her personal desire and consent. She can choose between her original nationality and the nationality of the husband. I believe that a non-citizen woman who has spent many years in the care of her husband and has children must have full legal protection to ensure her stay in the country in all cases, even divorce or death of the spouse.

Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A pink sunrise fills up the sky in Kuwait City. — Photo by Jassem Al-Motar (KUNA)

Horeca culinary exhibition kicks off tomorrow featuring 320 participants

Ten experts to lecture about home-cooking, healthy food

KUWAIT: Under the auspices of Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel, the 2019 Horeca Kuwait exhibition will be opened tomorrow at Kuwait International Fairgrounds in Mishref with participation of companies specialized in hospitality, catering and hotel equipment. The three-day event is organized by the Leaders Group Company for Consulting and Development in collaboration with the Hospitality Services Company.



Mariam Al-Aqeel



Nabila Al-Anjeri



Mohammed Najia

In this regard, Leaders Group stressed that Horeca is a unique event in Kuwait in terms of its type and size. The organizing committee also noted that the opening ceremony would be attended by heads of diplomatic, commercial and touristic missions designated in Kuwait, public sector officials, heads of boards of directors, experts and heads of chef unions in a number of European, Arab and Asian countries, who would take part in the cooking competitions held at the exhibition's sidelines.

The committee's statement added that all booths and display spaces had been booked very early, and explained that the opening ceremony would feature a speech by the minister, followed by a speech by Leaders Group's General Manager Nabila Al-Anjeri, then a tour for officials and guests around the exhibition to be briefed about various items on display and the cooking competition activities. The organizing committee also announced that the exhibition is sponsored by around 80 companies, adding that over 320 participants from Kuwait and other countries would take part in 21 competitions.

Two symposiums

Meanwhile, Leaders Group announced that this year's

activities include two main symposiums featuring ten specialized speakers who will discuss the future of the sectors on display. The first seminar takes place on the first day of the exhibition from 5-6 pm under the title of 'The Rise of Homegrown Food and Beverages Trend in Kuwait,' while the second seminar will be held on the second day at the same time under the title of 'Healthy Food and Beverages Trend in Kuwait,' the company said in a statement yesterday.

Speakers on the first seminar include Amer Zeltoun, Managing Partner at Maki Group; Chef Faisal Al-Nashmi, Director of Culinary Development at Al-Makan United



Jury panel from around the world



A seminar held during last year's exhibition.

Company and co-owner 'Street Al-Makan', 'Table Otto', 'Pam+ cow' and 'Street Cafe'; Chef Samaan Hilal, Managing Partner of Brainsteam (Lebanon); Jad Alameddine, Director of Food and Beverage at Mohamed Naser Al-Hajery and Sons Company; and Amr Al-Refal, Founder and CEO of 'Solo Co.' Nagi Morkos, Managing Partner of Hodema Consulting Services, will moderate the seminar.

Speakers on the second day include Dana Al-Salem, Managing Partner of Re-Store, Farm Manager and Sadeer Farms; Amal Chahine, Managing Partner of Ovo; Dalal Al-Tawheed, Co-Founder of Clean Eats; and Rashid Sultan, Founder and Managing Partner of Savor Ventures. Nada

Alameddine, Partner at Hodema Consulting Services, will moderate the seminar.

In the meantime, Horeca Kuwait's executive manager and secretary general of the Hotel Owners Union Mohammed Najia said that the exhibition has been gaining momentum on an annual basis. He added that the new seminars started in 2018 and highly appealed to hospitality companies and specialized visitors. Furthermore, Najia noted that the three-day cooking competitions include 320 contestants in various categories and that the jury panel includes heads of culinary unions and academies from around the world.

Health Ministry hosts 'Managing Change' workshop

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Health Ministry Undersecretary for Drug and Food Control Dr Abdullah Al-Bader said the health ministry believes in the importance of developing manpower as a cornerstone in the development of the ministry. He said the ministry began training heads of drug inspection, registration and control sectors as a start of this mission, as these sectors are highly important.

Bader spoke during a workshop organized by the health ministry in cooperation with Life Science Academy under the slogan 'Managing Change', which was presented to the leaders of the drug inspection, registration and control sectors to train the rest of the sectors, adding a training plan will be implemented soon. CEO of the Life Science Academy Mohammad Nahis Al-Enezi said the development of manpower resources and training them is highly required in all institutions of the country, particularly in the health ministry. He added that the role of the academy in polishing the skills and experiences of workers in healthcare is fundamental to enable them to present the best up-to-date services.



KUWAIT: Participants at the workshop pose for a group photo.

Local

Kuwaiti female well-achievers visit landmarks in Sri Lanka

Excelling male students head to Tajikistan on KFAED-funded trip

COLOMBO: A group of female well-achievers have arrived in Sri Lanka's capital Colombo and already visited some of the nation's iconic sites. Excursion of the high school female students is as part of the 'Be Among the Excellent' annual cultural program organized by Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED). They started their journey by touring prominent tourist attractions and enjoying shopping in the city, as well as visiting the Old Parliament, Independent Square, the mini White House, besides many other interesting places in Colombo. The students expressed their happiness and excitement for discovering Sri Lanka's attractions and culture, and for being briefed on projects funded by KFAED there.

Student Manager Al-Enezi said, "At first I hesitated to go on a trip to Sri Lanka, but later I changed my mind, as despite the simple life style, we were able to learn about many new cultures." Meanwhile, student Nour Al-Dubaib said, "I really enjoyed our trip today in Colombo, as we visited many tourist attractions."

The students are due to depart Colombo today, heading to Kandy, as they will visit elephants' reserve, as well as viewing KFAED projects of renovated bridges, and other development projects in areas and villages there. They have also conducted other entertaining and cultural tours like visiting a Sri Lankan village and Royal Botanic Gardens. Their visit to Sri Lanka will end by January 18.

Sharifa Al-Sabah, a press official at KFAED and head of the delegation, had said upon departure that Sri Lanka was chosen due to the nation's solid ties with Kuwait through KFAED, as well as for the country's geographical and cultural diversity.

KFAED has contributed to a number of key projects in Sri Lanka, she said, indicating that the 12 Kuwaiti female well-achievers would be acquainted during the visit with the country's cultural landmarks and the fund's activities there. The delegation also includes Fatma Al-Tirkait from KFAED, as well as Manal Al-Mutairi and Sheikhha Al-Kouh from the Ministry of Education.

Tajikistan

Meanwhile, a delegation, comprising of 12 excelling male high school students, headed to Tajikistan on a trip sponsored by KFAED in coordination with the Ministry of Education. As part of the 11th 'Be Among the Excellent' program, the KFAED continues to provide support to excelling students via trips to countries and areas benefiting from the fund's loans and grants. Sarraf



COLOMBO: A group of Kuwaiti female students pose for a picture at the Independence Square in Colombo, Sri Lanka. —KUNA

said that the fund was and will continue to be an entity that would support to education and students. The trip, which will last until January 17, aims at broadening the student's knowledge about other countries and also act as a medium to inform them about Kuwait's generous contributions to the world, said Sarraf. He added that the current trip will include meetings with Tajik officials and also would include visits to cultural, historic, and touristic sites. The KFAED and the Ministry of Education had chosen the students according to their achievements, revealed Sarraf.

In the meantime, Tajikistan's Ambassador to Kuwait Zubaydov Zubaydullo Najotovich lauded His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for building a reputation for Kuwait as a nation of active political role and strong humanitarian reputation. Ambassador Najotovich said that Tajikistan was eager to welcome the 12-student delegation. The KFAED-sponsored trip will include various activities and visits, showing the fund's contribution to the development of Tajikistan, said the Ambassador.

The students will view KFAED's efforts in Tajikistan and hopefully the trip will leave an impression on them, affirmed the Ambassador who hoped that the visit would contribute to the further development of bilateral ties. The KFAED had help Tajikistan to develop its infrastructure and boots the country's energy capacity through various projects in Tajikistan, a country known for its water resources representing around 60 percent of drinkable water in the central Asia region.



A group of male Kuwaiti students take a picture before heading to Tajikistan on a KFAED-funded trip.

During his last visit to Kuwait, President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon discussed with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah the possibility of boosting cooperation within water resources. He indicated that Tajikistan is seriously focusing on promoting water resources worldwide through its cooperation with the UN on the '2018-2028 International Decade for Action, Water for Sustainable Development,' an initiative

gathering 170-member countries. Regarding relations with Kuwait, Ambassador Najotovich revealed that since the opening of the embassy in 2012, Tajikistan and Kuwait had set plans to boost ties on all possible spheres. He commended the level of cooperation between Kuwait and Tajikistan, namely within the cultural domain with the continuous visits by Tajik musical groups to the Gulf country. — KUNA

Zain sponsors NUKS annual Omrah trip

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its Gold sponsorship of the annual Omrah trip organized by the National Union of Kuwait Students (NUKS) - Kuwait University branch. The trip to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, held from 9 - 12 January, features nearly 150 students and their families. Zain's support to the NUKS annual Omrah trip comes in line with its commitment towards supporting and encouraging various student activities, which falls under the company's Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy. Zain's strategy closely focuses on contributing to the development of the education sector by partnering with many organizations, including student bodies, to invest in education, which the company considers an essential ele-

ment of the further progress of national economy.

The Omrah trip, organized annually by the National Union of Kuwait Students (NUKS) - Kuwait University branch, featured this year nearly 150 students, their families, and religious figures that contributed to enriching the trip's program. The annual Omrah trip is considered one of the most prominent student activities organized by NUKS for Kuwait University's students with the aim of enriching their spiritual aspect. Zain's support to NUKS springs from the company's core Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy. The company believes that supporting the various educational programs and initiatives provides young people with skills and tools necessary to help them highlight and develop their potential, ultimately contributing to Kuwait's progress.

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



KUWAIT: Zain and NUKS KU staff with participants in the Omrah trip.

23,000 business permits issued

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry issued 22,904 commercial licenses including 18,057 for sole proprietorship companies between January 1 and end of December, 2018. The ministry said, in a press release yesterday, that it had issued the permits to the sole proprietorship companies and 12,067 for companies post establishment via Kuwait business center — the single counter. Moreover, the department had released other types of licenses for mobile businesses, 346, for small businesses and 5,178 ones for branches of the single owner companies.

Economic hurdles

In other news, Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel said yesterday that Arab

nations are fully capable of dealing with any obstacles that could impede economic growth and development. Cross-nation cooperation is the only way forward to ensure that the Arab region's development goals ultimately come to fruition, the minister said in a statement after she recently presided over pan-Arab talks on economic development. The mounting challenges facing many Arab nations, including difficulties thrust upon job seekers, "behoove us to take all necessary measures to keep economic growth steady," she explained. Earlier last week, senior officials from the Kuwait-based Arab Planning Institute came together for talks focusing on what more the organization can do to contribute to economic development in the region. — KUNA

Zain hosts LOYAC's Thailand Program orientation session



KUWAIT: Zain LOYAC Thailand Program participants with Zain and LOYAC teams at ZINC.

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, hosted the orientation session for the participants of LOYAC's Thailand Program at the Zain Innovation Center (ZINC) in the company's main headquarters in Shuwaikh. The program is organized by LOYAC, a non-profit organization that aims at developing the youth's talents and skills, and comes in exclusive sponsorship by Zain.

Zain's exclusive sponsorship to this cultural program comes as part of the company's Strategic Partnership with LOYAC, which continues this year for over 15 consecutive years. The partnership comes in line with the company's Corporate Sustainability Strategy, which closely focuses on enriching innovation and creativity within Kuwait's youth, especially in regards to developing and nurturing the skills of young girls, expanding their cultural senses, and empowering them within the community.

Zain hosted the orientation session for LOYAC's Thailand Program at the Zain Innovation Center (ZINC) in the company's main headquarters in Shuwaikh with the attendance of the participating girls, their parents, as well as Zain and LOYAC's teams. During the session, the girls and their parents were briefed about the trip's full program, its activities, and the destinations that will be visited. Zain's exclusive sponsorship to this cultural program comes in line with its commitment to support any entity that offers the proper educational environment for the next generation as per the highest international standards. The company will spare no efforts in offering its support to such initiatives and programs that serve the community and contribute to the further progress of the country.

The Thailand Program, organized by LOYAC, aims at offering girls aged 14 - 18 with an opportunity to take part in an educational and cultural trip to the Kingdom of Thailand. The trip's program was designed to offer participants a chance to learn about Thai culture, explore Bangkok and its markets, as well as explore distant Thai villages through volunteering. The program aims to enrich the girls' skills, develop their personalities, as well as offer them the chance to be confident in themselves and work as one team. The trip features many activities,

including bamboo utensils and pot making, Thai cuisine cooking lesson, community service to renew and build homes of elderly and underprivileged families, and more.

The Zain Innovation Center (ZINC) is a hub for entrepreneurs and digital investments launched as a platform for the innovations of students, youth, and entrepreneurs. ZINC encourages young minds to think and act creatively outside of the norm in an open, supportive environment for entrepreneurs to generate new ideas and develop them into viable opportunities.

Last year, Zain's support to LOYAC extended to a great number of educational initiatives and programs that catered to developing the youth's skills and talents, including the KON Social Entrepreneurship Program brought to Kuwait in collaboration with Babson College in Boston, considered the most prestigious entrepreneurship college in the United States and the number one institution in the world for entrepreneurship education. The company also offered its exclusive support to LOYAC's Internship Program at the United Nation's International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), as well as the LOYAC AC Milan Soccer School, and more.

During October - December 2018, Zain hosted students of the LOYAC part-time training program who worked at the company's various divisions, giving them an opportunity to gain experience in the private sector work environment. Zain also offered the students financial rewards in recognition of their efforts and as an encouragement to their dedication.

Zain is proud to be one of the Strategic Partners of LOYAC since its inception, especially that it is considered one of the most prominent national programs that cater to the youth and offers them a healthy and empowering environment to develop their skills and talents in an educational, fun, and social atmosphere.

Since its inception in 2002, LOYAC has grown to be the first choice of the youth in Kuwait when it comes to innovative and high quality educational programs. LOYAC runs several programs for the youth to develop their professional skills, enhance their personal growth and to help them find their sense of purpose by extending themselves to others.



New alliance raises pressure on the BJP

Ruling ANC kick starts South African election season

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NIMES: A demonstrator holds a placard reading "Power to the People" as he poses with the Arena of Nimes in background during an anti-government demonstration called by the Yellow Vests "Gilets Jaunes" movement. — AFP

'Yellow vests' mobilize for more protests

Macron accused of ignoring the plight of millions of people

PARIS: Thousands of anti-government demonstrators marched in cities across France yesterday in a new round of "yellow vest" protests against President Emmanuel Macron, accused of ignoring the plight of millions of people struggling to make ends meet. Officials have vowed zero tolerance for the violence that has marred the weekly protests since they began two months ago, deploying some 80,000 security forces nationwide.

In Paris, epicenter of the fiery street clashes and vandalism that have made global headlines, 5,000 riot police were on hand, using tall barricades and armored vehicles to lock down the central Place de la Concorde and surrounding districts. Hundreds of officers were also on guard on the Champs-Elysees, where banks, jewelry stores and other shops had boarded up windows in anticipation of renewed looting and violence.

Yet many cafes and retailers on the iconic avenue remained open for business, as several thousands of protesters marched calmly from the Place de la Bastille toward the Arc de Triomphe early in the afternoon. Many sang the "Marseillaise" national anthem, while

others held signs saying "Insecurity is not a job!" At times the crowd yelled "Free Christophe!" in reference to Christophe Dettinger, the former professional boxer arrested last week after being filmed bashing two police officers during the Paris demos. Police said some 30 people had been detained in the capital earlier for carrying weapons or other charges. "We've come to Paris to make ourselves heard, and we wanted to see for ourselves at least once what's going on here," said Patrick, 37, who told AFP he had travelled from the Savoie region of western France.

'Macron resign!'

In the well-heeled race-horsing town of Chantilly just north of Paris, 1,000 or so protesters marched through the centre before descending on the hippodrome where they delayed the start of a race, local media said. And another 1,200 protesters gathered in the central city of Bourges, where some yellow-vest organizers were hoping to those from areas far from the capital.

Signs said "Macron resign!" and "France is angry,"

while local prosecutor Joel Garrigue said five people had been detained after police discovered a cache of ball bearings during a search of their car. The protests also spilt over the border into eastern Belgium late on Friday, where one of around 25 protesters manning a blockade died after being hit by a truck, Belgian media reported.

Mutual mistrust

Officials had warned of bigger and more violent protests than last week, when demonstrators rammed a forklift truck through the main doors of a government ministry in Paris. "Those who are calling to demonstrate tomorrow know there will be violence, and therefore they are in part responsible," Interior Minister Christophe Castaner said in a Facebook interview Friday with Brut, a digital news site favored by many yellow vests.

But many yellow vests pointed to images of a police officer repeatedly striking an unarmed man on the ground during a protest last week in Toulon, accusing the police of excessive use of force. The movement,

which began as protests over high fuel taxes, has snowballed into a wholesale rejection of Macron and his policies, which are seen favouring the wealthy at the expense of rural and small-town France.

Politicians inspire 'distrust, disgust'

Macron has called for a national debate starting next week to hear voters' grievances, hoping to sate demands for more of a say in national law-making and tamp down the protesters' anger. He has already unveiled a 10-billion-euro (\$11.5 billion) financial relief package for low earners, and axed the planned fuel tax hike. But the public consultations risk being hobbled by record levels of distrust towards politicians and representatives of the state.

A poll by the Cevipof political sciences institute released Friday showed 77 percent of respondents thought politicians inspired "distrust", "disgust" or "boredom". And Macron may not have done himself any favors on Friday, when he told a gathering at the Elysee Palace that "too many of our citizens think they can get something without making the necessary effort." — AFP

Malaysian state chooses new sultan, expected to be elected king

KUALA LUMPUR: A Malaysian state announced it had a new sultan yesterday, who is expected to be elected king after the former monarch resigned following his reported marriage to a Russian former beauty queen. Tengku Abdullah Shah has replaced his father, Sultan Ahmad Shah as the ruler of Pahang state, the official Bernama news agency said, citing a senior palace official.

Local reports said the move was designed to pave the way for Sultan Abdullah to be chosen as the next king of Malaysia by the Council of Rulers, who will chose a new king on January 24. Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy with a unique arrangement where the national throne changes hands every five years between rulers of the country's nine states. Pahang state is due to provide the next ruler.

The country was thrown into shock Sunday when reigning king

Sultan Muhammad V resigned unexpectedly after just two years of rule, following reports that he married an ex-beauty queen in Russia in November during a purported two-month medical leave. The resignation was the first for the country since its independence from British rule in 1957. Royal officials have not commented on the reported wedding, or said what condition prompted the former king to take the leave.

Sultan Abdullah Shah, 59, is a popular figure in the sports scene and is currently president of the Asian Hockey Federation and a council member of football's world governing body, FIFA. While their role is ceremonial, Malaysia's royalty command great respect, especially from Malaysia's predominantly Muslim Malays, and criticizing them is regarded as offensive. Portraits of the king and queen adorn government buildings throughout the country. — AFP

Trump blasts FBI counterintel probe

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump blasted the FBI yesterday, insisting it acted "for no reason & with no proof" when it opened an investigation into whether he was acting on Russia's behalf after he fired the agency's director, James Comey, in May 2017. The New York Times reported that the FBI launched the previously undisclosed counterintelligence investigation to determine whether Trump posed a national security threat, at the same time that it opened a criminal probe into possible obstruction of justice by the president.

The FBI investigation was subsequently folded into the broader probe by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into Russia's meddling in the 2016 election and possible collaboration by the Trump campaign. No evidence has publicly emerged that Trump was secretly in contact with or took direction from Russian officials, the Times said.

Trump reacts

"Wow, just learned in the Failing New York Times that the corrupt former leaders of the FBI, almost all fired or forced to leave the agency for some very bad reasons, opened up an investigation on me, for no reason & with no proof, after I fired Lyin' James Comey, a total sleaze!" Trump tweeted. According to Trump, "the FBI was in complete turmoil ... because of Comey's poor leadership" and the

way he handled the investigation into Hillary Clinton's use of a private server to send some government emails.

"My firing of James Comey was a great day for America," Trump claimed, describing the former FBI director as "a Crooked Cop who is being totally protected by his best friend, Bob Mueller." The Times said that the FBI had been suspicious of Trump's ties to Russia during the 2016 campaign. But it held off on opening an investigation until the president sacked Comey, who refused to pledge allegiance to Trump and roll back the nascent Russia investigation.

A 'witch hunt'?

Trump has repeatedly criticized the Mueller investigation as a "witch hunt" and views it as an attempt to besmirch the legitimacy of his presidency. His press secretary, Sarah Sanders, said in a statement yesterday that the latest charges are "absurd," adding, "James Comey was fired because he's a disgraced partisan hack... (and) President Trump has actually been tough on Russia."

Mueller, meanwhile, has issued dozens of indictments and steadily chalked up convictions of some of the president's close associates — including his former national security advisor, his former personal lawyer, and his ex-campaign chief. The ex-national security advisor, Michael Flynn, pleaded guilty to lying to investigators about his Moscow ties.

The lawyer, Michael Cohen, has been sentenced to three years in prison for multiple crimes, including felony violations of campaign finance laws that prosecutors allege were car-

ried out under Trump's direction. And Trump's former presidential campaign chair, Paul Manafort, has been convicted in one case brought by Mueller and pleaded guilty in another, over financial crimes related to his work in Ukraine before the 2016 campaign, and for witness tampering.

Cell phone records show that Cohen was near Prague during the summer of 2016, supporting claims that he met there with Russian officials during the presidential election campaign, McClatchy news service has reported. Cohen, who will testify in Congress on February 7, insists that he has never been to Prague, but added in a tweet: "#Mueller knows everything!"

Manafort, meanwhile, has admitted to sharing polling data with a Russian during the 2016 presidential race, according to a court filing inadvertently made public by his lawyers. CNN reported that the intended recipients were two pro-Russia Ukrainian oligarchs. Manafort has denied lying to investigators about his dealings with the Russian, Konstantin Kilimnik, a political consultant with alleged intelligence ties, claiming he merely forgot details during the hectic campaign. The specifics of the Mueller allegations were not previously known publicly, having been blacked out in a heavily redacted December 7 filing by the prosecutor's team. But in Manafort's response, the electronic formatting for the redaction could easily be bypassed, revealing exactly what he was accused of lying about. Mueller's grand jury investigation, meanwhile, has been extended by a judge beyond its original 18-month mandate. — AFP

International

Trudeau: China ignored diplomatic immunity in detaining Canadian

Canada's top court confirms expats' voting rights

OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Friday accused China of ignoring a former Canadian envoy's "diplomatic immunity" when it detained him last month along with a compatriot. Michael Kovrig was arrested on December 10 in China, after taking a leave from his diplomatic posting to work for the International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank.

China detained former diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor last month, accusing them both of activities that "endanger China's security"—a phrase often used by Beijing when alleging espionage. Their detentions are thought to be in retaliation for Canada's arrest on a US request of Huawei vice president Meng Wanzhou, who is accused of violating Iran sanctions.

"It is unfortunate that China has arbitrarily and unfairly detained two Canadian citizens, and indeed in one of the cases is not respecting diplomatic immunity," said Trudeau. "This is something that we are engaged right now both with Chinese officials and with our partners around the world where there is a concern for the need for all countries to do like Canada and to respect the rule of law and the independence of our judicial processes."

It was the first public comment on Kovrig's status. Officials previously said he was on an unpaid leave from his Canadian government job. According to the Vienna Convention, persons carrying a diplomatic passport enjoy immunity when they are abroad. Trudeau's statement therefore suggests that Kovrig carried such a passport while on sabbatical, which is possible if authorized by Canada's foreign ministry.

Ottawa has called-backed by Australia, Britain, France, Germany, the European Union and the United States—for the Canadians' immediate release. On Thursday, the Netherlands, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia also added their voices of support for Canada. China's Ambassador to Canada Lu Shaye, in a letter to a Canadian newspaper on Wednesday, accused Ottawa

and its allies of applying a "double standard" in criticizing the detentions of Kovrig and Spavor while defending Meng's arrest, attributing this to "Western egotism and white supremacy."

Voting rights

In other news, Canada's top court on Friday confirmed the voting rights of expatriates by ruling that a law-already repealed last month—wrongly denied those living abroad for five years or more a chance to cast a ballot. In a 5-2 decision, the Supreme Court said the regulation infringing on Canadian expats' constitutional right to vote, which Chief Justice Richard Wagner called a "fundamental political right" and "a core tenet of our democracy."

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal government had already reformed the elections act, doing away with the five-year provision last month. But the ruling was still widely viewed as important in that it would prevent future governments from bringing back the restrictions. The impugned sections of the act had been on the books since 1993 but had only been used during the previous Tory government's decade in office, to 2015.

The law was challenged by two Canadians living in the United States. They both tried to vote in the 2011 election but were rebuffed due to the residency requirement. Over the past century, Canada has expanded the right to vote, originally restricted to property-owning men aged 21 or older, to women, racial minorities, persons once described as suffering from a "mental disease," prison inmates and soldiers and diplomatic staff posted abroad. Residence, the court noted, was one of the last restrictions on the right to vote in Canadian federal elections.

The majority of the court said the government failed to justify the measure, and called it overly broad. "While it seeks to bar people from voting who lack a sufficient connection to Canada, no correlation has been shown between, on the one hand, how long a



LA MALBAIE, CANADA: Trump and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau hold a meeting on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in La Malbaie, Quebec, Canada. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and US President Donald Trump denounced China's "arbitrary detention" of two Canadians during a telephone call. —AFP

Canadian citizen has lived abroad and, on the other hand, the extent of his or her subjective commitment to Canada," said the ruling. "Many non-resident citizens maintain deep and abiding connections to Canada through family, online media and visits home, and by contributing taxes and collecting social benefits," the justices noted.

In a dissenting opinion, Justices Suzanne Cote and Russell Brown called the five-year rule "a reasonable

limit" on voting rights. "Opening the vote to long-term non-residents... would be a regressive development, undermining the longstanding and entirely salutary practice in Westminster parliamentary democracies of privileging local connections in deciding who may elect local representatives," they wrote. According to the government, an estimated three million Canadians or nine percent of the population live abroad. Expatriate voting has historically been low. —AFP

Obama protege Julian Castro set to join 2020 race

SAN ANTONIO: Former mayor of San Antonio, Texas and Obama-era cabinet member Julian Castro was expected yesterday to launch his bid to become the nation's first Hispanic president, scheduling his announcement in a border state central to America's immigration debate. Castro would become the most high-profile Democrat to date to officially enter the 2020 race, which is expected to include a diverse field of candidates eager to challenge President Donald Trump.

But the 44-year-old would be among the underdogs in a political showdown that may well feature heavyweights like former vice president Joe Biden, US senators Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders and Kamala Harris, and perhaps even billionaire businessman Michael Bloomberg. Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, a progressive Democrat, said Friday she will officially announce her presidential run in the coming days.

Castro's strong oratory skills, experience as Barack Obama's housing secretary and as mayor of the nation's seventh

largest city, not to mention his telegenic charisma, could help propel the Texas native into the top tier. He would also become the third prominent Latino presidential candidate in four years, after Republican senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio fought Trump for their party's nomination in 2016.

Castro's candidacy could also help revive Democratic enthusiasm among Latino voters, who supported Hillary Clinton but at a lower rate than Obama. Trump made immigration a flashpoint of that race, and it remains among the nation's most contentious issues. The US government remains locked in a partial shutdown, soon to begin its fourth week, over Trump's demand for \$5.7 billion in border wall funding.

A "great guy"

Castro's national profile took off in 2012 when he became the first Latino to give a keynote address at the Democratic National Convention. Four years later he was a finalist to be Clinton's running mate. Castro, a fierce Trump critic, is a third generation American. Last year he said he probably would not be in the United States if today's strict immigration policies were in place when Castro's grandmother crossed the border as a young girl in 1922.

In his convention speech Castro highlighted "an unlikely journey" that he has



WASHINGTON DC: In this file photo taken on April 18, 2016 Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro addresses the North American Building Trades Union National Legislative Conference. —AFP

lived, including growing up with twin brother Joaquin, who is a US congressman. The phrase became the title of his new memoir that was published last month. He has kept the contents of his announcement secret, but he is widely expected to reveal his White House ambitions. "I'll tell you and I'll tell the world what I'm going to do," he said this week on MSNBC.

Castro does not yet have the national recognition of luminaries Biden, Sanders and Warren. Dena Grayson, a Democratic strategist, said Castro is a "great guy" and "phenomenal public speaker" who has potential broad appeal in states with large numbers of Hispanic voters, like California, Texas and Florida. But standing out in a crowded field will be "difficult," Grayson added. —AFP

Congresswoman Gabbard set to run for president

WASHINGTON: Democratic congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, an Iraq war veteran who met dictator Bashar Al-Assad in Syria during that country's devastating civil war, said Friday that she is launching a US presidential bid. "I have decided to run and will be making a formal announcement within the next week," Gabbard told CNN.

If elected, the 37-year-old lawmaker would be the youngest president in US history. She is the first Hindu member of Congress and its first Samoan American. "There are a lot of reasons for me to make this decision. There are a lot of challenges that are facing the American people that I'm concerned about and that I want to help solve," she said, citing health care access and climate change among them.

Gabbard sits on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, where she is able to influence US foreign policy. "There is one main issue that is central to the rest, and that is the issue of war and peace," Gabbard added. "I look forward to being able to get into this and to talk about it in depth when we make our announcement." Gabbard was born in American Samoa and was raised in Hawaii, where she is known to surf.

The previous Democratic president, Barack Obama, was also raised in Hawaii, and is the only president who was born in the island state. Gabbard's announcement comes ahead of what is expected to be a wave of high-profile candidates throwing their hats in the ring. Senator Elizabeth Warren has formed an exploratory committee for a presidential bid, and last week took a high-profile trip to the early voting state of Iowa.

Former vice president Joe Biden and progressive Senator Bernie Sanders, whom Gabbard supported over Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Democratic primaries, are also mulling entering the race. —AFP



PHILADELPHIA: In this file photo US Representative Tulsi Gabbard speaks during Day 2 of the Democratic National Convention at the Wells Fargo Center. —AFP

cast" had become offensive to Americans. "White nationalist, white supremacist, Western civilization — how did that language become offensive?" King said. "Why did I sit in classes teaching me about the merits of our history and our civilization?" Scott responded to King's remarks with a column in The Washington Post, and they were also denounced by several other members of the Republican Party. "Anyone who needs 'white nationalist' or 'white supremacist' defined, described and defended does lack some pretty common knowledge," said the senator from South Carolina.

"White nationalists and white supremacists have strewn (havoc) across our nation for hundreds of years," he said. "When people with opinions similar to King's open their mouths, they damage not only the Republican Party and the conservative brand but also our nation as a whole,"

Scott said. Kevin McCarthy, leader of the Republican minority in the House of Representatives, also condemned King's comments.

"Everything about white supremacy and white nationalism goes against who we are as a nation," McCarthy said. "Steve's language is reckless, wrong, and has no place in our society." King insisted to the Times that he was not racist and pointed out pictures on Twitter of him meeting people of various religions and races. "I want to make one thing abundantly clear: I reject those labels and the evil ideology that they define," King added in a statement. King described himself — "like the Founding Fathers" — as an advocate for Western values and "simply a nationalist." King is known for espousing hard-line views on immigration and has long backed building a wall along the southern border with Mexico. —AFP

Kidnapped US teen found alive months after parents' murder

GORDON: A 21-year-old man has been charged with murdering the parents of an American teen as part of a calculated plot to kidnap her, police said Friday, after 13-year-old Jayme Closs was found alive following three months in captivity. The subject of a nationwide search since her parents were found murdered in their home in rural Wisconsin in October, Closs made a seemingly miraculous escape Thursday afternoon, seeking help from a neighbor who alerted authorities.

Minutes later, police arrested the man she identified as her captor, Jake Thomas Patterson, and have charged him with abducting Closs and fatally shooting her parents. "Jayme was taken against her will and escaped from the residence in which she was being held and found help," Barron County Sheriff Chris Fitzgerald told reporters. "The teen was said to be in good health and was to be reunited with her extended family late Friday. She was cleared to leave the hospital and has been talking to investigators. "She is doing as well as circumstances will allow," Fitzgerald said. Patterson, who had no previous criminal record in Wisconsin, is accused of carefully planning his attack — specifically targeting the young teen for reasons that remained unclear. He was to appear in court Monday.

Crying teen sought neighbor's help

Closs was being held in a rural home approximately 75 miles north of her home in Barron, Wisconsin. She escaped and ran to a vacation cabin where Jeanne Nutter was just returning from walking her dog at around 4:30 pm Thursday. "She said she was lost, she didn't know where she was," Nutter told AFP. "I didn't know the situation until she got near me, and then she told me her name, and I knew who she was because I'd seen her picture everywhere."

The 66-year-old took the teen to a neighbor's home, where they called police. Nutter said Closs appeared traumatized but in good physical condition, wearing an oversized sweatshirt and large shoes that were clearly not her own. "She was crying when I first met her, but once I grabbed hold of her and held her as she walked, then she was calm," she said.

Trail had gone cold

Detectives have not yet established what had happened to the teen over the last three months, the motive for the kidnapping, or how she escaped. Patterson was the authorities' only suspect, described as unemployed and a long-time resident of rural Gordon. He was arrested Thursday without resistance while driving in his car. Police believe he had been searching for Jayme.

The sheriff said they found a number of weapons at his home, including a shotgun that resembled the one used to shoot open the Closs's front door in the middle of the night on October 15 and kill Jayme's parents James Closs, 56, and Denise Closs, 46. A nationwide search for Jayme had left law enforcement frustrated with few clues and a trail that had gone cold.

"The suspect had specific intentions to kidnap Jayme and went to great lengths to prepare to take her," the sheriff said, such as shaving his head to avoid leaving traces of identifying evidence behind. There were no immediate links that explained how or why Patterson allegedly targeted Jayme Closs. While the young man worked at the same meat processing plant as Jayme's parents nearly three years ago, he did so for only one day and police said there is no evidence that there was any contact between them. "At this time, nothing in this case shows the suspect knew anyone at the Closs home or at any time had contact with anyone in the Closs family," Fitzgerald said. —AFP

Iowa congressman under fire for racism

WASHINGTON: The lone black Republican in the US Senate launched a blistering attack Friday on a fellow Republican congressman who has been accused of making racist comments. "Some in our party wonder why Republicans are constantly accused of racism — it is because of our silence when things like this are said," Senator Tim Scott said of the remarks by Representative Steve King of Iowa.

King, in an interview with The New York Times this week, asked how the terms "white nationalist" and "white suprema-

International

Ruling ANC kick starts South African election season with slew of pledges

‘Our movement has fallen short of our people’s expectations’

DURBAN: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa unveils the ANC’s election manifesto yesterday with pledges to transform the economy and fight corruption as the ruling party tries to woo voters. Ramaphosa is set to release details of the manifesto before tens of thousands of supporters in the eastern city of Durban, marking the start of four months of hectic campaigning.

The African National Congress (ANC), which has ruled since the end of apartheid 25 years ago, is tipped to win the election in May despite faltering support, internal divisions and a sluggish economy. The party of Nelson Mandela suffered a slump in popularity under the scandal-ridden presidency of Jacob Zuma, who was ousted last February after nine years at the helm. But a recent IPSOS survey predicted the ANC could garner as much as 61 percent in the national and provincial elections.

At the legislative level, that would put it on a par with its performance in 2014, when it picked up 62 percent. In South Africa’s parliament, the party which holds a majority of seats also selects the president. The forecast upswing is pinned on the appointment of moderate pro-business reformer Ramaphosa as president after ANC lawmakers forced Zuma to resign as corruption scandals piled up.

In an address earlier this week marking 107 years since the party was founded, Ramaphosa admitted that in “recent times, our movement has fallen short of our people’s expectations”. And at a dinner on Friday night he said some South Africans “tell harrowing stories about what has not changed” since the end of apartheid in 1994. “Our manifesto is a coherent and bold plan for a better life for all, addressing the persistent realities of unemployment, poverty and inequality,” he said.

The ANC now has a clear plan to boost the economy, create jobs and reduce inequality, he said. “We will step up the fight against corruption throughout society and safeguard the integrity of the state”. Tens of thou-

sands of party activists dressed mostly in yellow party colours converged at the 85,000-seater soccer stadium in the coastal city of Durban for the launch of the manifesto where they danced to music.

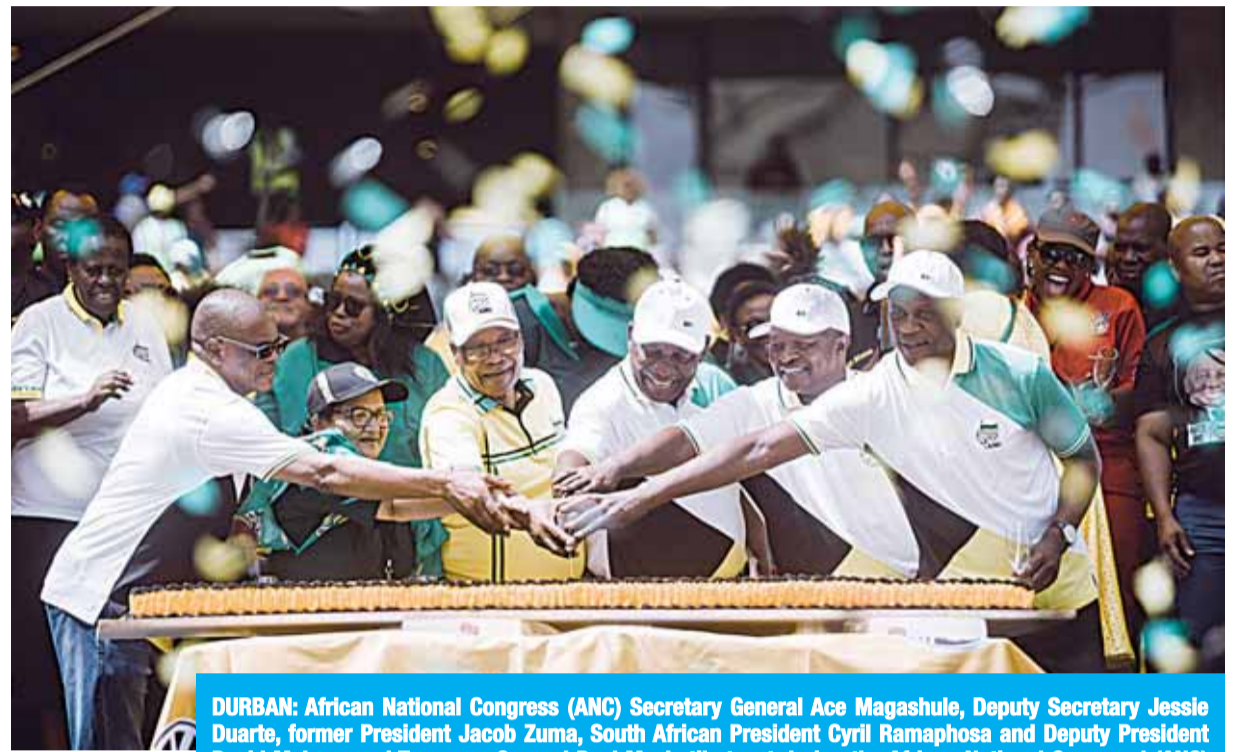
In a noisy and colorful display, dozens of motorbike riders flying ANC flags, circled the pitch - revving up their bikes to chants and applause from supporters on the terraces. In a bruising internal party battle, Ramaphosa won a power struggle to succeed Zuma, whose favored candidate was Zuma’s former wife. Senior party officials have this week fanned out across the surrounding Kwa-Zulu Natal province, spreading the message of a revived and unified party.

Party revival?

“We are confident that this manifesto will lead to the renewal of the mandate of the ANC to govern,” ANC Secretary General Ace Magashule told reporters. “The unity is there. It is visible.” Launching its election manifesto in heavily-populated KwaZulu-Natal — Zuma’s home province and former stronghold — is a strategic choice after last year’s divisions. Ramaphosa has publicly tried to mend ties, sitting next to Zuma and praising him at party events.

In policy terms, the manifesto is set to underline the ANC’s commitment to land reform to tackle racial inequality — setting the stage for one of the election’s fiercest battlegrounds. One of Ramaphosa’s flagship pledges is to change the constitution to allow land to be taken from minority white owners without compensation — a plan aimed at attracting landless black voters but that has alarmed many foreign investors.

The South African economy is forecast to have grown just 0.7 percent last year, with unemployment remaining at record highs of over 27 percent. The ANC will face the main opposition Democratic Alliance and the radical leftist Economic Freedom Fighters party in the election. Both parties hope to make gains due to the



DURBAN: African National Congress (ANC) Secretary General Ace Magashule, Deputy Secretary Jessie Duarte, former President Jacob Zuma, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and Deputy President David Mabuza and Treasurer General Paul Mashatile toast during the African National Congress’ (ANC) 107th anniversary celebrations at the Moses Mabhida Stadium. —AFP

ANC’s poor recent record and discontent over stark post-apartheid inequality. But they have struggled to dent the ruling party since Zuma’s fall.

Unemployed mother of six, Marriam Xobololo, 53, from the rural area of eNgcobo in the Eastern Cape province has voted for the ANC since 1994. “When you join the ANC, it’s like when you accept Christ in your heart. The ANC is just like Christ in my heart,” she

said as she waited for Ramaphosa to speak. “I will forever vote for ANC, and I will die and perish voting for the ANC. We are nothing without ANC”. Lungile Nogabe, a businessman who drove to Durban from the central city of Bloemfontein, said: “We lost support as our members were disappointed, especially by corruption. Now that we have a new president, you will see wonders.” —AFP

12 civilians killed in jihadist attack in Burkina Faso

OUAGADOUGOU: Twelve civilians were killed on Thursday during a jihadist attack in the north of Burkina Faso, which has been battling a wave of Islamist violence, officials said Friday. The west African country declared a state of emergency in several provinces at the end of last year and on Thursday replaced its army chief as it struggled to put a stop to a spate of such attacks.

In the latest violence, gunmen attacked a village market in broad daylight, the security ministry said in a statement issued late Friday. “Around 30 armed individuals perpetrated... a terrorist attack in the village of Gasseliki,” it said, giving a toll of 12 dead and two wounded. “A barn, a cart and six shops were also set alight,” it added. A local source told AFP that the attackers “ransacked stores and opened fire on people who had gathered for the weekly market”.

Jihadist attacks began in northern Burkina Faso in 2015 but then spread to the east, near the border with Togo and Benin. The country is part of the vast Sahel region and one of the poorest states in the world. The region turned into a hotbed of violent extremism and lawlessness after chaos engulfed Libya in 2011, which was followed by an Islamist insurgency in northern Mali and the rise of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria.

Most attacks in Burkina Faso itself have been attributed to the jihadist group Ansarul Islam, which emerged near the Mali border in December 2016, and to the JNIM (the Group to Support Islam and Muslims), which has sworn allegiance to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Ansarul Islam emerged as violence spilled over from Mali, where radical Islamists seized key Sahara towns in 2012 before being ousted by French troops. Smaller groups are also active, with the overall number of fighters estimated to be in the hundreds, according to security sources. —AFP

Many feared dead after petrol tanker blast in Nigeria

WARRI: Nigerian police yesterday said many people were feared dead after a petrol tanker veered off the road, caught fire and exploded as people tried to recover fuel. The vehicle crashed in the Odukpiani area of the southeastern state of Cross River, just north of the state capital, Calabar, at about 5pm (1600 GMT) on Friday. Local residents rushed to collect the leaking fuel when it caught fire, triggering the blast.

Cross River state police spokeswoman Irene Ugbo said the blast could have been sparked by the clashing of steel containers used to scoop up the petrol. “I can’t confirm the exact number of casualties,” she said, adding: “The casualties are high.” The injured were taken to the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital for treatment to varying degrees of burns. One local resident, Akpan Imon, said at least 18 people were killed. “I counted 18 bodies including women and children burnt beyond recognition,” he said.

“I believe the casualty level could be more because people from other neighboring communities had thronged the scene.” Another local, Sunday Ibor, said “over 20 bodies” were taken to the local government secretariat. Petrol tanker and pipeline blasts are common in Nigeria, where despite the country’s multi-billion-dollar oil and gas industry, most people live in poverty. Fires and explosions often occur as people try to siphon fuel from pipelines and also following accidents involving fuel tankers on badly maintained road. —AFP

Pro-Kabila camp wins DRC legislative poll

KINSHASA: Parties supporting outgoing Democratic Republic of Congo president Joseph Kabila won a majority in long-delayed legislative elections, according to an AFP tally of results released yesterday, as the opposition sought a recount of the disputed presidential poll.

Pro-Kabila parties had passed the 250-seat threshold required to secure a majority in the 500-seat national assembly, according to collated results from the Independent National Election Commission (CENI). More than 15,000 candidates were running in the poll, which determines who will control parliament for the next five years. Pro-Kabila candidates had secured 288 of the 429 seats so far declared, with 141 going to the opposition.

The huge central African country, which straddles an area the size of western Europe, has been in the grip of a two-year political crisis triggered by Kabila’s refusal to step down when his two-term constitutional limit expired at the end of 2016. A presidential election to choose a successor was delayed three times before finally taking place on December 30, the same day as the legislative poll. The poll’s runner-up Martin Fayulu, an opposition candidate tipped by pollsters as the likely winner of the vote, told supporters on Friday he would demand a recount.

He said he would challenge Corneille Nangaa, head of the election commission “to produce the tally reports from polling stations in front of witnesses” and Congolese and international observers.

Provisional results released on Thursday gave Felix Tshisekedi, a rival opposition candidate, 38.57 percent of the vote, just ahead of Fayulu with 34.8 percent. Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary, the candidate backed by Kabila, came a distant third with 23.8 percent.

The declared result was a surprise to many observers of the mineral-rich but poverty-stricken country, which has suffered two major wars in the past 22 years, as well as bloodshed in elections in 2006 and 2011 that saw Kabila returned to office. Pre-election opinion polls had flagged Fayulu as clear favorite while Kabila critics predicted an outcome rigged in favor of Shadary. The powerful Roman Catholic church bluntly said CENI’s provisional result “does not correspond” with data that its 40,000 election monitors had collected at polling stations.

Fayulu’s bloc on Friday said he was the true victor, claiming he had garnered 61 percent of the vote. Candidates had 48 hours after the result to file any appeal, and the Constitutional Court has a week in which to deliberate. “We don’t expect the election to be annulled, but (a decision in favour of) a recount,” Fayulu said.

Unstable giant

Polling day had unfolded relatively peacefully, but suspicions over the count have deepened. The turmoil has darkened hopes that the country will have its first peaceful handover of power since it gained independence in 1960. International reactions to the results have been guarded. Most leaders issued statements calling for any disputes to be resolved peacefully, but notably lacking any congratulations for Tshisekedi.

Competing appeals in the dispute were pitched to the UN Security Council on Friday. CENI chief Nangaa, speaking by



KINSHASA: Police stand in front of supporters of Democratic Republic of Congo opposition leader and presidential candidate Martin Fayulu as they take part in a protest to contest presidential election results. —AFP

video conference, pleaded for “the new authorities to be supported by the international community”. Bishop Marcel Utambi, head of the Catholic church’s conference of bishops, urged the Security Council to ask CENI to release the records of vote-counting at polling stations to allow for verification.

Tshisekedi-Kabila deal?

Analysts said they believed Kabila, 47, had sought to avoid the expected backlash and international condemnation that would have followed had Shadary — the candidate he publicly supported — been declared winner. According to this scenario, he therefore struck a deal with Tshisekedi, head of the country’s oldest and biggest opposition party.

Some commentators suggested Kabila would have sought immunity from prosecution for his iron-fisted 18-year rule, and

protection from assets seizure in return for offering his support. Thursday’s pre-dawn announcement brought thousands of Tshisekedi supporters onto the streets in celebration, while others who had backed Fayulu came out to protest. The authorities late Friday imposed an 8pm-5am curfew in Kikwit, a Fayulu stronghold in the west of the country, city mayor Leonard Mutangu told AFP.

Five civilians were killed there on Thursday in a police operation to curb post-election violence, said National Police spokesman Colonel Pierrot-Rombaut Mwanamputu. Seventeen police were injured, he said, denying earlier reports of police fatalities. A relay station of the national radio and television broadcaster, RTNC, was also ransacked, he added. In the eastern city of Goma, at least one person was killed, officials said. —AFP

Venezuela legislature calls for protest to oust Maduro

CARACAS: Venezuela’s sidelined opposition-controlled legislature is calling for a mass protest against President Nicolas Maduro in a bid to oust the socialist leader in favor of “a transitional government.” Maduro, 56, was sworn in for a second term on Thursday, having won a controversial election in May that was boycotted by the opposition and branded a fraud by the United States, European Union and Organization of American States.

The president of the National Assembly, Juan Guaido, said Friday that the constitution gives the legislature the right to assume transitional power after declaring Maduro a “usurper,” but said it would need military backing and for people to take to the streets to demand change. “Is it enough to lean on the constitution in a dictatorship? No. It needs to be the people, the military and the international community that lead us to take

over,” said the 35-year-old Guaido, speaking to a crowd of around 1,000 opposition supporters in Caracas. In response, prisons minister Iris Varela threatened Guaido on Twitter, saying she had a cell ready for him — as Maduro dismissed the opposition as “little boys.” “I hope you quickly name your cabinet to know who is going to accompany you,” Varela said.

Foreign support for Guaido

But Guaido’s announcement was welcomed outside of Venezuela. US National Security Advisor John Bolton said the administration of President Donald Trump “resolutely supports the Venezuelan National Assembly, the only legitimate branch of government duly elected by the Venezuelan people,” and especially supports “the courageous decision” by Guaido to “declare that Maduro does not legitimately hold the country’s presidency.”

In Washington, OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro recognized Guaido as head of state, as the person at the top of Venezuela’s only legitimate governing body. “We welcome the assumption of @jguaido as interim President of Venezuela,” Almagro tweeted. Brazil’s far-right government welcomed Guaido’s readiness to “constitutionally assume the Venezuelan presidency.”



CARACAS: View of a flag with a design against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro during an extraordinary open meeting of Venezuela’s opposition-led National Assembly, in front of the UNDP headquarter. —AFP

Guaido called for a mass protest on January 23 — the day in 1958 on which the military dictatorship of Marcos Perez Jimenez fell. The National Assembly has dismissed Maduro’s election as illegitimate, but the body has been sidelined by the president’s power grab. Having lost control

of the legislature in 2016, Maduro last year created a rival Constituent Assembly filled with loyalists. And all decisions taken by the National Assembly are considered null and void by Venezuela’s Supreme Court, the pro-government Supreme Justice Tribunal. —AFP

International

Myanmar Reuters journalists lose appeal against 7-year jail sentence

Judge says the original verdict was a 'reasonable decision'

YANGON: Two Reuters journalists jailed for seven years while investigating atrocities committed against the Rohingya in Myanmar had their appeal dismissed Friday, dismaying colleagues and tearful family members who had held slim hopes they would walk free. Reporters Wa Lone, 32, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 28, were arrested in Yangon in December 2017 and later jailed for violating the state secrets act, a charge Reuters said was trumped up to muzzle their reporting.

Prosecutors say the two had classified information regarding security operations in Rakhine state, from where hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims fled during an army-led crackdown the United Nations has described as "ethnic cleansing". Aung Naing, a judge at the Yangon Regional High Court, said the original verdict was a "reasonable decision" delivered in line with the law. "The court decides to dismiss the appeal," he said.

The reporters' wives cried after the decision, which condemns the pair to continue their incarceration at Yangon's notorious Insein prison, where they have been held for the last 13 months. "I feel really sad that what we hoped for did not happen," a stone-faced Chit Su Win, who is married to Kyaw Soe Oo, told reporters outside the court. Wa Lone's wife Pan Ei Mon — who has given birth to a baby girl since her husband was put behind bars — was similarly despondent. "I don't want to talk about the decision today as it is not good news," she said.

Presidential pardon?

The two men — who were not present for the decision — have insisted they were victims of a police set-up, pointing to testimony from a serving officer who said a superior ordered others to entrap them. At the time of the arrest they were probing the extrajudicial killing of 10 Rohingya at Inn Din village in northern Rakhine state.

"They remain behind bars for one reason: those in power sought to silence the truth," Reuters editor-in-chief

Stephen J Adler said in a statement Friday. The original trial was widely regarded as a sham and seen as punishment for their investigation and a warning shot to other media. Outside the country, the two men have been hailed as media freedom heroes and jointly named Time magazine's Person of the Year 2018, alongside other high-profile journalists. But they have gained little sympathy within Myanmar.

The violent military campaign in 2017 forced more than 720,000 Rohingya across the border to Bangladesh, with refugees bringing accounts of murder, rape and arson. UN investigators have called for top generals to be investigated for genocide and singled out de facto civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi for criticism for failing to condemn the operations. The image of the formerly renowned champion of human rights has been further damaged by the Reuters conviction.

In her most comprehensive comments on their case in September, Suu Kyi denied the pair had been jailed "because they were journalists" and endorsed the court decision that "they had broken the Official Secrets Act". Options are dwindling for the two young men. The legal team can lodge an appeal with Myanmar's Supreme Court but some see a presidential pardon as another way out, even though the president Win Myint is a Suu Kyi loyalist.

International condemnation

The United States said it was "deeply disappointed" by the verdict and pledged to press the journalists' case. "A free and independent press should be protected in any democracy. Today's ruling casts doubt not only on freedom of expression in Burma, but also raises questions about Burma's commitment to the rule of law," State Department spokesman Robert Palladino said, using Myanmar's former name.

Reacting outside the court, European Union ambassador to Myanmar Kristian Schmidt said he looked to the



YANGON: This file photo taken on September 03, 2018 shows Myanmar journalist Wa Lone (C) is escorted by police after being sentenced by a court to jail. — AFP

president to "correct the injustice". Speaking on the BBC, UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt urged Suu Kyi "to look at whether that due process" was followed in the case, calling on the fallen rights icon to take "a personal interest

in the future of these two brave journalists." Myanmar's army gets 25 percent of parliamentary seats unelected under a constitution it wrote and runs all defense affairs without input from the civilian government. — AFP

New alliance raises pressure on the BJP

LUCKNOW: Two regional parties that were former bitter rivals announced an unlikely alliance yesterday to fight Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Hindu nationalist party in a looming general election. The Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) — key players in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh — said they would set aside their differences to jointly fight Modi in the bedrock state.

The two central-left parties have widespread support among lower castes and poor voters across the state — India's most populous, with 220 million people. Uttar Pradesh is a bellwether of national politics, accounting for 80 of the 552 members of parliament in New Delhi. An election is expected to be held in April and May and one recent poll indicated Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) may fall short of a majority.

Akhilesh Yadav, the Samajwadi Party head, said the alliance would counter the "divisive politics" of the BJP, which won a landslide victory in 2014. "The BJP is dividing the country, it is stoking fear and hatred among communities," Yadav told a news conference sat alongside Mayawati, a popular low-caste leader who heads the



LUCKNOW: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav (R) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader Mayawati take part in a press conference to announce their political alliance. — AFP

BSP. The parties, which will contest 38 seats each out of the state's 80, left the main opposition Congress party out of the alliance.

The two have been fierce rivals in recent years. They teamed up in 1993 and formed the Uttar Pradesh state government but relations soured after Mayawati said she was assaulted by Samajwadi Party activists in 1995. Modi's BJP suffered a rare reverse when it lost three key state elections to Congress last month, amid discontent over unemployment and economic

inequality. A BJP spokesman played down the importance of the alliance.

"We are confident. Even if all the parties come together, we will still win," Sudhanshu Trivedi told reporters in Delhi where the BJP is holding a key convention. Modi rallied 10,000 party workers at the convention, dismissing critics who say his policies harm the poor. "During our time there has not been a single corruption allegation against us," he said "We believe in treating everyone equally and taking the country on the path of development." — AFP

Thai security forces kill two linked to school shooting

BANGKOK: Two insurgents believed to be tied to a motorcycle drive-by shooting at a school in Thailand's south were shot dead yesterday, police said, as UNICEF warned of trauma for children near the scene of the lunchtime violence. Since 2004 clashes between Malay-Muslim rebels and the Buddhist-majority Thai state that annexed the area over 100 years ago have killed nearly 7,000 people, mostly civilians of both faiths.

The conflict rarely makes global headlines but is a reality for residents of border provinces where security forces maintain a large footprint, aided by poorly paid defense "volunteers" drawn from local communities. The four men killed in Thursday's shooting were all Muslims and were guarding a school in Pattani province when the attackers struck just before lunchtime with students mere meters away.

Pattani provincial police commander Piyawat Chalamsri told AFP yesterday that two people with alleged ties to the school violence were killed in a shootout yesterday morning. Though he did not give information about their identities or affiliation, he said he was "confident that they

were the same group who carried out the attack Thursday" by driving by on motorbikes. Authorities have also detained one suspect and are questioning five others, while a military source said an eight-year-old had been grazed by a bullet but not seriously injured.

UNICEF Thailand representative Thomas Davin said Friday that one child at the Bukoh school attack was reportedly injured by debris and some who may have witnessed the attack could face long term psychological trauma. "This attack has undoubtedly put the school children, the teachers and school personnel in harm's way. It has put children at grave risk of injury or death," he said. "Such violence could also affect parents' willingness to send their children to school — potentially to the detriment of many children's learning and future development."

The 15-year insurgency has seen scores of teachers killed, slain for their perceived collaboration with the Thai state, which led to the use of armed guards at schools.

The death toll in the conflict dropped to a record low last year as Thailand's junta tightened its security operations. But recent weeks have seen an uptick in violence, as rebels show they remain able to carry out more pinpointed operations.

In a rare statement dated January 4 the main rebel group — the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) — swore to "keep fighting" while warning people not to help or support the state. But Thai authorities as well as the Malaysian facilitator of the talks have recently expressed confidence they will make progress soon. — AFP

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Washington Watch

Republicans play
'Israel Card' and fail

By Dr James J Zogby

As this past week began, with the shutdown of parts of the US government entering its third week, Republicans, desperate to force the Democrat's hand, decided to play the "Israel card." The effort failed. The standoff between the White House and the Democrats that caused the shutdown is the result of President Trump's insistence that any new congressionally approved budgets for this year must include over \$5 billion to cover the cost of the "wall" he has promised to build on the US border with Mexico. This is the third such standoff over this very same issue in Trump's two years in office.

Exactly one year ago, Democrats offered the Administration a compromise in the form of trade-offs. They agree to support wall-funding in exchange for White House concessions on the status of undocumented minors. At first Trump agreed, but after blow-back from hardline conservatives, he backed away from the compromise and upped the ante by insulting immigrants from African countries and calling for an end to "family unification" visas.

Now, with Democrats in control of Congress, the President and the Republicans in Congress have hardened their stance, in effect saying, "no wall, no budget." Recognizing that their position is increasingly untenable, since a majority of the public don't want or see any need for a wall, they have tried a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, Congressional Republicans have attempted to shift the discussion from a "wall" to the more general need for more border security. For his part, Trump and his White House spokespersons, while continuing to insist on a wall, have tried to use fear tactics warning of thousands of terrorists and drugs "flowing unimpeded across the border."

Into the second week of the standoff, following the swearing-in of the new Congress, Democrats declared that the first priority of this Congress should be passing the budget and reopening the government. As their first act, the House of Representatives passed a compromise budget bill that the Republican Senate had endorsed just one month ago. That bill didn't pass the Republican-controlled House and so never went any further. After passing this budget bill, the new Democratic-controlled House sent it to the Senate for approval. Because Trump now doesn't approve of this compromise, the Republican leader of the Senate refuses to bring this bill, which just weeks ago he had supported, to a vote. Until he does, Democrats in the Senate have said that they feel it inappropriate to conduct any other Senate business.

It was at this point, Republican Senator Mario Rubio, with the blessing of the Senate Majority Leader, tried to "pull a fast one" on the Democrats by introducing Senate Bill 1 (SBI) "Strengthening America's Security in the Middle East." SBI has four parts. The first is a wide ranging and significant upgrade of US security assistance to Israel. Next is a reauthorization of US-Jordan defense cooperation. Then comes a number of provisions that deal with sanctions against Syria and assistance to Syrian people. The final portion of the bill is called the "Combating BDS Act of 2019" - an effort to support state and local governments that criminalize or punish those who engage in boycotts, divestment, or sanctions against "Israel or areas under Israeli control."

Despite disclaimers that SBI doesn't predetermine Israel's borders or violate US citizen's Constitutionally protected rights, it actually does both. By including "areas under Israel's control" for "protection" against BDS, the bill clearly accepts Israel's occupation of much of the West Bank. And by its very nature, SBI is a violation of US citizen's rights to engage in free speech and freedom of choice - which is why the bill has been opposed by the American Civil Liberties Union and a host of liberal and conservative rights organizations. It was precisely because of the concern with the violation of free speech that this anti-BDS bill has not passed in earlier congresses.

By putting these anti-BDS provisions in the bill and including another Israel-related related section, Republicans hoped to accomplish two objectives: break the resolve of the Democrats who object to conducting "business as usual" until a budget is passed and use "support for Israel" as a wedge issue to try to peel American Jewish support away from the Democratic party. As clever as they thought their crass exploitation of Israel may have been, it didn't work.

The first Democrat to publicly object to Rubio's ploy was Senator Bernie Sanders who tweeted: "It's absurd that the first bill during the shutdown is legislation which punishes Americans who exercise their constitutional right to engage in political activity. Democrats must block consideration of any bills that don't reopen the government. Let's get our priorities right." In response, newly sworn-in Representative Rashida Tlaib tweeted: "They forgot what country they represent. This is the US where boycotting is a right & part of our historical fight for freedom and equality. Maybe a refresher on our US Constitution is in order, then get back to opening up our government instead of taking our rights away." Rubio and a host of American Jewish groups and advocates jumped on this bizarrely charging that Tlaib was suggesting that Jews have "dual-loyalty."

NOTE: Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo speaks to the press during a tour of the newly-inaugurated Al-Fattah Al-Allam Mosque in Egypt's New Administrative Capital, 45 km east of Cairo, on Jan 10. — AFP

Strange revisionism of Pompeo's Cairo speech

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's much-marketed speech in Cairo was rich in straw man fallacies while short on substantive specifics, a speech bursting with contradictions that reminded me just how hard it must be to speak for a president who has, at best, an incoherent foreign policy. Pompeo's speech appeared to have three intended audiences, none of which was actually present in the American University in Cairo auditorium: The Oval Office; the Saudi royal court; and President Trump's political base, which hungers for ABO ("Anything but Obama"), however inaccurate.

The strange revisionism of Pompeo's Cairo speech was hard to miss. He began by excoriating Barack Obama for words the former president never spoke. Referring to Obama's 2009 Cairo speech, Pompeo said that Obama had told Egypt that "radical Islamist terrorism does not stem from an ideology" and that "9/11 led my country to abandon its ideals." Pompeo argued that Obama was guilty of seeing the United States "as a force for what ails the Middle East," and that "the results of these misjudgments have been dire."

Of course, Obama never said any of that. As his presidency began, in a Middle East still reeling by the American invasion of Iraq - a blunder opposed by most of the Arab world - Obama defended the United States: "America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire. The United States has been one of the greatest sources of progress that the world has ever known." He did make it clear that "I have unequivocally prohibited the use of torture by the United States," and for good reason:

President George W Bush's own administration had come to believe that Guantanamo and the fallout of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal had badly damaged America's image, aided terrorist recruitment, and made it harder for the United States to bring Arab allies to its side. Obama never said that radical terrorism was devoid of ideology; in fact, like his predecessor, he argued that "America is not - and never will be - at war with Islam." He separated the

terrorists from the religion, in order to pull the Muslim world closer in isolating and fighting those very extremists who were bastardizing a religion.

It's not a new phenomenon for the Trump administration to rewrite the history of the Obama administration. But this time it was particularly brazen. Pompeo argued that, after Syria's 2013 poison gas attacks, "in our hesitation to wield power, we did nothing"; he neglected to mention that it was Republican Senate Leader Mitch McConnell who opposed granting Obama the authority he'd asked for to conduct airstrikes, or that then-private citizen Trump opposed US intervention of any kind in Syria. But the big question is why an American secretary of state would travel to the heart of the Arab world to deliver a speech largely intended for partisan political consumption at home?

One might argue that Pompeo had little choice but to engage in rhetorical broadsides, given the difficulty of explaining Trump's vision. The secretary argued that "the age of self-inflicted American shame is over"; he might want to check with his commander in chief, who has famously defended autocrats who kill journalists and innocents and said, "our country does plenty of killing too". It requires extraordinary rhetorical dexterity to attack his predecessors for "abandoning" the Middle East less than a month after Trump, without warning, announced a unilateral, precipitous withdrawal of US special forces from Syria, prompting the resignation of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis in protest.

But my lasting worry about Pompeo's speech is more than its contradictions: it's the willful misunderstanding of what Obama sought to achieve in the region. Pompeo doesn't need to agree with Obama's policies to understand and be informed by their motivation. Obama in 2009 sought a "reset" with the populations of the Middle East because he diagnosed the danger of America's image being defined in the region to serve our adversaries' agendas: the Arab Spring which followed two years later con-

firmed why the United States needs to tend to its image on Arab streets, not just with autocratic allies: there's no guarantee their reigns will endure.

Pompeo should worry now that Trump, in mismanaging America's image, has once again handed Iran and others a convenient weapon of mass distraction. He should certainly worry that Trump's decision to put all his eggs in the basket of personal relationships with two or three leaders in the volatile region could prove short-sighted.

Pompeo should also remember that the Obama administration performed a delicate diplomatic dance: rather than plunge into a unilateral war with Iran, Obama won even grudging Gulf Arab support for an Iran nuclear weapons agreement that is still working in spite of the absence of the United States. By seemingly taking sides on ancient Sunni-Shiite sectarian divisions between Riyadh and Tehran, Trump is exacerbating tensions instead of seeking an uneasy equilibrium that serves America's interests.

And, of course, in decrying the Obama approach that successfully decimated Islamic State (which hasn't changed in practice under Trump but has shifted in rhetoric) Pompeo forgets that Secretary of State John Kerry began his diplomacy to organize the coalition against Islamic State in Jeddah. Having the kingdom - home of Makkah and Madinah - prominent in a coalition against Sunni extremists was pivotal in mounting an operation that couldn't be mistaken as a war against Islam. It was Saudi Arabia that appreciated the ways the Obama administration bent over backwards to demonstrate that we were not at war with their religion.

Pompeo, like all secretaries of state, will ultimately be judged on substance, not speeches. But make no mistake, Thursday in Cairo, he made his own job a little harder. Some listening is in order - to the Arab Street, and to history.

NOTE: David Eckels Wade was chief of staff to the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and chief of staff to the US Department of State from 2013-2015. The opinions expressed here are his own. — Reuters

No, Brexit Britain
doesn't want its
empire back

Britain is moving towards an exit from the European Union on March 29, possibly with no agreement, and thus courting - according to the Bank of England - an 8 percent drop in GDP and a 7.5 percent rise in unemployment. A drear prospect, attended by matching drear commentaries on the stupidity of the 52 percent of the British electorate who voted for Brexit in 2016.

Some observers have seen the vote as evidence that imperial urges still dominate. In March 2017 Washington Post foreign affairs reporter Ishaan Tharoor wrote of Brits "harboring delusions of empire (while)...the fantasy of Britain's past collides almost farcically against Britain's present." As this year began, he returned to the imperial theme, solemnly warning that, for Brits "the old colonial hubris" is omnipresent, but "along with imperial nostalgia comes a fair amount of delusion."

It's one of the most common fantasies presently peddled about the mindset of the UK - that it is mired, hopelessly, in a mourning of greatness gone, and a dream to regain it. The British journalist Paul Mason writes of "the self-deluded narrative that has guided the whole Brexit strategy: the idea that 'our' former colonies will want to form a new, white, English-speaking trading area - nicknamed Empire 2.0 - to replace the EU." The Irish writer Fintan O'Toole, believes that the English think that if "England is not an imperial power, it must be the only other thing it can be: a colony," seeing himself, with nostalgic shivers, threatened once more by a resurgent Germany.

Yet no body of opinion, no organization, no individual capable of thought wants an empire. Government ministers, charged with carrying out the will of the electorate, talk up - probably over-optimistically - the chances of a network of trade agreements,

many with former colonies such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States itself. One of the biggest boosters is UK Business Secretary Greg Clark, who invokes "fantastic opportunities for the future" for "a country that is superbly well-positioned in most of the big transformations that are taking place across the world today." He's routinely mocked as a fantasist, but he's doing what any politician who believes in a course of action does - he's talking it up. His rhetoric isn't a sign that he believes Britannia can again rule the waves, or the continents.

The charge of imperial nostalgia which Brexiters are supposed to nurse is often accompanied by grim reports of a country tearing itself apart. The Spectator commentator Stephen Daisley laments that "the House of Commons, once respected around the world as the gold standard of political debate, has become a source of national embarrassment, a symbol of a fractious and directionless nation." Parliament, to be sure, has been in several uproars this past week - both inside the chamber, where the Speaker was accused of abusing his neutrality by breaking a rule to favor those who want to remain in the EU, and outside, where a mob of largely young, male pro-Brexiters screamed "Nazi!" and "Fascist!" at Remainers.

This is what is called democracy and political debate - if not the gold standard, certainly an upsetting, but always vivid, exchange of views. Journalism, which lamented the blandness of politics, now has its wish for passion - and appears to hate it. These deeply consequential arguments, in both the UK and the US, appear to have remained - just about - within a non-violent frame. They have not in France, where at least nine have died as protests spread across the country. This is not bloody revolution - the violence, frightening as it is, has been largely confined to buildings and cars. Rather, what comes to the surface are elemental issues of politics: Unemployment, inequality, marginalization, fear of the future.

NOTE: John Lloyd co-founded the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. The opinions expressed here are his own. — Reuters

As US gov't
shutdown drags
on, where is
McConnell?

When President Donald Trump stormed out of a White House meeting with congressional leaders last Wednesday, US Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell sat there silently, uttering not a word as the talks blew up, according to others in the room. The No. 1 Republican in Congress, who rose to power on his reputation as a master of legislative wrangling, has had little to say in public or private during a partial federal government shutdown that began on Dec 22 and has no end in sight.

Showing no interest in defying his president and Trump's demand that triggered the shutdown for funding for a US-Mexico border wall opposed by Democrats, McConnell has kept a low profile. This posture, allies and opponents said, is about McConnell protecting himself, vulnerable Republicans and their control of the Senate ahead of the 2020 elections. At the core of McConnell's quiet loyalty to Trump, despite past friction between them, is a calculation that Trump's popularity with Republican voters makes standing by him, in the long run, politically wiser than responding to short-term worries about the shutdown, aides and experts said.

"The leader is prepared to engage, but the leader always wants to be able to look ahead and see the two or three other moves ahead of the immediate move," Republican Senator Thom Tillis told Reuters, referring to McConnell. The cost of this long-term focus, Democrats said, is that McConnell has ceded control of the Senate to Trump for the dura-

tion of the shutdown fight by pledging to block any shutdown-ending legislation the president would not sign.

Democratic Senator Joe Manchin, who helped negotiate an end to an earlier shutdown, said this of McConnell's absence from negotiations: "Basically, that's what's holding everything up." Nancy Pelosi, speaker of the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives, is passing shutdown-ending spending bills in her chamber, including one on Friday. If McConnell would only put those measures on the Senate floor for a vote, Democrats argue, senators from both parties would support them. That would then pressure Trump, according to the Democrats, to sign the bills into law and reopen government, even if the measures lacked the \$5.7 billion in wall funding he is demanding. McConnell has made clear this will not happen.

Slip out the back

Twice now, House Republican leaders Kevin McCarthy and Steve Scalise have emerged from high-level White House shutdown talks to address reporters, once with Trump and once with Vice President Mike Pence. While McCarthy and Scalise went to the microphones, McConnell returned unobtrusively to the Capitol. A senior Democratic aide described McConnell's demeanor in meetings with Democrats about the shutdown as more "subdued" than when he helped end previous shutdowns.

One other possible explanation for this, Democrats said, is that McConnell was burned by Trump last month when the president reversed position and rejected a bipartisan, Senate-passed spending bill that would have averted the shutdown. About a quarter of the government closed after Trump rejected that bill, unexpectedly demanding that any measure to restore funding to agencies whose funding expired for unrelated reasons must include more than \$5 billion for his wall. — Reuters

Business

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HONG KONG: Pedestrians walk on a pavement along Russell Street in the shopping district of Causeway Bay in Hong Kong on Friday. Russell Street replaced New York's Upper Fifth Avenue as the world's most expensive retail street by rental value, according to property consultants Cushman & Wakefield in November last year. — AFP

Global investors look to China amid slowdown

As world stumbles into 2019, recession models flash orange warnings

LONDON: Ten years after China helped stave off the threat of a global depression with a huge stimulus plan, investors are looking once again towards Beijing as the world economy heads for a slowdown, or worse, in 2019.

Booming China has accounted for about a third of the growth in the global economy in recent years. So recent signs that it is losing momentum is unsettling when the US boom, turbo-charged by President Donald Trump's tax cuts of 2017, seems to have peaked and Europe's heavyweights are stalling.

China's slowdown is already being felt around the world, from Apple's profit warning due to weaker sales of its iPhones to carmaker Jaguar Land Rover laying off workers, after a 22 percent fall in sales in the country in 2018.

Policy sources told Reuters in Beijing on Friday that the government is planning a lower economic growth target of 6-6.5 percent for 2019 after an expected 6.6 percent in 2018, which would be the slowest expansion since 1990.

In the first few days of 2019, China raised infrastructure spending with a \$34 billion railway investment and its central bank loosened the screws on banks to encourage them lend more, its fifth such move in a year. "China, that's what worries me most," Joachim Fels, managing director and global economic advisor at bond giant Pacific Investment Management Company, said as he surveyed the outlook for the world economy in 2019.

As well as cutting China's appetite for imports, a deeper slowdown could weaken its yuan currency and fan the flames of the trade war between Beijing and Washington. However, Fels said his recession models for 2019 were flashing only orange warnings—not red—in part because the US Federal Reserve was likely to pause its run of interest rate hikes after one or two more increases. China is expected to do more to act to help its economy too, although officials in Beijing say they do not plan a stimulus of the magnitude of the nearly \$600 billion

package unleashed in 2008, shortly after the collapse of Lehman Brothers.

"I find it hard to look at it historically and bet against the Chinese authorities managing to stabilize their economy," Jim McCormick, global head of desk strategy for RBS division NatWest Markets, said.

"When China wants to stabilize its economy, they tend to be successful."

In November, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development trimmed its forecasts for Chinese growth to 6.3 percent in 2019 followed by 6.0 percent in 2020.

Since then, the impact of US-China trade tensions have become more apparent, OECD senior economist Margit Molnar said, suggesting the forecasts could be lowered again.

Higher borrowing by local governments in China suggested a pick-up in infrastructure spending was coming, she said, potentially helping to offset signs of fragile confidence among Chinese consumers.

"The major issue is to guarantee a gradual slowing," Molnar said.

Investors breathe easier

For the time being, the concerns of investors in late 2018 about the global economy have eased, leading to a tentative recovery in battered stock markets. A round of talks between US and Chinese trade officials in Beijing did not end in acrimony. And in Europe, a slowdown is probably in part due to one-off factors such as new pollution rules for carmakers and the impact of the 'gilets jaunes' protests in France which has been felt in the supply chains that stretch across the border into Germany.

Steven Bell, chief economist with BMO Global Asset Management, said surveys of purchasing managers in the private sector around the world suggested a broad pick-up in industrial production was not far off. And for many consumers in rich economies, low inflation and gradually rising wages will help their spending power.

But even if the world economy avoids a painful slowdown this year, it faces daunting

fundamental challenges. Many countries seem stuck in a rut of slow productivity growth which puts a brake on earnings and has propelled the rise of populist politics, from Trump to the protests in France.

In Britain, the radical left-wing leadership of Britain's opposition Labor Party is worrying investors after Prime Minister Theresa May split her Conservative Party with her plan to ease Britain out of the European Union at the end of March. Gabriel Sterne, head of global macro research at Oxford Economics, said the pressure on politicians to heed the frustration of voters after years of austerity could help end an overly tight squeeze on public spending by some governments.

"By contrast, a worst-case scenario is one in which frustrated politicians launch hasty attacks or takeovers of key institutions, compromising central bank independence and launching unsustainable fiscal expansions," he said. "Afflicted advanced-economy assets could even behave as if in an emerging market crisis." — Reuters

Zimbabwe plans new currency as dollar shortage creates havoc

HARARE: Zimbabwe will introduce a new currency in the next 12 months, the country's Finance Minister said, as a shortage of US dollars plunges the financial system into disarray, forcing businesses to close and threatening unrest. The southern African nation abandoned its own hyperinflation-wrecked currency in 2009 at the height of an economic recession, adopting the greenback and other currencies including sterling and the South African rand.

But without enough hard currency to back up the \$10 billion of electronic funds trapped in local bank accounts, businesses

and civil servants are demanding payment in cash which can be deposited and used to make payments both inside and outside the country.

Mthuli Ncube told a townhall meeting late on Friday that a new local currency would be introduced in less than twelve months. "On the issue of raising enough foreign currency to introduce the new currency, we are on our way already, give us months, not years," he said.

Zimbabwe currently has less than two weeks import cover, according to central bank data, and the government has previously said it would only consider launching a new currency if it had at least six months of reserves. Locals are haunted by memories of the Zimbabwean dollar, which became worthless as hyperinflation spiralled to reach 500 billion percent in 2008, the highest rate in the world for a country not at war, wiping out pensions and savings.

A surrogate bond note currency introduced in 2016 to stem dollar shortages has also collapsed in value.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa is under pressure to revive the economy but, in something of a vicious circle, the dollar shortages are undermining efforts to win back foreign investors sidelined under his predecessor Robert Mugabe. With less than \$400 million in actual cash in Zimbabwe according to central bank figures, there are fuel shortages and companies are struggling to import raw materials and equipment, forcing them to buy greenback notes on the black market at a premium of up to 370 percent. The Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries has warned some of its members could stop operating at the end of the month due to the dollar crunch. Zimbabwe's iconic manufacturer of cooking oil and soap, Olivine Industries said yesterday it had suspended production and put workers on indefinite leave because it owed foreign suppliers \$11 million. A local associate of global brewing giant Anheuser-Busch Inbev said this week it would invest more than \$120 million of dividends and fees trapped in Zimbabwe into the central bank's savings bonds. — Reuters



HARARE: Public transport drivers complain about having to pay for fuel in US dollars at a fuel station, on Friday in Harare. Motorists are spending nights waiting in long queues for petrol and diesel as the country is experiencing crippling fuel shortages. — AFP

Business

Faisal Tareq Arab is Gulf Bank's newest Al-Danah millionaire

Live announcement made at The Avenues



Gulf Bank's team

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced the winner of its annual Al-Danah KD 1 million draw. Faisal Tareq Arab was named as this year's winner at an exciting event held at The Avenues on 10th January 2019. The event was held in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and EY, it was also broadcasted live on 88.8 FM Q8 Pulse.

Fun for the whole family

Kicking off at 4pm, the entertaining event had fun for the whole family, with activities ranging from face-painting and handicrafts, to a host of games and challenges. The audience was then treated to a live performance by a Kuwaiti Band. Their popular traditional songs and dances, inspired by Kuwait's seafaring traditions, added to the electric atmosphere of the event.

'Catch the cash'

Gulf Bank's exclusive and wildly popular 'Catch the Cash' game took center-stage at the event, drawing in the crowds, as hundreds of people registered for a chance to enter. As the live entertainment concluded and the main event began, participants' names were selected through a draw. This year's edition of the game had two boxes giving people twice the chance to participate and win. The challenge was to catch as much cash within 10 seconds, with the total prize amounting to KD 3,000.

'Danah hour'

This year's event saw the introduction of 'Danah Hour'. A designated booth offered valuable instant prizes to those named 'Dana', as well as entry to a surprise draw. Winners of the draw were announced at the event, with 10 lucky winners awarded a prize of

KD 200 each credited to their Al-Danah account.

'Al-Danah millionaire'

Mohammed Al-Qattan, Deputy General Manager for Consumer Banking and Ahmed Al-Amir, Assistant General Manager of External Communication at Gulf Bank, took to the stage, alongside the youngest Al-Danah millionaire from last year, twelve-year-old Obaid Saad Al-Rasheedi and his father to announce this year's winner. In the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative and EY, Obaid Saad Al-Rasheedi pressed the button revealing this year's winner. Faisal Tareq Habeeb Arab was crowned the 2018 Al-Danah millionaire, winning the grand prize of KD 1,000,000, Gulf Bank extends its sincere congratulations to Kuwait's newest Al-Danah millionaire.

'Interview with Ahmad Al-Amir, GM'

"Congratulations to Mr Faisal Arab, and thank you to all those who joined us at the event. The turn-out was incredible and we hope that everyone enjoyed this year's entertainment. The Al-Danah account rewards customers with the chance of incredible prizes and we look forward to continuing our legacy of making Kuwaiti millionaires in the years to come."

About Al-Danah Account

Al-Danah is Gulf Bank's flagship account, open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of KD 200 to open an account and the same amount should be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. Customers who open an account and/or deposit



Mohammed Al-Qattan, Deputy General Manager for Consumer Banking, announces the winner's name

more will enter the weekly draw within two days. The Al-Danah draw distributes more than KD 2 million in prizes every year.

Al-Danah offers several unique services to customers, including the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card, which allows account holders to deposit money into their accounts at their convenience. Account holders can also calculate their weekly, quarterly, and yearly chances of winning the draws through the 'Al Danah Chances' calculator available on the Gulf Bank website and app.

To take part in the upcoming Al-Danah quarterly and yearly draws, customers must meet the required

hold period for each draw. Al-Danah chances are added on a daily basis, the more customers save and the longer they save for, the higher their chances of winning. Furthermore, loyal customers will be rewarded and have their previous year's chances transferred to the next year.

Customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's 58 branches, transfer online, place queries through the official Gulf Bank WhatsApp service on 65805805 or call the customer contact center on 1805805 for assistance and guidance. Customers can also visit the website to find out more about Al-Danah and its winners.



The crowd



Traditional Kuwaiti band



Catch the cash game



Last year's Danah millionaire on stage



Children's activities



One of 'Al-Danah Hour' winners



Mohammed Al-Qattan and Ahmed Al-Ameer with last year's millionaire



The draw

Business

Lebanon dollar-bonds tumble after debt rescheduling report

LONDON/BEIRUT: Lebanon's dollar-denominated sovereign bonds tumbled for a second day on Friday following a Bloomberg report quoting the finance minister saying a fiscal reform plan included a debt rescheduling. Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil said such a rescheduling would be undertaken in coordination with lenders and the central bank, Bloomberg said, citing a statement. The plan did not include any change to Lebanon's fixed exchange rate, it added.

Lebanon's dollar-denominated bonds suffered a second day of hefty falls with many issues trading at record lows.

The 2025 bond dropped 5.25 cents to a fresh record low of 73.50 cents in the dollar.

According to a summary of the comments to Bloomberg circulated by the finance ministry, Khalil did say the plan under consideration included a rescheduling, but he denied there was any intention to "restructure" Lebanon's public debt, which is equal to around 150 percent of GDP.

But a Lebanese newspaper cited him on Thursday as saying the ministry was "preparing a financial correction plan including restructuring of public debt", which triggered Thursday's sell-off in dollar-denominated debt. Asked by Reuters on Friday whether a haircut - or writedown in value -

was under consideration, Khalil said: "There is absolutely no intention of touching the value of Lebanese bonds or taking a percentage of them."

"The proposals are an operation to organize and manage the debt and to move ahead with reform measures that reduce the burden of it," he added.

Tim Ash at BlueBay Asset Management said the comments had caused concern in the markets.

"The damage is done ... (this) just reflects the extent of the problems faced by Lebanon - there is simply no space for failing to adopt the right tone/language in all this," he said.

Khalil told Reuters on Thursday that Lebanon was studying ways to manage its public debt and its structure as part of plans for public finance reform.

The International Monetary Fund urged Lebanon in June to carry out "an immediate and

substantial fiscal adjustment" to improve debt sustainability. More than eight months since an election, political leaders have still not been able to agree a new government that could set about reforms to boost confidence.

Khalil, a top figure in the Amal Movement led by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, has recently become more vocal in his warnings about the economy. Last month, he said Lebanon was in an economic crisis that had started to turn into a financial one which he hoped would not become a monetary one.

Khalil has held the post of finance minister since 2014 and is expected to retain the position in the new government. A deal on forming the new cabinet to be led by Saad Al-Hariri appeared close last month but the last obstacle was not resolved. —Reuters

Cheaper gasoline weighs on US consumer prices in December

WASHINGTON: US consumer prices fell for the first time in nine months in December amid a plunge in gasoline prices, but underlying inflation pressures remained firm as rental housing and healthcare costs rose steadily. Overall, the report from the Labor Department on Friday painted a picture of inflation that was under control, with increases in some categories offset by declines elsewhere. This likely supports recent statements by Federal Reserve officials pledging patience in raising interest rates this year.

"The Fed will take this as further proof that price pressures are building more slowly than some have feared based on the strong growth of late and tight labor market," said James McCann, senior global economist at Aberdeen Standard Investments in Boston. "It certainly seems to justify the Fed's message about being more patient on rate increases."

The Consumer Price Index dipped 0.1 percent last month, the first drop and weakest reading since March, after being unchanged in November. In the 12 months through December, the CPI rose 1.9 percent, slowing from November's 2.2 percent gain.

Excluding the volatile food and energy components, the CPI increased 0.2 percent, advancing by the same margin for a third straight month. In the 12 months through December, the so-called core CPI rose 2.2 percent, matching November's increase. December's inflation readings were in line with economists' expectations. The CPI rose 1.9 percent in 2018, slowing from a 2.1 percent increase in 2017. But the core CPI jumped 2.2 percent, up from 1.8 percent in 2017.

The Fed, which has a 2 percent inflation target, tracks a different measure, the core personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, for monetary policy.

The core PCE price index increased 1.9 percent year-on-year in November after rising 1.8 percent in October. It hit 2 percent in March for the first time since April 2012. The US central bank has forecast two interest rate hikes this year, but several policymakers, including Chairman Jerome Powell, have said they would be cautious about tightening monetary policy.

Powell reiterated that view on Thursday, saying "especially with inflation low and under control we have the ability to be patient and watch patiently and carefully" while the central bank monitored economic data and financial markets for risks to growth.

Minutes of the US central bank's Dec. 18-19 policy meeting published on Wednesday showed "many" officials were of the view that the Fed "could afford to be patient about further policy firming."

But with core inflation remaining firm despite a strong dollar and slowing global growth, economists say further rate increases this year cannot be ruled out. In addition, a tighter labor market is boosting wage growth. "If core inflation holds firm, the Fed will continue to consider additional rate hikes this year," said Sam Bullard, a senior economist at Wells Fargo Securities in Charlotte, North Carolina. The Fed lifted borrowing costs four times in 2018. The dollar was little changed against a basket of currencies, while US Treasury prices rose. Stocks on Wall Street were trading lower after a five-day rally. —Reuters

(This invitation is prepared for promotional purposes and it does not disguise, diminish or obscure important items from the investment subject of promotion)

Invitation to subscribe to the Capital Increase Shares of United Projects Company for Aviation Services K.S.C.P. ("UPAC")

Commercial Registration (82992)



Pursuant to the resolution passed by the Extra-ordinary General Assembly Meeting of United Projects Company for Aviation Services K.S.C.P. ("UPAC" or the "Issuer" or the "Company") held on 29 September 2016, approving the increase of the company's authorized share capital to KD 38,250,000; and pursuant to the resolution of the Board of Directors of UPAC dated 12 September 2018 approving the increase of the issued and paid up share capital with a total nominal value of KD 3,275,000 (Three million and two hundred seventy five thousand Kuwaiti dinar) divided into 32,750,000 ordinary shares (Thirty two million and seven hundred fifty thousand ordinary shares) at a total value of KD 18,012,500 (Eighteen million and twelve thousand five hundred Kuwaiti dinar) including the issuance premium; and pursuant to the approval of the Capital Markets Authority ("CMA") approving the issuance of the new shares, on 19 November 2018 and the approval of the CMA on the Prospectus on 19 December 2018;

UPAC's Board of Directors is pleased to invite all shareholders who are registered in the company's shareholders' register as of 13 January 2019 to subscribe to the new shares in accordance with the following terms:

Subscription Period	From 17 January 2019 (Inclusive) to 14 February 2019 (Inclusive) from Sunday to Thursday from 9 am to 2 pm excluding official holidays.
Offer Price	550 Kuwaiti Fils per Share (including the nominal value of 100 Kuwaiti Fils per share and the issuance premium of 450 Kuwaiti Fils).
Record Date	13 January 2019
Eligible subscribers/ Preemption right	Shareholders recorded in UPAC's shareholders' register as of 13 January 2019 have the right to subscribe to up to approximately 25%* of their holding.
Subscription in additional shares	Eligible Subscribers with pre-emption right are allowed to subscribe to additional surplus shares resulting from other shareholders not exercising their pre-emption right, provided that, such eligible subscriber has fully subscribed to the capital increase shares to which he/she is entitled.
Allocations of shares	The Offer Shares shall be allocated among eligible shareholders who have submitted a request to subscribe into number of Offer Shares in proportion of their respective ownership of the issued shares as on record date. The Board of Directors will allocate the surplus shares, that resulted from shareholders not exercising their preemption rights, to eligible shareholders who are willing to subscribe in additional shares above their preemption right.
Lead Manager and Subscription Agent	Kuwait Financial Centre K.P.S.C.
Subscription Agent Address	Qibla, Mubarak Al-Kabeer Street, Duaij Building, Ground Floor (in front of Boursa Kuwait).
Required Documents	The subscriber must submit the following documents to the Subscription Agent along with the Subscription Application Form, as applicable. The Subscription Agent officer will check the copies against originals and thereafter return the originals to the subscriber.
Individual Subscribers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original & copy of personal civil identification card; • Original & copy of passport for citizens of GCC states; • Original & copy of special legal proxy for subscribing in shares (for proxy subscribers); • Original & copy of Certificate of Guardianship for minors/orphans; or • Original & copy of Determination of Succession Deed for heirs. • Evidence of payment of the subscription amount along with the Subscriber's IBAN number. • If the Subscriber is not present in person, an original proxy to the person delegated in administrative dealings related to the Subscription Application (provided that the signature of the Subscriber on the proxy is authenticated by the Subscriber's Bank).
Corporate Subscribers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original & copy of Commercial Registration Certificate; • Original & copy of the specimen of signature for the authorized signatory issued by Public Authority of Manpower or attested by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and; • Original & copy of the personal identification card of the authorized signatory; • Evidence of payment of the subscription amount along with the Subscriber's IBAN number. • If the authorized signatory is not present in person, an original proxy issued by the authorized signatory to the person delegated in administrative dealings related to the Subscription Application.
Payment Methods	<p>1. Bank Transfer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bank Name: Gulf Bank, Kuwait • A/C Number: 06406899 • A/C Title: KFC (Markaz) - Clients - Collections - Fiduciary Money • IBAN: KW51GULB000000000000000006406899 • Swift Code: GULBKWKW <p>2. Certified bank cheque in favor of the subscription account: KFC (Markaz) - Clients - Collections - Fiduciary Money</p>
Risk Factors	Investment in shares includes various risk factors which include the exposure of the issuer's operations to geopolitical and economic risks; ongoing unrest in the Middle East, Build Operate and Transfer (BOT) projects related risks; performance volatility of the real estate sector; rise of market competition; risks of correlation between the performance of various sectors, other than the real estate sector, and the performance of the company's projects; risks related to performance of long term lease contracts; prospects of the company's success in managing its various projects; risks related to real estate development projects; general liquidity risks and the associated costs of raising liquidity; the credit risk of the clients, the risk of execution on collateral of loans provided to Related Companies. Other notable risks are related to key operational risks, such as the risk of increased maintenance and operational costs, as well as risks related to internal compliance and risk management policies and procedures, application of Corporate Governance Rules, the ability to recruit and retain qualified and experienced personnel; and the maintenance of the issuers accounting policies and methods. There also exist additional factors related to the region in which the issuer operates, which include: risks related to the development of legal systems of Kuwait and GCC; legal and regulatory systems, lawsuits and fines that the issuer may encounter, Kuwait bankruptcy rules; and Force Majeure. There are also some key factors to consider associated with investing in shares, including the suitability of the investment, liquidity and volatility of the share price; dividend payments; dilution of existing shareholdings; application of Corporate Income Tax and Value - Added Taxes; and Capital Gains Taxes on Kuwaiti and other Companies; change in Law and implications of GCC monetary unity. For further details on risk factors, please revert to the issue Prospectus.
How to Obtain a Copy of the Prospectus	The shareholders can obtain a copy of the Prospectus from the head office of the Subscription Agent (mentioned above), the subscription agent's website (www.markaz.com), the head office of the issuer (Kuwait International Airport, Mezzanine Parking, Kuwait) or through the issuer's website (www.upac.com.kw).
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Business

NBK Economic Report

Qatar's economic outlook remains positive as confidence returns

Growth driven by continued infrastructure investment

KUWAIT: Qatar's economy has been performing well, with output expected to increase by an annual average of 2.7 percent over 2018-2020 from 1.6 percent in 2017 on the back of gains in the non-hydrocarbon sector, especially in manufacturing and construction, and in the gas sector, where the authorities are intent on expanding LNG capacity by 43 percent by 2024. Underpinning economic activity is the government's expansive public investment program, which is now reaching an advanced stage with the FIFA World Cup only three years away.

Qatar's public finances are also on a firmer footing, with the country's first fiscal surplus in three years expected in 2018, at 3.1 percent of GDP, and its foreign reserves back on the rise, thanks to higher oil and gas prices and restrained public expenditure growth.

Moreover, businesses and investors appear to have regained their confidence in Qatar's economy: non-resident deposits are returning, private sector credit growth, led by corporates, is in the double digits, and the stock market just ended 2018 posting the highest yearly gains in the region at 21 percent.

Nevertheless, challenges remain, including continued dependence on the hydrocarbon sector, which is at the mercy of volatile energy prices, rising borrowing costs linked to tightening US monetary policy and regional geopolitical risks, with no sign yet of a resolution to the GCC boycott.

Infrastructure investment

The non-hydrocarbon sector will continue to spearhead economic growth, rising by 4.1 percent y/y and 4.8 percent y/y in 2019 and 2020, respectively, and supported by the government's \$200bn infrastructure investment program under the auspices of the Qatar National Vision 2030.

Activity in 2018 was dominated by output gains in the manufacturing and construction sectors, with the Laffan refinery ramping up production and further progress made in relation to transportation, entertainment and real estate infrastructure projects ahead of the World Cup in 2022. The benefits resulting from regulatory reforms introduced over the last two years, such as allowing 100 percent foreign ownership across all sectors, accelerating the issuances of commercial and

industrial licenses and offering long-term expatriates permanent residency in Qatar, should also accrue over the forecast period. In the gas sector, the authorities' intention to expand LNG production capacity by 43 percent to 110 million tons per annum (mtpa) by 2024 could see real output gains appear as early as 2020-Qatar Petroleum (QP) has already issued its first tender for drilling rigs. Hydrocarbon sector real GDP growth should, therefore, rise from 0.3 percent in 2018 to 0.9 percent by 2020.

Inflation subdued

Inflation, which is expected to average 0.3 percent in 2018, has been weighed down by continued weakness in the real estate sector (due to oversupply and the moderation in population growth) and by base effects relating to the spike in food prices in 2017 in the aftermath of the GCC trade boycott. Both CPI components were in negative growth territory in November 2018, falling by 2.6 percent y/y and 2.4 percent, respectively. Inflation (avg.) should pick up slowly to 2.3 percent in 2020 (but to more than 3.5 percent if the VAT is introduced in 2020).

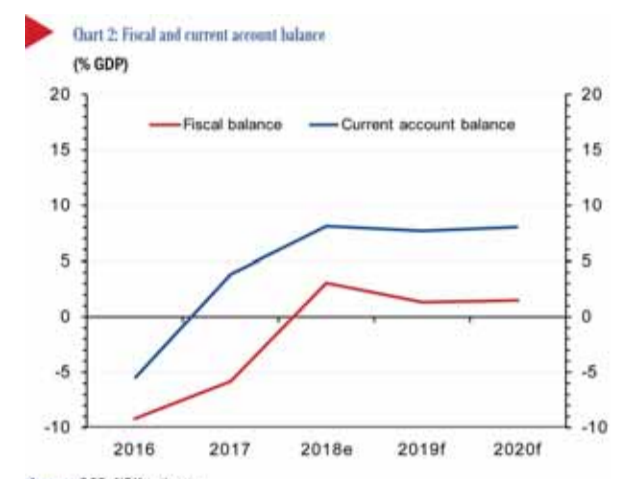
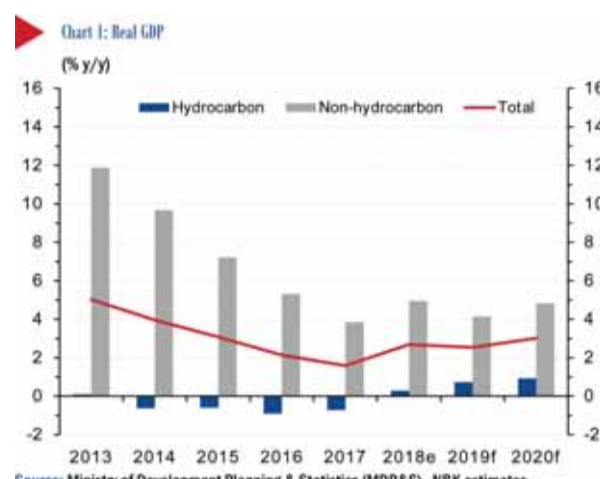
First fiscal surplus

Qatar's fiscal balance is expected to shift into a surplus of 3.1 percent of GDP in 2018, following three consecutive years of deficits. While this is due primarily to higher oil and gas revenues following the increase in energy prices, restrained expenditures (cuts to subsidies, merging of ministries etc.) and some increase in non-oil revenues are also responsible. The fiscal deficit has been financed primarily by domestic debt, although Qatar returned to the international bond markets in April 2018 with a successful \$12bn sale. There were no shortage of takers.

The external current account balance, which moved into a surplus in 2017, also improved. Looking ahead, while energy prices are expected to be softer in 2019-20, it is unlikely that either account will slip back into a deficit.

Meanwhile, official QCB reserves (gross) in October 2018, were at \$28.2bn, not far off pre-blockade levels. Banking sector has recovered from post-blockade capital flight, while credit growth continues to be robust.

Furthermore, thanks to timely injections of liquidity

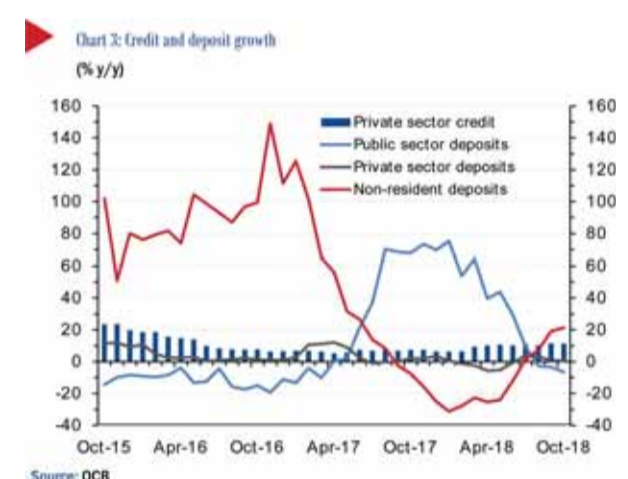


by the Qatari sovereign wealth fund, the QIA, the government was able to offset the outflows of non-resident deposits that followed the dispute. Overall, foreign bank liabilities-deposits from overseas banks, non-residents and debt securities-have increased by about 20 percent, as of October 2018, with non-resident inflows in particular recovering after bottoming out at QR135bn in November 2017, a drop of 27 percent from pre-embargo levels. Growth in the overall and private sector deposit base has been weak, though, running at 1.5 percent y/y and 0.5 percent y/y in October 2018, respectively. Base effects relating to 2017's sizeable government deposit placements are also at play, though.

Private sector credit growth, on the other hand, has outpaced deposit growth (+11.4 percent y/y), thanks to increased demand from the services, general trade and real estate sectors. This is positive for the broader economy, coming against a backdrop of rising borrowing costs-the Qatar Central Bank (QCB) raised its benchmark QMR deposit rates four times in 2018 (25 bps each time) in line with the US Fed's monetary tightening schedule.

Qatari equities

The benchmark Qatar Exchange (QE) index rose 21 percent in 2018, outperforming regional stock indices. Starting from a lower base compared to its GCC neigh-



bors following 2017's negative performance, Qatari equities benefitted from sizeable portfolio inflows linked to the MSCI rebalancing and generally positive sentiment linked to higher energy prices. The authorities' relaxation of foreign ownership limits and the rating agency Moody's affirmation of the sovereign's Aa3 rating and its revision of the outlook on the government's long-term issuer ratings from negative to stable also helped to instill confidence in Qatar's economy.

Microsoft reveals regional organizations' 2019 'manifesto' on digital transformation

KUWAIT: Almost three in four Middle East organizations that have not yet moved their digital estates and IT environments to the cloud, plan to do so in 2019, a Microsoft survey has revealed. The finding was one of many found by Microsoft in the company's construction of the "2019 Middle East Digital Transformation Manifesto" - covering experiences, attitudes and intentions of the region's businesses and government agencies regarding technological change.

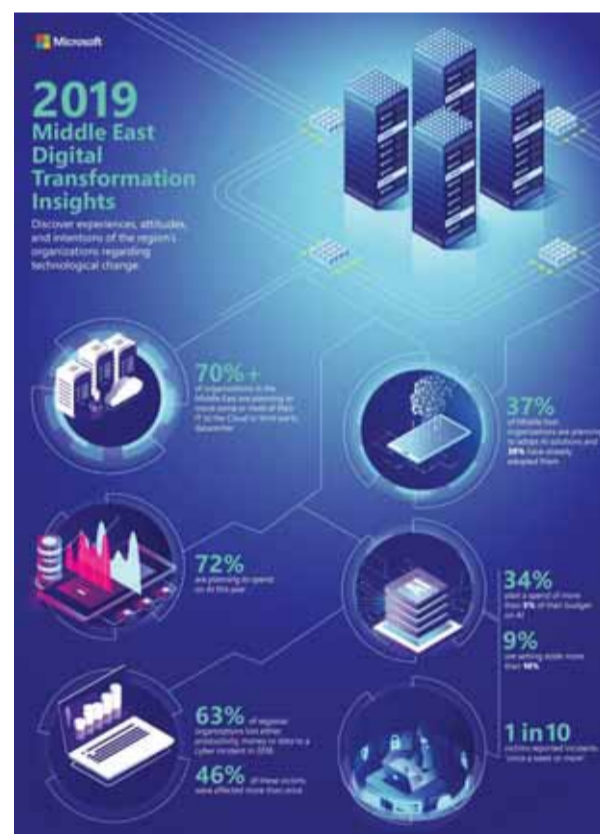
More than 1,300 technology and digital decision makers from across the Middle East took part in the survey. Nearly half of all respondents (48 percent) said that their organization had yet to move some or any of its IT infrastructure to a third-party cloud. But more than 73 percent plan to do so in the coming year. The recent finding reflects previous, similar discoveries made by Microsoft and independent global research firms, suggesting region-wide accelerated engagement with cloud computing and related technologies.

Artificial intelligence is one such example. Almost two in five Middle East organizations (39 percent) have already adopted AI solutions and more than one third (37 percent) are planning to adopt in 2019. Companies are getting bolder with their budgets in embracing AI. Some 72 percent are planning to spend on AI this year, suggesting that most previous adopters are planning further investments. Around one in three (34 percent) plan a spend of greater than 5 percent of their budget on AI, and 9 percent are setting aside more than 10 percent.

Attitudes towards the security of third-party datacenters have also progressed. Findings on cybersecurity reveal a troubling threat landscape from which migrating organizations appear eager to escape. Some 63 percent of respondents said their company lost either productivity or data to a cyber incident in 2018; 46 percent of these victims were affected more than once; and almost one in 10 victims reported incidents "once a week or more".

"The overarching lesson from these findings is that the region's need for a trusted, secure, intelligent cloud has never been greater," said Ihsan Anabtawi, Chief Operating and Marketing Officer for Microsoft Gulf. "Concerns over security and escalating IT budgets, as well as the desire to develop intelligent digital ecosystems that serve business needs in real time, are driving more and more organizations to the cloud. Microsoft's commitment to regional economic development - demonstrated by our contribution to infrastructure development, entrepreneurial mentorship and job creation - will take another huge step forward, when we open our first Middle East hyper-scale cloud datacenters in Abu Dhabi and Dubai this year".

A recent IDC report shows that the cloud and the Microsoft



ecosystem will bring over 520,000 jobs to the Middle East & Africa region over the next five years. More importantly, the World Bank recently concluded that for every technology job created worldwide, 4.3 more are generated across sectors and income groups.

While creating new job opportunities across the ecosystem, the new UAE datacenters will adhere to Microsoft's trusted-cloud principles of security, privacy, compliance and transparency, helping organizations meet customers' needs while also delivering data residency, low latency, security and local certification requirements. In addition to its commitment to the region, Microsoft's decision to establish the datacenters emerged from multiple market-research programs and discussions with customers and partners throughout the Middle East.

"We called this study the 'Middle East Digital Transformation Manifesto' because it is the clearest indication yet of the business community's ambitions and intentions with regards to digital transformation. Microsoft's mission is to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. It is our obligation and privilege to move forward with our customers - to help them engage citizens and consumers, empower employees, optimize operations and reinvent business models. We will continue to play our part in spurring entrepreneurship, accelerating innovation and fuelling growth," added Anabtawi.

the country to the verge of reneging on trillions of dollars of financial obligations. To prepare for that possibility, two Fed staffers penned a memo outlining nine actions the Fed could take if failure to raise the US debt ceiling triggered a debt default.

Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke then convened a video-conference with fellow policymakers, a transcript of which was among a trove of Fed documents from that year published Friday, the 21st day of a partial government shutdown that has revived memories of 2013, when government funding lapsed for more than two weeks amid a protracted debt crisis. Options included several that policymakers readily supported, including expanding ongoing bond purchases and providing emergency lending. —Reuters

Top IT trends that will redefine businesses in 2019

By Sami Abi Esber

We are living in an era of unparalleled innovation. As new and emerging technologies continue to redefine IT and business, the pace of change and technological advancement is accelerating. Today, we are looking at a smarter, intelligent future driven by technologies such as cloud, artificial intelligence, blockchain, internet of things, and more. While the industry has already embarked on its digital transformation journey, businesses are yet to realize the full potential of these technologies and how they will shape the way we do business in the future.

In the coming years, new digital businesses and brands will bring greater focus into the region and will help accelerate the ICT business. Across the Middle East, Africa and Turkey, banking, finance, healthcare and utilities are taking the lead in driving digital transformation. The local drivers for such initiatives center around customer experience enhancement and achieving competitive advantage. These initiatives are driving investments into mobility, analytics, cybersecurity and cloud solutions.

Regardless of the industry or enterprise, one or the other technology will definitely play a part in transforming the business by offering benefits like cost savings, improved security and better customer experience, among others. Here we define the top technologies that regional organizations can leverage to transform their business in 2019:

1. Internet of Things

With the acceleration of digital transformation in the region, more and more devices are getting connected. Although the adoption of IoT will be massive, it is still slow as the devices are not standardized. From autonomous vehicles to drones to sensors in oilfields, healthcare, transport, Oil & Gas etc., IoT will have a huge impact on enterprises and consumers. Our Group is developing innovative IoT solutions and is working with IBM and other major players like Microsoft, Cisco & GE to implement solutions like Predictive Maintenance instead of the traditional Preventative Maintenance model for Oil and Gas

5. Big Data

With massive volumes of data being generated every second from connected devices, machines and IoT, Big Data is definitely a trend to watch out for. Big Data is the new oil as it has the potential to empower organizations to make better business decisions, in real time. By unlocking the organization's data, they can fundamentally change the way it operates and steer the transformative, digital journey the company's stakeholders expect. Note: Sami Abi Esber is President - MDS Gulf, Board Member-Midis Group.

assets and Real Estate facilities based on Maximo. One of our affiliated companies recently signed an agreement with Etisalat to jointly offer Smart Integrated Facility Management Solutions to achieve Cost savings, Operational efficiencies and enhanced Customer satisfaction.

2. Artificial Intelligence

The use of AI technologies is now penetrating many aspects of business. A recent survey by ServiceNow across Europe, Middle East and Africa indicates that customer service is an area that is showing a fast return on investment. Companies across these regions are deploying AI technologies to revolutionize customer service as more and more consumers are showing an acceptance to AI-driven experiences. Nearly 30 percent of EMEA organizations have introduced AI technologies to customer service and 72 percent of those are already seeing benefits that include freeing up agent time, more efficient processing of high-volume tasks and providing always-on customer support.

3. Blockchain

Interest in blockchain technologies in the region is growing rapidly. The pace is being set by the government and public sector including education, healthcare, finance, distribution and services. The most popular blockchain use cases in the coming years will be cross-border payment and settlements, asset and goods management and identity management. Across the private sector, we have seen announcements of recent initiatives by The Atlantis, Jordan Investment Bank, Noon Capital, DIFC, Halal Guide, amongst others. Global blockchain player, ConsenSys recently conducted a blockchain developer training and hackathon camp in Lebanon.

4. Multi-Cloud

Enterprises in the region are now using multiple cloud solutions whether on-premises, public cloud, or a hybrid of both. In the coming years, upfront costs will become less important as cloud vendors continue to produce convincing use cases. AI and machine learning will be fundamental in increasing the levels of automation. Corporate cloud literacy is becoming an operational prerequisite as technological progress accelerates in EMEA. With a multi-cloud strategy, businesses can decide how to distribute workloads to cloud platforms that are best suited for specific tasks.

If US again risks default, Fed has 'loathsome' playbook

SAN FRANCISCO: Should political deadlock in Washington again bring the world's biggest economy to the brink of a debt default, the US central bank has a playbook that includes options one policymaker once labeled "loathsome," but, perhaps, necessary.

The policymaker was Jerome Powell, now the Federal Reserve chairman and a Fed governor in October 2013 when a political debate over federal spending brought

Health & Technology

Not just for kids: A leap for seniors at Vegas tech show

LAS VEGAS: With artificial intelligence to detect falls, virtual reality to combat isolation and "powered" clothing to assist the incapacitated, the tech world is stepping up its effort to "disrupt" aging.

At the Consumer Electronics Show this week in Las Vegas, exhibitors were showcasing new ways to help the elderly remain independent, mentally fit and connected.

Some systems took a page from the gaming world of youngsters to help seniors "travel" to new places and connect with loved ones. "Everyone knows seniors get lonely but that isolation can also lead to a lot of medical problems, including the acceleration of dementia," said Kyle Rand, founder and chief executive of Rendevar, a startup which works with assisted living homes to give seniors a way to virtually visit remote locations.

"They can stand atop the Eiffel Tower, they can go on an African safari, or revisit their childhood home." Rendevar was launched in the Washington DC tech incubator created by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), which in recent years has been funding efforts to develop new technologies for seniors.

In the consumer space from the AARP incubator, Alcove VR enables seniors to be part of a virtual world with loved ones who may be far away.

"You can step into a virtual living room (with a friend or family member and just hang out," said Cezara Windrem, the AARP product manager for Alcove.

Alcove was launched this week as a free application on Oculus, the Facebook-owned virtual reality unit. The AARP exhibit also included VRHealth, which offers cognitive behavioral therapy using virtual reality, and Pillo, a device which serves as a personal assistant and medication dispenser focused on health for seniors.

Virtual caregivers

Other exhibitors showcased technology that could help seniors remain in their homes, and give family members peace of mind by monitoring their condition, in some cases using predictive analytics to determine if they are at risk.

Walabot, a wall-mounted monitoring system developed by the Israeli startup Vayyar, uses radio waves and three-dimensional imaging to keep tabs on seniors living alone.

"You don't need to wear anything, there are no cameras," said Ofer Familier, head of business development for Vayyar. The company, which makes a range of sensor equipment, says Walabot can detect subtle changes in gait, movement or breathing which could signal a risk of a fall or other problem.

"We can detect falls, but the predictive aspect of it is to monitor changes in behavior so we can alert family members," Familier said. Also launched at CES was the Addison Virtual Caregiver, a video-based assistant with a female avatar which can converse, offer reminders on medication and detect potential health issues. With the data gathered from the device, "we can classify people as high-risk or low-risk fallers," said David Keeley, research director for Addison parent firm SameDay Security.

"We can predict the rate of functional decline"

Alicia Mangram, a Phoenix-based trauma surgeon who is an advisor to Addison, said the system can be useful in helping seniors remain independent. "Right now when we send people home (from a hospital) we don't know what happens to them," Mangram said. "This allows us to check on them." Florida-based startup CarePredict exhibited its system based on a wearable band that helps monitor seniors in assisted living facilities.

"We can passively and unobtrusively monitor the daily activities of seniors, and our predictive tools can help identify if they are at risk of falls, depression, malnutrition or urinary tract infections," said CarePredict's Jerry Wilkink. Tech firms see a promising market in these kinds of devices, with public attention focused by the Apple Watch's feature of fall detection.

According to research firm eMarketer, Americans of age 55 and older are the fastest-growing group of electronic wearable users in the US, largely due to the devices' enhanced health features.



LAS VEGAS: The VR Fetus app from South Korean startup GirjaeSoft is displayed at CES 2019 at the Las Vegas Convention Center in Las Vegas, Nevada on Friday. A pregnant woman can monitor fetal growth information via the app, and can see 3D images of the fetus using GirjaeSoft's dedicated virtual reality head-mounted device (HMD) and a connected ultrasound machine. — AFP

Artificial muscles

For those with mobility issues, the California startup Seismic unveiled its wearable tech body suit which can augment a user's muscles and help them maintain posture. The "core wellness suit," which weighs under five pounds and can be worn under street clothes, has robotic components that provide up to 30 watts of power to each hip and the lower back to support sitting, standing, lifting, or carrying—similar to an exoskeleton but without the bulk.

Sarah Thomas, a Seismic vice president and advisor to tech startups, said the new product is designed not only for the elderly but for factory workers to ease fatigue and anyone with mobility issues. Thomas said tech products for seniors should not be "stigmatized" with unsightly products. "We should be designing with age in mind but without the ageist perspective," Thomas told a CES panel. —AFP

Oceans warming faster than expected, set heat record in 2018: Scientists

OSLO: The oceans are warming faster than previously estimated, setting a new temperature record in 2018 in a trend that is damaging marine life, scientists said on Thursday.

New measurements, aided by an international network of 3,900 floats deployed in the oceans since 2000, showed more warming since 1971 than calculated by the latest UN assessment of climate change in 2013, they said. And "observational records of ocean heat content show that ocean warming is accelerating," the authors in China and the United States wrote in the journal Science of ocean waters down to 2,000 metres (6,600 ft).

Man-made greenhouse gas emissions are warming the atmosphere, according to the overwhelming majority of climate scientists, and a large part of the heat gets absorbed by the oceans. That in turn is forcing fish to flee to cooler waters.

"Global warming is here, and has major consequences already. There is no doubt, none!" the authors wrote in a statement.

Almost 200 nations plan to phase out fossil fuels this century under the 2015 Paris climate agreement to limit warming. US President Donald Trump, who wants to promote US fossil fuels, plans to pull out of the pact in 2020. Data due for publication next week will show "2018 was the warmest year on record for the global ocean, surpassing 2017," said lead author Lijing Cheng, of the Institute of Atmospheric Physics at the Chinese Academy of Sciences. He told Reuters that records for ocean warming had been broken almost every year since 2000.

Overall, temperatures in the ocean down to 2,000 metres rose about 0.1 degree Celsius (0.18F) from 1971-2010, he said. The 2013 UN assessment estimated slower rates of heat uptake but did not give a single comparable number. A separate study on Monday, by the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service, said 2018 was the fourth warmest year for global surface temperatures in records dating back to the 19th century. — AFP

SpaceX to lay off 10% of workforce

SAN FRANCISCO: Elon Musk's rocket company SpaceX will reduce its workforce by about 10 percent of the company's more than 6,000 employees, it said on Friday. The company said it will "part ways" with some of its manpower, citing "extraordinarily difficult challenges ahead."

"To continue delivering for our customers and to succeed in developing interplanetary spacecraft and a global space-based Internet, SpaceX must become a leaner company. Either of these developments, even when attempted separately, have bankrupted other organizations", a spokesman said in an email.

In June, Elon Musk fired at least seven people in the senior management team leading a SpaceX satellite launch project, Reuters reported in November. The firings were related to disagreements over the pace at which the team was developing and testing its Starlink satellites.

SpaceX's Starlink program is competing with OneWeb and Canada's Telesat to be the first to market with a new satellite-based internet service. The management shakeup involved Musk bringing in new managers from SpaceX headquarters in California to replace a number of the managers he fired in Seattle. Last month, SpaceX launched its first US national security space mission, when a SpaceX rocket carrying a US military navigation satellite blasted off from Florida's Cape Canaveral. In December, the Wall Street Journal reported that SpaceX was raising \$500 million, taking its valuation to \$30.5 billion. — Reuters

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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

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Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368
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DR. WALEED S BUHAIMED
Consultant of General Surgery
Laprosopic and Bariatric Surgery

Academic Certificates - Training

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

Scope of clinical Practice.

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

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

What's On



Report on inaugural function of ICSK Higher Education Fair 2019



History was made today in The Indian Community School Senior when the Diamond Jubilee celebrations was flagged off by the Inauguration of Higher Education Fair 2019 amidst much pomp and glory. The Principal and Senior Administrator of ICSK Dr V Binumon welcomed the galaxy of invited guest. The Chief Guest of the function HE Dato' Mohammad Ali Selamat, the Ambassador of Malaysia to Kuwait, Guest of Honor Raj Gopal Singh, Deputy Chief of Mission and Appellate Authority, Indian Embassy and Special Guest Dr PR Venketaram inaugurated the Higher Education Fair 2019 by lighting the lamp. Addressing the august gathering HE Dato' Mohammad Ali Selamat remarked that it was an exemplary fair, giving opportunity to multitude of students aspiring to realize their dreams. He also mentioned the hospitality

of ICSK, which reverberated in the beautifully rendered Malaysian National Anthem by the school choir "Swaranjali".

The special guest and the world renowned career Guru Dr PR Venketaram articulated that the Higher Education fair and the personal career guidance were very professionally arranged for the first time for 4 consecutive days under the guidance and support of the Management of the school, the Principal and his team. He also put in a word of advice to the children and the parents stressing that the choice of a right course was the most important condition to acquire an appropriate career.

Dr PR Venketaram also added that he was overwhelmed and motivated by the response of parents and children during the counseling session and he high-

lighted the fact that it was the first time in his career that he had conducted a one to one counseling for more than 50 students in one day. The inaugural function also witnessed 'Guru Pranamam' a special event honoring the Principals of various schools in Kuwait.

All universities participating in the higher education fair were felicitated with mementoes during this function. The grand and solemn function was accentuated by the rhythmic dances of Athira, Amelendu, Athishni, Bhawna, Divya, Mriga, Beneetta and Akshita accompanied by the versatile Anaghaon the maniveena. The program concluded with the vote of thanks by the deputy Vice Principal Mrs Susan Rajesh Pothen. The Grand Inauguration sailed smoothly to its destination by the scintillating steering of the host, Mrs Sandhya Menon.

Safir Fintas Hotel organizes blood drive



Safir Fintas Kuwait Hotel organized a blood donation campaign in collaboration with the Kuwait Central Blood Bank. The initiative stems from the belief in the importance of making social contributions. The one-day event was open to all colleagues of Safir Fintas Hotel, whose donated blood to be used to save the lives of many people, especially women giving birth, premature babies, and people involved in accidents. Saif Eddin Mohammed, the General Manager of Safir Fintas Kuwait Hotel, commented, "We are pleased that the Kuwait Central Blood Bank is supporting our campaign, to promote awareness about the importance of securing a source of safe blood, which is critical to saving many people's lives." And he thanked the Blood Bank representatives for supporting the responsible business commitment of Safir Fintas Kuwait Hotel, and all colleagues, to make a positive contribution to the local community."



India is passing through a critical phase, says Karat

India is passing through a critical phase today with the current NDA government seeking to undermine the secular fabric of the country and destroy its democratic institutions, said Prakash Karat, the politburo member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), here on Friday.

Addressing the valedictory session of Kerala Arts Lovers Association's (KALA Kuwait) 40th anniversary celebrations, Karat, the high-ranking political leader from India said, "The country is going to witness parliamentary elections within next 100 days, it is imperative on the part of all secular democratic parties in the country to rally forces against the present ruling coalition in India and defeat it in the elections," he said.

Unleashing a scathing attack on the present National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, he alleged that the government failed in delivering all of its promises it made when it came to power in 2014. The economy is in crisis today with the country witnessing an economic slowdown. Disgruntled farmers are up in arms against the government. The public sector has become even more weaker while banking sector is in dire straits today. Job scenario turned bleak in the past year, as almost 11 million Indians lost their jobs in 2018 alone, he pointed out.

"Today, the fundamental secular fabric of the country is threatened. The NDA is propounding a politics of division in a secular country where its constitution guarantees



equal rights to every citizen. Social justice and equity is denied to people today. Dalits and Muslims are lynched in the name of protecting cows," he said.

Karat also attended a 'Meet the Press' program on Thursday in which he acknowledged the key role of the Congress party in the coming elections as the key opposition. However, he ruled out the possibility of a broader pan-India alliance as socio-political equations in each state are different. "It is possible to forge alliances against BJP at regional levels as we see in Uttar Pradesh where Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party have formed a grand alliance against NDA," he said.

Karat said Rafale deal was the largest defense scam in India where the Indian Air Force wanted 126 aircraft originally which was reduced to 36 under the new deal. He also questioned how Anil Ambani's Reliance

Defence became the Indian offset partner of French firm Dassault Aviation. "If the results of the state elections held recently in the country are any indication, there will be a non-BJP government at the center after the Lok Sabha elections," he said. The BJP conceded power to the Congress in three key Hindi heartland states in the recent elections.

KALA Kuwait honored 40 of its old members who completed decades of their services in the association at the conference. Earlier, KALA General Secretary Saji Thomas Mathew welcomed the gathering and gave a brief on organization's charity and welfare activities during 2018. Naganathan delivered the presidential address. J Saji, T V Hikmath, N Ajithkumar, Ramesh Kannapuram, Abey Varicaud, Sherif Thamarassery, Rama Ajith, Praseeth Karunakarn, M.D Musafir and Anilkumar were among others who spoke on the occasion.

LOYAC to organize a trip to Thailand

Within its voluntary programs for girls aging 14-18, LOYAC will organize a trip to Thailand in the period of January 14-21. The program was introduced during a meeting between LOYAC representatives and those of ZAIN, the trip's sponsor at Zain's headquarters. LOYAC's communal services

manager, Yosra Al Essa said that the program reflects LOYAC's keenness to provide youth with experiences and skills that would help develop their personalities and self-reliance. It also helps promote voluntary and recreational skills along with working within groups and openness to other cultures.



Announcement from South African Embassy

The Embassy of the Republic of South Africa to the State of Kuwait in collaboration with the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters has the pleasure to announce that it will be hosting a South African Multiple Award winning Jazz Music Group from 12 - 18 January 2018. The Music Group is led by a Jazz legend McCoy Mrubata, a Saxophonist, flute player, music teacher and composer. The Group will present a resounding uniquely South African Jazz performance at the Al Qurain Festival on Tuesday 15 January 2019 at 19h30 at Abdullhusein Abdul Redah Theatre in Salmiyah.

Mrubata was born in 1959 in Cape Town's historic Langa Township, South Africa. He grew up with the sounds of African music: the soulful hymns of the Zion Church, the chants and rhythms of traditional healers and the brassy jive of the Merry Macs band who rehearsed opposite his home. McCoy Mrubata is a highly experienced and well-travelled Jazz Music legend who has conducted music workshops and lectures for grad-

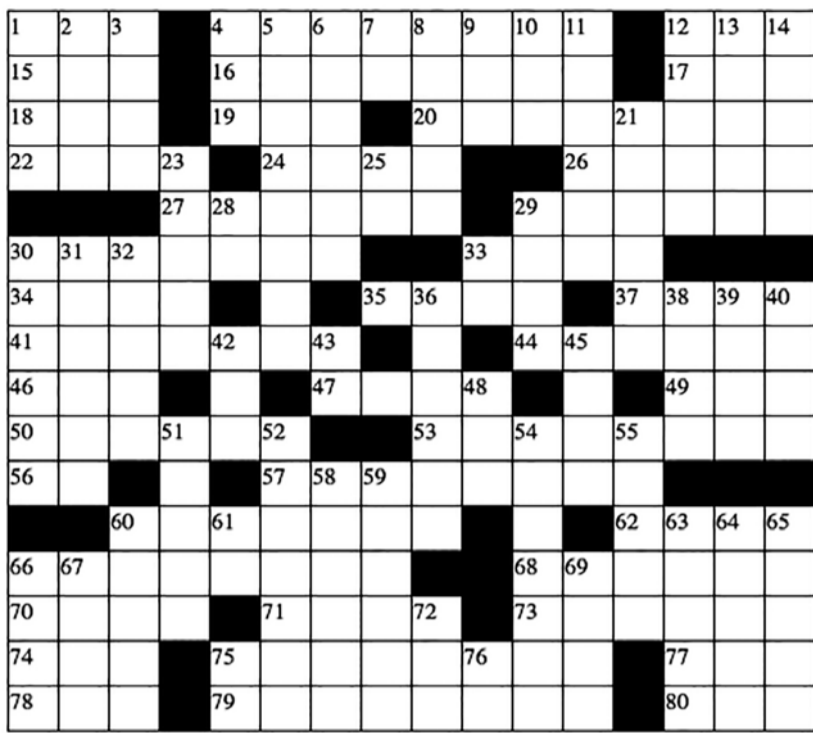


uate and postgraduate students at several international universities in Africa, Europe and the USA.

Mrubata won a number of prizes including: Gilby's Music For Africa (1991), five time winner of the South African Music Award for the "Best Jazz Album" category, Angola COCAN Africa Cup Of Nations Competition Ambassador (2010) and Winner of the Kenny Center Gold Medal Award (2018). The South African Embassy and the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters look forward to seeing you at Abdullhusein Abdul Redah Theatre to enjoy the Heart and Soul of Africa.

Stars

CROSSWORD 2108



ACROSS

1. A bachelor's degree in naval science.
4. A clap of the hands to indicate approval.
12. Any high mountain.
15. Resinlike substance secreted by certain lac insects.
16. Often cultivated for the decorative foliage.
17. (computer science) The smallest discrete component of an image or picture on a CRT screen (usually a colored dot).
18. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
19. The act of slowing down or falling behind.
20. (British) The side of a vehicle nearest the kerb.
22. A small cake leavened with yeast.
24. An amino acid that is found in the central nervous system.
26. A Bantu language spoken by the Chaga people in northern Tanzania.
27. Of or relating to the nervous system.
30. The capital and largest city of Greece.
34. A thin wedge of material (wood or metal or stone) for driving into crevices.
35. One thousandth of a second.
37. (informal) Being satisfactory or in satisfactory condition.
41. East Indian cereal grass whose seed yield a somewhat bitter flour, a staple in the Orient.
44. Be compatible or in accordance with.
46. A metal-bearing mineral valuable enough to be mined.
47. A condition (mostly in boys) characterized by behavioral and learning disorders.
49. Seed of a pea plant.
50. Russian mathematician (1856-1922).
53. North Atlantic rockfish.
56. An edge tool with a heavy bladed head mounted across a handle.
57. Ratlike rodent with soft fur and large ears of the Andes.
62. The basic unit of money in Bangladesh.
66. Where the air is unconfined.
68. Somewhat ill or prone to illness.
70. Small buffalo of the Celebes having small straight horns.
71. A relative position or degree of value in a graded group.
73. West Indian tree having racemes of fragrant white flowers and yielding a durable timber and resinous juice.
74. Of a light yellowish-brown color n. l.
77. A decree that prohibits something.
78. The quality of a color as determined by its dominant wavelength.
79. German romantic composer known for piano music and songs (1810-1856).
80. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

1. Divulge information or secrets.
2. Kamarupan languages spoken in north-eastern India and western Burma.
3. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
4. A lipoprotein that transports cholesterol in the blood.
5. A river in central Brazil that flows generally northward (with many falls) to join the Tocantins River.
6. A syllabic script used in writing Sanskrit and Hindi.
7. The district occupied entirely by the city of Washington.
8. (astronomy) An indistinct surface feature of Mars once thought to be a system of channels.
9. Towards the side away from the wind.
10. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
11. The 3 goddesses of fate or destiny.
12. Relating to or having the characteristics of bees.
13. A projecting ridge on a mountain or submerged under water.
14. Appeal or request earnestly.
21. The second great battle of the American Civil War (1862).
23. (Jungian psychology) The inner self (not the external persona) that is in touch with the unconscious.
25. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
28. Half the width of an em.
29. Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America.
31. The middle region of the body of an arthropod between the head and the abdomen.
32. A person responsible for hiring workers.
33. A brittle gray crystalline element that is a semiconducting metalloid (resembling silicon) used in transistors.
36. Flesh of young Atlantic cod weighing up to 2 pounds.
38. A cap with a flat circular top and a visor.
39. (Greek mythology) Greek god of war.
40. Not only so, but.
42. The sound made by a pigeon v l.
43. A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
45. Keep in mind or convey as a conviction or view.
48. A licensed medical practitioner.
51. To some (great or small) extent.
52. An ACE inhibitor (trade name Vasotec) that blocks the formation of angiotensin in the kidney and so results in vasodilation.
54. A small but appreciable amount.
55. Of or relating to a fetus.
58. The Jewish rite of circumcision performed on a male child on the eighth day of his life.
59. A net or mesh foundation for lace.
60. Make amends for.
61. (Greek mythology) A maiden seduced by Zeus.
63. Jordan's port.
64. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
65. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
67. Relatively small fast-moving sloth.
69. Earn on some commercial or business transaction.
72. Rate of revolution of a motor.
75. A chronic progressive nervous disorder involving loss of myelin sheath around certain nerve fibers.
76. (astronomy) The angular distance of a celestial point measured westward along the celestial equator from the zenith crossing.

Friday's Solution

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

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You may find yourself wanting to discover more about your roots. Where did you come from? What obstacles did your ancestors face? This is a great time to do some research and discover more about your heritage. Just as the past seems to be of great importance to you, so is the future. You are in a great frame of mind to do some future planning. Get your affairs in order. Spend some time researching the financial investments you have been considering. Change can bring great reward, Aries.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You may find yourself in a bit of a conflict when it comes to balancing your Home Life and work life. You may find yourself passing an opportunity by at work because it will interfere with time with your family. This may be a hard decision to make at this time, but the payoff with your family will be well worth it. In a time for you to make sure your priorities are straight. You have a strong appreciation of your past. You are able to reflect and realize the obstacles and problems of your past talk to the lessons that made you and you are today.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You are a practical person with an abundance of common sense. You are able to use both of these qualities as assets to make your way to the top in the career world. You may be feeling a need to change your focus and tighten your circle a bit. You feel as if you need to spend more of your time and attention on you and yours. At this point you may have accomplished your goal in the workplace but feel you need to continue to work on your goal at home. This will be a balancing act to continue to make sure you thrive in every area of your life.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Love and expressing all the deep emotions you have for others becomes very important to you. You may be feeling a need to be needed. Never doubt that you are. You may find yourself in deep appreciation of everyone and everything around you. You are able to find beauty in every situation and in everything that surrounds you. This is time in your life filled with love and others are drawn to your loving ways and kind heart. Be careful today, as all around you becomes so appealing. You may want steer clear of the mall to resist the urge to bring all that catches your eye home with you. Cancer, a shopping spree could not only find you loving all you see, but also wanting to bring home everything you see!



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You don't care how, you want it now! This is your attitude when it comes to life today. You have taken love a step farther. Obsession is a more appropriate description of how you feel about your goals. This could be an extremely passionate time in your world. Jealousy and possessiveness may be emotions that play a role in your world. You may find your ambition is in overdrive and you will not stop until you have exactly what you want.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Family seems to be where your focus is. You desire a strong foundation and have been working hard to establish this in your world. You may find someone younger seeking advice and looking to you for assistance. You will be able to guide them with ease. Helping others brings great satisfaction to you and in a way will fulfill the need to be needed you have been desiring. It is a great time to sit and have a meaningful conversation with a loved one. Virgo, you will be able to relate your ideas with ease and grace and this conversation will be very beneficial to your relationship. Today will find you very successful when organizing the actions of those around you. You are very focused on those closest to you. These personal relationships are your driving force and you are in a very content and peaceful state.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Out with the old. Bring on the new, exciting and wild. What a rebel you are! If it goes against tradition you are all about it today. You crave excitement and the same old, same old, just isn't going to cut it for you. Change is in the air. A new hairstyle, a new outfit, or a visit to a new place tonight may be just what you need to add a little excitement to your life. Libra. Go have some fun!



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You are a practical person with an abundance of common sense. You are able to use both of these qualities as assets to make your way to the top in the career world. You may be feeling a need to change your focus and tighten your circle a bit. You feel as if you need to spend more of your time and attention on you and yours. At this point you may have accomplished your goal in the workplace but feel you need to continue to work on your goal at home. This will be a balancing act to continue to make sure you thrive in every area of your life. Your communication skills are at all time high and you are able to relate and interact with ease to all who surround you.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 18)

The sky is the limit for you today. You are optimistic and can accomplish anything you set your mind to. You have faith and are willing to take chances on an emotional level that may bring great reward and happiness your way. You may be deep within your feelings and have a desire to experience something new. An emotional wanderlust, if you will, is the desire of your heart. Today you are all about you. Your wants, needs, and desires, take over and all you can do is pursue what your heart wants. This is a very productive day for you physically and emotionally. You will find peace and happiness in accomplishing the goals you have set for yourself today, Sagittarius. Reach for the stars! You may just be the one that can touch them.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You may feel as if you are encountering negativity and not everyone is supportive when it comes to very sensitive issues you are dealing with in your life. These issues are very personal, and you may just be sharing with the wrong people. You will find someone close to you who will serve as a confidant who is extremely understanding and supportive of all that makes you unique. Capricorn, now is a great time to think outside of the box and follow that new path or project that is calling your name. You may reap great reward from trying something new.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday. The sun came up this morning, and you are still here. Try to focus on the present. Stressing ahead rarely changes outcomes. Many of the "what ifs" you fret about will never happen. Save your energy to deal with the realities. You are flexible, and you have the coping skills to handle whatever comes up. No problem is too large for you to conquer.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You are one of a kind. Relationships take on greater meaning in your life. You want everything in your world in its place and everything running smoothly. One thing out of place will cause stress and tension in for you. You have a talent for bringing those around you into harmony and this makes you a wonderful leader. You are placing great focus on your marriage or a close relationship with someone dear to you. This is a great move and will result in a strong bond you have been craving. Pisces, all is well in your world and the steps you are taking will develop feed the deep roots needed for lasting love and support from many close to you.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Real Estate 2

Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 22 letters spell a common Real Estate phrase.

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

- | | | | |
|------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| ACREAGE | DEBT | LANDLORD | SELLER |
| AMENITIES | DEFAULT | LEASE | SHOW HOME |
| APARTMENT | DOWN PAYMENT | LISTING | SOLD SIGN |
| APPRAISER | EQUITY | MARKET | SUBDIVISION |
| ASSESSOR | EVICTION | MORTGAGE | SUBLET |
| BANK | FLIP | PARCEL | SURVEY |
| BROKER | FLOOR SPACE | PHOTOS | TENANT |
| BUYER | FOR SALE SIGN | PRINCIPAL | TITLE |
| CLOSING | FORECLOSURE | PROPERTY TAX | TOWNHOUSE |
| COMMISSION | HIGH RISE | PUBLIC AUCTION | VALUE |
| CONDO FEES | INSPECTION | RENT | VIRTUAL TOUR |
| CONTRACTOR | INTEREST RATE | ROW HOUSE | ZONING |

Real Estate 1

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

- | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| AGENT | CONTRACT | INTERIOR | REALTOR |
| AMORTIZATION | CREDITOR | LAND | SELL |
| APPRAISAL | DEED | LAWYER | SKYSCRAPER |
| ASSESSMENT | DEPOSIT | LENDER | SOLD |
| ASSET | DEPRECIATION | LIEN | SQUARE FOOTAGE |
| BUILDING | DUPLEX | LOAN | TAXES |
| BUNGALOW | EXTERIOR | LOFT | TIMESHARE |
| BUYING | FLIPPING | MARKET VALUE | TOUR |
| CLOSER | FOR SALE | OFFER | TRIPLEX |
| COLLATERAL | HOUSE | PAYMENT | VACANCY |
| CONDEMNED | INSPECTOR | PLOT | VALUATION |
| CONDO | INSURANCE | PROPERTY | ZONE |

The hidden message is: MULTIPLE LISTING SERVICE

Daily SuDoku

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

Friday's Solution

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

Lifestyle

SUNDAY, JANUARY 13, 2019



A young Indian Sikh demonstrates his 'Gatka' traditional martial art skills during the 'Nagar Kirtan' procession ahead of the birth anniversary of the 10th Sikh Guru Gobind Singh in Amritsar.— AFP

REELPOLITIK: INDIA ELECTION FILMS GET BOLLYWOOD VOTE

Bollywood filmmakers are seeking to cash in on this year's Indian general election with a host of political movies, some of which smack of propaganda according to critics. The Hindi film industry has a long tradition of producing politically tinged flicks but industry watchers say 2019's offerings are more partisan than ever before. "What we have this year are quite a few films, some of which are biopics, that appear to be uncritical and unabashedly push the agenda of a particular party, its policies and political philosophies," said reviewer Nandini Ramnath.

"The Accidental Prime Minister" and "Uri: The Surgical Strike" are released on Friday. Films about the lives of two prominent politicians air later in January while a biopic on Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also in the works. The silver screen and politics have often intertwined in India. Many actors have become politicians while Bollywood has not shied away from tackling political issues in its plottines. "Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro" (Let it be, friends) became a cult classic in 1983 for its satirical takedown of corruption while 2010's "Peepli Live" was praised for tackling the difficult subject of farmer suicides.

Political movies have also fallen foul of the government. "Kissa Kursi Ka" (Story of the Chair) and "Aandhi" (Storm) were both banned by then prime minister Indira Gandhi in the 1970s. The former (1977) was viewed as satirising her politics while the latter (1975) was allegedly based on her relationship with her estranged husband, who died several years earlier.

The real and the reel

Supporters of Gandhi's party, Congress, have tried to stir up controversy around the "The Accidental Prime Minister", holding protests and even going to court, unsuccessfully, to try to block its release. They claim it portrays senior Congress members in a bad light and is propaganda for Modi and his ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP) — allegations the director denies. The Hindi-language film sees veteran actor Anupam Kher, a vocal supporter of Modi, play the leader's predecessor Manmohan Singh, also of the Congress party, as premier.

It is based on a memoir written by Sanjaya Baru, a former advisor to Singh. "This film is not about politics but about the relationship between Dr Singh and Sanjaya Baru through Baru's eyes. They are both heroes of the film. It's not propaganda," director Vijay Gutte told AFP. Some social media users and film critics have accused Kher of comically mimicking Singh's slow and measured way of walking and talking but the actor believes he has captured his mannerisms perfectly.

"It will take you a little time to distinguish between the real and the reel," Kher tweeted last month when posting a photo of Singh alongside one of himself in character. "That is the authenticity and the sincerity one has applied in portraying #DrManmohanSingh," he added.



Spread ideas

Several movies touching on politics were released during India's last election year in 2014, notably "Youngistan" and "Bhoothnath Returns" in which superstar Amitabh Bachchan played a ghost running against an evil candidate. Filmmakers say it makes good business sense to release movies with a political backdrop in the run-up to an election while others may be secretly hoping that they translate into votes as well. The nationalistic, all-guns-blazing "Uri: The Surgical Strike" which celebrates the Indian army's strikes on militants in 2016 in response to a raid that had killed 19 Indian soldiers, is likely to be popular.

Modi was widely lauded for the operation and the film sees Vicky Kaushal play an army major in charge of avenging the attack—which India blamed on its arch enemy Pakistan—on the Uri

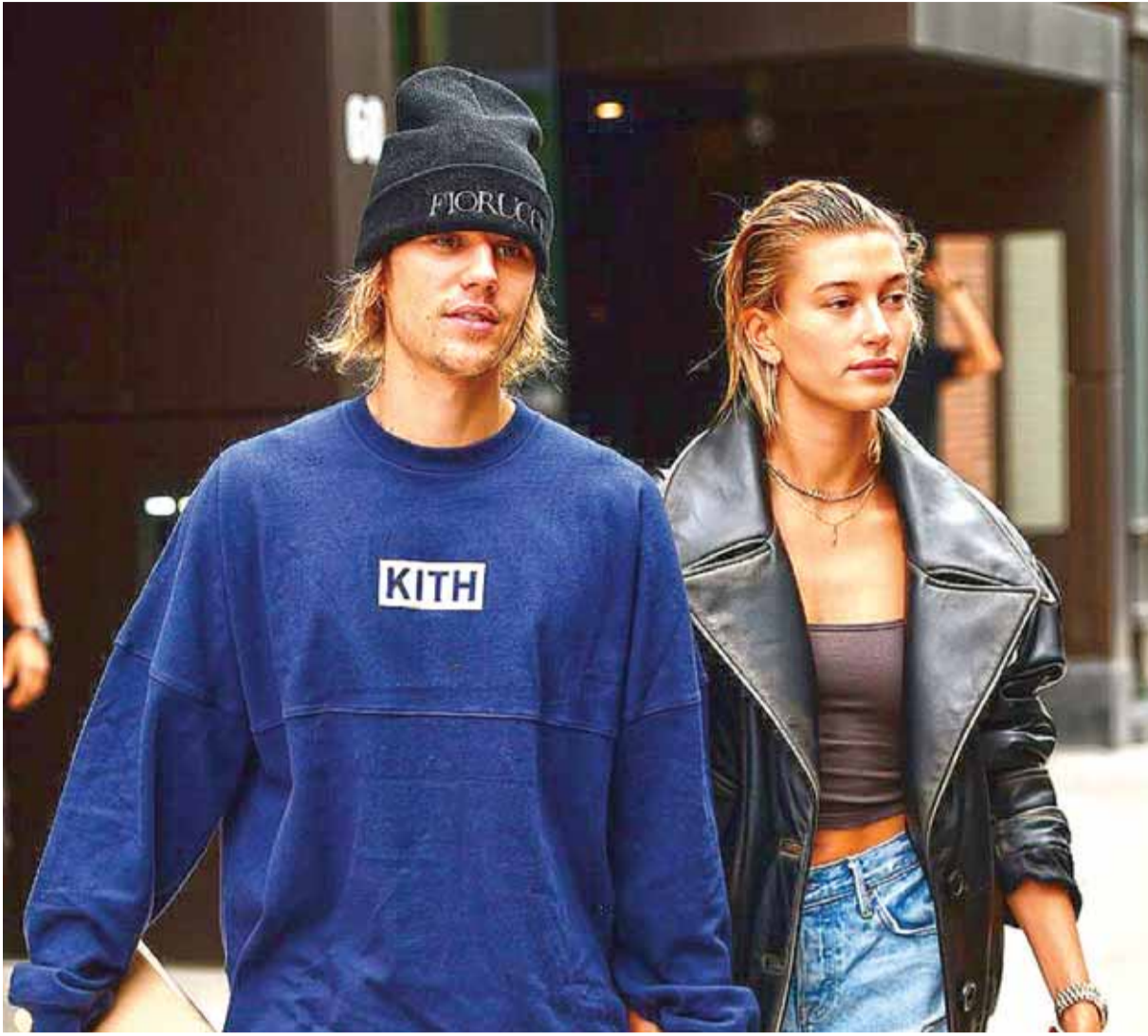
base. "Thackeray", a biopic about divisive Mumbai politician Bal Thackeray, who died in 2012, is tipped to be a hagiography designed to boost support for the Shiv Sena—a Hindu chauvinist party he led and founded.

A Shiv Sena politician has written the screenplay of the movie which is scheduled to hit screens on January 25, around what would have been Thackeray's 93rd birthday. January will also see the release of the first of a two-part Telugu-language biopic on actor-turned Andhra Pradesh politician N.T. Rama Rao. "... Popular cinema has emerged as an arena for propaganda, with a greater ability to sway opinion and spread ideas than other media," said Ramnath, a critic for Scroll.in.—AFP

(Left to right) In this file photo Indian Bollywood actors Vicky Kaushal, Paresh Rawal, Yami Gautam and Mohit Raina pose for a picture during a promotional event for the upcoming Hindi film 'Uri: The Surgical Strike,' in Mumbai.

In this file photo Indian Bollywood actor Anupam Kher poses for a picture during a promotional event for the Hindi film 'The Accidental Prime Minister' in Mumbai. — AFP photos

Lifestyle | Gossip



Hailey Bieber often feels insecure

The 22-year-old model - who tied the knot with Justin Bieber last year - admitted that she can't help but compare herself to her famous friends but she is learning to love herself for who she is. She told Buzzfeed: "I've struggled with comparison. I come from a world of modeling where it's really easy to compare myself to my own friends. You're just surrounded by a lot of beauty. I would say that every girl struggles with comparing themselves, whether it's on social media or [something else]. There's always going to be other women or other girls that you feel insecure around, or that you

compare yourself to: What if she's this and I'm not this? or What if I'm this and she's this? That is always happening no matter what, you know?" And Hailey revealed that she often takes social media breaks so that she can concentrate on herself. She explained: "It just does something to your soul. I think, if you pay too close attention to it. Taking breaks from social media, I think, is really important. I have times where I'll just take the app off my phone for like a week or a couple of days."

Sarah Hyland opens up about her fight with depression

The 28-year-old actress has opened up about her depression which affected her when she had a secret second kidney transplant after her first one failed, and now she has spoken candidly about how she got. Appearing on 'The Ellen DeGeneres Show', she said: "I would write letters in my head to loved ones of why I did it and my reasoning behind it, how it was nobody's fault. I didn't want to write it down on paper because I didn't want anybody to find it. That's how serious I was ... It ended up being myself that got me out of that. I had to do it on my own. I told myself I had to do it on my own." The 'Modern Family' star turned to a friend and verbalized her thoughts, which sparked a change and "helped immensely". However, Sarah was keen to point out that while it worked for her, she understands everyone with depression handles it differently. She added: "Every person with their anxiety or depression or if you have suicidal thoughts, every individual is different, so I wouldn't just rely on everything that I say. 'I'm just sharing my story. But I think talking to someone and saying it out loud really, really makes it sound almost ridiculous and it puts it into perspective.'" Now, almost two years on from the second procedure, the star is feeling much better and can now enjoy her life, including vacations to Mexico with her boyfriend Wells Adams.



Harry Styles is reportedly dating model

Kiko Mizuhara

The 24-year-old musician is believed to have met the Japanese-American beauty in Tokyo, which he has visited several times recently and the pair are said to have grown close, according to The Sun. They have also followed each other on Instagram. Kiko, 28, was born in Dallas but raised in Japan and along with modeling, has also branched out into acting and singing. While Harry has starred in ad campaigns for fashion house Gucci, Kiko has worked closely with Chanel's Karl Lagerfeld. Harry has been single since splitting from model Camille Rowe in July after a year of dating. Harry and Camille reportedly parted ways as they were unable to strike a balance between their careers and their love lives. The split reportedly came just two weeks after the 24-year-old singer completed his 89-date world tour on July 14. Their break-up came as a surprise as pals of Harry had previously insisted the pair seemed "happy and well-suited". An insider said of their romance: "He's very protective of his relationships so isn't going to want to make a big show of things. They are well suited and seem happy. She's a real star on the rise." The 'Sign of the Times' hitmaker's relationship with Camille came just one month after he parted ways with food blogger Tess Ward. He has also previously been linked to Kendall Jenner, Taylor Swift and Caroline Flack.



Jennifer Lopez constantly tries to evolve

The 49-year-old singer-and-actress worries about getting "stuck" so is always pushing herself to do new things and transform her career. She said: "I am constantly trying to evolve and to not get stuck. "It happens to people - you look at them and think, 'She got stuck or she let herself go.'" The 'Second Act' actress insists things don't have to decline as a person gets older because there's always an opportunity to make changes and keep "growing" and it's only people's own perceptions that hold them back. She told Britain's Grazia magazine: "There's this terrible idea that you get to a certain age and just plummet downwards. I don't believe that at all. "You can always reinvent. You can always make a change. You can always keep growing. "I believe that you can keep getting better and better and better. The only thing stopping you is you." The 'On the Floor' hitmaker recently admitted she has a hard time saying no because she doesn't want to miss out on anything, but as she's gotten older, she's learned how to be more selective over the work she takes on. She said: "It's hard for me to say no, and it always has been. I've always been this person who takes on a lot because I love so many things. I love acting. I love making movies. I also love making television. I love performing live ... When opportunities come, it's hard for me to say no. But what I think I've learned, and what I'm trying to do now at this point in my life is to say no a little bit more and hone it down to working smarter instead of working all the time. Which, it gets tiring."



Behati Prinsloo, Adam Levine 'fell in love over email'

The 30-year-old model married the Maroon 5 frontman - with whom she has two daughters, Dusty Rose, two, and Gio Grace, 10 months - in 2014, and has said the story of their romance first began when he contacted her for a role in a music video, and stayed in touch over email. She said: "I met my husband through a mutual friend. Adam was looking for a girl for a music video that could do some action stuff, and our friend was like, 'You should meet Behati because she's a total tomboy and down for anything.' So he emailed me asking if I could do it. I ended up not doing it, but we kept emailing each other. It was such a natural correspondence that we kind of fell in love over email." And after being smitten with each other for a month, they met for the first time when Behati went to LA for a job, and insists it was "love at first sight" when they finally laid eyes on each other. She added: "A month later, I went to LA for a job, and that was the first time we met in person. I remember walking in: I opened the door, and it was the classic moment where the light shines into the dark studio and everyone turned to look at me. He had boxing gloves on and he came to hug me-it was so awkward. Then he took me for dinner and we talked for hours and had the best time. It was love at first sight, it was crazy."

Lifestyle | Gossip



Kehlani is 'really excited' to give birth

The 23-year-old singer is expecting her first child with her guitarist Javie Young-White, and has said she can't wait to welcome her daughter into the world in a few months time, because she's always been "interested" in the "extreme pain but also extreme beauty" of childbirth. She said: "This is weird but I'm really excited to [give] birth. I'm really excited to experience that, just because I've always been interested in the birth process my whole life. If I had enough free time and I wasn't wrapped up in music, I'd probably be a doula or something. "But just to feel what the surrender feels like - completely surrendering to the entire process of being in extreme pain but also extreme beauty, it's very ceremonial for me. So I'm really excited for that." The 'Nights Like This' singer went on to share her concerns about becoming a parent, particularly as someone in the public eye. Meanwhile, Kehlani recently opened up about her battle with prenatal depression, as she insisted her pregnancy has been difficult. She wrote on social media: "2 days away from the 3rd trimester and this has been the hardest thing ever."

Margot Robbie thinks she's a 'terrible actor'

The 28-year-old actress has been nominated for several awards including Oscars, BAFTAs, and Golden Globes, but admits she still isn't confident in her own abilities, as she says she often has a "crisis of faith" in which she convinces herself she isn't good at her job. She said: "I have a huge crisis of faith and convince myself that I'm a terrible actor and I'm not actually any good at my job." And the 'Mary Queen of Scots' star says it's often up to her 29-year-old husband Tom Ackerley to convince her of her talents. She added to Australia's Daily Telegraph newspaper: "My husband (Tom) is like 'OK you know you say this every single time, you know this happens the week leading up' ... and then the first day is done and I'm like, 'I think I can do this'." Meanwhile, Margot recently revealed she finds it "uninspiring" to be cast as "the wife or the girlfriend" in movies, and said she was careful about what roles she accepted early in her career so as not to be typecast in roles that would be "the catalyst for the male story line".



Anne Hathaway nervous about hosting the Oscars

The 36-year-old actress hosted the Academy Awards ceremony with James Franco back in 2011, and has said that whilst it seemed easy at the time, the tricky part came with facing news reports and social media posts the day after, which evaluated her performance. She said: "The next day, finding out how you actually did. Because it feels nice, everybody tells you it's going well while you're doing it. While you're doing it, it's like doing anything, you know?" But the 'Ocean's 8' star insists that it doesn't matter if a host "bombs" their performance, because they're still "lucky" to have had the chance to take part in the prestigious event. Speaking to 'Entertainment Tonight', she said: "My approach to all this stuff is really simple: we're lucky. Whether or not it does well or it bombs, this is the stuff of dreams. This is not something to get upset about. Now, that being said, when it really bombs, it does sting a bit. I think it might end up being a net positive over life. Well, the lessons that I learned, the life lessons about who to trust and when to trust them, that's going to be the net positive." Anne's comments come as the upcoming 2019 Oscars ceremony, which is due to take place next month, is still searching for a host, after Kevin Hart stepped down from the role when historic homophobic tweets he had made were resurfaced.

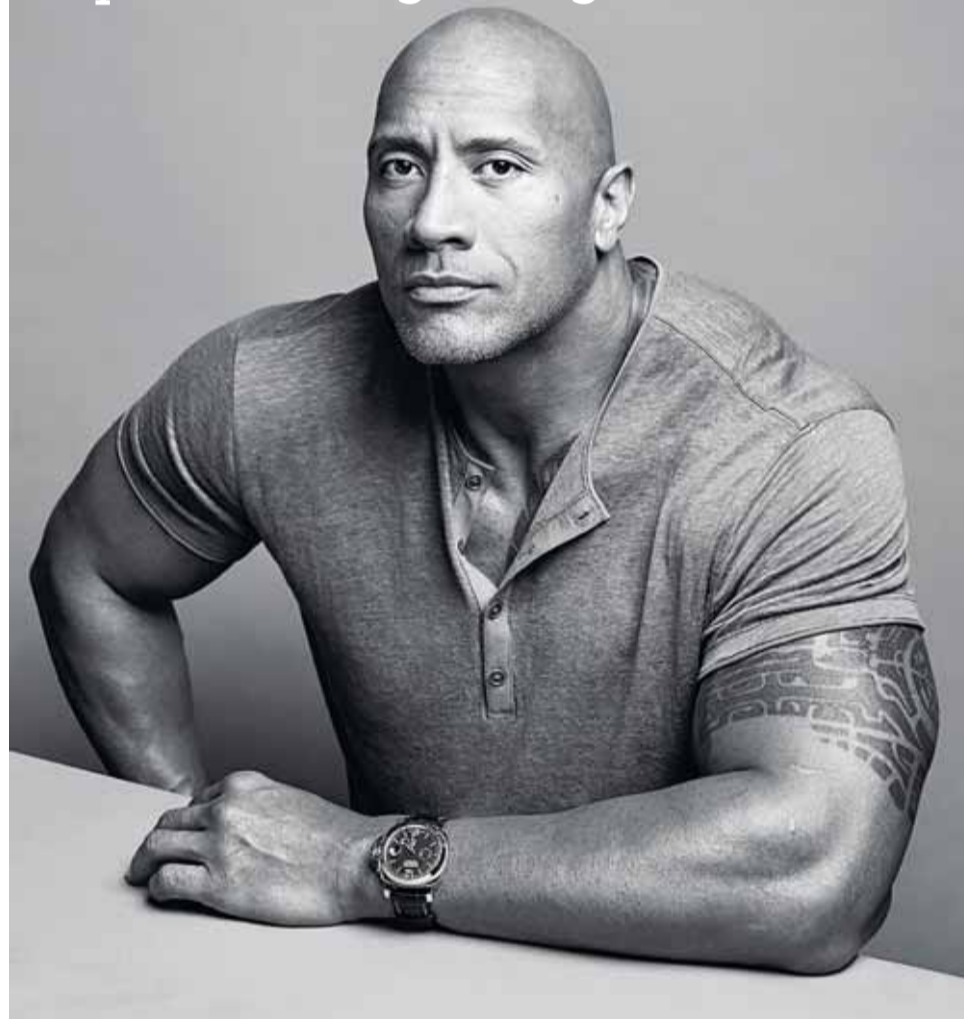


Anna Faris, Chris Pratt 'work really hard' to be supportive

The 42-year-old actress officially divorced Chris in November 2018, and has said that whilst their break-up did come with "bitterness and pain", the couple - who are now both in new relationships, Anna with Michael Barrett and Chris with Katherine Schwarzenegger - do their best to remain civil and "happy" for the sake of their six-year-old son Jack. Speaking on her 'Unqualified' podcast, she said: "Chris and I work really hard 'cause we have Jack, that is sort of the long game idea and making sure Jack is really happy, which makes us really happy. We have sort of the luxury of circumstance. You know, we are both in other loving relationships ... but it is ... it's like how do you not in general sink into a place of bitterness? "I do want to reiterate though, that I acknowledge, we all do, everyone acknowledges, that there is bitterness and pain with all breakups and that hopefully makes us all human. But the long game is just the worst being the bigger person. It just is. It sucks until, then what happens though, is that everyone's happy."



Dwayne Johnson slams youth for getting offended



The 46-year-old actor and professional wrestler has hit out at the younger generation, claiming they are ruining the hard work of people who "fought for freedom and equality", by trying to find more reasons to be "offended". He said: "So many good people fought for freedom and equality - but this generation are looking for a reason to be offended. If you are not agreeing with them then they are offended - and that is not what so many great men and women fought for." The 'Rampage' star says the world has come a long way in terms of

equality and acceptance, but believes "generational snowflake" is doing more harm than good to the movement. Speaking to the Daily Star newspaper, Dwayne added: "We thankfully now live in a world that has progressed over the last 30 or 40 years. People can be who they want, be with who they want, and live how they want. "That can only be a good thing - but generation snowflake or, whatever you want to call them, are actually putting us backwards."

Leonardo DiCaprio's mother soaks nosy fans with a hose



The 'Revenant' actor's house in Los Angeles is one of the stops on a bus tour of celebrity properties and protective Irmelina Indenbirken, 75, has reportedly taken drastic measures to try and keep tourists away from the abode. A source told The Sun newspaper: "Leo's mum is very protective of him and has taken measures into her own hands to keep tourists away. "She has been known to spray anyone who comes near with a garden hose, including the bus tour, which has left some fans very soggy. "It's happened several times, she has a good aim and has absolutely no qualms about dousing them. "In her eyes, people can be fans of Leo without having to go near his house." It was recently revealed the 44-year-old actor is selling off one of his Los Angeles properties for £1.3 million. Leonard bought the Spanish-style abode in Silver Lake 19 years ago for £608,000 after he shot to fame with 'Titanic', and now he is set to receive double what he originally paid after putting the house on the market. The multi-level home boasts four bedrooms and four-and-a-half bathrooms and comes with an elevator, pool and a fountain. Leonardo has previously sold properties in Malibu and Studio City and recently purchased Moby's old home, which is next door to his own Los Feliz residence.

Lifestyle | Features



Grooming equipment is seen at the Bespoken Man.



A worker grooms a client at the Bespoken Man.



A client looks on as he is shaved at the Bespoken Man.

WHISKY WITH YOUR WAX? SOUTH AFRICA RIDES 'METROSEXUAL' WAVE

Before male beauty parlors began popping up in South Africa a few years ago, image-conscious men like Gerhard Joubert felt awkward being pampered and preened in salons filled with women. "It's a male environment. They give you a whisky if you want a whisky. In the old days we had to go to female hair salons," said Joubert, reclining in a luxury leather chair for a pedicure in Sorbet Man, a men-only parlor in Johannesburg.

"I think we need to look better after ourselves. I think it's often been ignored, particular in South Africa." Two decades ago, well-groomed celebrities such as David Beckham began to change traditional attitudes towards masculinity, encouraging swathes of men to take greater care of their appearance and embrace the use of beauty products. South Africa has been slow to catch the

"metrosexual" wave, but a growing middle class and the spread of fashion trends on social media has seen global companies such as Unilever, Procter & Gamble and L'Oréal target more products at African men.

Salon chains are opening men-only parlors to sell these products and to meet the demand for everything from manicures to eyebrow threading. Sorbet Man was launched as a spinoff from a women's salon brand three years ago and now has 20 franchise stores. It expects turnover to rise 50 percent this year. Rival male beauty shops are springing up. "I think over the years the stigma about male grooming has really limited men from basically expressing themselves," said Dexter Pillay, co-owner of Bespoke Man, a salon in Johannesburg's business district.

"It's changed now so drastically where men are

more metrosexual." The global male grooming product market is expected to reach \$76 billion by 2023 from \$58 billion in 2017, according to industry research. Africa offers companies the chance to target millions of new consumers. "Africa's youthful population is seen as a market opportunity as manufacturers look to target the young modern male who is becoming increasingly conscious about appearance," said Nicola Cooper, a trend analyst. — Reuters



FIA worker gestures as he grooms a client at the Bespoken Man, a full-service gentleman's barber shop in Sandton, South Africa. — Reuters photos



London rapper Octavian hopes award will inspire other homeless youth

London rapper Octavian, who on Friday won the prestigious BBC Music Sound of 2019 award, said he hoped his success would inspire other youth who were homeless. "A few years ago I was sleeping between tube stations, the streets and sofa-surfing. Everyone's situation is different," Octavian told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by email.

"I hope ... the progression I've had in my career so far gives hope to homeless people that things can change," said the 23-year-old, whose full name is Octavian Oliver Godji. The award has previously been won by artists such as Adele, 50 Cent and Sam Smith. Octavian became homeless at 14, and spent years on the streets and sofa-surfing, he told the BBC, avoiding drugs, unable at times to afford even a bus ticket - but always involved in music.

News of his win was welcomed by Centrepoint, a British homelessness charity. "Octavian winning the BBC Music's Sound of 2019 shows that if homeless young people get the support they need they can go on to achieve their potential," Paul Noblet of Centrepoint said. The charity estimates about 103,000 young people asked for help from their local councils last year because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Octavian told the BBC that he was often shunned, unable to afford food or clothes, and had fought with his mother, teachers and the authorities. "I was just a bad kid. I didn't know how to harness my emotions," he said, adding that finding his craft had saved him. "It shows me that anything's possible." The artist with Angolan heritage, and who counts Drake among his fans, blended house, grime and dancehall to catch the attention of the judges with his first full-length mixtape 'Spaceman' released last year.

"Octavian is not in any genre - he is absolutely in his own lane," said radio DJ Benji B. "He makes music that is unique to him, and that is one of the many things that makes him such a great artist." Octavian is not the first celebrity to have fallen on hard times before making his name: musician Ed Sheeran said he slept outside Buckingham Palace and on London underground trains, while actors Halle Berry and James Bond star Daniel Craig spent time in shelters and on park benches. — Reuters

Michael Jackson estate slams sex abuse documentary

A new documentary that accuses Michael Jackson of sexually abusing two boys has been denounced by the late pop star's estate as an "outrageous and pathetic" attempt to exploit his name. "Leaving Neverland," which is to premiere at the Sundance Film Festival later this month, recounts the story of two men who are now in their 30s and allege they were sexually abused by the King of Pop when they were seven and 10.

"This is yet another lurid production in an outrageous and pathetic attempt to exploit and cash in on Michael Jackson," the singer's estate said in a statement carried by US media. It added that the "so-called" documentary was "just another rehash of dated and discredited allegations. It's baffling why any credible filmmaker would involve himself with this project." A synopsis reads: "At the height of his stardom, Michael Jackson began long-running relationships with two boys, aged seven and 10, and their families. "Now in their 30s, they tell the story of how they



In this file photo Pop star Michael Jackson performs the first of two concerts at the National Stadium in Singapore. — AFP

were sexually abused by Jackson, and how they came to terms with it years later." The filmmakers have confirmed to Rolling Stone magazine that the accusers featured in the documentary are choreographer Wade Robson, who filed a lawsuit against Jackson in 2013 claiming the singer molested him when he was seven, and James Safechuck, who sued Jackson's estate over sexual abuse charges.

Both lawsuits were dismissed in 2017. Director Dan Reed, who is behind a documentary on the 2015 terror attack against the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, has defended his two-part documentary, named for Jackson's famed California ranch. "If there's anything we've learned during this time in our history, it's that sexual abuse is complicated, and survivors' voices need to be listened to," he said in a statement.

"It took great courage for these two men to tell their stories and I have no question about their validity. I believe anyone who watches this film will see and feel the emotional toll on the men and their families and will appreciate the strength it takes to confront long-held secrets." Jackson, who died on June 25 2009 after being given an overdose of the anesthetic propofol, faced multiple allegations of child sex abuse during his lifetime. He was acquitted of abuse at a 2005 trial in California and paid a \$15 million court settlement in 1994 over allegations involving another child. — AFP

'Green Book' writer apologizes for anti-Muslim 9/11 tweet

"Green Book" screenwriter Nick Vallelonga has issued an apology for an anti-Muslim tweet from 2015 in which he expressed support for false claims that Muslims were celebrating in New Jersey following the 9/11 terror attacks. "I want to apologize. I spent my life trying to bring this story of overcoming differences and finding common ground to the screen, and I am incredibly sorry to everyone associated with Green Book," he said in a statement late Thursday.

"I especially deeply apologize to the brilliant and kind Mahershala Ali, and all members of the Muslim faith, for the hurt I have caused," he said. "I am also sorry to my late father who changed so much from Dr Shirley's friendship and I promise this lesson is not lost on me. 'Green Book' is a story about love, acceptance and overcoming barriers, and I will do better." Ali, who is Muslim, on Sunday won a Golden Globe award for his role as the real-life piano virtuoso Don Shirley in "Green Book."



The film, which picked up two other Golden Globes and is expected to be nominated for the Oscars, recounts the unlikely friendship between Shirley, who was black, and his driver, Tony Lip (Vallelonga's father), during a concert tour through the deep south in 1962. Vallelonga deleted his Twitter account after the controversial tweet dating back to November 2015 recently resurfaced on social media. The tweet came in response to then candidate Donald Trump's claim that he saw thousands of people cheering in Jersey City after the terror attacks.

"@realDonaldTrump 100% correct," Vallelonga wrote at the time. "Muslims in Jersey City cheering when towers went down. I saw it, as you did, possibly on local CBS news." Participant Media, which co-financed and produced "Green Book," has also released a statement denouncing Vallelonga's tweet. "We find Mr Vallelonga's Twitter post offensive, dangerous and antithetical to Participant Media's values. We reject it in no uncertain terms," it said.

Earlier this week, the film's director, Peter Farrelly, was also in hot water because of stories in several media outlets in 1998 recounting his habit of flashing his penis as a prank. He issued a statement on Wednesday apologizing for his behavior. "True. I was an idiot. I did this decades ago and I thought I was being funny and the truth is I'm embarrassed and it makes me cringe now. I'm deeply sorry." — AFP

In this file photo 'Green Book' co-writers Brian Currie, left, and Nick Vallelonga, right, attend the 2019 National Board of Review Gala at Cipriani 42nd Street in New York City.

Archaeologists restore ancient Palmyra artifacts in Damascus museum



A specialist works on a damaged statue from Palmyra at Syria's National Museum of Damascus, Syria. — Reuters

In the National Museum of Damascus, archaeologist Muntajab Youssef works on an ancient stone bust from Palmyra, one of hundreds of artifacts his team is painstakingly restoring after they were damaged by Islamic State. Centuries-old statues and sculptures were wrecked by the jihadists when they twice seized control of the old city in central Syria during the country's war, which will go into its ninth year in March.

The 1,800-year-old bust of a bejeweled and richly clothed woman, The Beauty of Palmyra, was damaged during the first offensive on the city by Islamic State fighters in 2015. After Syrian government forces took back the city with Russian military support in March 2016, the bust, alongside other damaged ancient monuments, was taken to Damascus and archived in boxes. When restoration work on it began last year, Youssef said it was in pieces.

"The hands and face were lost com-

pletely, also parts of the dress and there are areas that are weaker," Youssef, who has been working on the bust for two months, said. Youssef is one of 12 archaeologists working on the arduous restoration job, which first began with the moving of the damaged pieces to Damascus. Mamoun Abdulkarim, the former Head of Syrian Antiquities, said that in some cases broken artifacts were transported in empty ammunition boxes provided by the Syrian army in Palmyra.

How many artifacts there are in total is difficult to say, given the state they were found in. The lack of documentation for the artifacts also adds to the restoration challenge. "A big part of the documentation in the Palmyra museum, was damaged with the antiquities and computers," archaeologist Raed Abbas said. "A statue needs pictures ... in order to be rebuilt." — Reuters

Classifieds

Sunday, January 13, 2019

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Partly cloudy with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 28 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Partly cloudy with light to moderate variable wind to south easterly wind, with speed of 06 - 28 km/h.

WEATHER WATCH			Frost	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 12/01/2019 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	17 °C	10 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	17 °C	06 °C		
ABDALY	17 °C	02 °C		
BUBYAN	-- °C	-- °C		
JAHRA	18 °C	07 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	17 °C	08 °C		
SALMIYAH	17 °C	10 °C		
AHMADI	17 °C	09 °C		
NUWAISIB	19 °C	07 °C		
WAFRA	18 °C	05 °C		
SALMY	16 °C	03 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	01/13	Partly cloudy to cloudy	21 °C	08 °C	SE	15 - 45 km/h
Monday	01/14	Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	22 °C	15 °C	SE-NW	20 - 50 km/h
Tuesday	01/15	Partly cloudy	19 °C	11 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 28 km/h
Wednesday	01/16	Partly cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	20 °C	10 °C	SE-VRB	12 - 40 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:20
Sunrise	06:44
Zuhr	11:56
Asr	14:50
Sunset	17:09
Isha	18:30

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	16 °C
MIN. Temp.	08 °C
MAX. RH	63 %
MIN. RH	21 %
MAX. Wind	N 50 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

EMERGENCY



112

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is

1889988

LOST

I Zakir Mansoori lost my Indian Passport no. S 9921621, issued on 31/10/2018, Kuwait. If anyone finds please call on 94947880, 97421645. 10-1-2019

Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Wataniya Airways	22 066 536
Turkish Airlines	1884918
American Airlines	22087425
Jet Airways	22924455
FlyDubai	22414400
Qatar Airways	22423888
KLM	22425747
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6
British Airways	22425635
Air France	22430224
Emirates	22921555
Air India	22438184
Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Egypt Air	22421578
Swiss Air	22421516
Saudia	22426306
Middle East Airlines	22423073
Lufthansa	22422493
PIA	22421044
Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Indian Airlines	22456700
Oman Air	22958787
Turkish Airlines	22453820/1
Aeroflot	22404838/9



Flight Schedule

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

DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Sunday 13/1/2019				Departure Flights on Sunday 13/1/2019			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
JZR	254	Amman	00:05	JZR	407	Ahmedabad	00:05
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:15	AIC	988	Hyderabad/Chennai	00:05
FEG	1241	Alexandria	00:30	TRQ	231	KRT	00:30
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	BBC	044	Dhaka	00:45
KAC	102	London	00:50	JZR	707	Luxor	01:00
PGT	858	Istanbul	01:00	JAI	571	Mumbai	01:15
KAC	504	Beirut	01:15	FEG	1342	Sohag	01:30
DLH	625	Dammam	01:25	JZR	111	Doha	01:45
UAE	853	Dubai	01:45	KAC	363	Colombo	01:50
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	KAC	677	Dubai	01:50
IGO	1757	Kochi	01:55	KAC	417	Manila	02:00
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:25
JZR	722	Alexandria	02:15	THY	773	Istanbul	02:30
RBG	551	Alexandria	02:25	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:55
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	IGO	1758	Kochi	02:55
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	ETH	621	Ababa	03:05
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	RBG	552	Alexandria	03:05
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	UAE	854	Dubai	03:40
RJA	648	Amman	02:55	KLM	446	Amsterdam	03:55
KKK	1268	Istanbul	03:05	OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05	THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
PGT	860	Istanbul	03:10	QTR	1087	Doha	04:00
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	KKK	1269	Istanbul	04:00
JZR	1736	Cairo	03:30	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:05
KAC	414	Bangkok	04:00	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	PGT	861	Istanbul	04:25
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	JZR	701	Asyut	04:30
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	LMU	511	Cairo	05:00
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:30	KAC	103	London	05:10
DHX	170	Bahrain	04:35	KAC	203	Lahore	05:10
JZR	406	Kochi	04:45	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	DHX	173	Bahrain	05:30
KAC	382	Delhi	05:05	FDB	070	Dubai	05:50
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	JZR	215	Jeddah	06:00
THY	770	Istanbul	05:10	KAC	303	Mumbai	06:10
KAC	1544	Cairo	05:10	JZR	713	Sohag	06:15
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:15	JZR	121	Dubai	06:35
JZR	112	Doha	05:25	THY	771	Istanbul	06:40
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:40	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
KAC	344	Chennai	05:50	RJA	649	Amman	07:15
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	KAC	171	Frankfurt	08:10
KAC	302	Mumbai	06:25	KAC	165	Rome	08:20
QTR	8511	Doha	06:40	QTR	8512	Doha	08:40
KAC	678	Dubai	06:55	FDB	054	Dubai	08:50
BAW	157	London	07:05	KAC	501	Beirut	09:00
JZR	708	Luxor	07:15	KAC	787	Jeddah	09:05
KAC	358	Kochi	07:35	KAC	613	Bahrain	09:05
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	JZR	731	Cairo	09:10
KAC	384	Delhi	08:00	BAW	156	London	09:10
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KAC	791	Madinah	09:10
JZR	408	Ahmedabad	08:45	KAC	117	New York	09:15
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05	KAC	691	Muscat	09:20
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	KAC	541	Cairo	09:30
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30	KAC	561	Amman	09:40
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
IRA	665	Shiraz	09:40	KAC	101	London	09:45
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	KAC	741	Dammam	09:45
IRC	528	Ahwaz	10:00	KAC	671	Dubai	09:45
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	UAE	856	Dubai	10:00
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	JZR	301	Istanbul	10:05
JZR	702	Asyut	11:05	ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	10:10
JZR	122	Dubai	11:20	KAC	773	Riyadh	10:10
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
JZR	216	Jeddah	11:45	KAC	617	Doha	10:35
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	JZR	211	Jeddah	10:40
KAC	614	Bahrain	12:25	IRA	664	Shiraz	10:40
SAW	701	Dammam	12:30	IGO	1754	Ahmedabad	10:40
JZR	714	Sohag	12:35	QTR	1071	Doha	10:45
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	KAC	155	Istanbul	10:45
KAC	742	Dammam	12:50	IRC	529	Ahwaz	10:55

Regional powers stick with Bashir amid Sudan protests

KHARTOUM: As angry protests pile pressure on Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir to step down, key powers are standing by his regime to ensure stability in a strife-torn region, analysts say. Demonstrations that erupted in the provinces last month after the government tripled the price of bread have escalated into nationwide protests that analysts say pose the biggest challenge to Bashir since he took power in an Islamist-backed coup in 1989.

But despite bloodshed that Sudanese authorities say has claimed 22 lives, outside players ranging from Gulf rivals Qatar and Saudi Arabia to major powers China, Russia and the United States all see an interest in the 75-year-old staying at the helm. "All camps in the region are at each other's throat, but somehow they agree on Bashir," said Abdelwahab Al-Affendi, author and an academic at the Deha Institute for Graduate Studies. "They seem to favor continuity. They believe that any other alternative might not be favorable to them and to the region."

Egypt, which has deep historical ties with Sudan, has called repeatedly for stability in its southern neighbor, with its commanding position on the Nile on whose waters they both depend. "Egypt fully supports the

security and stability of Sudan, which is integral to Egypt's national security," President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi told a top Bashir aide who visited Cairo last week. Days earlier, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry expressed confidence that Sudan would "overcome the present situation".

Relations between Cairo and Khartoum had deteriorated sharply in 2017 over territorial disputes, but in recent months the two governments have ironed out their differences, with Sudan even lifting a 17-month ban on Egyptian agricultural produce.

Arab governments have scrambled to provide support, anxious to avoid any repetition of the upheavals that rocked the region in 2011. "There has been evidence of tangible support to Bashir... be it from Egypt, Saudi or Qatar," said Affendi. "These allies are against any kind of successful uprising. They feel that if it happens, then they will be next," he said, adding that the Arab Spring has not been forgotten.

Qatar's ruler Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani called Bashir just days after the protests erupted to offer his support. During his long years in power, Bashir has built up relations with all of the region's bickering diplomatic players, through a string of some-

times spectacular foreign policy twists. Just days before the protests erupted, he travelled to meet Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad in the first visit to Damascus by any Arab leader since the Syrian civil war erupted in 2011. "His foreign policy is in all directions driven by economic pressures," said a European diplomat on condition of anonymity.

The regime hosted Al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden in the 1990s, and then developed ties with Shiite Iran before severing them in 2016. In Oct 2017, increased cooperation with Washington helped Khartoum get a decades-old US trade embargo lifted. Washington has still kept Sudan on its blacklist of "state sponsors of terrorism" along with Iran, North Korea and Syria.

And although the US and the European Union do not openly back Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court on war crimes charges including genocide in Darfur, they work with Khartoum to ensure that "Sudan remains stable", the diplomat said. Any kind of instability in Sudan could trigger a new wave of Sudanese migrants headed towards Europe, he added.

Sudan's strategic location in the Horn of Africa is a blessing for Bashir, said Amal El-



OMDURMAN: Sudanese Muslims gather outside the Al-Nilayn mosque after Friday prayers in Khartoum's twin city on Friday. — AFP

Tawael of the Cairo-based Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies. "I think the international and regional powers will not allow Sudan to fall," she told AFP. "But a lot depends on how the balance of power shifts on the streets," she added. "The world also doesn't want to see another new bastion of hardliners that might be created if some-

thing like this happens."

Bashir surprised the West when he dumped Tehran for Riyadh in 2016. The shift was not just diplomatic. The Sudanese leader also sent hundreds of troops to join the Saudi-led coalition battling Iran-linked Shiite rebels in Yemen, in what he called an "ideological" decision. — AFP

Trump promises citizenship path...

Continued from Page 1

The real estate mogul ran for president as a hardliner on immigration and has previously vowed to crack down on H-1Bs by encouraging reporting of visa fraud and insisting that businesses first hire Americans. His promise on H-1Bs came just as Trump is pressing to build a wall on the Mexican border to keep out unauthorized immigrants and asylum seekers, most of whom are low-skilled, in a showdown with Congress that has triggered a shutdown of the federal government.

While it was unclear what prompted Trump's tweet, The Washington Post on Friday ran a front-page article on how tech workers are increasingly moving from the United States to Canada due to the hassle in obtaining H-1B visas. Silicon Valley and India have both pushed hard for a more generous visa system for skilled foreign employees, saying they are indispensable in powering the tech industry, but critics charge that native-born Americans should have priority for the generally well-paying jobs.

Doug Rand, a former White House official in the Obama administration who worked on immigration issues, said the proposed changes to the lottery selection process were at best modest and at worst could cause chaos. Some immigration experts do not believe the new registration system will be ready in time for the next lottery, which occurs in the spring. "The odds that a complicated new electronic processing system will be effectively launched by DHS in time for the next lottery on April 1 is low probability and has nothing to do with

a potential path to citizenship," Rand said.

Throughout his presidency, Trump has sought to stem illegal immigration and to deport more immigrants living in the United States illegally. His administration has also worked to limit legal immigration, including through a proposal that would penalize aspiring immigrants who use public benefits. Trump has also denied visas granted to family members of U.S. residents or citizens as "chain migration," and backed a Republican proposal in 2017 that would have slashed legal immigration in half.

"The devil is in the details," said Todd Schulte, president of FWD.us, a nonprofit group which advocates for pro-immigration policies. He said his group, which was founded by tech executives including Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, remains "skeptical of vague pronouncements given the administration's track record." US companies often use H-1B visas to hire graduate-level workers in specialized fields including information technology, medicine, engineering and mathematics. But the visa program has also drawn criticism for being used heavily by foreign outsourcing companies that squeeze out American firms.

The United States each year grants 85,000 H-1B visas, including 20,000 that are reserved for workers with master's degrees or higher. H-1B visas are granted to professional workers sponsored by employers for a period of three years, which can be extended once. The visa can still be simpler to obtain than seeking to become a permanent resident and eventually citizen of the United States. Studying official data, the Cato Institute last year estimated the wait for an Indian seeking an EB-2 visa, which provides permanent residency based on advanced academic achievement, had risen to 151 years - at which point, barring a medical miracle, the applicant would be dead. — Agencies

The withdrawal, Robertson said, "is based on operational conditions on the ground, including conversation with our allies and partners, and is not subject to an arbitrary timeline." He added: "For purposes of operational security, we will not discuss specific troop movements or timelines. However, we will confirm that there has been no redeployment of military personnel from Syria to date. The mission has not changed."

US defense officials said the withdrawal was only of certain types of gear, and not troops. "We are not withdrawing troops at this stage," one US defense official said. A second US defense official told AFP that the military had conducted a number of preparations for a deliberate withdrawal. "That includes planning for the moving of people and equipment, preparation of facilities to accept retrograde equipment," the official said, noting that no troops had been withdrawn. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported earlier that the US-led coalition in Syria had started scaling down its presence at Rmeilan airfield in the Hasakeh province of northeastern Syria. But the first defense official said this was merely part of a regular troop movement.

Democratic congressman Adam Schiff, who chairs the House Intelligence Committee, blasted the withdrawal plans. "The Trump Administration's foreign policy is as deeply flawed in its conception as it is dangerously incompetent in its execution," Schiff said on Twitter. Though Trump has said he wants a withdrawal to be coordinated, gradual and "prudent," observers have stressed that his announcement was having the same impact as a withdrawal itself. "The damage is done," said Fabrice Balanche, a geographer and Syria expert. "On the ground, the announcement of the pull-out is as if they were already gone."

Syria's devastating conflict began in 2011 with anti-government demonstrations that were brutally crushed, sparking a complex war involving multiple foreign militias and jihadist groups, as well as regional and international powers including the US. The withdrawal announcement had also sparked concerns among Arab states and Israel that it could open the way to growing Iranian influence.

Pompeo has pledged to "expel every last Iranian boot" from Syria, and yesterday sought to downplay the impact of the US pullout on this goal. "The fact that a couple of thousands of uniformed personnel in Syria will be withdrawing is a tactical change," he said. "It doesn't materially alter our capacity to continue to perform the military actions that we need to perform." The US is looking to create an anti-Iran front - the Middle East Strategic Alliance - bringing together Gulf countries as well as Egypt and Jordan. Washington is set to convene an international summit in Poland next month focusing on stability in the Middle East, including Iran's influence. — Agencies

2 firefighters, tourist killed

Continued from Page 1

out, there was no railing, nothing, and there was too much smoke," she said.

Besides the two dead firefighters, 47 other people were injured in the blast, 10 of them seriously, the Paris prosecutor's office said. A source in the Spanish foreign ministry said a woman who was holidaying with her husband in Paris died in hospital after the blast while another Spanish national was also injured. Around 100 police officers blocked off several streets in the area, home to restaurants and tourist attractions including the Musee Grevin wax museum and the popular Rue des Martyrs.

Police also closed off streets in front of the Garnier Opera house as emergency services landed two helicopters in front of the historic building to evacuate victims. The explosion occurred shortly after 9:00 am (0800

GMT) in building that housed a bakery as well as a restaurant on the ground floor in the Ninth Arrondissement. "It happened when there were people in the street, and firefighters inside," the interior minister said.

The shockwave was felt as far as four blocks away, Commander Eric Moulin of the Paris fire service said, adding that rescuers were still searching for other victims. Firefighters had been responding to an alert of a gas leak at the site when the explosion occurred, Paris prosecutor Remy Heitz said at the scene. "First there was a gas leak and the firefighters arrived, then there was an explosion that caused the fire," Heitz said.

Dozens of tourists, suitcases in hand, were evacuated from the many nearby hotels in the area, a popular weekend shopping destination for locals and visitors alike. Other residents were in bathrobes or quickly dressing in the street as police helicopters circled overhead. "We were sleeping when we heard the noise, it sounded like an earthquake," a teenager who lives on a nearby street told AFP. "We came downstairs and we saw a building on fire," her brother said. Many homes and buildings in Paris use gas for heating and cooking, though explosions due to leaks are relatively rare. — AFP

Govt shutdown becomes longest...

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employees - workers as diverse as FBI agents, air traffic controllers and museum staff - did not receive paychecks Friday. The shutdown became the longest on record at midnight Friday (0500 GMT Saturday), when it overtook a 21-day stretch in 1995-1996 under president Bill Clinton.

On Friday, however, Trump backed off a series of previous threats to end the deadlock by declaring a national emergency and attempting to secure the funds without congressional approval. "I'm not going to do it so fast," he said at a White House meeting. Trump described an emergency declaration as the "easy way out" and said Congress had to step up to the responsibility of approving the \$5.7 billion he says is needed. "If they can't do it... I will declare a national emergency. I have the absolute right," he said.

Until Friday, Trump had suggested numerous times that he was getting closer to taking the controversial decision. One powerful Republican ally, Senator Lindsey Graham, tweeted after talks with Trump: "Mr. President, Declare a national emergency NOW." But the president himself acknowledged in the White House meeting that an attempt to claim emergency powers would likely end up in legal battles going all the way to the Supreme Court - as other Republicans and some of his advisers have reportedly cautioned him. Opponents say that a unilateral presidential move would be constitutional overreach and set a dangerous precedent in similar controversies.

The standoff has turned into a test of political ego, particularly for Trump, who came into office boasting of his deal-making powers and making an aggressive border policy the keystone of his nationalist agenda. In two of his tweets yesterday, Trump pushed back on a media report that his White House was "chaotic" with no plan or strate-

Young Saudi teen arrives in Canada...

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Raif Badawi's wife Ensaf Haidar also praised Canada, calling Freeland on Twitter "the real hero" behind efforts to prevent Qunun's repatriation to Saudi Arabia. Qunun alleged that she was abused by her family - who deny the allegations - and rights groups also said she had renounced Islam, risking prosecution in Saudi Arabia. Qunun first said she was aiming for Australia, where officials had suggested they would give serious consideration to her claim for asylum, which was endorsed as legitimate by the UNHCR on Wednesday.

But late Friday Thailand's immigration police chief Surachate Hlakpam said a smiling and cheerful Rahaf was bound for Toronto and had left on a flight after 11pm (1600 GMT). "She chose Canada ... (and) Canada said it will accept her," Surachate told reporters at Bangkok's main airport. "She is safe now and has good physical and mental health. She is happy." Qunun left from the same airport where her quest for asylum began in a swift-moving process that defied most norms.

gy to end the shutdown. "The Fakes always like talking Chaos, there is NONE..." he tweeted. "I do have a plan on the Shutdown. But to understand that plan you would have to understand the fact that I won the election, and I promised... a Wall at the Southern Border. Elections have consequences!"

Democrats, meanwhile, seem determined at all costs to prevent the president from getting the wall he has often promised in his campaign-style rallies. Both Democrats and Republicans agree that the US-Mexican border presents major challenges, ranging from the violent Mexican drug trade to the plight of asylum seekers and poor migrants seeking new lives in the world's richest country. But Trump has turned his single-minded push for more walls into a political crusade that opponents say is a stunt to stoke xenophobia in his rightwing voter base while willfully ignoring the border's complex realities.

For the president, who visited the Texas border with Mexico on Thursday, the border situation amounts to an invasion by criminals. Only in recent days has he begun describing the problem as "humanitarian". Some studies show that illegal immigrants generally commit fewer crimes than people born in the United States, although not everyone agrees on this. More certain is that while narcotics do enter the country across remote sections of the border, most are sneaked through heavily guarded checkpoints in vehicles, the government's own Drug Enforcement Administration said in a 2017 report.

Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic leader in the House of Representatives, said money should be spent on border security but not on walls. "We need to look at the facts," she said. Separately, Puerto Rico's governor urged Trump to not redirect emergency funds from projects to help the storm-ravaged island to wall construction along the US-Mexico border. Ricardo Rossello's plea followed reports the White House has asked the Army Corps of Engineers to look into ways to divert funds destined for natural disaster relief for the wall. In September 2017, Hurricane Maria tore through the US territory in the Caribbean, killing some 3,000 people, causing catastrophic material damage and crippling the island's power grid. — AFP

On Friday afternoon Qunun posted a cryptic tweet on her profile saying, "I have some good news and some bad news." Her account was deactivated shortly afterward in response to death threats she had faced, her friends said. But she was back online later in the day, tweeting: "I would like to thank you people for supporting me and saving my life. Truly I have never dreamed of this love and support."

Qunun's skillful use of Twitter saw her amass tens of thousands of followers within a week, highlighting her plight at a time when Saudi Arabia's human rights record is under heavy scrutiny following the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi last year. Her deployment of social media allowed her to avoid the fate of countless other refugees who are quietly sent back home or left to languish in Bangkok detention centers. She refused to see her father, who traveled to Thailand and expressed opposition to her resettlement. Surachate said her father and brother were due to return home on a flight in the early hours of yesterday.

Although Qunun's asylum case moved quickly, the final maneuvers that led to her flight to Canada remain largely a mystery. Surachate had told reporters earlier Friday that "two or three" countries were ready to offer her asylum. The Southeast Asian country is not a signatory to a convention on refugees, and asylum seekers must be referred to a third country. — AFP

Pompeo 'optimistic' both Syrian Kurds...

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(Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's right to defend their country from terrorists". But, he added, "we also know that those fighting alongside of us for all this time deserve to be protected as well". Pompeo said he had spoken to Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. "Many details (are) still to be worked out but I'm optimistic that we can achieve a good outcome," he said.

Multiple operations including American-backed assaults have ousted IS militants from most of the swathes of Syria and Iraq they captured in 2014. But Trump's announcement raised fears of a long-threatened Turkish assault against the Kurds. On Thursday, Cavusoglu repeated that threat, telling NTV television: "If the (pullout) is put off with ridiculous excuses like Turks are massacring Kurds, which do not reflect the reality, we will implement this decision."

That came after a tense meeting between Turkish officials and Trump's national security adviser John Bolton in Ankara, aimed at coordinating the pullout process after Bolton set conditions that appeared to postpone it indefinitely. The terms included the total defeat of IS - still active in some parts of Syria - and ensuring protection for Kurdish fighters. The US-led coalition launched operations against IS in Sept 2014, forming the SDF a year later with some 25,000 Kurdish fighters and 5,000 Arabs - all Syrian.

Backed by US arms and air support, the YPG-dominated group has overrun the de facto Syrian capital of IS, Raqqa, and a large part of Deir Ezzor province. But that stirred Turkish fears of a break-away Kurdish state on its border. As well as fighting IS, the YPG has also battled pro-Ankara forces in northwestern Syria, pulling SDF forces away from the battle against jihadists in the east of the country. Trump's announcement last month prompted the YPG to call on Syrian government troops to deploy alongside their own forces in the north to help counter a potential Turkish offensive.

A spokesman for the US military said Friday it had begun "the process of our deliberate withdrawal from Syria". But US defense officials quickly sought to clarify that while gear was being pulled out, "we are not withdrawing troops at this stage". Late Friday, Pentagon spokesman Cmdr Sean Robertson said that Operation Inherent Resolve "is implementing the orderly withdrawal of forces from northeast Syria within a framework coordinated across the US government".

Sports

Petra Kvitova digs deep to outlast Barty in Sydney final

De Minaur downs Seppi to win first ATP title at Sydney

SYDNEY: Petra Kvitova outlasted Ashleigh Barty in a final-set tiebreak to win the Sydney International for the second time yesterday. The Czech 2015 champion and fifth seed fought back from dropping the opening set and an early break in the final set to beat the top-ranked Aussie, 1-6, 7-5, 7-6 (7/3) in two hours 19 minutes.

It was a gutsy performance from the two-time Wimbledon champion who only finished her semi-final against Aliaksandra Sasnovich in the early hours of yesterday. Kvitova had beaten Barty both the previous times they played, including in the Birmingham final in 2017, but she had to dig deep to win her eighth straight final, coming back from an 0-3 deficit in the final set.

"I left everything out there. I was cramping in the end. It wasn't the best," Kvitova said. "She's Aussie, so she used to these conditions. I played three times in the night, so for me it was totally different conditions, which from the beginning I feel very, very slow."

"So it just took me a while to get used to the rhythm and get back to the play. It was such a great final. It was a big fight until the end. That's the way a final should be." Kvitova prevailed despite her serve being broken six times in the match but she finished with 31 winners to Barty's 23.

Barty raced through the opening set after breaking the big-serving Kvitova in the first game on back-to-back double faults. Kvitova began to hit her spots with her powerful groundstrokes in the second set and broke Barty for 6-5 and then served out the set in the next game with a backhand winner that clipped the back of the baseline on her second set point.

Barty broke early to lead 3-0 in the final set, but Kvitova broke back in the fifth game to level at 3-3. Barty saved four break points in the ninth game but with the break in hand, Kvitova couldn't serve out the match. She broke again in the 11th game but began to struggle physically and back-to-back double faults took the

deciding set to a tiebreak.

The Czech fired a running cross-court forehand winner on match point to claim her 26th career title and a sixth WTA title in the past 12 months. "Of course, it's tough to take. It's been a hell of a week. I mean, I couldn't have left anything more out on the court," Barty said.

"Petra came up with the goods when she needed it today. Sometimes when you play Petra, you have those matches where a lot of the time it's out of my control."

Earlier, Australian teenager Alex De Minaur won two matches in a day to claim his first career ATP title at the Sydney International yesterday. De Minaur, 19 and ranked 29, conquered the fresher Italian Andreas Seppi 7-5, 7-6 (7/5) in the final after overcoming Frenchman Gilles Simon in a rain-postponed semi-final earlier in the day.

De Minaur's triumph made him the youngest winner of the Sydney tournament since his mentor Lleyton Hewitt claimed it as a 19-year-old in 2001. Sydney-born De Minaur is the first Australian champion at the 134-year tournament since Bernard Tomic in 2013.

"It's crazy that this actually happened," De Minaur told the crowd shortly after his victory. "I thought it wouldn't happen. Third time lucky, and you guys don't know how much it means to do it in front of all you guys, in front of my home."

In his second straight Sydney final, the fifth seed won 75 percent of first-serve points to improve on his runner-up finish to Russian Daniil Medvedev last year. De Minaur has soared 208 places to 29 in the ATP Rankings and was named ATP Newcomer of the Year after earning 28 tour-level victories throughout his 2018 campaign.

After conceding a break of serve in the opening game of the match, De Minaur levelled the opening set at 3-3. The first set appeared to be heading towards a tie-break until De Minaur broke in the 12th game, attacking Seppi's forehand to force errors and earn short balls in return from his opponent.



SYDNEY: Petra Kvitova of the Czech Republic (R) holds the trophy with Australia's Ashleigh Barty after winning in the women's final match at the Sydney International tennis tournament in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

Seppi was again the first to strike in the second set. The Italian earned his first break point of the set before capitalising on a De Minaur double-fault to lead 4-3. But the Australian youngster broke back for 4-4 as Seppi

made consecutive groundstroke errors. In the tie-break, De Minaur recovered from a mini-break down three times, before clinching the title on his first championship point as Seppi netted a backhand. —AFP

Kerber keeping Open expectations in check

MELBOURNE: Wimbledon champion Angelique Kerber yesterday said her confidence and motivation were sky high and her form good, but she is thinking no further than round one of the opening Grand Slam of the year.

Despite her reticence to look too far forward, the world number two is seen as one of the favourites for the Australian Open crown, carrying good momentum into the tournament after a stellar 2018. The 30-year-old has the experience to make another deep run at Melbourne Park, having won in 2016.

"Now we have a new season coming, and the motivation is really high again," she said ahead of her first round clash with Poland's Polona

Hercog. "You know, for me it's important to be going on court and trying to make the transit from my practice sessions to the match ones."

"I was really working hard in the pre-season, and now I'm really looking forward to having the competition and playing matches again," added the German star. Kerber fell to world number one Simona Halep 9-7 in the third set of an epic semi-final battle last year but was not prepared to outline her aspirations for 2019.

"I'm not putting too much expectation on me, with the results and everything like that," she said. "I'm here to, like always at the Grand Slams, find my rhythm, play the first round, try to do my best, then look day by day."

"I know that I am playing good right now, that I had good matches, that I have the confidence. But still it's not easy being here. The tournament starts from zero." Kerber is working with new coach Rainer Schuttler, who reached the Australian Open final in 2003 where he lost to Andre Agassi.

German Tennis Association's Barbara Rittner, who helped develop Kerber as a



MELBOURNE: Angelique Kerber of Germany hits a backhand return during a training session in Melbourne yesterday, ahead of the Australian Open tennis tournament. —AFP

teenager, said recently that Schuttler would add more "daring" to her game. Kerber said he was her first coach who actually played at the top level, and this was proving invaluable.

"He knows how it is to being under

pressure, to having emotions on court. He understands my thinking," she said. "You know, on court he is also a hard worker. He loves the sport like me, we are both really trying to do our best. We have the passion." — AFP

Quick learner Halep ready for Slam crown number two

MELBOURNE: World number one Simona Halep yesterday admitted losing the 2018 Australian Open final was a painful moment, but it taught her how to better handle pressure situations which she has since put to good use.

The Romanian was targeting a first ever Grand Slam title in that match against Caroline Wozniacki and looked on track to win before folding in the third set. Halep had won her service game and then broke the Dane to get a 4-3 lead.

She served for what would have been a 5-3 advantage but Wozniacki broke then held serve for lead 5-4. The fired-up Dane went on to break again and win 7-6 (7/2), 3-6, 6-4, leaving Halep crushed.

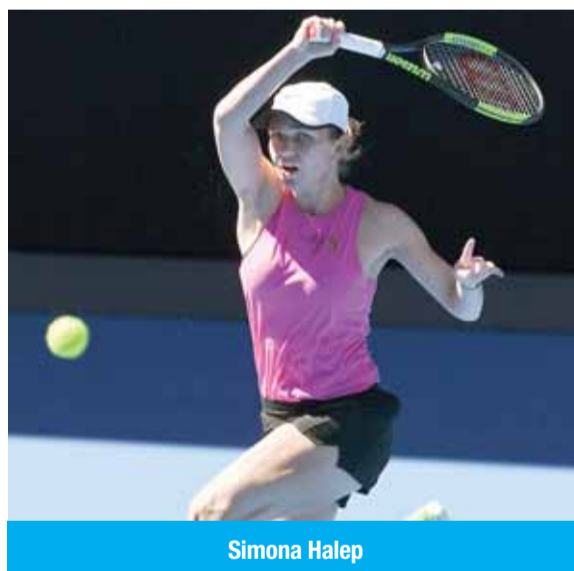
"I didn't want to think that much about that match because it was really painful to lose it," she said at Melbourne Park when asked to reflect on what went wrong. "But I learned some things from that match. That break (at 4-3) broke me a little bit in that moment."

"Now I know how to manage better if that happens again. "She was better at that moment and maybe fresher than me because I played so many long matches before. She was actually less tired than me and deserved to win. She was stronger," she added.

A gutsy Halep took what she learned into the next major of the year, the French Open, and made no similar mistakes, romping through the third set of the final 6-1 against Sloane Stephens to finally clinch her maiden Slam title.

"It made a big difference (because) I can say inside myself I did what I wanted to do. I won a Grand Slam finally," said the 27-year-old. "Now I can say I'm a real number one before I said without a Grand Slam, you are not a real number one."

"I'm happy. I'm enjoying the time. Everything I've done last year made me be more relaxed," she added. The stellar year saw Halep end 2018 as the world number one, despite her season ending early



Simona Halep

in October when she suffered a herniated disc in her back.

She called the injury "very scary" and literally did nothing for six weeks to get over it. But the lay-off means she will start her Australian Open campaign against Estonia's Kaia Kanepi with limited court time after crashing out of the warm-up Sydney International at the first hurdle.

Despite playing just one game since October, Halep insisted she was fit and ready to go. "I practised very well these past few days. I'm looking forward actually to the start. But I have three more days, so I will chill another day, then I will start to be focused for what I have to do during the match," she said.

Along with the injury, another low point of 2018 was losing coach Darren Cahill, who left to spend more time with his family. Halep said the team around her was close-knit and finding a suitable replacement was not easy.

But she suggested that could change soon. "Every time you commit to someone in your team, you have to give 100 percent. So I was not ready in the off-season," she said of hiring a new coach.

"Now I'm feeling that I'm getting better. As I say always, at this level it is impossible without coach. So maybe in the close future I will have someone. But for the moment, I'm just by myself." — AFP

New kid Zverev sad at 'coolest dude' Murray quitting tennis

MELBOURNE: Brightest new kid on the block Alexander Zverev said yesterday he was sad to hear "super nice" Andy Murray say the Australian Open could be his last tournament. Murray on Friday shocked the tennis world by declaring that his chronic hip pain had not been eased by surgery a year ago and he could end his storied career in Melbourne next week.

World number four Zverev is the flag-bearer for the next generation of stars, having beaten Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic to win the biggest crown of his career at the ATP Finals last year.

And he said he would always appreciate what the 31-year-old three-times Grand Slam winner Murray had done for the sport and new players like himself as they emerge on tour. "Obviously he's one of the best guys on tour outside the court. He's always super nice to be around, super nice to kind of be in the locker room with," Zverev told reporters at Melbourne Park.

"The media always kind of puts him as a boring guy who doesn't give interviews well or something like that. No, he's actually one of the funniest and coolest dudes out there. "We as players, well, you can see how much we really like, really appreciate what he's done."

Zverev said despite his stellar 2018 season he had little expectation coming into the season's first Grand Slam, having only ever reached one quarter-final in 14 previous appearances at the majors.

"I've never been past the third round (in Melbourne), so we'll see how it goes," said the young star who faces Slovenia's Aljaz Bedene in the first round. "But I just want to enjoy being here. I just want to enjoy playing as much as I can. I just want to enjoy playing in the biggest stadiums, playing in the biggest matches."

"Once I learn how to really enjoy it and really find fun in what I do, I think everything else will take care of itself." World number two Rafael Nadal has endured some epic encounters with Murray down the years and said he had felt for the Brit after his jaw-dropping, tear-filled press conference on Friday.

"Yeah, of course it is very bad news," said the Spanish 17-times Grand Slam champion. "But being honest, when you are going on court every day without the clear goal because you cannot move well, you have pain, then is a moment to take a decision."

Nadal, 32, gave a heartfelt tribute to his long-standing rival and recognised that with Federer now aged 37 and Djokovic 31, the era of the "big four" was drawing to a close. "It will be a very important loss for us, for the world of tennis, for the tour, for the fans, even for the rivals that have been part of a great rivalry between the best players for a long time, and a great competitor. But that's life. "We will miss him. But today is him. Tomorrow another one. We are not 20 anymore."

Nick Kyrgios had been one of the first to pay tribute to Murray on social media and told reporters Saturday: "He's a legend. Someone that everyone could relate to, especially myself. Everyone knows how sad it is." — AFP

Shy Osaka working to be more mature

MELBOURNE: US Open winner Naomi Osaka admitted yesterday that she was naturally shy and said one of her key goals in the off-season had been to work on her confidence and become more mature.

The likable 21-year-old Japanese was catapulted into the global spotlight when she won the US Open last year, beating Serena Williams, whose tantrum at the umpire in the final almost overshadowed her achievement.

The breakthrough made her a new standard bearer for tennis in her homeland, Asia and the next generation of women, and she is working hard on living up to the hype. While focusing on her game during the off-season, she has also been concentrating on better dealing with the off-court responsibilities that come with being a major winner.

"For me one of my biggest goals is to be more mature, like to mature as a person," she said ahead of her opening round clash at the Australian Open against Poland's Magda Linette next week. "And I feel like in a way I am, but in other parts I'm very, like, three years' old mentality, you know? I feel like just levelling that out is one of my biggest goals I had during the off-season."

Winning in Flushing Meadows has meant Osaka now has to do far more media, and her confidence in that department is growing. But she admits to still struggling in one-on-one situations. "I mean, in press I feel comfortable because I'm being asked questions," she said, when it was noted that she seems more relaxed in media conferences.

"But you know when you have to do small talk, like, 'hello, how are you?', after that, I don't know what to do." Asked what she does in those situations, she replied: "I go, 'uhm, okay', then I walk away." —AFP

Sports

Sharma fireworks thwarted as Australia beat India in 1st ODI

Test discard Handscomb topscored with 73 off 61 balls for Australia

SYDNEY: Australia fended off an explosive century from Rohit Sharma to post a morale-boosting 34-run victory over India in the first one-day international in Sydney yesterday. The Australians made 288 for five off their 50 overs after winning the toss and restricted India to 254 for nine.

Sharma blasted 133 off 129 balls in a scintillating effort to keep India in the contest, while man-of-the-match Jhye Richardson took four for 26 for Australia. It was a tonic for the ailing Australians, coming off their first-ever home Test series defeat to Virat Kohli's India and after winning just three of their previous 24 ODIs.

Test discard Peter Handscomb topscored with 73 off 61 balls for Australia with Usman Khawaja and Shaun Marsh also registered half-centuries. "I am very pleased with the performance," Australia skipper Aaron Finch said.

"I think the way they rebuilt, Rohit and MS Dhoni, we knew they will take it deep and we managed to pick up the wickets at the right time. "We can always improve, our execution with the ball was at times off. It will be a good series."

Handscomb, passed over this week by selectors for this month's two Tests against Sri Lanka, led the way with six fours and two sixes. Fellow Test discard Marsh knocked up 54 off 70 balls while Khawaja made 59 from 81.

India's Bhuvneshwar Kumar finished with two for 66 and wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav claimed two for 54. "We are not very pleased with the way we played," Kohli said. "I thought we were fine with the ball, score of 300-plus was par on that wicket. We thought 280 was chaseable on that wicket but losing three wickets in such a short span of time is never good.

"Rohit was outstanding and MS Dhoni supported him well but we could have done better with the tempo of the game." India lurched to a disastrous start, losing three wickets in the first six overs, from which they failed to recover. Shikhar Dhawan was out on the sixth ball of the innings when he was leg before wicket for a first-ball duck to ODI debutant Jason Behrendorff.

It got worse for India when Kohli was caught at square leg off Richardson for three and two balls later Ambati Rayudu was trapped leg before wicket by Richardson



SYDNEY: Australia's wicketkeeper Alex Carey (L) appeals unsuccessfully for the LBW wicket of India's batsman Mahendra Singh Dhoni (C) during the first one-day international (ODI) match between Australia and India at the Sydney Cricket Ground in Sydney yesterday. —AFP

SCOREBOARD

Collated scoreboard in the first one-day international between Australia and India at the Sydney Cricket Ground yesterday:

Australia		India	
A. Carey c Sharma b Kuldeep	24	V. Kohli c Stoinis b Richardson	3
A. Finch b Kumar	6	A. Rayudu lbw b Richardson	0
U. Khawaja lbw b Jadeja	59	M.S. Dhoni lbw b Behrendorff	51
S. Marsh c Shami b Kuldeep	54	D. Karthik b Richardson	12
P.Handscomb c Dhawan b Kumar	73	R. Jadeja c Marsh b Richardson	8
M. Stoinis not out	47	B. Kumar not out	29
G. Maxwell not out	11	K. Yadav c Khawaja b Siddle	3
Extras: (b4, lb2, nb2, w6)	14	M. Shami c Maxwell b Stoinis	1
Total: (5 wickets: 50 overs)	288	Extras: (lb7, nb1, w6)	14
Fall of wickets: 1-8 (Finch), 2-41 (Carey), 3-133 (Khawaja), 4-186 (Marsh), 5-254 (Handscomb)		Total: (9 wickets: 50 overs)	254
Did not bat: J. Richardson, N. Lyon, P. Siddle, J. Behrendorff		Fall of wickets: 1-1 (Dhawan), 2-4 (Kohli), 3-4 (Rayudu), 4-141 (Dhoni), 5-176 (Karthik), 6-213 (Jadeja), 7-221 (Sharma), 8-247 (Yadav), 9-254 (Shami)	
Bowling: Kumar 10-0-66-2 (1w), Ahmed 8-0-55-0 (2w, 2nb), Shami 10-0-46-0 (3w), Kuldeep 10-0-54-2, Jadeja 10-0-48-1, Rayudu 2-0-13-0.		Did not bat: K. Ahmed	
		Bowling: Behrendorff 10-2-39-2 (1w, 1nb), Richardson 10-2-26-4 (3w), Siddle 8-0-48-1, Lyon 10-1-50-0, Stoinis 10-0-66-2 (2w), Maxwell 2-0-18-0.	
		Result: Australia win by 34 runs	

after a review for a two-ball duck, leaving India rocking at four for three.

Former World Cup-winning captain M.S. Dhoni put on 137 runs with Sharma for the fourth wicket to stabilise India's rocky start before he was out leg before wicket to Behrendorff for 51 and his 68th ODI half-century.

Dhoni, 37, who has captained India 332 times across the three formats, faced 96 balls and hit three fours and a six. Sharma kept India in the contest with some prodigious hitting, blasting six sixes and 10 fours.

But his mighty knock came to an end when he skied Marcus Stoinis to Glenn Maxwell at deep mid-wicket to end India's remaining hopes. All-rounder Stoinis remained unbeaten on 47 off 43 balls with two fours and two sixes, while limited-over specialist Glenn Maxwell finished 11 off just five balls in Australia's innings.

Aaron Finch fell for six in the third over when he was bowled by Kumar for the paceman's 100th ODI wicket. Alex Carey fell in Kuldeep's first over when he attempted to cut the leg-spinner, only to get an outside edge to Sharma at slip for 24 off 31 balls.

Khawaja and Marsh put on 92 runs for the third wicket before Khawaja was out leg before wicket to spinner Ravindra Jadeja for 59 in the 29th over. Khawaja was struck on the front pad while attempting to sweep and sought a review but there was no 'hot spot' detected off the bat.

Marsh looked well set before he holed out to Mohammed Shami off Kuldeep at long on, ending a 53-run stand with Handscomb, who later found Dhawan at extra cover off Kumar. The second match in the three-match series takes place in Adelaide on Tuesday. — AFP

Olivier wrecks Pakistan again

JOHANNESBURG: Duanne Olivier took his third five-wicket haul of the series as South Africa gained a 77-run first innings lead on the second day of the third and final Test against Pakistan at the Wanderers Stadium yesterday.

The fast bowler took five for 51 as Pakistan were

SCOREBOARD

Scores at the end of Pakistan's first innings on the second day of the third and final Test against South Africa at the Wanderers Stadium yesterday:

South Africa, first innings, 262	
Pakistan, first innings (overnight 17-2)	
Imam-ul-Haq c Elgar b Philander	43
Shan Masood c De Kock b Philander	2
Azhar Ali c De Kock b Philander	0
Mohammad Abbas c De Bruyn b Olivier	11
Asad Shafiq c De Kock b Olivier	0
Babar Azam c Rabada b Olivier	49
Sarfraz Ahmed c Amla b Rabada	50
Shadab Khan c De Bruyn b Rabada	5
Faheem Ashraf c Zubayr Hamza b Olivier	0
Mohammad Amir c Zubayr Hamza b Olivier	10
Hasan Ali not out	0
Extras: (b5, lb10)	15
Total: (49.4 overs)	185
Fall of wickets: 1-6 (Masood), 2-6 (Azhar), 3-53 (Abbas), 4-53 (Shafiq), 5-91 (Imam), 6-169 (Sarfraz), 7-169 (Azam), 8-169 (Ashraf), 9-185 (Amir)	
Bowling: Steyn 12-4-35-0, Philander 13-4-43-3, Rabada 11.4-0-41-2, Olivier 13-2-51-5.	



JOHANNESBURG: Pakistan batsman Imam-ul-Haq (R) avoids a bounce during the second day of the third Cricket Test match between South Africa and Pakistan at Wanderers cricket stadium yesterday in Johannesburg, South Africa. —AFP

bowled out for 185. The tourists lost their last five wickets for 16 runs. South Africa were 25 for one in their second innings at tea, losing stand-in captain Dean Elgar, who was caught behind off Mohammad Amir for five.

Olivier was twice involved in crucial breakthroughs in Pakistan's innings. He ended an hour of frustration for South Africa when he took two wickets in four balls immediately after the morning drinks break, ending the stubborn resistance of nightwatchman Mohammad Abbas, who batted for 88 minutes and faced 51 balls in scoring 11. Three balls later Asad Shafiq ducked a bouncer but was caught behind off his glove.

Abbas and opening batsman Imam-ul-Haq, who went on to make 43, were both dropped twice during the first hour of play. South Africa also missed two run-out opportunities. Pakistan were reduced to 91 for five when Imam was caught at second slip off Vernon Philander but Babar Azam (49) and captain Sarfraz Ahmed (50) put on 78 off only 61 balls for the sixth wicket.

Kagiso Rabada ended the stand when Sarfraz was caught at first slip and four balls later Olivier had Azam caught at long leg. Olivier made it a double strike when Faheem Ashraf was out first ball, splicing a mistimed pull to short leg. — AFP

England's 'biggest year in a generation' starts with WI test

LONDON: England begin a 2019 that England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chief executive Tom Harrison believes represents a "once in a generation" opportunity with a West Indies tour that could yet prove uncomfortably awkward.

With both a World Cup—a tournament the England men's team have never won—and an Ashes on home soil on the horizon, it will be a challenge for England's leading cricketers in both the one-day and Test formats to maintain their focus on the challenge in front of them rather than be distracted by the bigger prizes ahead.

A three-Test tour and five-match one-day series in the Caribbean, which gets underway with a warm-up fixture against a West Indies Board XI in Barbados next week, should provide a good barometer of England's progress.

Joe Root's Test side are second in the world rankings, while Eoin Morgan's men top the equivalent one-day standings. By contrast, the West Indies are currently eighth in the Test table and ninth in the ODI list.

England, fresh from an emphatic away Test series win in Sri Lanka that followed a home success against top-ranked India, will be firm favourites. And yet England have won only one Test series in the West Indies since 1968, when Michael Vaughan's team sealed a 3-0 victory in 2004.

They've toured the Caribbean twice more since then, losing 1-0 in 2009 and then drawing 1-1 four years ago after a build-up where ECB chairman Colin Graves had dismissed the West Indies as "mediocre".

Root's men will have to cope with the pressure of being overwhelming favourites to beat a struggling West Indies side who will be coached by an Englishman in the recently-appointed Richard Pybus. Yet for England, the stakes are even higher in what will be Australian coach Trevor Bayliss's final year in charge before stepping down. Following their miserable first-round exit at the 2015 World Cup, former England captain turned ECB supremo Andrew Strauss, made limited-overs cricket a priority.

This year's edition will prove the worth of that policy. More than that, the fact the Ashes and the World Cup fall in the same season—something that hasn't happened since the inaugural 1975 men's World Cup in England—could provide the ECB with a massive opportunity to connect with a wider British sporting public who have lost contact with the game.

Many casual fans, and potential cricket lovers, were 'abandoned' when the ECB decided to end live free-to-air television coverage of home internationals after England's 2005 Ashes triumph in favour of more lucrative deals with satellite broadcasters.

But as Michael Atherton, the former England captain turned The Times cricket correspondent wrote, the absence of a major international football tournament in 2019 offers cricket the chance to "own" the summer in its birthplace. — AFP

Doncic's 3-pointer helps Mavs sink Timberwolves

DALLAS: Rookie sensation Luka Doncic drained the game-winning 3-pointer, scored a team-high 29 points and finished two rebounds shy of a triple-double to lead the Dallas Mavericks to a rare road win, 119-115 over the Minnesota Timberwolves on Friday in Minneapolis. Doncic, the second-leading All-Star vote-getter in the Western Conference so far, went toe to toe with the Wolves' Karl-Anthony Towns, who finished with a game-high 30 points plus 11 rebounds and four blocks. Doncic had 12 assists. Doncic's game-winner, shot over Towns' outstretched arm, swished through with 22.9 seconds left for a 117-115 lead. It came just seconds after he threw away an inbounds pass with Minnesota leading 115-114. However, the Wolves gave it right back to set up the 19-year-old's heroics. Harrison Barnes added 23 points for the Mavericks. Minnesota's Andrew Wiggins, coming off a 40-point per-

formance, finished with 17 points, and Derrick Rose had 21 off the bench.

ROCKETS 141, CAVALIERS 113

James Harden posted his fourth 40-point triple-double on the season, and host Houston turned an early run into a blowout of Cleveland, which lost its 12th straight game. Harden finished with 43 points, 10 rebounds and 12 assists despite sitting out the fourth quarter. His 13th 40-point game this season set a franchise record. Harden converted all 11 of his free throws. All 10 of his rebounds came on the defensive end. Houston's Clint Capela had 19 points, four rebounds and two blocked shots in 30 minutes. Cedi Osman paced Cleveland's starters with 15 points while the backcourt of Alec Burks and Collin Sexton totaled 27 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists.

WARRIORS 146, BULLS 109

Klay Thompson buried three consecutive 3-pointers in the first 70 seconds as host Golden State ran away from Chicago in Oakland, Calif., and won its third straight game. The win capped one of the highest-scoring, season-series sweeps in NBA history, with the Warriors having blown out the Bulls 149-124 in Chicago on Oct. 29. Thompson, who scored 52 points in the October game, scored a game-high 30

points. Stephen Curry backed Thompson with 28 points and a game-high eight assists for the Warriors, and Kevin Durant added 22 points. Zach LaVine produced a team-high 29 points for the Bulls.

JAZZ 113, LAKERS 95

Donovan Mitchell finished with 33 points and a career-high nine assists to lead Utah's rout of Los Angeles Lakers in Salt Lake City. Three Jazz players finished with double-doubles: Rudy Gobert (12 points, season-high 18 rebounds); Joe Ingles (14 points, career-high 12 rebounds); and Derrick Favors (15 points, season-high 13 rebounds). Michael Beasley scored 17 points to lead the Lakers. Brandon Ingram added 15 points, and Kyle Kuzma chipped in 11 points and eight rebounds. Los Angeles lost for the sixth time in nine games without LeBron James, who remained in Los Angeles due to a groin injury.

RAPTORS 122, NETS 105

Kawhi Leonard scored 20 points and nabbed 11 rebounds as Toronto won its season-high seventh consecutive home game at the expense of Brooklyn. Leonard has scored at least 20 points in a career-best 18 straight games for the Raptors, who avenged a 106-105 overtime loss in Brooklyn on Dec 7. Pascal Siakam added 16 points for the Raptors, and Serge Ibaka

had 14 points and nine rebounds. D'Angelo Russell amassed 24 points, six rebounds and nine assists for the Nets.

HAWKS 123, 76ERS 121

John Collins hit the go-ahead jumper with 9.5 seconds remaining to lift Atlanta past Philadelphia, which played without All-Star center Joel Embiid, sidelined due to a sore left ankle. Kevin Huerter led the Hawks with a career-high 29 points. Collins added 25, and Dewayne Dedmon had 19. Rookie Trae Young scored 18 points. Jimmy Butler paced the Sixers with 30 points, but he missed a pair of free throws with 2.4 seconds remaining after making his first 12. Philadelphia's Ben Simmons recorded his seventh triple-double of the season with 23 points, 15 assists and 10 rebounds. JJ Redick scored 20 points.

BLAZERS 127, HORNETS 96

CJ McCollum scored 30 points despite sitting out the fourth quarter as host Portland won its fourth straight game and 11th in its last 15, romping past Charlotte. Damian Lillard added 20 points and Jusuf Nurkic collected 11 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists for the Trail Blazers. Kemba Walker scored 18 points but made only 5 of 19 shots from the field for the Hornets, who lost for the seventh time in 10 outings. Jeremy Lamb added 15 points. — Reuters

Sports

Rice scores first Hammers goal to defeat Arsenal

Fulham sunk by two own goals at Burnley

LONDON: Declan Rice's first West Ham goal secured a 1-0 win over Arsenal in a capital city derby clash at the London Stadium. The victory in yesterday's early kick-off saw the Hammers move up to eighth in the Premier League table, on 31 points, ahead of the bulk of the weekend's fixtures.

Teenage midfielder Rice gave himself an early present for his 20th birthday on Monday by scoring the only goal of the game three minutes into the second half. "I can't put it into the words," an elated Rice told Sky Sports. "The lads are always on at me to take the shot on more."

West Ham captain Mark Noble was almost as pleased as Rice himself, adding: "I am delighted for this young man to score the goal...He is a special talent and keeps working hard." Defeat dented Arsenal's bid to break into the top four, with the Gunners still adrift of Chelsea—their next opponents—in the race for a Champions League place.

"It is difficult to win if you don't score," said Arsenal's Laurent Koscielny, after a defeat that meant the Gunners had won just one of their last seven away Premier League matches. The defender, looking ahead to next weekend's clash with Chelsea at the Emirates Stadium, said: "It is a home game against an opponent in the top four. We know what we need to do. We need to prepare all week for this important team."

West Ham named Marko Arnautovic in their starting line-up despite the Austrian forward's brother and agent saying Thursday he wanted to move to the Chinese Super League. And it appeared Arnautovic was waving goodbye to the home fans in a London Stadium record of over 59,000 when substituted in

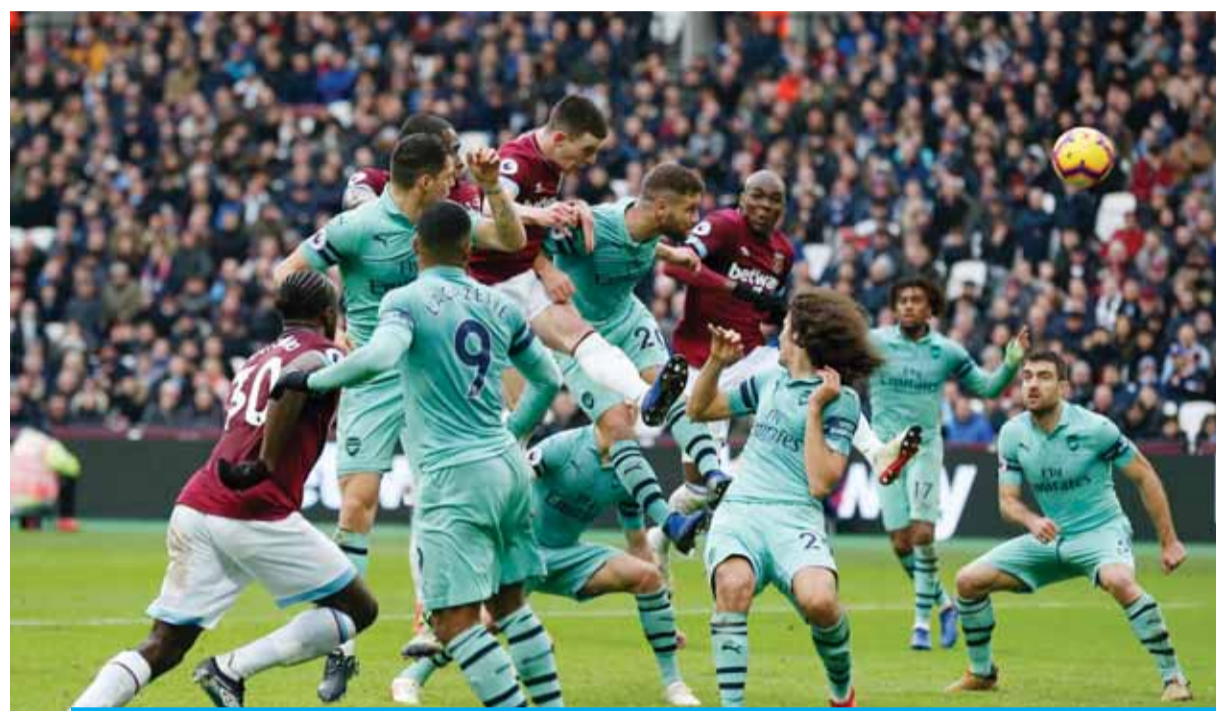
the 71st minute. "We will see what happens in the next days," said Manuel Pellegrini, the West Ham manager. "It is an issue that the club must see what is the best for the player, for the club and for everyone." Former Arsenal favourite Samir Nasri started against his old club as the midfielder made his Premier League debut for the Hammers.

Koscielny and Shkodran Mustafi returned from injury for Arsenal but there was no place in their squad for Mesut Ozil. The match was goalless at the interval following near-misses by Arsenal midfielder Matteo Guendouzi and Hammers playmaker Felipe Anderson.

That all changed in the 48th minute courtesy of Rice, a Republic of Ireland Under-21 international. Granit Xhaka's poor clearing header fell to Anderson, whose ball came to Rice via a neat lay-off from Nasri and Rice's first-time shot gave Arsenal goalkeeper Bernd Leno little chance.

Arsenal pressed for an equaliser but the Hammers survived three minutes of stoppage time as they held on for victory. Earlier, Burnley beat Fulham 2-1 at Turf Moor yesterday thanks to two own goals to make it three straight league wins for Sean Dyche's side and leave the visitors deep in relegation danger.

German international Andre Schurrle put Fulham, without an away win this season, ahead in brilliant fashion in the second minute, bringing down a long ball from Denis Odoi and blasting, first time, past Tom Heaton. Burnley got back on level terms though in the 20th minute when Jeff Hendrick's low drive was turned into his own net by Fulham defender Joe Bryan. Three minutes later and Hendrick had forced another own goal—his drive headed in by Odoi to put the Claret 2-



LONDON: West Ham United's Irish defender Declan Rice (C) jumps highest but heads the ball narrowly wide during the English Premier League football match between West Ham United and Arsenal at The London Stadium, in east London yesterday. — AFP

1 up. Burnley defender James Tarkowski had to clear a Luciano Vietto drive off the line shortly after the interval and Fulham had most of the pressure after the break without creating many clear-cut chances.

Burnley did not have a shot on target in the game but moved up to 15th place with the win, while Fulham are next to bottom on 14 points, five points from safety. — Agencies

Ten-man Southampton out of drop zone with Leicester win

LEICESTER CITY: Southampton moved out of the relegation zone with a 2-1 win over Leicester City in the Premier League yesterday despite playing half the match with 10 men at the King Power Stadium.

Saints came into the contest having picked up four points in their last two Premier League away games, and found themselves in front after 11 minutes through James Ward-Prowse's penalty.

Their task was seemingly made more difficult when Yan Valery was sent off for a second yellow card just before halftime but Shane Long squeezed the ball home to double Southampton's advantage just before the break. Leicester committed more bodies forward in the second period and soon got themselves back in the match through Wilfred Ndidi's scrappy goal in the 58th minute. No team has given up more points from leading positions than Southampton this season, but they dug in and held out for another three crucial points. The win moves Southampton up to 16th while Leicester followed up their humiliating FA Cup defeat by League Two side Newport County with a loss that sees them drop to eighth.

Meanwhile, bottom club Huddersfield Town ended their eight-match losing streak in the Premier League with a goalless draw at fellow strugglers Cardiff City yesterday.

Cardiff, in 17th place, did not manage a shot on target and Huddersfield were left fuming over a decision from referee Lee Mason.

Mason pointed to the spot when Florent Hadergjonaj



LEICESTER: Southampton's English midfielder James Ward-Prowse (L) vies with Leicester City's English midfielder Demarai Gray during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Southampton at King Power Stadium in Leicester. — AFP

went down under challenge from Joe Bennett but changed his mind after consulting his assistant.

Huddersfield had lost their previous six games at Cardiff in all competitions but after having the better of Saturday's match will be disappointed not to have

picked up all three points.

The Terriers had 61 per cent of possession and Jason Puncheon and Steve Mounie both went close to a breakthrough. The Yorkshire club remain bottom on 11 points, eight points away from safety. —Reuters

Japan golden oldie 'King Kazu' renews contract before 52nd birthday

TOKYO: Former Japan striker Kazuyoshi Miura, who turns 52 next month, has extended his record as the J-League's oldest player after renewing his contract with Yokohama FC, the club said. The veteran footballer, admirably nicknamed "King Kazu" for his spirited onfield style, will kick off his 34th career season this year, the second division club announced Friday.

"I thank fans for supporting me all the time," Miura said in a brief statement. "I want to work out at full stretch every day... and play as many games as possible by making every minute count." In 2017, Miura surpassed football's previous professional longevity record and became the oldest player to score a competitive goal in a professional match. Both records were previously held by English legend Stanley Matthews.

Last year he played nine games for Yokohama but failed to score. Miura left Japan for Brazil in 1982 and signed a contract with Santos FC in 1986 to make his professional debut. He made his Japan debut in 1990 and pushed for the country's first ever World Cup appearance in 1998 but failed to join the final squad for France despite scoring 55 goals in 89 games for the national side.

He was one of the stars of the professional J-League at its 1993 launch before joining Italy's Genoa on loan the following year. Miura, who has played for Yokohama since 2005, has said he wants to play on until he turns 60. Yokohama lost in the first division play-offs last year. Their 2019 season kicks off on February 24. —AFP

Rashford can be as good as Kane, says Utd boss Solskjaer

MANCHESTER: Manchester United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer says Marcus Rashford has the potential to be as good a centre-forward as England teammate Harry Kane as the pair prepare to face off in the Premier League this weekend.

Rashford is expected to line up as the spearhead of United's attack when they face Kane's Tottenham at Wembley today with both the team and striker on a hot run of form under the interim manager.

Rashford looks reborn under interim coach Solskjaer, scoring three times in the centre-forward position as United have rattled off four straight league wins since the Norwegian took over from the sacked Mourinho in December to close in on the Champions League places.

"He can become a top, top striker," said Solskjaer. "We can talk about Harry Kane and his class and I'm sure Marcus as well. He's got the potential to get up there. He's got frightening pace, he's now become stronger and can hold the ball up for us. He's a great link player."

Kane, 25, has set the goalscoring standards in English football over the past three years—he was the league's top scorer in 2015/16 and 2016/17 before finishing runner-up to Liverpool's Mohamed Salah last season.

He won the Golden Boot at last year's World Cup and this season is joint-top scorer alongside Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang on 14 goals. Rashford, 21, scored four goals in his first two senior matches for United after being given his debut

by then-manager Louis van Gaal in February 2016, and established himself as a regular squad member at Old Trafford. However, he was regularly restricted to substitute appearances after Jose Mourinho replaced Van Gaal as manager later that year, and was often asked to play in a left-sided role, with Romelu Lukaku as the central attacker.

Since returning to United, where he played as a striker between 1996 and 2007, Solskjaer has spoken repeatedly of the need to return to the attractive, attacking football that they played for much of Alex Ferguson's reign.

A central part of Ferguson's philosophy was the development of players from the club's academy, which Rashford joined at the age of seven.

United have a proud history of producing their own talent, having included at least one youth-team graduate in every first-team matchday squad since October 1937. Solskjaer sees Rashford's academy background as valuable, suggesting the forward has learned from a young age about the attacking style traditionally associated with United. "Marcus has been brought up here," he said. "There were a couple of training sessions here (I watched) with the young kids, and Chongy (Tahith Chong) and Angel (Gomes) and him and Jesse, they played together in a certain way. He's a very exciting player to work with." Solskjaer, loaned to United by Norwegian club Molde for the rest of this season, reiterated that there have been no discussions with United's executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward over the permanent job despite his desire to take the hot seat.

"No, we've not had that conversation," said Solskjaer. "You don't plan five or six months ahead and then suddenly change that after two weeks. No, nothing's changed. We just keep working every single day on improving the team here."

"I work with a fantastic coaching staff, I have to say. We'll put a plan together on how we want to look the next few months." —AFP

Live		Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE			
Everton FC v Bournemouth FC	beIN SPORTS HD 2	17:15	
Tottenham Hotspur v Manchester United	beIN SPORTS HD 2	19:30	
SPANISH LEAGUE			
Atletico de Madrid v Levante	beIN SPORTS HD 3	14:00	
Athletic de Bilbao v Sevilla FC	beIN SPORTS HD 3	18:15	
FC Barcelona v SD Eibar	beIN SPORTS HD 3	20:30	
Real Betis v Real Madrid CF	beIN SPORTS HD 3	22:45	
FRENCH LEAGUE			
FC Nantes v Stade Rennais	beIN SPORTS HD 6	17:00	
Toulouse FC v RC Strasbourg	beIN SPORTS HD 6	19:00	
Dijon v Montpellier HSC	beIN SPORTS HD 4	19:00	
Olympique Marseille v AS Monaco FC	beIN SPORTS HD 6	23:00	
ASIAN NATIONS CUP 2019			
North Korea v Qatar	beIN SPORTS	14:00	
Oman v Japan	beIN SPORTS	16:30	
Turkmenistan v Uzbekistan	beIN SPORTS	19:00	

Immobile fires Lazio into Coppa Italia quarter-finals

MILAN: Ciro Immobile scored a first-half brace as Lazio booked the first Coppa Italia quarter-final berth yesterday with a 4-1 win over third-division Novara in a game which was marred by racist and anti-semitic chants from a small section of the crowd at the Stadio Olimpico.

The chanting came from Lazio's North End and was also aimed at police who had clashed with fans on Wednesday at Piazza della Libertà in the capital when celebrations to mark the club's 119th anniversary turned violent.

Lazio dominated the last-16 tie against the Serie C side from northern Italy with Immobile setting up Luis Alberto's 12th-minute opener for the Romans. Novara goalkeeper Elia Benedettini saved Immobile's 20th-minute penalty, but the Lazio forward netted the rebound, adding a second 15 minutes later for his 13th goal in all competitions this season.

Serbian midfielder Sergej Milinkovic-Savic blasted in a free-kick to give the hosts a comfortable four-goal lead just before the break. Umberto Eusepi pulled a goal back for Novara when he slotted in a penalty awarded for a Luiz Felipe handball after consultation with VAR just after half-time.

Lazio, who won the last of their six Coppa Italia trophies in 2013, will next play either Inter Milan or Benevento in the quarter-finals. Juventus begin their quest for a fifth consecutive Coppa Italia later on Saturday at Bologna, as former five-time winners AC Milan are away to Sampdoria, who last won the Cup 25 years ago.

The Italian league is still on its winter break but Juventus and AC Milan are warming up for the Super Cup final in Saudi Arabia next Wednesday. —AFP

25 Petra Kvitova digs deep to outlast Barty in Sydney final



26 Sharma fireworks thwarted as Australia beat India in 1st ODI



27 Rice scores first Hammers goal to defeat Arsenal



Iran, Iraq, Saudis soar into last 16



ABU DHABI: Iran's midfielder Sayed Ashkan Dejagah (C) dribbles past Vietnam's midfielder Duc Huy Pham (L) and Vietnam's midfielder Quang Hai Nguyen (R) during the 2019 AFC Asian Cup group D football match between Vietnam and Iran at the al-Nahyan Stadium in Abu Dhabi yesterday. — AFP

ABU DHABI: Back-from-retirement Sardar Azmoun fired Iran into the Asian Cup knockout phase yesterday as Carloz Queiroz's side were joined by arch-rivals Iraq and fellow former winners Saudi Arabia in the last 16. Azmoun, 24, quit the national team after fans rounded on him following Iran's exit at last year's World Cup, but he was the toast of Tehran once again with both goals in a 2-0 win over Vietnam. Saudi Arabia, who like Iran are three-time former winners of the Asian showpiece, beat Lebanon 2-0, while teenager Mohanad Ali inspired 2007 champions Iraq to a 3-0 win over Yemen.

Iran, Iraq and Saudi, with seven titles between them, joined already qualified South Korea, China and Jordan as the round of 16 began to take shape. Queiroz singled out Azmoun after the Rubin Kazan forward's double made him the tournament's top scorer with three goals, and gave Iran a record ninth successive first-round victory. "He's a finisher," said the Portuguese, now in his eighth year as Iran coach. "We have high hopes for him for this competition. But the way the team is contributing

around him, and our movement in the last third, are very interesting."

Iran, looking to end a 43-year title drought since last winning Asian football's most coveted prize, could have scored four or five but for some poor finishing in Abu Dhabi. "It's a pity our performance didn't produce a couple more goals," Iran coach Queiroz told reporters. "But winning is the best medicine in football. To win two games and score seven goals - I have to praise my players because I am very demanding."

Solo goal

Saman Ghoddos and Mehdi Taremi went close for Asia's top-ranked team before Azmoun rose to head home a Ghoddos cross after 38 minutes. Azmoun lashed in his third of the tournament from the edge of the box 20 minutes from time to make it seven unanswered goals for Iran, who crushed Yemen 5-0 in their opening Group D game. In Sharjah, 18-year-old Ali scored a wonderful solo goal to put Iraq 1-0 up after 11 minutes, although

questions must be raised of the Yemeni defence.

Pouncing on a loose back pass, Ali held off three defenders before rifling his shot past Yemen goalkeeper Jalal Hassan for his second of the tournament. Bashar Resan doubled Iraq's lead midway through the first half when his deflected shot drifted in off the upright with Hassan slow to get across. Ali hit the post in one of the rare highlights of the second half before Alaa Abbas grabbed Iraq's third in injury time, finishing sharply after Ahmed Yaseen's header into his path.

Iran and Iraq will meet in Dubai on Wednesday to decide who tops Group D in a repeat of their combustible quarter-final of 2015, which Iraq won on penalties. Saudi Arabia also maintained their perfect record as they beat Lebanon 2-0, winning their opening two games for the first time since 1996 - when they last won the title. Fahd Al-Muwallad smashed a loose ball into the roof of the net with just 12 minutes gone, and on 67 minutes Hussain Al-Moqahwi finished at the far post from Hatan Bahbri's teasing cross. — AFP



DUBAI: Saudi Arabia's goalkeeper Mohammed Al-Owais (yellow jersey) punches the ball during the 2019 AFC Asian Cup group E football match between Lebanon and Saudi Arabia at the Maktoum bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Stadium yesterday. — AFP

Salah penalty sends Liverpool seven points clear again

BRIGHTON: Liverpool bounced back from two consecutive defeats to remain on course for a first league title in 29 years, but were made to wait before breaking down an obdurate Brighton thanks to Mohamed Salah's 50th-minute penalty in a 1-0 win yesterday.

Victory reestablished Jurgen Klopp's side's seven-point lead over Manchester City at the top of the table, which was reduced to four when the champions inflicted Liverpool's only Premier League defeat of the campaign to breathe new life into the title race nine days ago.

Liverpool were far from their fluent best on England's south coast, but ground out a vital win to settle any nerves caused by that defeat thanks to a 13th clean sheet in 22 league games this season. Klopp made wholesale changes for Monday's FA Cup elimination to Wolves to underline his priorities for this season and he recalled a host of first-team regulars, including Salah.

However, the Egyptian and the rest of Liverpool's forward line were starved of service before the break as Brighton sat deep and the visitors dominated possession without any cutting edge. Roberto Firmino just failed to

reach a dangerous Andy Robertson cross, while Xherdan Shaqiri nodded inches wide.

But neither side managed a single shot on target in the first half as Glenn Murray headed Albion's best chance over the bar. Salah immediately signalled a change in Liverpool's intent after half-time as his powerful shot at the end of a purposeful run was well saved by David Button. Brighton, though, were architects of their own downfall moments later. Salah was given too much room inside the area to turn and Pascal Gross then hauled down last season's Premier League player of the year.

Salah stepped up to blast the penalty past Button and move level with Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Harry Kane as the league's top-scorer on 14 goals for the season. One moment of madness from Gross undid Chris Hughton's gameplan to defend and frustrate the league leaders. Yet, the German midfielder had a chance to make amends almost immediately with Brighton's best opportunity to level, but his shot was bravely blocked by Fabinho. From then on Liverpool looked more likely to add to their lead than concede as Firmino's fierce strike from outside the box was placed too close to Button before Georginio Wijnaldum and Sadio Mane fired wide.

Salah passed up a glorious chance two minutes from time when he turned James Milner's driven cross wide from point-blank range. That could have proved costly when Florin Andone escaped in behind the Liverpool defence in stoppage time, but his low cross found no takers. And Liverpool held out to ensure a largely forgettable 90 minutes could be remembered as another important step on course to the title come May. — AFP



BRIGHTON: Liverpool's Brazilian midfielder Roberto Firmino (L) vies with Brighton's English midfielder Dale Stephens (R) during the English Premier League football match between Brighton and Hove Albion and Liverpool at the American Express Community Stadium in Brighton, southern England yesterday. — AFP