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# Kuwait mulling cancellation of kafala system for expats

## Govt to mandate appointing citizens in administrative positions in private sector

### Amir attends international anti-corruption conference



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends an international anti-corruption conference yesterday. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen at right. — KUNA (See Page 3)

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Well-informed sources said Minister of State for Economic Development Mariam Al-Aqeel will soon head a ministerial meeting to discuss cancelling the kafala (sponsorship) system for expats as part of measures to be taken by the government to resolve the demographic and labor market imbalances. Kuwaiti rights groups have long called on the government to abolish its kafala system for expats, which has long been criticized as a form of bonded labor.

The sources added that the government is fully convinced of the need to cancel the

sponsorship system in a bid to fight visa trafficking after previous attempts failed. The sources also noted that cancelling expats' sponsorship will improve Kuwait's ranking on the lists of international organizations such as the International Labour Organization and human rights groups.

The sources stressed that the new system after cancelling the kafala system will be closely related to the policies of replacing expats with Kuwaitis, namely in administrative positions in the private sector, which reflects the government's measures to replace all expats in the public sector with citizens within five years.

The sources explained that Kuwait will follow Saudi Arabia's experience in this regard and mandate the appointment of citizens in administrative positions in the private sector and that companies which do not comply will have to pay special taxes.

Different forms of kafala systems are in force in the all Gulf states and some other Arab countries. The system is highly criticized by activists and human rights group for exploiting workers and denying them basic rights, such as the ability to travel or change jobs. Employers often confiscate workers' passports, although this is illegal in most countries.

### Blast, gunfire rock Nairobi hotel complex

NAIROBI: A huge blast followed by a gun battle rocked an upmarket hotel and office complex in Nairobi yesterday in an attack claimed by the Al-Qaeda-linked Shabaab Islamist group. The explosion at the DusitD2 compound, which includes a 101-room hotel, restaurant and office buildings housing local and international companies, was heard from AFP's bureau some five kilometers away. Al-Shabaab, which carried out a notorious assault on a Nairobi shopping mall in 2013, claimed responsibility, according to the SITE Intelligence Group which monitors militant activities.



NAIROBI: Special forces protect people at the scene of an explosion at a hotel complex in Nairobi's Westlands suburb yesterday. — AFP

Continued on Page 24

### Cottoning on: Chinese seed sprouts on moon

BEIJING: A small green shoot is growing on the moon in an out-of-this-world first after a cottonseed germinated on board a Chinese lunar lander, scientists said yesterday. The sprout has emerged from a lattice-like structure inside a canister since the Chang'e-4 lander set down earlier this month, according to a series of photos released by the Advanced Technology Research Institute at Chongqing University. "This is the first time humans have done biological growth experiments on the lunar surface," said Xie Gengxin, who led the design of the experiment.

The Chang'e-4 probe - named after a Chinese moon goddess - made the world's first soft landing on the moon's "dark side" on Jan 3, a major step in China's ambitions to become a space superpower. Scientists from Chongqing University - who designed the "mini lunar biosphere" experiment - sent an 18-cm bucket-like container holding air, water and soil.

Inside are cotton, potato, and arabidopsis seeds - a plant of the mustard family - as well as fruit fly eggs and yeast. Images sent back by the probe show a cotton sprout has grown well, but so far none of the other plants has taken, the university said. —AFP



This handout photograph shows a cotton sprout growing in a lattice-structured container inside the Chang'e-4 moon probe on the far side of the moon. — AFP

### Saudi teen refugee wants to fight for other women

TORONTO: A Saudi teen who caused an international sensation by defying her family and seeking asylum abroad yesterday vowed to fight for women's freedoms in her first public address since she was taken in by Canada. Rahaf Mohammed Al-Qunun captured the world's attention with a trail of tweets from her hotel room at Bangkok's airport, where she holed up after Thai authorities initially barred her from travelling on to Australia.

Her emotional social media posts ignited a #SaveRahaf movement as she fled what she said was physical and psychological abuse from her family - and prompted quick action. She was granted refugee status and was welcomed by Canada's Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland after landing in Toronto on Saturday.

"Today and for years to come, I will work in support of freedom for women around the world, the same freedom that I experienced on the first day I arrived in Canada," she told a press conference, reading from a prepared statement in Arabic. Standing in front of a large Canadian flag at the Toronto offices of refugee resettling agency Costi, Qunun said: "I am one of the lucky ones." "I know there are unlucky women that disappeared after escaping and could not do anything to



TORONTO: Rahaf Mohammed Al-Qunun addresses the media during a press conference yesterday. — AFP

change their reality," she said through a translator.

Her family has denied the abuse allegations. Reflecting on her own experience, she said: "I was not treated respectfully by my family and not allowed to be myself and who I want to be. In Saudi Arabia, this is the case for all Saudi women except for those that have understanding parents. They can't be independent and need approval of their male guardian for everything." Rights groups have said she has renounced Islam, risking prosecution in her home country.

Continued on Page 24

### Kuwaiti prof flees to US, claims asylum

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Former Kuwait University law professor Dr Fatima Al-Matar yesterday announced she has moved to the US along with her daughter and has applied for asylum there. "I am so happy that I will start a new life in a beautiful and superb country that believes in the values of human dignity. God Bless America," Matar said on her Twitter account. She said she has been referred to the public prosecution on blasphemy charges and that she could no longer bear living in "this society".

In further tweets, Matar explained she had left for the US with her daughter and claimed asylum there. "We were placed in a refugee center for two weeks and were treated with utmost respect, except for having no access to mobile phones or laptops until a decision was made. A lawyer was also appointed for me free of charge," she said, adding she is very happy that her daughter will have a better life.



Fatima Al-Matar

### Trump foots bill for fast food feast

WASHINGTON: With White House residence staff among those hit by the US government shutdown, Donald Trump personally ordered in an "all American" feast of burgers and pizza on Monday for a visiting football team. "Because of the shutdown, as you know... we went out and we ordered American fast food paid for by me," the president quipped, as he prepared to host the Clemson Tigers univer-

sity players to celebrate their national championship win. "I think they'd like it better than anything we could give," said Trump, after landing back at the White House following a day trip to New Orleans.

"We have pizzas, we have 300 hamburgers, many, many French fries, all of our favorite foods - I want to see what's here when we leave, because I don't think it's going to be much," the president mused. Asked to name his own favorite fast food - as he stood smiling behind the gargantuan spread - Trump demurred, insisting: "I like them all." "If it's American, I like it. It's all American stuff. The reason we did this is because of the shutdown," he added. "We want to make sure that everything is right, so we sent out, we got this." —AFP



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump speaks alongside fast food he purchased in the State Dining Room of the White House on Monday. — AFP

## Local

# Amir, Crown Prince receive visiting Commander of Turkish Gendarmerie

Kuwait National Guard, Turkish Gendarmerie discuss boosting cooperation



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with the visiting Commander of Turkish Gendarmerie General Arif Cetin and his accompanying delegation. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Commander of Turkish Gendarmerie General Arif Cetin.



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



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Director-General of OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) Abdulhamid Al-Khalifa.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace the visiting Commander of Turkish Gendarmerie General Arif Cetin and his accompanying delegation. The receptions were attended by Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah and Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti National Guard Lieutenant General Hashim Al-Rifaie.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received the Commander

of Turkish Gendarmerie and his delegation. The meeting was attended by Head of Protocols at the Diwan of His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Mubarak Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, and Lt Gen Rifaie. Furthermore, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met with the visiting Commander of Turkish Gendarmerie and his accompanying delegation. Lt Gen Rifaie and Director of the Diwan of Deputy Chief of the Kuwait National Guard Maj Gen

Jamal Mohammad Theyab attended the meeting.

In the meantime, Lt Gen Rifaie held a meeting with General Cetin at Kuwait National Guard's headquarters, during which they discussed ways of boosting security and military cooperation, in addition to coordination in the training field.

Also yesterday, His Highness the Amir and His Highness the Crown Prince separately received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Meanwhile,

His Highness the Prime Minister received Director-General of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) Abdulwahab Al-Bader, accompanied by visiting Director-General of OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) Abdulhamid Al-Khalifa and his accompanying delegation. In the meantime, His Highness the Prime Minister received Municipal Council Chairman Osama Al-Otaibi, who submitted to His Highness a copy of a publication on the Municipal Council's minutes since 1932. — KUNA



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with the visiting Commander of Turkish Gendarmerie General Arif Cetin and his accompanying delegation.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Municipal Council Chairman Osama Al-Otaibi.



Undersecretary of the Kuwaiti National Guard Lieutenant General Hashim Al-Rifaie and Commander of Turkish Gendarmerie General Arif Cetin attend a meeting in Kuwait yesterday.

## Assembly Speaker holds talks with IPU President

KUWAIT: Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem held yesterday official talks with visiting President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Gabriela Cuevas Barron, and her accompanying delegation. They tackled many issues to be discussed during the upcoming Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Conference to be held in Qatar, as Barron stressed the importance of working to unite positions to better serve and solve those issues. The talks were attended by head of the accompanying mission of honor MP Safa Al-Hashim, and

MPs Mubarak Al-Herayyes and Ali Al-Degbasi, Parliament's Secretary General Allam Al-Kandiri, and Charge d'Affaires at Mexico's Embassy in Kuwait. Ghanem held a lunch banquet following the meeting, in honor of Barron and her accompanying delegation, with a number of MPs attending.

Meanwhile, Ghanem gratefully acknowledged the support of the IPU, saying its president has always stood up for Arab interests. The IPU chief is "fully coordinating" with the Kuwaiti parliament over matters that concern the wider Arab region, Ghanem told the press. He commended Cuevas Barron for her profound concern over the latest happenings in the region, "warmly welcoming" her amid her visit to Kuwait as part of an extensive tour of the Middle East. Ghanem went on to wish the global parliamentary bloc success ahead of major meetings later this year. The IPU President and her accompanying delegation arrived in Kuwait on Sunday on a four-day official visit. — KUNA



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and IPU President Gabriela Cuevas Barron are pictured inside the National Assembly yesterday. — KUNA

## Kuwait to invest \$20 billion to develop civil aviation: DGCA chief

NEW DELHI: An investment of \$20 billion is expected to be made in the next 10 years to develop and modernize civil aviation sector in Kuwait, a senior Kuwaiti official said. President of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah made that statement as he presented a paper in a ministerial session titled 'Connecting the World' featured at the Global Aviation Summit - 2019, which is being held in the Indian financial capital of Mumbai to share best experiences in the field and discuss ways of enhanced cooperation in civil aviation.

Sheikh Salman also said that in order to increase the capacity of Kuwait International Airport and to improve services provided to passengers, a new passenger Terminal 4 (T4) was opened. The T4 can accommodate 4.5 million passengers annually. The new passenger Terminal 5, with a capacity of 2.2 million passengers annually, has also been opened. He added that Kuwait International Airport is currently undergoing a number of development projects, including the construction of a new passenger Terminal 2, which can accommodate 25 million passengers annually and the construction of a new third runway and a new observation tower in addition to the shipping city.

Indian Minister of Civil Aviation Suresh Prabhu opened the inaugural session, which was attended by Kuwait Ambassador to India Jassem Al-Najm and senior officials from Kuwait, in the presence of a number of foreign ministers and industry officials as well as President of Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). The summit is discussing latest developments in the air transport industry and ways to enhance joint cooperation in civil aviation.

The summit, co-hosted by the Indian Ministry of Civil Aviation, the Indian Airports Authority and the FICCI, aims to provide a platform to exchange experience in innovations and latest developments in air travel and discuss the challenges facing the aviation sector. Leaders from airlines, manufacturers, investors, vendors, cargo, space industry, banking institutions and skill development agencies are also represented in the summit. — KUNA



NEW DELHI: Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah speaks during a session held as part of the Global Aviation Summit - 2019 in Mumbai, India. — KUNA

Local

# Fighting graft integral for seeking a better future for Kuwait: Minister

Amir attends, patronizes Kuwait international anti-corruption conference



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and other state officials attend the inauguration of the Kuwait international anti-corruption conference at Bayan Palace's theater yesterday. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah arrives to the venue.



A group photo featuring His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and other officials during the ceremony.

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attended and patronized at Bayan Palace's theater yesterday the Kuwait international anti-corruption conference 'Integrity for Development.' His Highness the Amir was received at the venue by Minister of Justice and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Fahad Al-Afasi and head of Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) Abdurrahman Al-Nemash. The conference was attended by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, President of the Supreme Judicial Council, President of the Constitutional Court and Head of the Cassation Court Justice Youssef Al-Mutawa'a, GCC Secretary General Abdullah Al-Zayani and other state officials and dignitaries.

**Amir's involvement**

Delivering his speech, Minister Afasi lauded His Highness the Amir's keenness on attending the conference and supporting the cause of anti-corruption, an integral part of seeking a better future for Kuwait. The minister commended His Highness the Amir's involvement in the establishment of Nazaha, saying that the entity was working vigilantly in bolstering transparency and fairness in Kuwait. A corruption-free society will focus its compass on attaining development; therefore, it should be the goal for all sectors of society, said Afasi. Corruption is one of the main reasons that plans for development worldwide faces numerous challenges, stated Afasi who called for more efforts to eradicate such social ailment. Through the backing of His Highness the Amir and his clear vision for development, Kuwait will reach its goals of welfare, security, and justice for all, affirmed Al-Afasi who commended the organizing of such important event in Kuwait, which will contribute to the state's Vision 2035.

Similarly, in his speech, Nemash lauded His Highness the Amir for hosting the international conference at Bayan Palace, saying that it reflected the leadership's keenness on supporting local and international efforts against corruption. Nemash argued that if left unnoticed, corruption would bring down any state or organization no matter how highly developed such entity is. Whether it was on an individual or state levels, all resources must be utilized to combat corruption in all of its forms, said Nemash who affirmed that through cooperation and coordination everything would be possible.

In regards to Nazaha's efforts, the official said that the authority's main objective was to protect public wealth from exploiters and wrongdoers. He attributed the success of Nazaha's cause to the efforts of the government, which should always focus on protecting society from corruption. The official commended His Highness the Amir's national campaign and strategy to combat corruption to prevent it from spreading its negative effects socially, politically and economically.

The strategy focuses on the boosting rule of law, bolstering transparency, questioning violators and spreading citizens' trust in the government, said Nemash, affirming that Nazaha would contribute to the cause to help the state both locally and internationally.

**Corruption's cost**

Meanwhile, Director of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Regional Hub for the Arab States Khaled Abdelshafi commended the State of Kuwait for its initiative to host the international conference. He stressed anti-corruption policies were very important and sought by various governments around the world. Corruption comes at a cost, said Abdelshafi, revealing that the annual cost for corruption worldwide reached \$2.6 trillion, around five percent of the world's national income. The cost in the Arab region in particular is about \$90 billion annually, he indicated. The UNDP regional official said that corruption also took its toll on other sectors, saying that economy was not the only victim. He added that to combat corruption the rule of law on all must be established no matter what the cost. The official shared with the conferees his belief that technology must be used to combat corruption, saying that new tools must be operated in corruption risk management at government entities to encourage behavioral economics, which would lead to the promotion of transparency.

Developing human resources and boosting finances to combat corruption are other methods to rid the world from this ailment, said Abdelshafi who affirmed that the UN maintained its stance on encouraging the world to fight corruption in all of its forums. While there are 186 countries who are members in the United Nations Convention against Corruption, it is very important to know that efforts against corruption was within the 17-point Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. Goal 16 calls for peace, justice and strong institutions around the world.

The UNDP official took the chance to congratulate Kuwait on setting a national strategy to combat corruption and also establishing Nazaha. He affirmed that Kuwait through its efforts to combat corruption will surely reach its goals for development exemplified by Vision 2035. — KUNA

**\$2.6 trillion worldwide cost of corruption**



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah signs a document to launch the national campaign and strategy to combat corruption, as His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah looks on.



Members of the audience watch a presentation made during the ceremony.



Minister of Justice and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Fahad Al-Afasi delivers his speech.



Head of Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) Abdurrahman Al-Nemash addresses the audience.



Director of the UNDP Regional Hub for the Arab States Khaled Abdelshafi speaks during the event.

## Local

## Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** A woman takes a picture of a statue depicting 'Hamarat Al-Gayla' by Kuwaiti artist Bader Al-Mansour at a gallery in Kuwait City on January 14, 2019. 'Hamarat Al-Gayla' (afternoon's donkey) is a mythical creature from the Kuwaiti folklore, said to follow children who leave their houses alone during the day. Fearing for their safety, parents used this creature's story to intimidate their children against going outside especially during the blazing-hot summer afternoons when streets used to be almost empty. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Cultural Office in Bahrain organizes 4th Arab Culture Attaches Forum

## Sheikh Jaber Cultural Center to host late Saudi King Fahad gallery

**MANAMA:** The Cultural Office of Kuwait in Bahrain organized the Fourth Cultural Forum for Arab Cultural Attaches under the patronage and presence of the Advisor of the Bahraini King for Media Affairs Nabil Al-Hamar. In a press statement on the sidelines of the forum, Hamar thanked Kuwait Cultural Office for organizing this forum to be attended by a group of poets and writers from various Arab countries. He also praised the great efforts to make this forum a success, including artistic performances and poetry evenings, pointing out that it is an "excellent" initiative.

Meanwhile, the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps

Ambassador of Kuwait to Bahrain Sheikh Azzam Al-Sabah expressed his gratitude and appreciation to Hamar for sponsoring this forum, which is an opportunity to exchange views and ideas among the participants. The Ambassador stressed the keenness of Bahrain to support all cultural and literary activities and seminars, and expressed his hope to hold the fifth forum with the participation of all writers and artists from different Arab countries. "Cultural cooperation between Arab embassies in Bahrain is evident of its leadership in the Arab cultural field," said the head of the Kuwaiti Cultural Office Dr

Abdullah Al-Kandari. A number of ambassadors accredited to Bahrain attended the opening of the forum.

### Photo gallery

In other news, the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center announced that it plans to host a special photo gallery about the life and achievements of late Saudi King Fahad bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud during the period of 11-23 February. The gallery would shed light on the whole life of late King Fahad and his national, regional and international achievements, Saudi Minister of State and head of the

organizing committee Prince Turki bin Mohammad bin Fahad said in a press statement on Monday. He noted that the exhibition would also highlight the main stages of late King Fahad's life in a professional and chronological order, using the latest display technologies. Prince Turki said that the gallery would allocate a special section for the history of the Kuwaiti-Saudi relations. This section would include a number of rare photos of the former Saudi and Kuwaiti leaders, he said. He expressed great appreciation to Kuwait's leaders and official for their cordial welcome and support to the planned event. — KUNA

## Kuwaiti students visit ski resort in Tajikistan

**DUSHABNE:** Kuwait's outstanding students on Monday paid a visit to Safed-Dara ski resort in Tajikistan. The visit is part of a trip organized by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) in collaboration with the Education Ministry. The program of the trip continues until tomorrow. Speaking on the sidelines of the tour, some Tajikistan's officials responsible for the resort told KUNA that there are several potentials, which can contribute to developing and expanding tourism in the society. Some specialized trainers take charge of preparing people through an organized program on skating and mountain climbing in Tajikistan, they noted. Varzob district attracts many tourists during ski season, as local residents rent their homes to tourists and sell handicrafts to them, the

officials said, pointing to some main expected projects to develop the area. They have commended the Kuwait-Tajikistan relations in all domains, expressing gratitude to the Kuwaiti delegation for visiting the resort.

Meanwhile, some Kuwaiti students expressed their impression over the tour. They said that were admired by the visit during which they watched several charming views in Tajikistan. Hamed Ashkenani, a high-school student, said he was admired by mountains, touring in the resort and good organization of the resort's officials. Ahmad Al-Kandari, another student, also voiced his delight at the tour in the resort, which included an entertainment program, amid charming places and views. The Safed-Dara ski resort is located in the Varzob district, 70 kilometers north of Dushanbe. It was officially opened in 1976. The journey program was launched in 2010 upon an initiative by the KFAED and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. Under the program, two trips are organized for two overseas countries per year for outstanding high-school students; one for 12 females and another for a dozen of males. The aim of KFAED's trip is to reward the outstanding students and encourage them for more success and excellence. — KUNA



**DUSHABNE:** Kuwaiti students pose for a group picture during their visit to a ski resort in Tajikistan. — KUNA

## KFAED offers \$6 million loan to Belize

**KUWAIT:** A loan agreement was signed in Belize yesterday by Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) and Belize, whereby the former will offer a loan worth 6 million (\$20.4 million to bankroll the Caracol Road Project. The project is meant to promote economic and social development in Belize by providing reliable year-round land transportation in a subtropical forest region, which is located in Cayo District in the west-central part of Belize, the bank said in a statement.

It will improve connectivity and accessibility to places of work and social services for the inhabitants of the various towns and settlements located along the road path, and will enhance access to touristic attractions including the Caracol Archaeological Reserve, which is located at the southern end of the road, it added. The project also includes works on 15 bridges, where 14 bridges will be new reinforced concrete construction replacing the old structures and one bridge will need rehabilitation works, according to the statement.

By signing this agreement, the loan will be the 6th loan extended by the Fund to Belize considering that the Fund had already extended to Belize 5 loans within the Transport Sector, the amount totaling KD 12.8 million. The KFAED had also extended to Belize 3 Technical Assistance facilities to finance feasibility studies in the transportation sector for a total amount of KD 478,000 (\$ 1.5 million). — KUNA

## Government debates National Youth Policy

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Minister of State for Youth Mohammad Al-Jabri and his office staff briefed the cabinet Monday about a National Youth Policy which aimed at investing in human resources in compliance with Kuwait's 2035 vision. Jabri, also Minister of Information, and his staff said the policy reflected government's commitment towards development, empowering youth and preparing them to achieve objectives of the vision. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said.

They said the National Youth Policy would cover important fields like education, innovation, health, labor, culture, social responsibility and citizenship. Saleh said in a statement following a cabinet meeting,

chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. This policy, they explained, was prepared in collaboration with youth institutes to be in harmony with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the development plan and the government program.

The cabinet, said Saleh, assigned the government's educational, health and youth committee to prepare executive mechanisms for the National Youth Policy within two weeks. Meanwhile, the cabinet discussed a report by the Ministry of Electricity and Water over collections of electricity and water bills. Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah briefed the cabinet about outcome of a recent visit by Oman's foreign minister Yusuf bin Alawi, during which they discussed supporting the GCC march, as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest.

The government, on the other hand, expressed regret over the human casualties caused by an explosion in a bakery in Paris, France, and snow storms in Algeria and the US, as well as a collapse of a coal mine in China. — KUNA

Local

# 2019-2020 development plan referred to National Assembly

## Jleeb crimes dropped by 27 percent in Dec 2018

By Meshaal Al-Enezi and A Saleh

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Economic Development Mariam Al-Aqeel yesterday referred the 2019-2020 development plan to the National Assembly after it was reviewed by the Cabinet as part of the 2015-2016/2019-2020 second development plan, said the Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Development and Planning Khaled Mahdi. Speaking at a press conference, Mahdi explained the plan includes 135 projects, 32 programs and 66 indexes, in addition to 238 policies with investment cost of KD 3,539,000,000.

Mahdi added that the projects are based on a diversified economy and focus on improving the business environment, financial sustainability, developing tourism, privatization and developing the oil sector. He added that the projects also focus on developing human resources, improving the quality of education, youth empowerment, resolving local market imbalances, integrating citizens with special needs in the employment system, improving senior citizens' services and enhancing social solidarity.

### Jleeb crimes

Combined efforts exerted by various government bodies in launching inspection campaigns in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh helped enforce the law and reduce crimes

in the area by 27 percent in Dec 2018 compared to the same period the previous year. In this regard, security sources said that the campaigns resulted in arresting 500 people and referring them to relevant authorities, closing down scores of violating stores, removing tons of violating goods and half a ton of waste, tracking down street vendors and removing violations on public property. The sources added only 841 felonies were filed in Dec 2018 compared to 1,044 in the same period of 2017, and that crimes filed were only 292 compared to 380 in Dec 2017.



### Manpower authority to limit paperwork

that the authority constantly reviews its decisions to make sure they match public interest and the labor market needs. Khodor added that the authority is taking confident steps towards automating all its services and getting rid of paper documentation. He added that the authority is currently reconsidering the fee paid for its services, noting that they are the lowest in GCC states.

### Automated services

The Public Authority for Manpower's deputy director Hassan Al-Khodor stressed

### Convoy headquarters

Kuwait Municipality's acting director Abdullah Emadi rejected a request made by the Hajj Convoy Owners Union to license headquarters in residential areas. Emadi approved a request made by the awqaf



The National Assembly.

ministry to expand a mosque in Mubarak Al-Kabeer.

### Terminal 2

With fears that the operator would monopolize the terminal, the Supreme Council for Planning and Development urged the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to take its time before contracting

an international operator to operate Terminal 2 (T2). In its report, the council called for further studies, noting that contracting an international operator and management would marginalize DGCA with all its technical, human, financial and administrative skills. The report also called for studying regional and GCC experiences in this regard.

## Interior Ministry highlights drug fighting efforts

KUWAIT: The criminal security sector at the Interior Ministry lauded the support of Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Sheikh Khalid Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and follow-up by Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Essam Al-Naham of drug fighting programs, which achieved good results in foiling attempts to get drugs through Kuwait's borders, according to statistics issued by the sector about drugs cases last year.

The sector said that all security systems are exerting efforts to improve work on programs to fight drugs and psychoactive drugs. It said joint relation with international organizations to improve current elements to implement the law. Statistics of the criminal security department for 2018: shabu (methamphetamine): 61.149 kg; opium: 1.979 kg; heroin: 27.449 kg; marijuana: 35

seedlings (69,766 kg); cocaine: 1.249 kg; qat: 41.040 kg; chemical (synthetic marijuana): 24.618 kg; psychoactive drugs: 26,220,489 million tablets; liquor: 49,074 bottles.

### Camp robbed

Detectives arrested a citizen who stole a complete camp and erected it somewhere else. A citizen told police that his camp was removed completely, so detectives were asked to work on the case. They then found a camp pitched nearby, and after the complainant told them about the camp's description, they entered the camp and the victim found all his belongings. The man who was found inside told them the camp belongs to a friend who had gone to bring some goods. When he returned, police arrested him and he confessed to stealing the camp.

### Thieves caught

Four citizens who formed a gang to steal and store the loot in a Rahaya farm were arrested by detectives, who found three stolen cars, drugs, drugs paraphernalia and power generators. Coordination was done with Kuwait Municipality to remove the farm. The arrests were made following attempts by the suspects to escape. — Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai



KUWAIT: A road roller flipped over on the Seventh Ring Road, killing its operator. Firemen from the Kabd fire station rushed to the scene shortly after the accident was reported. They recovered the Asian man's body, which was transferred to the coroner. An investigation was opened. — By Hanan Al-Saoudun

## Oil price between \$55-\$65 pb in first half of 2019: Analyst

KUWAIT: In the first half of 2019, the price of oil is expected to reach \$55 to \$65 per barrel (pb) with Kuwaiti oil at around \$50 to \$60 pb, said an analyst yesterday. Mohammad Al-Shatti, an oil analyst, said that it was too early to have a concrete idea of where the prices will be going this year due to numerous variables and challenges. With that being said, the analyst forecasted the price of the Brent crude for the second half of the year to reach \$70 to \$80 pb, and equivalent of \$65 to \$75 pb in Kuwaiti oil. He indicated that prices will vary according to forthcoming developments, noting that the continuous decrease in Iranian oil production to around three million bpd, the continuing of the agreement to cut-down on production by the OPEC and non-OPEC coalition, the status quo of the US-Chinese trade war will play huge part roles in determining the stability of prices.

Other factors will also have an impact, affirmed Shatti who indicated that the Brent crude price will probably be less than the price in 2018 by \$5 to \$10 pb. When and if the crude price goes up, it would be important to analyze the causes, said Shatti who added that it would be interesting to see how the decrease of supplies in the light of the Saudi 400,000 barrel per day (bpd) production decrease will play in the international market. He said that the decrease of Iranian oil production by 800,000 bpd and the and the OPEC and non-OPEC intention to decrease production by 1.2 million bpd for the first six months of 2019 provided an



insight of a serious intention to stabilize prices for both producers and consumers.

Meanwhile, there are still fears of the global economy entering a phase of regression as a result of various happenings including the US China trade war, which occurred late in 2018, stated the official. He added that there was still hope for a positive outlook with news regarding negotiations between the US and China, which will hopefully have some positive impact on global economy and the price of oil. The analyst touched on the status of Shale oil, saying that the only way to monitor the price of this type of oil was through the prices of other types and the status quo of the market. The US, Russia, and Saudi Arabia are the biggest producers in the world with a combined 11 million bpd, said Shatti who affirmed that the market was in need of crude oil at a reasonable production level and stable price. The coalition of oil producers had achieved great milestones in 2017-18 and hopefully such things will continue this year, he said. — KUNA

## NOTICE

COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS 1987  
IN THE SUPREME COURT No.951

Common Law and Equity Division

BETWEEN

IN THE MATTER OF ARTOC BANK AND TRUST LIMITED  
(In Liquidation)

AND

IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT  
(Chapter 279)

### NOTICE OF APPOINTMENT OF OFFICIAL LIQUIDATOR

TAKE NOTICE that pursuant to the order of the Honourable Mr. Justice Keith Thompson dated the 5<sup>th</sup> November, A.D., 2018, Mrs Renée D. Lockhart was appointed as the Official Liquidator of Artoc Bank & Trust Company Limited (In Liquidation) ("Artoct") in Place of Mr. Basil L. Ands who died on the 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2018

*Renée D. Lockhart*  
Renée D. Lockhart

Official Liquidator  
PKF Bahamas  
Pannell House  
44 Elizabeth Avenue  
Nassau, The Bahamas



Zimbabwe police fires tear gas as crackdown tightens

## Lindsey Graham: Bidding for the elusive 'Trump whisperer' status

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TORONTO: Rahaf Mohammed Al-Qunun, 18, addressed the media during a press conference in Toronto at the offices of COSTI, a refugee resettling agency yesterday. —AFP

# Trudeau notches a win with Saudi refugee

‘We believe very strongly that women’s rights are human rights’

**MONTREAL:** Prime Minister Justin Trudeau notched himself a political win ahead of Canadian legislative elections by granting asylum to the teenage Saudi girl fleeing her parents, experts here say. Trudeau sent Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland to greet 18-year-old Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun as the young woman landed in Toronto on Saturday.

As Freeland clutched Qunun's arm in the presence of reporters from across the globe she reminded everyone that human rights were Canada's priorities under Trudeau — especially the rights of women in countries like Saudi Arabia. By granting Qunun asylum, Canada was “standing up for human rights around the world, and we believe very strongly that women's rights are human rights,” Freeland said.

### Scoring one more point

Accepting the Saudi teen was “very good on a humanitarian level,” said Ferry de Kerckhove, a Canadian former diplomat and current professor at the University of Ottawa, “but it's also a very good move for the prime minister and for Canada.” “You had to see Ms. Freeland's beaming smile when she greeted the young woman,” he told AFP.

“We felt they had scored one more point” against those “awful Saudis” who murdered dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi, he said. Qunun's attempt to flee Saudi Arabia was embraced by rights groups as a beacon of defiance against repression. The Saudi teen captured the world's attention with a trail of Twitter posts that ignited a #SaveRahaf movement as she fled what she said was physical and psychological abuse

from her family in ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia.

Rights groups also said she had renounced Islam, risking prosecution in her homeland. Qunun's family has denied the abuse allegations. The publicity thwarted an attempt to deport the teen to Saudi Arabia after she arrived in Bangkok on a flight from Kuwait. Thai authorities instead turning her over to the UN's refugee agency. On Friday Trudeau made the surprise announcement that Canada would grant her asylum.

### Opening Pandora's Box

“At a time when Saudi Arabia's global image is tarnished by assassination of critics, I cannot imagine that there was not mirth in the Canadian government shared by the well-meant genuine sense of wanting to protect a refugee,” said University of Ottawa law professor Amir Attaran. But the move is certain to further strain Canada's relations with the kingdom.

Ties soured in August 2018 over Ottawa's criticism of human rights in Saudi Arabia, prompting Riyadh to expel Canada's 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. Canada is “on the right side of history” by granting Qunun asylum, said University of Waterloo political scientist Bessma Momani.

### Silence from Riyadh

“We are demonstrating our moral leadership on the issue of gender equality,” she wrote in a Globe and

Assad and offered the warring sides a peace plan that was supposed to start with a ceasefire and envisaged a political transition.

But just six months later, on August 2, Annan resigned, saying he had given it his “best” and complaining of a lack of support from major powers, implicitly referring to Russian and Chinese vetoes. “You have to understand, as an envoy, I can't want peace more than the protagonists, more than the Security Council or the international community for that matter,” he said.

### Brahimi: 'sad' to leave

Lakhdar Brahimi, a former Algerian foreign minister and one of the world's most respected peace envoys, was named to take over on August 17, 2012. The following month he met Assad in Damascus, warning that the worsening conflict “is a threat to the Syrian people, the region and the world”.

He urged “all parties to unite their efforts to find a solution”, adding that the Syrian government needed to assume greater responsibility for a cessation of hostilities. Brahimi organized in January and February 2014 the first face-to-face negotiations between the government and the opposition in Geneva, under the leadership of the United States and Russia.

However, he came up against the regime's refusal to discuss the future of Assad and on May 13, after less than two years in the job, he too quit. Brahimi said he was “very

Mail newspaper opinion piece. The diplomatic risks, she says, are minimal. “Our bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia is already at an all-time low, so there may be no lower place to go,” she said. By harnessing the power of social media to garner global attention, Qunun “has opened a Pandora's box that only Saudi Arabia can close,” Momani wrote.

As of early Monday Saudi authorities had no official reaction on the affair. De Kerckhove predicted that the Saudis will stay “rather quiet.” “My only concern,” he said, “is that the Saudis will take revenge” on jailed blogger Badawi. However he hoped that the global outcry following the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi case “will prevent them” from such action.

Attaran told AFP that the Saudis “are learning the stupidity of their incendiary foreign policy.” When in mid-2018 “they burned their political, educational and financial linkages with Canada, they left no leverage over which to rebuke Canada meaningfully.” Canada holds legislative elections in October in which Trudeau will seek a second term in office. Even though he leads in the polls, Trudeau faces an emboldened opposition and pushback on issues such as immigration, a carbon tax and environmental protection.

Also unresolved: the (Can) \$15 billion sales contract with Saudi Arabia for light-armored vehicles, signed by the previous Conservative administration of Stephen Harper. Political opponents and human rights activists have slammed Trudeau for failing to end the contract. A cancellation however would come at a steep price: at least Can \$1 billion in penalties, and a loss of jobs in Ontario province where the vehicles are built. —AFP

sad ... (to) leave Syria behind in such a bad state”. Damascus welcomed the resignation, having accused Brahimi of bias and interference in its internal affairs after he criticized its planned June 2014 presidential election as a blow to peace efforts.

### De Mistura: 'sorry'

On July 10, 2014, veteran Italian-Swedish diplomat Staffan de Mistura took on the role, going on to organize nine rounds of indirect negotiations, in Geneva and Vienna, which come to nothing. In December 2017, de Mistura called the penultimate round of talks a “golden opportunity missed” and accused the Syrian government of not seeking true dialogue with the opposition.

On October 17, 2018, he announced he would step down, citing “purely personal reasons”, but with no breakthrough in sight. He spent his last months in post pushing a UN plan to establish a committee to write a new constitution for Syria, envisaged to provide a basis for ending the war. But in December 2018 he acknowledged the body would not be in place by year's end, as had been hoped.

“I deeply regret what has not been achieved, and I am sorry more was not possible,” he said, noting there were issues with a list of participants proposed by the government. An op-ed in Syria's pro-government Al-Watan newspaper underscored his tense relationship with Assad's regime. “In Damascus, we will never be sorry for Staffan de Mistura's departure,” it said. —AFP

## Palestinians go on strike against social security law

**RAMALLAH:** Thousands of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank joined a strike yesterday against their government's proposed new social security law, fearing the fund will be mismanaged. The strike, which saw much of Ramallah, Hebron and other Palestinian cities closed, comes hours before president Mahmud Abbas is due to address the United Nations.

A few thousand people protested outside the Social Security Corporation in Ramallah, where Abbas's government is based. Under the proposed system both private employers and their employees would pay monthly into a government-managed fund, with employees receiving a pension when they retire. The government says it will provide new security for employees, arguing similar systems exist in countries across the globe.

Protesters say they do not trust the Palestinian government to manage the fund and point out there are no guarantees. They also say Israel's occupation of the West Bank means that the long-term existence of the Palestinian Authority government is far from secure. Israeli soldiers have carried out repeated raids inside Ramallah in recent weeks, including near Abbas's headquarters, following two deadly shootings.

Amer Farah, who works at Bank of Palestine in Ramallah, said that in functioning states the social security laws were important to protect citizens' futures. “But we are still under occupation, and there is no contact between parts of the country,” he told AFP, alluding to the decade-long split between the West Bank and Gaza, where Abbas's rivals Hamas are in control. “The country is not stable, neither economically nor politically. How will they implement the law?” Abbas is due to speak at the United Nations General Assembly later Tuesday, where he is expected to again call on world powers to recognize Palestine as a state. —AFP

## UN envoys who failed in quest for Syria peace

**BEIRUT:** New UN envoy Geir Pedersen, who arrived in Damascus yesterday on his first visit since taking up post, is the fourth head of UN efforts to end Syria's nearly eight-year-old civil war. The United Nations has had three previous special envoys to Syria in and all have quit as their peace bids stalled.

Pedersen — a seasoned Norwegian diplomat — took over on January 7 from Staffan de Mistura, who followed veteran Algerian diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi and former UN chief Kofi Annan. Here is a recap of their efforts in the face of the conflict that killed more than 360,000 people and displaced millions since 2011.

### Annan: did his 'best'

The late Kofi Annan, UN secretary general from 1997 to 2006, was on February 23, 2012 named to represent both the UN and the Arab League in efforts aimed at ending “violence and human rights violations, and promoting a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis”. He visited Damascus several times to meet President Bashar Al-

International

# Hindus gather by the millions in India for world's largest festival

Expected to attract more than 100 million pilgrims

**ALLAHABAD:** The largest gathering of humanity on the planet began yesterday, with tens of millions showered in rose petals and holy ash at a spectacular Hindu festival on India's sacred riverbanks. The Kumbh Mela is expected to attract more than 100 million pilgrims to Allahabad over the next seven weeks to bathe in waters considered among the holiest in Hinduism.

Allahabad rises alongside the Ganges, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati, and the banks of these hallowed rivers have transformed into a riot of color for the centuries-old festival. A gigantic tent city has emerged near the confluence of the rivers, where Hindus believe bathing during the Kumbh helps cleanse sins and brings salvation. Before dawn thousands of naked holy men smeared in ash, some on horseback, proceeded toward the rivers' meeting point known as "Sangam".

The "naga sadhus" plunged into the chilly waters before the sun rose, as nearby devotees chanted praises to the Hindu deity Shiva. "This is the purpose of my life," said Sadhu Sridhar, reapplying a grey ash to his body after emerging from the waters. Throughout the day, millions of pilgrims will queue in huge processions for their chance to plunge into the waters in northern Uttar Pradesh state. "I do not know whether my prayers were accepted, but I am satisfied after taking a dip," said Narendranath Chakraborty, a 72-year-old who travelled from Kolkata in India's east.

The last major gathering in Allahabad in 2013 drew an astonishing 120 million people, organizers said. Thirty million devotees — more than the entire population of Australia — are said to have bathed on a single auspicious day. A helicopter dropped rose petals

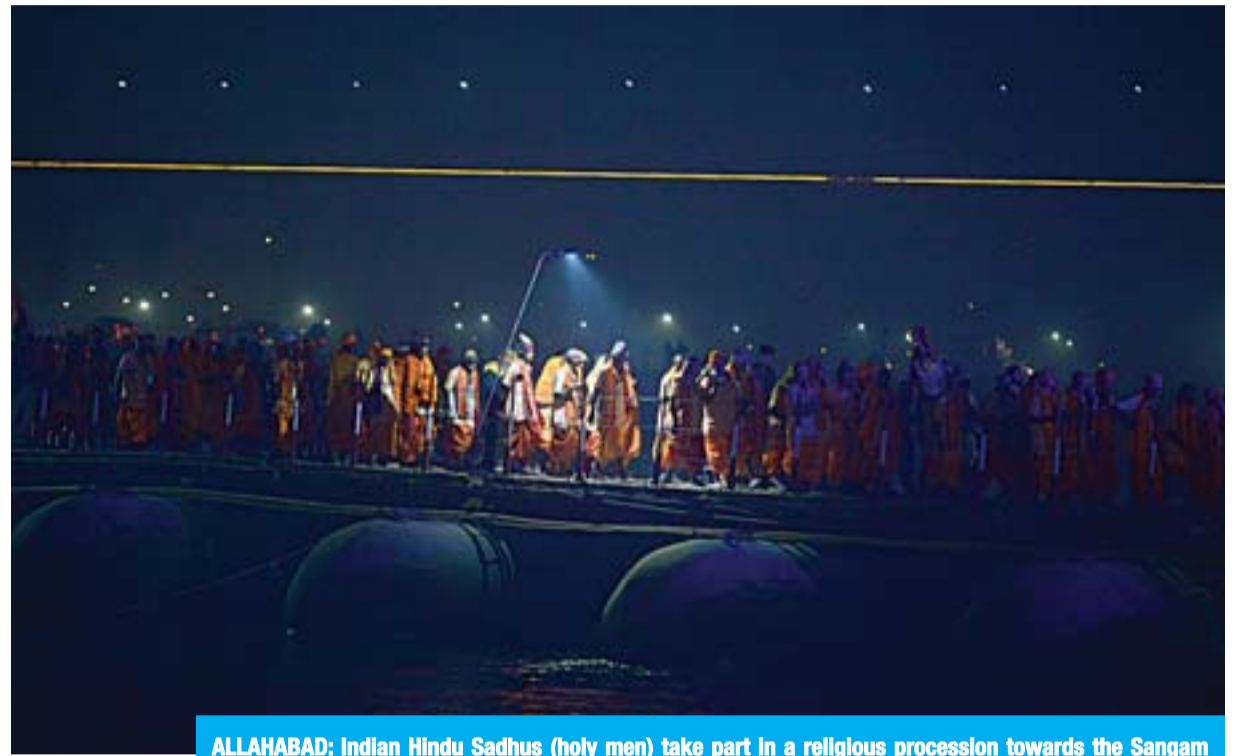
Tuesday on an endless sea of dreadlocked sadhus smoking marijuana, priests offering blessings in saffron robes and pilgrims from every corner of India. "All the Gods descend on this sacred place during this period. This is the most auspicious event for any human being," said Chandhans Pandey, a 60-year-old devotee. "I have been planning to attend (for) many years."

**Politics and faith**

Nearly 30,000 police have been deployed to oversee crowds for the huge undertaking, and prevent stampedes that have marred previous gatherings. Patrol drones buzzed over a 45-square kilometer encampment set aside specially for pilgrims — a temporary city three-quarters the size of Manhattan. Restaurants, roads and marketplaces have sprung up to cater to the huge influx of visitors, along with 122,000 toilets and 300 kilometers of road.

Festival veteran Ganeshanand Bharamachari, from nearby Varanasi, said the Kumbh had grown in popularity in recent years. "People, mostly from cities, are becoming increasingly religious because the western life they were living has not led them anywhere," the 78-year-old told AFP. The Uttar Pradesh state government, led by a firebrand Hindu priest, has heavily promoted this year's festival, which comes as India prepares for a general election due by May.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party is in power in Uttar Pradesh, visited Allahabad in December to inaugurate a high-tech command centre to manage the Kumbh. The historic city was even renamed Prayagraj in October by the state's conservative government, stripping its centuries-old name and replacing it with an ancient Hindu title. But it is still



**ALLAHABAD:** Indian Hindu Sadhus (holy men) take part in a religious procession towards the Sangam area as they cross a pontoon bridge during the "royal entry" for the Kumbh Mela. —AFP

widely known as Allahabad, the name given by Islamic rulers that reigned over India hundreds of years ago.

According to Hindu mythology, gods and demons fought a war over a sacred pitcher, or kumbh, con-

taining the nectar of immortality. During the tussle, a few drops fell to earth at four different locations — one being Allahabad. The Kumbh, which runs until March 4, was recognized as an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO in 2017. —AFP

## Indian temple trailblazer beaten by mother-in-law

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM:** One of the two women who infuriated Hindu traditionalists by entering a revered shrine in India was attacked by her mother-in-law yesterday as soon as she returned home after days on the run, police said. Kanakadurga, 39, had been in hiding since she made history by setting foot in the Sabarimala temple on January 2 along with Bindu Ammini, sparking days of unrest in the southern state of Kerala.

Sabarimala, set on top of a hill in a tiger reserve, is dedicated to the celibate deity Ayyappa, and followers believe letting in women of menstruating age goes against his wishes. A September ruling by India's Supreme Court that all women could enter the temple angered devotees, including supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi — who was in Kerala on Tuesday — and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

After moving to more than 10 different safe houses, Kanakadurga, who uses only one name, returned home yesterday morning, only to be attacked by the enraged relative — reportedly with a stick.

"A case was registered by

Kanakadurga against her mother-in-law who, she said, attacked her when she arrived home this morning at 7.15 am," a police official in Perinthalmanna town told AFP on condition of anonymity. A complaint had been registered against the mother-in-law for "voluntarily causing hurt by dangerous weapons or means" and "wrongful restraint", reports said.

Kanakadurga, a government employee, was admitted to a hospital in the nearby city of Malappuram where protesters had begun gathering and chanting slogans. It was not known immediately how serious her injuries were. In a recent interview with AFP while still in hiding, Kanakadurga said she had gone to Sabarimala to exercise her right as a devotee and to reinforce gender equality.

**'Purification'**

She also said her family was angry with her as she had not told them in advance about her temple visit, fearing they would try and prevent her. After Bindu and Kanakadurga entered the temple, the head priest shut the temple doors for an hour-long "purification ceremony" in line with the widespread belief that menstruating women are impure. Sabarimala has become a new flashpoint for Indian women in their battle for social change ahead of elections in the world's biggest democracy due by May.

In 2012 the brutal gang rape and murder of a woman on a Delhi bus sparked huge protests and shone a spotlight on the shocking level of sexu-



**KOCHI:** India police intervene as members of Sabarimala Karma Samithi try to disrupt a celebratory meeting after two women entered Sabarimala Ayyappa temple, at the High Court Junction. —AFP

al violence in the country. Last year India witnessed its own "#MeToo" movement. The women's entry into Sabarimala sparked days of clashes involving Hindu right-wing activists, devotees, riot police using tear gas and water cannon, and supporters of Kerala's leftist state government — which supports the entry of women.

Mobs damaged buses, burnt effigies and threw stones and crude bombs on the streets. One person was killed and hundreds arrested. Believed to be one of the holiest Hindu temples, Sabarimala receives millions of visitors every year. Those wishing to visit undergo a 41-day period of introspection and detach-

ment known as vratha, abstaining from sex, meat, intoxicants and even shaving. Only those who have observed the vratha and carry the irrumude, a symbolic offering, can enter the main courtyard up 18 divine golden steps.

The sacred offerings, tied in a cloth usually carried on the head or shoulders, include coconuts, rose water, rice and pepper. The Supreme Court is due to start hearing a legal challenge on its ruling from January 22. Its ruling on Sabarimala was the latest to irk conservatives in the deeply traditional country of 1.25 billion people, after it overturned a colonial-era ban on gay sex and on adultery. —AFP

## Taleban claim Kabul truck bomb attack, warn more to follow

**KABUL:** The Taleban yesterday claimed responsibility for a powerful truck bomb in Kabul that ripped through surrounding neighborhoods, killing at least four people including an Indian national, and wounding more than 100 in the latest assault on the Afghan capital. In a grim message, the militants also vowed to carry out more attacks in the city in direct response to the recent appointment of former spy-master and anti-Taliban veteran Amrullah Saleh as interior minister.

Monday evening's explosion near the heavily fortified Green Village foreign compound shook Kabul and comes as diplomats ramp up efforts to end the 17-year war in Afghanistan, which by some estimates was the world's deadliest conflict in 2018. The force of the blast was felt across the sprawling city, initially causing confusion about the exact location of the attack. It shattered the windows of surrounding houses and shops.

Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid told journalists on WhatsApp that four attackers blew up an explosives-packed truck before entering Green Village and "killing many" for-

eigners. Four people, including three guards and one civilian, have been confirmed dead and 113 wounded, the health ministry said. An Indian national was among those killed, India's foreign ministry said in a statement. Kabul police spokesman Basir Mujahid told AFP that most of the victims were Afghan civilians.

"Seven or eight people have been injured in every house around here including myself," said resident Mohammad Aref. "When I came out, the street was full of bodies of the dead and injured." Until recently some UN staff had lived and worked at Green Village, which is heavily protected by cement blast walls. But interior ministry spokesman Najib Danish said earlier the compound was now largely empty and "only a number of guards" were left. A much bigger UN compound along with Afghanistan's customs office and headquarters for the Independent Election Commission are also nearby.

**'Sabotage'**

It is the second Taleban-claimed attack on a foreign compound in Kabul in recent months. In late November a vehicle bomb exploded outside the compound of British security firm G4S, killing at least 10 people. Five G4S employees were among the dead. That was followed by a suicide and gun attack on a government compound in Kabul on December 24 that killed at least 43 people, making it one of the deadliest assaults on the city last year.

The latest bombing comes as US



**KABUL:** An Afghan woman sits next to a wounded child after receiving treatment at Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital after a powerful truck bomb attack. —AFP

peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad visits the region for further meetings aimed at bringing an end to the war in Afghanistan. Khalilzad, who met Taleban representatives last month in Abu Dhabi, is travelling to Afghanistan as well as China, India and Pakistan on the trip lasting through January 21. Afghan officials suggested the latest attack appeared to be an attempt to derail the burgeoning peace process, vowing the bombing would not go unanswered. "As we are trying to reach a regional consensus on peace, the enemy is trying to sabotage it," said National Security Advisor Hamdullah

Mohib on social media. "I strongly condemn this attack and promise I will seriously investigate and avenge it," he added.

Last month's leaking of US President Donald Trump's plan to slash troop numbers in Afghanistan, however, has threatened to derail the efforts and alarmed many Afghans who fear a return to oppressive Taleban rule. Diplomats in Kabul have long said any negotiations with the militants would likely happen as fighting continued on the battlefield — cold comfort for Afghan civilians who have long borne the brunt of the war. —AFP

## Model claiming Trump secrets to be deported

**PATTAYA:** A Belarusian model who claimed she had proof of Russian efforts to help Donald Trump win office was set to be deported after being convicted yesterday nearly a year after her arrest in Thailand for participating in a "sex training course". Anastasia Vashukevich, known by her pen name Nastya Rybka, has been held with several others since a police raid in the sleazy seaside resort of Pattaya last February.

She had travelled to Thailand after becoming embroiled in a political scandal with Russian aluminum tycoon Oleg Deripaska, a one-time associate of US President Trump's disgraced former campaign director Paul Manafort. She set off a scramble for details after promising to reveal "missing puzzle pieces" regarding claims the Kremlin aided Trump's 2016 election victory. But the material never surfaced and critics dismissed it as a publicity stunt.

The Pattaya Provincial Court convicted her and seven co-defendants after they suddenly pleaded guilty to multiple charges including solicitation and illegal assembly. "The court found them all guilty of soliciting sex," said a judge on the panel, handing them three-year sentences and \$6,000 fines but reducing the sentences to time served. "The court releases them today," the judge added.

Thai immigration chief Surachate Hakpam said they would be transferred to an immigration detention centre in Bangkok and deported. "The next step, I will coordinate with the Russian government for their deportation, which will likely take one week for all the processes to complete," Surachate told AFP. "They are blacklisted from Thailand permanently for conducting bad deeds." —AFP

## Singapore vows to cane Briton despite protest

**SINGAPORE:** Singapore insisted yesterday it would still cane a British man convicted of drug smuggling despite a plea from London not to proceed with the punishment. Yuen Ye Ming was sentenced by a Singapore court last year to 20 years in jail and 24 strokes of the cane after he was convicted of drug-related offences, including trafficking, consumption and possession.

Flogging with a rattan cane, a legacy of British colonial rule, is a common punishment in Singapore and the city-state rarely backs down in applying the law. Yuen was first arrested in August 2016 for drug-related offences and was convicted last year but released on bail pending sentencing. Singapore's interior ministry said. While out on bail, he was arrested again for similar narcotics offences, the ministry said.

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt had asked his Singaporean counterpart during a visit to the city-state this month that Yuen be spared caning, a spokesman for Britain's foreign ministry said. "We strongly oppose the use of corporal punishment, such as caning, in all cases," the spokesman said. "The Foreign Secretary personally raised this with the Singaporean Minister for Foreign Affairs earlier this month." But Singapore insisted the punishment would be carried out. —AFP

## International

## Zimbabwe police fires tear gas as crackdown tightens

## Government more than doubled petrol prices at the weekend

**BULAWAYO:** Zimbabwe police fired tear gas to disperse protesters in the second city of Bulawayo yesterday, a day after the country was rocked by violent demonstrations against a sharp hike in fuel prices. Police moved in after protesters chanted for the removal of President Emmerson Mnangagwa and as looting broke out in Bulawayo, a stronghold of opposition to the ruling ZANU-PF party, an AFP reporter witnessed. The streets of the capital, Harare, were deserted after Monday's demonstrations when public anger over Zimbabwe's worsening economic crisis erupted. The government more than doubled petrol prices at the weekend after months of shortages when drivers have been forced to queue for hours to fill up, while essentials such as bread and medicines have also been scarce.

In the capital Harare, most shops remained closed after Monday's protests and minibuses taxis that usually transport workers from the suburbs to the city centre were not running. In Kuwadzana suburb, police were on patrol and forcing people off the streets. One resident, Tawanda Mataya, said he and his 17-year-old son had been beaten up by police. "It's so painful," Mataya told AFP showing swellings on his back. "I was standing at my gate to assess whether I could go to work then this group of police who were passing by started beating me." My son who heard me screaming and opened the window to see what was happening was slapped several times."

## Pressure on president

In a televised address late Saturday, President Emmerson Mnangagwa announced the fuel price hike, saying it was needed to tackle severe shortages and "rampant" illegal trading. Mnangagwa took over from long-time ruler and autocrat Robert Mugabe following

a military takeover in 2017, before winning a disputed election in July.

Currently on a tour of European countries, Mnangagwa will attend the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland, next week. Speaking in Russia on Monday, Mnangagwa said the fuel price increase "was necessary and still is". On Monday, the police had dispersed hundreds of protesters who burnt tyres, erected barricades and looted businesses on the first day of a three-day general strike. Security Minister Owen Ncube said the security action caused "loss of life" without giving figures on the number of dead and wounded.

The Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights said 13 people had sustained gunshot wounds in and around Harare on Monday. At least 200 people were arrested during the disturbances. Zimbabwe's mobile phone networks and internet were partially shut down, with one industry source saying the systems had been jammed and many users complaining of limited access. Yesterday morning the Twitter account of the Ministry of Information said that "public order has been restored".

The Zimbabwe Trade Union Confederation (ZCTU), for its part, reiterated its call to strike. "Today it's day two of the Shutdown. We urge workers and citizens everywhere to stay at home," ZCTU tweeted. "Our struggle is genuine and there must be economic reforms for the poor to survive."

Zimbabwe's economy has been in dire straits since hyperinflation wiped out savings between 2007 and 2009, when the Zimbabwean dollar was abandoned in favor of the US dollar. Zimbabweans rely on electronic payments as US dollar notes are in short supply. The local "bond note" currency, introduced in 2016, is little trusted and falling in value. Mnangagwa — Mugabe's



**BULAWAYO:** A police officer removes tyres set by protesters during a "stay-away" demonstration against the doubling of fuel prices. —AFP

former deputy — has claimed that he represented a fresh start for the country and vowed to revive the economy by attracting foreign investment. In Bulawayo, one night guard on duty outside a closed shop told AFP

that his colleagues had not turned up to work yesterday. "Things are hard, and the protest and the protests should continue as long as they are peaceful," said Nicholas Banda. —AFP

## National security under scrutiny at Nigeria vote

**LAGOS:** In Nigeria, where religious and ethnic identity often determines support for a candidate, Mudi Bawa might well have been expected to vote for Muhammadu Buhari in 2015. Both are northern Muslims. But the fisherman had another reason to choose Buhari: the hope he could help him return to the home he had to flee when Boko Haram attacked.

"There was tremendous improvement in security when Buhari became president," said Bawa, from Baga, in the northeastern state of Borno. "But unfortunately, in the last few months Boko Haram have resurfaced... The security situation has deteriorated," he told AFP. Few but the hardest of headline presidential supporters would disagree with Bawa's assessment, as the country once again prepares to go to the polls.

In opposition, Buhari benefited politically from the fall-out of the conflict, which saw the jihadists capture swathes of territory and declare a caliphate. President Goodluck Jonathan was lambasted for his government's response to the threat, and particularly his reaction to the high-profile kidnapping of 219 schoolgirls. Buhari, the former army general who once headed a military government in the 1980s, was seen as a better bet to restore order.

## Persistent attacks

He made a strong start, recognizing the need to re-energize the moribund regional force and rally the international community for support against extremism. Lost ground was recovered: the threat to sovereignty diminished; soldiers' morale improved as more equipment was provided. Thousands of hostages were rescued or released, including 107 of the 219 kidnapped Chibok girls; many internally displaced people began to return home. —AFP

## Police raid Barcelona cell suspected of plotting attack

**BARCELONA:** Spanish police launched a counter-terrorism operation in Barcelona and a nearby city yesterday against a cell suspected of plotting an attack, a police spokesman said. Two people had been arrested in Barcelona and Igualada, 60 kilometers west of the Catalan capital, as part of the raid, the spokesman for Catalonia's police force, the Mossos d'Esquadra, told AFP. Further arrests were expected, he added.

"The goal (of the cell) was to attack but we are still investigating which places may have been targeted," the spokesman said. Over 100 officers were taking part in the "counter-terrorism operation" launched by the Catalan police force at six am (0500 GMT), the Mossos said on Twitter. Police stormed five properties in Barcelona and a sixth in Igualada as part of the operation.

Armed officers, wearing black ski masks, stood guard outside a building in central Barcelona as boxes and bags were removed from a flat, according to an AFP reporter on the scene. The operation was ordered by Spain's High Court, which is charged with terrorism investigations, and it is focused on "the crimes of terrorism, public health offences and organized crime", the Mossos said. —AFP

## Merkel's 'crown princess' seeks to chart own path

**BERLIN:** Dismissed by some as a mini-Angela Merkel, the new leader of Germany's centre-right CDU party and likely next chancellor has marked the turn of the year by underlining a change in tone from her mentor. Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, known in Germany as AKK after her initials, raised eyebrows yesterday when she said her party will hold a critical session on February 11 on Germany's immigration policies.

"By reviewing the policies with regards to refugees since 2015, the new boss of the CDU shows that she's not a younger version of Angela Merkel," the Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper said. "She is positioning herself clearly against Merkel", whose decision in 2015 to keep Germany's borders open to refugees has deeply divided the country. AKK's planned debate on the decision to let in more than a million asylum seekers was a way to openly contradict Merkel, who has always said debate about the past would amount to "frittering away" time.

"A month after her closely-run election, Kramp-Karrenbauer has started to orientate the CDU her way, setting its work program," wrote the Frankfurter

Allgemeine Zeitung. In a symbolic gesture suggesting a departure from Merkel's years, AKK is also using a different office at the CDU's headquarters from that of her predecessor. Kramp-Karrenbauer, 56, was elevated to the "crown princess" position after Merkel tapped her to be the party's number two as general secretary early last year.

Following Merkel's announcement that she would not run for another term as CDU chair after 18 years in the job, Kramp-Karrenbauer won a party election in early December to take over the post. Merkel has also said that she would step down as chancellor at the end of her mandate in 2021, meaning that the new chairwoman of the CDU stands a real chance of succeeding her as Germany's leader. Kramp-Karrenbauer's win in December marked not only a victory for herself, but also one against an anti-Merkel rival, Friedrich Merz, who had championed a more conservative tone.

## 'So much unity'

Her narrow win raised questions about whether she would be able to get Merz's followers to fall in line. Since then however, the markedly more conservative line pursued by AKK has repositioned the party on a slew of issues where Merkel's critics had accused her of being too moderate. Beyond migration, AKK on Sunday took an environmental NGO to task over its anti-diesel campaign and pledged that she would not endanger thousands of jobs in the automobile sector.

On social issues, she has raised the question of reexamining dual nationality



**POTSDAM:** Leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (L) and German Chancellor Angela Merkel wait at the beginning of a two-day meeting of the Christian Democrat's Union (CDU) leadership. —AFP

for those with foreign origins. The devout Catholic has for long said she was opposed to gay marriage. With one fell swoop, she has not only placated Merz's followers for now, but also introduced a detente with the Bavarian sister party Christian Social Union, which has for years been sniping at Merkel's heels.

"There has not been so much unity in the Union in a long time," noted national news agency DPA. The strategy appeared to be paying off for now, with the CDU-CSU polling at just above 30 percent and holding the far-right at 14 percent. A key test will come during European elections in

May, followed by three state elections in the autumn in eastern Germany, a stronghold of the far-right.

Even if the CDU-CSU alliance were to hold its ground in the elections, poor scores for its junior coalition partner the Social Democrats (SPD) could prompt the centre-left party to quit the bloc. And Kramp-Karrenbauer's repositioning of the party towards more conservative policies could lead to clashes with the SPD, making life more difficult for Merkel. The SPD, which is struggling in the polls, is already bristling at Kramp-Karrenbauer's call to slash taxes. —AFP

## Brussels museum gunman is linked to other jihadists

**BRUSSELS:** The Frenchman accused of murdering four people at the Jewish museum of Belgium had links with other jihadists, including those behind the Brussels and Paris attacks, investigators say. At least one lawyer wants to see if defendant Mehdi Nemmouche sheds more light on such links during his trial that opened last Thursday for the May 24, 2014 museum shooting spree.

The first opportunity may come on Tuesday when Nemmouche begins testifying in his defense in a Brussels criminal court. Guillaume Lys, the lawyer for the French Association of Victims of Terrorism (AFVT), hopes his cross-examination may yield more detail about the November 13, 2015 Paris attacks. "Our goal is to be able to have more information about the links between these people and others whom we know and who committed other acts," said Lys, who represents a civil party in the trial. The following links have already been established by investigators:

## Abdelhamid Abaaoud

Weeks before the Jewish museum attack, Nemmouche was in regular telephone contact with Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the presumed mastermind of the Paris

attacks that killed 130 people and wounded hundreds more. Abaaoud was killed in a police shootout days after those attacks. The calls took place in January 2014, when Nemmouche had just left Syria and was preparing to travel to southeast Asia via Turkey. His trip would take in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore and Thailand. The two men are believed to have fought together in Syria in 2013.

## Salah Abdeslam

When the Brussels suicide bombings killed 32 people and wounded hundreds on March 22, 2016, both Nemmouche and Paris attacks suspect Salah Abdeslam were in the same prison in the Belgian city of Bruges. Abdeslam had been arrested in Brussels just days before after being on the run since the Paris massacre several months earlier. Belgian investigators in the prison on the day of the bombings heard the two men talk to each other with voices raised as their cells were not next to each other.

Nemmouche told Abdeslam that a "Brahim" and a "Sofian" had died in the bombings at Zaventem Airport, the main international airport outside Brussels. For investigators, these first names correspond to those of the airport suicide bombers Ibrahim El Bakraoui and Najim Laachraoui, also known as Soufiane Kayal. This information suggested to investigators that the pair knew the attackers.

## Najim Laachraoui

Nemmouche shared other links with Najim Laachraoui, who was also believed to be one of the bomb makers for the Paris attacks. Four French journalists have identified the two as



**BRUSSELS:** Defense lawyers Henri Laquay (L) is seen prior to a hearing of the trial regarding the terrorist attack at the Jewish Museum. —AFP

among their jailers after they were kidnapped in Syria in June 2013 and released on April 18, 2014. Investigators also found an audio file attributed to Laachraoui from a computer seized near an alleged hideout of the Brussels bombers. It was believed he recorded it in February or March 2016. The Belgian jihadist was heard suggesting kidnapping celebrities in order to exchange them for "brothers" in prison, including Nemmouche.

## Salim Benghalem

The kidnapped French journalists also identified as another of their jailers Salim Benghalem, a French jihadist leader who was believed to have been killed in Syria at

the end of 2017. France's Le Monde newspaper said he had duties that were more important than those of Nemmouche as he was suspected of having played a key role in dispatching jihadists from France. In France, Benghalem gravitated toward the "Buttes-Chaumont" jihadist network, named after a park in Paris. There he reportedly met the Kouachi brothers, who carried out the January 7, 2015 attack against the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo, killing 12 people. He also met Amady Coulibaly, the man who the next day murdered a female police officer before killing four people at a Kosher supermarket in Paris on January 9. —AFP



International

# Lindsey Graham: Bidding for the elusive 'Trump whisperer' status

The Republican lawmaker has emerged as a crucial Trump collaborator

WASHINGTON: Senator Lindsey Graham once said Donald Trump should "go to hell." Trump called him a "nut job." Today, they are unlikely political allies, with the powerful South Carolinian influencing the president on multiple fronts. While they got off on the wrong foot, the Republican lawmaker has emerged as a crucial Trump collaborator, even if they remain at odds on some prominent issues.

On immigration, tensions with Saudi Arabia, criminal justice and the partial government shutdown now in its fourth week, Graham has repeatedly weighed in, not just in public fora but behind closed doors with Trump. And as the Senate Judiciary Committee's new chairman, the often audacious Republican will be able to again showcase his support for Trump's nominees on Tuesday, when his panel begins hearings on Bill Barr, the president's nominee to become attorney general. But is the straight-talking, critic-turned-ally also a so-called "Trump whisperer" who can help the president navigate Washington's pitfalls?

"That's what I think of whenever I think of Lindsey," Republican Senator Mike Rounds told AFP about the moniker, which has circulated ever since Graham started golfing with Trump in 2017 despite their differences. "He's one of the guys who can go in and sit down and have a frank discussion with the president." Those discussions do not always go Graham's way. On Monday, Trump dismissed the senator's effort to allow closed-down gov-

ernment agencies to re-open while a debate proceeds over border security and immigration. "That was the suggestion that Lindsey made, but I did reject it," Trump told reporters at the White House.

**'This is hell'**

When Graham's gavel bangs, it will cement his role as a Capitol Hill power player. The senator has said he wants a respectful hearing, after Democrats expressed worry about Barr's criticism of the accusations of collusion between Trump and Russia. Graham's fiery indignation against Democrats in another forum last year — Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh's hearing — made him a conservative rock star. "This is not a job interview. This is hell," Graham thundered after losing patience with Democrats who grilled Kavanaugh about sexual assault allegations from decades ago. "You all want power. God, I hope you never get it," he seethed, pointing his finger at stone-faced Democrats.

Kavanaugh was eventually confirmed to the high court, a huge victory for the White House, which sang Graham's praises. Graham's performance may have had a political calculation. He is up for re-election in 2020, and should he appear too centrist or if Trump turns against him, he could face a difficult primary challenge from the right.

Graham, whose own 2016 presidential campaign was short-lived, spit venom at Trump during the race, calling him a "kook" unfit for office. In 2017 he would savage

Trump for his bombastic tweets, and he criticized the president's weak response to a violent white supremacist rally in Virginia. But he also insisted Trump was growing into the job. They played golf, dined at the White House and spoke often by phone.

**Congressional confidante**

As a national security hawk, Graham operated in lockstep with his best friend in the Senate, the late John McCain, on major issues like Iraq and campaign finance reform. McCain never warmed to Trump, and clashed bitterly with him on issues like health care, awkwardly putting Graham on the opposite side of key votes. But with McCain away from Washington for much of 2018 due to illness — he died in late August — Graham inched closer to Trump's orbit.

"If you know anything about me, I want to be relevant," Graham told CNN days after McCain's death. "I want to make sure that this president, Donald Trump, who I didn't vote for, ran against, is successful." Eventually he became a congressional confidante, and was looked to multiple times to broker deals on immigration. Those deals have yet to bear fruit, but Graham remains at the center of the negotiations. He has also publicly pushed back against the president on foreign policy.

In December he severely criticized Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammed bin Salman over the murder of a US-based journalist in the Saudi consulate in Turkey. And he bluntly urged Trump to reconsider his decision to pull



WASHINGTON DC: US Sen Lindsey Graham arrives at the office of Senate Majority Leader Sen. Mitch McConnell for a meeting January 10, 2019 at the Capitol. — AFP

US troops out of Syria. Republican colleagues nevertheless sound pleased with the relationship. "It's been a positive," Senator Marco Rubio said. Graham and Trump do not see eye to eye on everything, Rubio added, "but I'm glad Lindsey's talking to him about things."

On the Democratic side, Senator Cory Booker said he was happy that Graham's

"relationship with the White House helped" bring about a major reform of the criminal justice system. Graham has been in Congress since 1995, often showing a self-deprecating humor. As a single male, he has faced rumors about his sexuality. Last October he told celebrity website TMZ: "To the extent that it matters, I'm not gay." — AFP

## US extends troop deployment at Mexico border

WASHINGTON: The Pentagon said Monday it would extend until September 30 the deployment of active-duty soldiers and Coast Guard members at the US-Mexico border, while expanding the mission to include surveillance and detection. Lengthening the troops' mission past a January 31 deadline, the Pentagon said it was "transitioning its support at the southwestern border from hardening ports of entry to mobile surveillance and detection, as well as concertina wire emplacement between ports of entry."

"DoD will continue to provide aviation support," the statement added, referring to the Department of Defense. The Pentagon already has about 2,350 active-duty troops stationed along the boundary, deployed under a controversial order President Donald Trump gave last year before midterm elections in November as several thousand Central American migrants made their way to the border to seek asylum from violence and poverty in their own countries.

Critics decried Trump's order as a costly political stunt to galvanize supporters ahead of the vote, in which his Republicans lost control of the House of Representatives. Trump spoke of a "national emergency" and an "invasion" — initially suggesting US troops could shoot migrants if they threw stones at the US border. The US military is not allowed in almost any case to get involved in domestic law enforcement and the border mission has put the supposedly non-political military in an uncomfortable spotlight. About 2,200 National Guardsmen were supporting border operations even before Trump sent the active-duty troops. The unusual deployment was supposed to end in mid-December, but the Department of Homeland Security asked that it be extended until January, a date which is now further prolonged.

**Some troops grumbled**

The troops' role had primarily been to erect miles of concertina-wire fencing along popular crossing points. Trump is unwavering in his demand for a border barrier, which has triggered a major impasse with



CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico: A police officer closes the door on a van outside the Casa del Migrante facility as they help bring people trying to immigrate into the United States to a port of entry to turn themselves in to the US Customs and Border Protection personnel for asylum consideration. — AFP

legislators and a partial government shutdown that is entering its fourth week. The president only recently backed away from talk of an emergency declaration that would have freed up Department of Defense funds for a border barrier, after pressing it for days as a way out of the continuing budget standoff.

The troop deployment was one of several issues on which Trump and former Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis disagreed before he resigned in December after the leader's shock decision to pull troops from Syria. Mattis said front-line border troops would only carry batons. In November visited troops on the border and reiterated that their job in the short term was to assist under-resourced Customs and Border Protection agents and put up physical obstacles. But "longer term, it's somewhat to be determined," he said at the time.

Some rank-and-file troops initially grumbled about the purpose of the mission to US media before they were placed under strict instructions not to voice personal opinions to the press. Several soldiers AFP spoke to say their time on the border provided valuable real-world training, albeit without the risks of combat. Twice since November, US Border Patrol agents have fired tear gas during attempted mass migrant crossings in the San Diego area. — AFP

## House Republicans censure colleague for racist remarks

WASHINGTON: US House Republican leaders delivered an extraordinary rebuke Monday to an Iowa congressman from their party over his recent remarks deemed as racist, with some calling for his resignation. Steve King, whose comments last week about white supremacy sparked bipartisan outrage, will be stripped of all committee assignments, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy's office said.

"Steve's remarks are beneath the dignity of the Party of Lincoln and the United States of America," McCarthy said. "His comments call into question whether he will treat all Americans equally, without regard for race and ethnicity." King, a strong supporter of President Donald Trump, is an opponent of illegal immigration and unabashed defender of white culture. In an interview last week with The New York Times, the 69-year-old asked how certain terms had become insulting or inappropriate.

"White nationalist, white supremacist, Western civilization — how did that language become offensive?" said King in his latest in a long list of similar comments. The outcry was comprehensive, with the Senate's lone black Republican, Tim Scott, delivering a withering attack on King and the "silence" within the Republican Party when such remarks are made. Top Senate Republican Mitch McConnell called the

Iowa conservative "unwelcome and unworthy of his elected position."

Others like Senator Mitt Romney went further, urging King to resign and leave the party. Amid the uproar, President Donald Trump told reporters asking about his reaction to King, "I really haven't been following it." King has used explosive racial language for years, often without consequences. In 2018 he declared that "we can't restore our civilization with other people's babies." The House speaker at the time, Paul Ryan, said he hoped King "misspoke."

With pressure mounting Monday, McCarthy took action. His move, approved by the House Republican Steering Committee, effectively prevents King from putting his stamp on legislation, other than through a vote on the House floor. King called McCarthy's castigation an "unprecedented assault on my freedom of speech."

King was re-elected in November for a ninth term despite caustic rhetoric about what he called efforts to supplant Europe's white Christian majority with minorities. Some Democrats mocked Republicans for their sudden outrage. "GOP leaders finally acknowledge Steve King as the blatant racist he is," congressman Earl Blumenauer tweeted. "The question is...what took them so long? He has been spewing hate for years." — AFP

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# Business

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2019

**12** Hundreds of flights axed as fresh strike hits German airports



**13** VW and Ford confirm alliance to build commercial vans, pickups



**14** Turkish Airlines reached 80.2% load factor in December 2018



Millionaire Faisal Tareq Habib Arab and his father with Gulf Bank CEO and team

## Gulf Bank receives new Al-Danah millionaire

KUWAIT: The Gulf Bank recently received the winner of the KD 1 million Al-Danah prize Faisal Tareq Habib Arab and his father at the bank's headquarters. They were received at the bank by Tony Maher and the bank's management team and presented him the prize.

The winner's name was declared during a raffle draw and a special ceremony that was held on January 10 at the Avenues.

Speaking on the occasion, Arab, who works for the Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) said that he was still young when his father opened the Al-Danah account in his name. He said he continued saving money in the account when he started his career but had never dreamt of winning one million dinars.

Gulf Bank's Deputy Director for Foreign Communications, Ahmed Al-Amir said the bank congratulates the winner and welcomes his visit. "Arab is the 13th winner of this grand prize that had been given away for the last 11 years now to make more millionaires.

Gulf Bank held its weekly draw on 13th January 2019 announcing the names of its winners for the week from the 6th January till the 10th January 2019, in which five winners received KD 1,000 each, every week.

**The winners this week are:**

- Turki Maiah Ali Saleh
- Ebtelal Abdullah Ahmad Alramadhan
- Abbas Fakhr Aldin Tawala
- Ghalyh Qasi Ahmed Aldrweh
- Mohammad Abdulredha Hussain Aaleem

Gulf Bank encourages customers to increase their



Ahmad Al-Amir

chances of winning with Al-Danah by depositing more into their Gulf Bank accounts using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services.

Al-Danah offers a number of 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 chances of winning the draws through the 'Al-Danah Chances' calculator available on the Gulf Bank website and app.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is 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. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to their account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the weekly draw within two days. To take part in the Al-Danah 2019 upcoming quarterly and yearly draws, customers must meet the required hold period for each draw.



Millionaire and his father with Gulf Bank team



Winner with Mohammed Al-Qattan



The millionaire and his father

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Ramadan Ali Hassan Abdullah Al-Sharah   2015	Mohammed Ahmaed Thlaat Helal Mahmood   December 2008
Madiha Abdulla Bouftain   2014	Hani Hussein Mohammed Al Hababi   August 2008
Zahra Khashouei   2013	Faisal Misalam Fahed Al Ajmy   May 2008
Salama Mohammad Mutlaq Al Rahaili   2012	Badriya Solaiman Al Qattan   2007

All draws are conducted under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce. Beginning September 2018, the Al Danah account, as well as the quarterly and yearly draws, are being reviewed by Ernst & Young.

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Business

# VW and Ford confirm alliance to build commercial vans, pickups

Toyota, Mazda plan to open a joint factory in US



DETROIT: A 1964 VW Beetle is on display in the VW area during day two of the 2019 The North American International Auto Show yesterday at the Cobo Center in Detroit, Michigan. —AFP



DUESSELDORF: In this file photo, the logos of car makers Ford (left) and Volkswagen (VW) are seen at the expo "Caravan Salon Duesseldorf" at the fairgrounds in Duesseldorf, Germany. —AFP

DETROIT: Volkswagen and Ford announced yesterday that the automakers had agreed to an alliance to jointly develop commercial vans and pickups starting in 2022 in a bid to reduce costs.

The announcement came after more than six months of talks between the car giants which has also included discussions around autonomous and electrification technologies. The companies said they had agreed to "investigate collaboration on autonomous vehicles, mobility services and electric vehicles and have started to explore those opportunities."

The deal reached between the American and German automakers to develop commercial vans and medium-sized pickups as early as 2022 does not involve cross-ownership, according to a joint statement. VW CEO Herbert Diess said the alliance "will be a cornerstone for our drive to improve competitiveness." Under the alliance, to be governed by a joint committee headed by the chief executives of both companies, Ford will engineer and build medium-sized pickups for both companies.

Ford will also build large commercial vans for European customers and VW will develop a city van.

The alliance follows in the footsteps of others formed in the auto industry. Honda in October invested \$2.5 billion in Cruise, GM's proprietary technology subsidiary, in exchange for a 5.7 percent stake.

Toyota and Mazda plan to open a joint factory in the southern US city of Huntsville, Alabama in 2021.

The Detroit auto show was abuzz over what Ford and Volkswagen would announce yesterday, after the car giants called off a joint appearance during which they were widely expected to announce an alliance.

The two car giants have been in discussions for more

than six months over a partnership to develop self-driving and electric technologies. But a source close to the talks told AFP that they had so far only produced a deal over commercial vehicles.

A highly-anticipated announcement at the US's premiere auto show in the Motor City was called off late Monday, and the two sides planned a conference call with reporters instead for the following morning.

"We don't have enough details yet to go out in front of more than 500 journalists, so we decided to call it off," Ford spokesman Mark Truby said. —AFP

## US car buyers swerve away from compact cars and sedans

DETROIT: A persistent question shadowed all of the shiny new vehicles and highly-produced, glitzy debuts at the Detroit auto show this week: Where are the sedans?

Volkswagen was among the few to trumpet a new sedan—those compact and mid-sized cars that shuttled generations of American children to school in the morning and soccer practice in the afternoon. But despite its ubiquity in the suburban driveways and garages of the past, the vehicle segment's future is anything but certain.

The middle-class sedan—as opposed to luxury brands and high-performance sports cars—is hard to find this week on the Detroit auto show's floor, eclipsed by row upon row of giant trucks and SUVs.

"Car companies are acknowledging that the crossover, sport utility vehicle boom is continuing," said analyst Michelle Krebs of AutoTrader.

Detroit's Big Three automakers—Ford, General Motors and Fiat Chrysler—have gradually abandoned production of sedans for lack of profitability and lack of interest from consumers.

Sales of traditional cars are expected to plummet to 21.5 percent of the US auto market by 2025, according to LMC Automotive. Last year, sedans and small cars accounted for 31.2 percent of new-vehicle sales—down from half only six years ago.

The abrupt tumble coincided with the revival of the US auto industry, a drop in gas prices and a decade of economic recovery in the United States.

Consumers flocked to larger SUVs and trucks, which



DETROIT: Infiniti concept cars on display during day two of the 2019 The North American International Auto Show yesterday. —AFP

became more and more luxurious and comfortable and increasingly gas efficient.

### 'Badly produced'

SUV sales rose 87 percent since 2013. The "sports" utility vehicle—now more likely to be used as the family car—is expected to account for about 40 percent of the North American vehicle market by 2025, according to LMC Automotive.

Meanwhile, once popular sedans such as the Toyota Camry, Honda Accord, Ford Fusion and Nissan Altima saw their sales dip in 2018 by double digits. And analysts predict the worst is yet to come.

To reduce overcapacity in the production of small cars and sedans, America's Big Three automakers downsized. Fiat Chrysler's late CEO Sergio Marchionne in 2016 was the first to give up on the vehicle segment—ending production of the Dodge Dart and Chrysler 200 to focus on Jeeps and RAM pickups. The company's stock price more than doubled in

and entrepreneur. "The model does not benefit hawkers," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation yesterday.

Singapore's National Environment Agency (NEA), which oversees hawker centers, did not respond to e-mails seeking comment. The NEA has said that despite the problems, the social enterprise model is "here to stay", and that it benefits hawkers, cleaners and patrons. It is "one of the ways we are trying to address the many challenges of the hawker trade such as renewal and manpower constraints," Amy Khor, senior minister of state for environment, told parliament in November.

The model lets hawkers try new ideas to "bring vibrancy" to the trade, while ensuring that Singaporeans "continue to have access to affordable food in clean environments, and that our hawkers can earn a decent living", she said.

Cashless payments, automated tray returns and centralized dishwashing have all helped cut costs for hawkers under this model, said Khor. Singapore last year topped the Economist Intelligence Unit's Global Food Security Index of 113 countries for the first time, scoring high on measures such as affordability and availability.

The cheap meals in its hawker centers are a vital part of this, and the city is also boosting local agricultural production. The government said in 2011 that it would build 10 new hawker centers, the first to be built in decades. It is also pushing for a world heritage tag for them this year from the United Nations cultural agency.

If the social enterprise model is to continue, Singapore should allow an independent team to check that they deliver on the promise "to make the hawker food culture viable, affordable and sustainable", wrote KF Seetoh, a popular food blogger. —Reuters

## Not cheap or cheerful: Singapore hawker centers struggle with new business model

SINGAPORE: A social enterprise model for some of Singapore's hawker centers has been criticized over high costs and poor management, as the wealthy nation tries to revitalize its popular food stalls.

The hawker centers, which offer local and regional foods for just a couple of dollars, are an ever-present part of Singapore life and a source of pride, with two stalls having won a Michelin star in 2016 - the first street food stalls to do so. The government, which manages the hawker centres, sees them as vital in providing jobs for the less privileged, ensuring cheap meals for low-income residents and attracting tourists.

But the trade is struggling with competition and a failure to lure younger talent.

Seeking solutions, the government handed management of 13 of the city's 114 hawker centres to social enterprises, which do good while also earning a profit.

But some of the new centres that are managed by social enterprises have been criticized over poor management, high rentals and strict conditions imposed on hawkers, many of whom are elderly.

"The intention is good, but they've turned something that is meant for public good into something for private good," said Jack Sim, a social worker

three years. GM in November said it would end production of six models: the Cadillac CT6 and XTS, as well as the Chevrolet Impala, Cruze, Volt, and the Buick LaCrosse. Ford joined the fray. By 2020, it will no longer sell the Fusion, Taurus, or Focus in the United States. Aside from the Mustang sports car, it will only offer pickup trucks and SUVs.

"Ford loses an estimated \$800 million a year selling cars in North America," said Bob Shanks, the group's CFO.

For consumers, one of the main draws of small cars and sedans used to be efficiency and cost. But that has changed.

Take the Chevrolet Malibu. The sedan averages 29 miles per gallon in the city—practically identical to the larger Chevy Equinox SUV's 28 miles per gallon. The SUV also costs just \$2,000 more.

"Frankly, it's about usable space," said Ford Chairman Bill Ford. "It's very clear that our customers are saying to us: we want more usable space, we want, in many cases, three-row seating and those kinds of things."

He argues, however, that if there is renewed love for compact cars, "we can adapt very quickly." —AFP

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Health & Technology

# Scientists in Hong Kong claim antiviral breakthrough

## Chemical could slow spread of deadly viral illnesses

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong scientists claim they have made a potential breakthrough discovery in the fight against infectious diseases—a chemical that could slow the spread of deadly viral illnesses. A team from the University of Hong Kong described the newly discovered chemical as “highly potent in interrupting the life cycle of diverse viruses” in a study published this month in the journal *Nature Communications*.

The scientists told AFP Monday that it could one day be used as a broad-spectrum antiviral for a host of infectious diseases—and even for viruses that have yet to emerge—if it passes clinical trials. The spread in recent decades of sometimes deadly bird flu strains, the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) have underscored the need for new drugs that can work more quickly than vaccines.

Broad-spectrum antivirals are seen as the holy grail because they can be used against multiple pathogens. In contrast, vaccines usually only protect against one strain, and by the

time they are produced the virus may have mutated. The HKU team tested their chemical “AM580” on mice in a two-year study and found it stopped the replication of a host of flu strains—including H1N1, H5N1 and H7N9 — as well as the viruses that cause SARS and MERS.

It also stopped the replication of the mosquito-borne Zika virus and Enterovirus 71 which causes hand, foot and mouth disease. “This is what we call a broad-spectrum antiviral drug, which means it can kill a number of viruses,” microbiologist Yuen Kwok-yung, who led the team, told AFP. “This is quite important in the early control of an epidemic.”

### Starving the virus

The study is part of a growing body of research by virologists to find drugs that avoid targeting a virus directly—something which could lead to resistance. Instead they look for compounds that interrupt the way viruses use crucial fatty acids, known as lipids, within a host’s cells to replicate. “This study is science in progress—an early step in an exciting new direction,” said Benjamin Neuman, an

expert on viruses at Texas A&M University-Texarkana who has published his own studies on starving viruses of lipids.

“Viruses are totally dependent on supplies stolen from their hosts, and a number of recent studies have shown that treatments that interrupt the steady flow of lipids in an infected cell are highly effective at blocking a wide range of viruses,” he told AFP. The next step is to test the drug on a wider variety of animals, including pigs and primates, before pushing to clinical trials, a process Yuen said could take up to eight years.

The HKU team have applied for a patent in the United States. A derivative of AM580 is already being used in Japan to treat cancer, raising hopes that it will show low toxicity for humans. But Neuman warns there are drawbacks. Like many chemotherapy methods used to fight cancer, antivirals such as AM580 damage a person’s cells to starve a virus. While cells can heal, much research still needs to be done on how and when to use such techniques.

“Unless the treatment is targeted very carefully, the potential for side effects would



be very worrying,” he said. Densely populated Hong Kong has first-hand experience of deadly viral outbreaks. In 2003, nearly 300 people died from SARS and the city’s densely packed apartment blocks are considered hugely vulnerable to future outbreaks.—AFP

## Antarctica ice loss increases six fold since 1979

**TAMPA:** Global warming is melting ice in Antarctica faster than ever before—about six times more per year now than 40 years ago—leading to increasingly high sea levels worldwide, scientists warned Monday. Already, Antarctic melting has raised global sea levels more than half an inch (1.4 centimeters) between 1979 and 2017, said the report in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS), a peer-reviewed US journal.

And the pace of melting is expected to lead to disastrous sea level rise in the years to come, according to lead author Eric Rignot, chair of Earth system science at the University of California, Irvine. “As the Antarctic ice sheet continues to melt away, we expect multi-meter sea level rise from Antarctica in the coming centuries,” Rignot said. A rise of 1.8 meters by 2100, as some scientists forecast in worst-case scenarios, would flood many coastal cities that are home to millions of people around the world, previous research has shown. For the current study, researchers embarked on the longest-ever assessment of ice mass in the Antarctic, across 18 geographic regions. Data came from high-resolution aerial photographs taken by NASA planes, along with satellite radar from multiple space agencies.

Researchers discovered that from 1979 to 1990, Antarctica shed an average of 40 billion tons of ice mass annually.

By the years 2009 to 2017, the ice loss had increased more than sixfold, to 252 billion tons per year. Even more worrying, researchers found that areas that were once considered “stable and immune to change” in East Antarctica, are shedding quite a lot of ice, too, said the study. “The Wilkes Land sector of East Antarctica has, overall, always been an important participant in the mass loss, even as far back as the 1980s, as our research has shown,” Rignot said.

“This region is probably more sensitive to climate than has traditionally been assumed, and that’s important to know, because it holds even more ice than West Antarctica and the Antarctic Peninsula together.”

### Ice loss

The total amount of ice in the Antarctic, if it all melted, would be enough to raise sea level 187 feet. By far, the most ice in Antarctica is concentrated in the east, where there is enough sea ice to drive 170 feet of sea level rise, compared to about 17 feet in the entire West Antarctic ice sheet. The East Antarctic Ice Sheet is the world’s largest, containing roughly half of Earth’s freshwater. Until now, most research has shown that the majority of melting is happening in the West. A landmark study published in *Nature* in June last year found that Antarctic ice melt had tripled since 1992, but did not show significant melting in the east. However, a subsequent study published in *Nature* in September 2018 analyzed layers of sediment from the ocean floor deposited the last time the Wilkes Subglacial Basin, part of the Eastern Antarctic due south of Australia, melted around 125,000 years ago.—AFP

## Total lunar eclipse on Jan 20-21 will be last until 2022

**WASHINGTON:** People in North and South America, a large part of Europe and Africa may get a glimpse of a total lunar eclipse overnight from January 20 to 21, the last such event until 2022. For those in Europe and Africa, the total eclipse will unfold shortly before sunrise. For those in North and South America, the eclipse can be viewed at the beginning or in the middle of the night. The full Moon will be in the Earth’s shadow from 03:34 GMT to 06:51 GMT. When the eclipse begins, a shadow will move in from the left, as if taking a bite out of the Moon.

The total eclipse will last about an hour, beginning at 04:41 GMT according to NASA. During the eclipse, the Moon will still be visible, but in a shade of red. That’s why a lunar eclipse is often called a “blood Moon.” The red color is due to the same phenomenon that causes sunsets to appear pink, orange or red. “A little bit of sunlight is refracted by the Earth’s atmosphere and reaches the Moon,

bending around the edges of the Earth,” explained Walter Freeman, an assistant teaching professor at Syracuse University’s physics department.

“This small amount of red light still illuminates the Moon enough for us to see it. Instead of being bright and white, the Moon will be very dim and red, 10,000 or so times dimmer than usual.” Although total lunar eclipses happen, on average, about one to three times per year, after this one there will be a gap of three years until another is visible. “It’s the last chance for a little while to see a total lunar eclipse,” said Bruce Betts, chief scientist at The Planetary Society.

The next total eclipse will be visible from Europe on May 16, 2022. Some partial lunar eclipses will happen in the meantime. Total eclipses happen only when the Earth moves precisely between the Sun and Moon. Cloudy weather can interfere with viewing, but experts say that unlike in the case of a solar eclipse, there is no need for special eyewear to step outside and view a lunar eclipse.

That’s because the Moon does not produce light of its own, but only reflects the Sun’s light. “The Moon is never bright enough to hurt our eyes like the Sun is,” said Freeman. “A blood Moon is one of the few opportunities we have to see both the Moon and the stars in the sky at the same time, since the Moon is usually too bright.”—AFP

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What's On



# Marina Hotel holds 'bohemian' themed annual staff party

Marina Hotel recently organized its annual staff party at Salwa Sabah Al-Ahmad Hall which aimed to bring the employees together to celebrate their individual and company success and their continuous dedications and contribution towards success and achieving impressive results. The event was attended by the hotel's management and employees.

On this occasion, Nabil Hammoud, Marina Hotel General Manager,

said: "I would like to send my gratitude to all Marina Hotel employees for their outstanding efforts during 2018 and the hard work which has played a big role in the hotel's development. I highly encouraged everyone to aim higher and work better through constant commitment always striving for excellence."

The fun filled event included distributing awards in various categories for Employee of the Month, Employee of the Year, Long Service

Award, Supervisor of the 4th Quarter and Supervisor of the Year. Additional rewards were also distributed during the evening which included Honesty, Sustainability, Productivity, Best Team Player and Dedication. The Bohemian -themed event included various entertainment activities that engaged the audience, including live shows and competitions where many gifts were distributed to participants and ended with a buffet dinner.

## Horeca Kuwait 2019 witnesses various activities on second day

The activities of Horeca Kuwait 2019 continued yesterday in hall number eight at the International Fair Grounds in Mishref where huge numbers of specialized visitors showed up. Aside from the number of visitors to various hospitality, food industries and hotel equipment company booths and sections, the second day of the exhibition witnessed new activities including competitions for the best desert, the best food collection, the best burger and ice arts.

The competitions were followed by a workshop presented by Chef Nicolas Paterson from Cordon Blue, London on the latest technologies in using candy to make carved and decorated deserts. In this regard, Leaders Group Company for Consultancies and development, which organizes the exhibition jointly with the Lebanese Hospitality Services Co., said that this cycle of the exhibition attracted a lot of

diplomats from foreign embassies in Kuwait.

Leaders group statement added that at the sidelines of the second day activities, and in collaboration with La Maison du Fromage, the French ambassador in Kuwait, Marie Mendupuy organized a special cheese tasting event at the embassy premises in Jabriya which was attended Leaders group manager, Nabila Al-Anjery, Hospitality Services manager, Joumana Dammous, Horeca executive manager, Mohammed Najia, diplomats and heads of the companies sponsoring Horeca Kuwait 2019.

The first day of the exhibition witnessed a seminar on "The rise of local restaurants trending in Kuwait" where speakers included Amer Zeltoun, Managing Partner at Maki Group, Chef Faisal Al Nashmi, Director of Culinary Development- Al Mekan United Company and co-owner -Street Al Mekan, Table Otto, Pam+ cow and Street Cafe, Chef Samaan Hlail, Managing Partner - Brainsteam, Lebanon, Jad Alameddine, Director of Food and Beverage -Mohamed Naser Al-Hajery & Sons Ltd. (MNH), Amr AlRefal, Founder & CEO - Solo Co and the moderator Nada Alamuddine, Managing Partner -Hodema Consulting Services. The seminar discussed the secrets of success of Kuwaiti restaurants and trademarks amidst fierce competition, especially with the presence of over 100,000 cafes and restaurants in Kuwait.





# Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2019



Italian fashion designer Giorgio Armani (center) poses with models following the presentation of the Men's Fall/Winter 2019/20 fashion collection he designed for Emporio Armani on January 14, 2019 in Milan. — AFP

## Afghan talent show singer finds fame as Justin Trudeau's double

An Afghan talent show contestant's striking resemblance to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has turned him into an unlikely celebrity in the war-torn country—and potentially given him the winning edge. Abdul Salam Maftoon, a wedding singer from a village in the remote and impoverished northeastern province of Badakhshan, had never even heard of his more famous doppelganger until a judge on the popular television music contest Afghan Star pointed out the uncanny likeness. Slightly built with a long face and dark brown hair and eyes, Maftoon, 29, hopes the flattering comparison to the politician widely rated as one of the sexiest leaders in the world will bring him more votes on Afghanistan's version of American Idol.

"People have forgotten my name and now they just call me 'Justin Trudeau,'" Maftoon told AFP, his self-conscious smile revealing two gold-plated front teeth. "I didn't know anything about Justin Trudeau until I saw the photos on social media. 'The resemblance has boosted my chances of winning the competition by 50 percent.'"

Composite photos of the pair—Maftoon wearing a hat favored by men in northern Afghanistan and Trudeau in Western-style clothing—have drawn scores of comments on Facebook. And a video of an Afghan Star panel discussion about their physical similarities has been viewed tens of thousands of times. "Trudeau's lost twin," wrote Neila Abdulzadah on Facebook. Fowzia Zereh posted: "I think their story is like a Bollywood movie—they were separated at birth and he found his lost twin brother." Another said: "This is truly the copy of Trudeau. I'd love to see our Trudeau win this year's Afghan Star."

### 'Next Justin Bieber'

Maftoon has a good chance. The performer is among eight contestants to make it through to the next elimination round on Thursday. The final will be held on March 21, the Persian new year's eve. So far Maftoon's repertoire of romantic folk songs, which he sings in both of Afghanistan's official languages Dari and Pashto, and his looks have impressed viewers, whose votes decide which performer is kicked off the show each week.

He has also caught the attention of the official judges. "He looks like my prime minister," said Afghan-born Canadian musician Qais Ulfat, one of the four judges who first pointed out Maftoon's resemblance to Trudeau. "His voice is very satisfying. He has that god-gifted vocal ability. 'This guy could be the next Justin Bieber.'"

Until now Maftoon has relied on singing and playing instruments at wedding and birthday parties to support his wife and four children. But he is confident that his new-found fame will boost demand for his entertainment services. "When I go back to my hometown people will definitely call me," Maftoon said, his trademark hat perched on the back of his head as he practiced vocals with Ulfat in a recording studio at local television station Tolo.

While Maftoon has little chance of going to Canada anytime soon, he holds hopes of one day meeting his Canadian double. "I want to meet him if he wants to because he is a global personality and I am a poor man from a remote part of Afghanistan," he said. "We will see what happens." — AFP



Abdul Salam Maftoon (left) poses for a picture at the Kaboora Production studio in Kabul.— AFP photos



This combo shows a file photo taken of Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (left) speaking at the end of the 17th Francophone countries summit in the Armenian city of Yerevan; and an image of Abdul Salam Maftoon (right), an Afghan singer and contestant of the television music competition 'Afghan Star', speaking during an interview with AFP in Kabul.



Abdul Salam Maftoon rehearses next to competition judge Qais Ulfat (right) at the Kaboora Production studio in Kabul.



Abdul Salam Maftoon takes part in an interview with AFP in Kabul.



Abdul Salam Maftoon poses at the Kaboora Production studio in Kabul.

## Israeli museum under fire over 'McJesus' exhibit

A fast-food clown nailed to a cross has united its Finnish creator with Holy Land Christians demanding the artwork's removal from an exhibition at an Israeli museum. The controversy involves "McJesus", a statue of a crucified Ronald McDonald by Jani Leinonen on display at the Haifa Museum of Art. It, along with a figurine representing Jesus as a smiling crucified Ken doll, has raised the ire of members of the local Christian community. The works are part of "Sacred Goods", an exhibition about consumerism running in the northern coastal city's museum since August.

Images of the exhibits began circulating on social media last week, and in a Friday demonstration outside the museum protesters wounded three police officers with stones. Two molotov cocktails also hit the museum in recent days, police said. After a series of meetings with Christian leaders, the museum resolved to install signs warning of "offensive content" at the exhibition's entrance, a spokeswoman for the institution said Monday. The proposed solution, however, did not satisfy Christian leaders, who petitioned the Haifa district court to order the museum and municipality to remove "McJesus" and "Ken Jesus Christ" from public display.

The works are part of an exhibition dealing with religion and faith in the culture of consumerism, the spokeswoman said. "McJesus", created by a Christian artist, has been displayed "in many European museums," and "is about the cynical use of religious symbols by giant corporations," she added. It shows how Ronald McDonald "has become a symbol of popular culture, reaching the level of religious worship".

But while "McJesus" might be taken primarily as a critique of capitalism in other parts of the world, in the Middle East such visual imagery was blasphemous, said Wadie Abunassar, advisor to church leaders in the Holy Land. "We're not in Europe, we're in Israel," said Abunassar. "To us, as Arabs and Christians, this is an affront to our symbols, and we demand their removal."

### 'Would be taboo'

There are approximately 130,000-140,000 Christians in Israel, according to Abunassar, most of them Arabs, making them a minority within the minority of the overall Arab population. "In Israel such displays against Muslims and Jews would be taboo, but against Christians they're allowed," he said. Another person demanding the removal of "McJesus" was the artist who created it. The attention the Christian campaign drew to the exhibition surprised Leinonen, who said he had in September demanded the museum remove it "as a protest against Israel's human rights violations". —AFP



Italian fashion designer Giorgio Armani (center) poses with models following the presentation of the Men's Fall/Winter 2019/20 fashion collection he designed for Emporio Armani in Milan. — AFP photos



# Emporio Armani goes primitive in Milan Fashion Week

Emporio Armani tapped primitive instincts while maintaining a balance between formality and sport in the Armani group's line for younger fashion-forward men. Designer Giorgio Armani wrapped men in shaggy synthetic fur and lined coats with warm lambskin, an interpretation of another era's animal fur capes he says was inspired by the natural world.

parkas glowed down the runway, eliciting a spontaneous round of applause mid-show.

Beyond the classic black and winter white, the color palette was icy, recalling Nordic lands where the designer said one might live a more tranquil life. "It is difficult to find a place to live well. Today, one lives badly everywhere. A bomb goes off, the yellow vests protest, there are armored vehicles. Where can you live tranquilly?" the designer said backstage. Not even an island - that gets submerged by the sea, which is all a consequence of our activity and our way of influencing nature." Armani skipped showing his main Giorgio Armani line at the January shows and instead plans to have a combined menswear and womenswear show next month at his Silos museum in Milan. — AP



Models present creations for fashion house Emporio Armani during its Men's Fall/Winter 2019/20 fashion show in Milan.



The collection was a display of richness, from big oversized furry sweaters and velvet coats over double-breasted suits to synthetic fur neck wraps. Stand-out pieces included shaggy overcoats and the similarly inspired shaggy fur boots that were paired with sportier attire. Both formal and casual trousers were cinched at the ankle with either a snap or elastic. And when the occasion demands, the Emporio Armani man is not so primitive he won't wear a tie now and then - a rarity on Milan menswear runways. A series of pure white activewear trousers with matching



Lifestyle | Fashion



Palestinian fashion designer Yasmeen Mjalli speaks while standing in her clothing shop where her label collection "BabyFist" carrying anti-sexual harassment slogans is showcased. — AFP photos



Palestinian fashion designer Yasmeen Mjalli speaks while standing in her clothing shop.



Palestinian fashion designer and label founder Yasmeen Mjalli (left), along with her creative director Amira Khader, pose for a picture with one of their label "BabyFist's" canvas bags.



This picture shows clothing from the Palestinian feminist fashion label "BabyFist" on display at a shop in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank.



Palestinian fashion designer Yasmeen Mjalli speaks while standing in her clothing shop where her label collection "BabyFist" carrying anti-sexual harassment slogans is showcased, in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank.

# 'Not your habibti': Palestinian designer seeks to empower women

It's only three words on a T-shirt or embroidered on a denim jacket in Palestinian designer Yasmeen Mjalli's collection, but they carry a powerful message: "Not your habibti", or darling. She sees the clothes as helping empower Palestinian women facing unwelcome male attention in public. "When a woman is exposed to so much harassment on the street, she begins to dress to protect herself, to hide herself as opposed to expressing herself," the 22-year-old art history graduate says, leaning against the counter of her shop in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank.

On fabrics of muted colors and on canvas bags from her BabyFist label, she places messages in English and Arabic inside drawings of flowers and other designs. "Every rose has its revolution," one says. Mjalli grew up in the United States, where she lived with her Palestinian parents. She started painting slogans on her own clothes when the family relocated to the West Bank and she found herself facing a different reality. "I have experienced things like comments, really uncomfortable stares, the kind that make you feel very violated," she said. "I have been assaulted in the streets, people touching me," she adds, catching one tattooed arm in her other hand to mimic being grabbed. In August 2017, she launched her first collection and a few months later opened the Ramallah shop to complement her existing online sales.

### Made in Palestine

"It's not like the T-shirt is going to stop harassment," she says. But it's "a reminder that you are part of something bigger that is working to empower women and to give back in some way and that is trying to have this conversation that challenges all of these structures which we are victims of too", she adds. The goal, Mjalli says, is to create a community. Using Instagram, free workshops in her shop and public places where she sometimes installs herself with a typewriter, she offers Palestinian women the freedom to express their feelings and tell stories they cannot share elsewhere.

She donates around 10 percent of her fashion earnings to a local women's group. One project she funds sent a doctor and volunteers into schools to teach Palestinian girls about menstruation, a subject still largely taboo. While defining herself as a feminist, Mjalli says that her fight against harassment of women is unconnect-

ed to the #MeToo movement. "I don't think it's related even though it happened at the same time," she said, though acknowledging that the movement gave her own efforts a boost. "It's a very American and it's a very white feminism, and it's not what we are doing here." All BabyFist garments are made in the Palestinian territories. Jackets are sewn in Hassan Shehada's Gaza workshop. Among the sewing machines humming under fluorescent lights, Shehada shows a denim jacket embroidered with "Not your habibti". "I am proud that women wear the fruits of my labors and I am also very proud that they are labeled 'Made in Palestine'," he says.



A Palestinian man browses for clothing at the feminist "BabyFist" collection shop in Ramallah.

### Fight against occupation

In the past three months, he has made 1,500 items for BabyFist. It was a breath of fresh air for Shehada's business in the Gaza Strip, under an Israeli blockade for more than a decade and with endemic high unemployment. "Working with BabyFist has given me back hope," he says, adding that it has fulfilled a dream of exporting to Europe. But manufacturing in Gaza comes at a cost.

Israeli restrictions mean jackets have been held up for weeks when the land crossing through Israel was closed due to mass Palestinian protests and clashes along the fence, Mjalli said. "The border was closed in definitively and we couldn't get anything in or out," she

said. "It's a constant battle." She says that around 40 percent of her sales are made in the Ramallah store and 60 percent online, mostly to the Palestinian and broader Arab diaspora.

### Opposition

Not everyone, however, is a fan. Mjalli has come under fire from conservatives, who say she draws attention to women's bodies by designing clothes that carry provocative messages. Her criticism of some aspects of Palestinian society has also raised the hackles of those who believe that the struggle against Israeli occupation



This picture shows clothing from the Palestinian feminist fashion label "BabyFist" on display at a shop in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank.

is the only legitimate public campaign. For her, the fight for Palestinian independence and campaigning for women's rights are intertwined. "The occupation robs men in our society of any sense of control, any sense of masculinity which in turn affects women's rights," she says. For Mjalli, there have been "already two or three generations of women that have had to suffer while we say: 'OK, you can wait.'" — AFP

# Age no barrier for China's senior catwalk models

Wearing a bright floral ensemble with her short hair dyed blonde, Chinese model Ma Yinhong struts a Shanghai catwalk with a style and swagger that belie her 56 years. She made her modeling debut just two years ago and is already in demand, working for leading fashion brands such as Dolce & Gabbana. Ma is one of a growing number of older models sought after by Chinese and international labels trying to court the country's growing faction of "silver spenders".



Chinese model Ma Yinhong during a visit to a salon in Shanghai.

healthcare ads, today glamorous Chinese seniors are in demand for high fashion. "They save me as 'best for last' in fashion shows after young models, so I am quite visible," Ma said. By 2050, one in three people in China, or 487 million people, will be over the age of 60 — more than the population of the United States — according to the official Xinhua news agency.

This greying population, combined with rising incomes and living standards, means an explosion in consumption by China's elderly is forecast in coming decades. Once expected to selflessly stay home and mind the grandchildren, seniors — particularly women — have become a coveted market for products like clothing, fashion accessories, cosmetics and travel, according to consumer research firm Mintel.

### Silver spenders

Portraying older models in active, youthful lifestyles sells well in a culture with a strong tradition of respect and deference toward elders, part-time model Liu Wei said. "A sense of sophistication can show in the facial expressions of seniors," explained the 52-year-old. He

added: "Handsome young men, even with their good bodies, cannot convey maturity." Liu only began modeling two months ago and does it as a hobby. The owner of two listed companies, he typically appears in adverts as a successful businessman.

"The market for senior models in China is not huge yet but it is growing," said Michelle Chien, a modeling agent with ESEE Model Management, one of the city's largest agencies. This echoes a trend now well established in Western markets, where brands have been keen to tap the pockets of the affluent baby boomer generation. In the past five years, catwalks globally have seen greater age diversity and models such as Jacky O'Shaughnessy, Jan de Villeneuve, and Elon Musk's mother Maye Musk, making names for themselves as fashion stars in their 60s and 70s.

In her youth, Ma had hoped for a career in fashion design. She moved to Japan to study in the 1980s but did not graduate as she could not afford the fashion fees. But she did not start modeling until getting her first gig two years ago after sending her photo to a Shanghai fashion house. Despite fashion brands embracing the grey hair and wrinkles that come with older models, Ma said it was still important to stay stylish and in shape. She gets her hair done every three weeks, and stays fit with daily breathing exercises and regular workouts at the gym. Ma explained: "Keeping in good health keeps me on the catwalk. There is no age limit in fashion, so hopefully my dream can continue." — AFP



Chinese model Ma Yinhong during a visit to a salon in Shanghai.

She seems to embody this target market of older Chinese who are spending more on themselves. "I never go out without dressing up and getting made up. I never let myself look like an old granny," Ma told AFP at a recent show for Uooyaa, which used a mix of younger Chinese and foreign models, as well as seniors. Once confined largely to life insurance and



This photo shows 56-year-old Chinese model Ma Yinhong (right) talking to her friends at a cafe in central Shanghai.



This photo shows 56-year-old Chinese model Ma Yinhong walking along a street in downtown Shanghai.



This photo shows 56-year-old Chinese model Ma Yinhong posing for a portrait in downtown Shanghai. — AFP photos









Sports

# Harden (57) lights up Grizzlies, Mitchell, Jazz drive past Pistons

## Kings beat Blazers to extend hot home streak

### NBA results/standings

LA Clippers 117, New Orleans 121; San Antonio 93, Charlotte 108; Brooklyn 109, Boston 102; Sacramento 115, Portland 107; Utah 100, Detroit 94; Houston 112, Memphis 94.

#### Eastern Conference

	W	L	PCT	GB
Toronto	33	12	0.733	-
Milwaukee	30	12	0.714	1.5
Indiana	28	14	0.667	3.5
Philadelphia	28	16	0.636	4.5
Boston	25	18	0.581	7
Miami	21	20	0.512	10
Brooklyn	22	23	0.489	11
Charlotte	20	23	0.465	12
Orlando	19	24	0.442	13
Detroit	18	24	0.429	13.5
Washington	18	26	0.409	14.5
Atlanta	13	30	0.302	19
Chicago	10	33	0.233	22
New York	10	33	0.233	22
Cleveland	9	35	0.205	23.5

#### Western Conference

	W	L	PCT	GB
Denver	29	13	0.690	-
Golden State	29	14	0.674	0.5
Oklahoma City	26	16	0.619	3
Houston	25	18	0.581	4.5
Portland	26	19	0.578	4.5
LA Clippers	24	19	0.558	5.5
San Antonio	25	20	0.556	5.5
Utah	24	21	0.533	6.5
LA Lakers	23	21	0.523	7
Sacramento	23	21	0.523	7
Minnesota	21	22	0.488	8.5
New Orleans	21	23	0.477	9
Dallas	20	23	0.465	9.5
Memphis	19	24	0.442	10.5
Phoenix	11	33	0.250	19

**HOUSTON:** James Harden scored a season-high 57 points, and the host Houston Rockets survived their first game without center Clint Capela, pulling away in the second half for a 112-94 victory over the reeling Memphis Grizzlies on Monday. Harden recorded his 17th consecutive 30-point game, the longest such streak since Wilt Chamberlain had a 20-game run in 1964. Kobe Bryant had a stretch of 16 straight 30-point games in 2003. Harden scored 36 points in the first half. One night after the Rockets lost Capela for up to six weeks with a right thumb injury, Harden shot 17 of 33 from the floor, including 6 of 15 on 3-point tries, while converting 17 of 18 free throws. He added nine rebounds. Danuel House Jr. tallied 15 points and Gerald Green scored 14 points for Houston, which has alternated wins and losses over the past seven games. Garrett Temple and Mike Conley scored 14 each for the Grizzlies, who have dropped eight of their past nine games.

#### Hornets 108, Spurs 93

Kemba Walker poured in 33 points and Jeremy Lamb added 19 as visiting Charlotte walked past San Antonio to snap a three-game losing streak. The game was the first in San Antonio as a member of the visiting team for Charlotte guard Tony Parker, who played for the Spurs for 17 years before signing with the Hornets in the offseason as a free agent. Parker scored eight points, all in the second half. The contest was also a return to San Antonio for Hornets rookie coach James Borrego, who spent the past four seasons as an assistant with the Spurs. LaMarcus Aldridge led the Spurs with 28 points while Derrick White hit for 18.

#### Pelicans 121, Clippers 117

Anthony Davis overcame a slow start and finished with 46 points and 16 rebounds to lead New Orleans to a win at Los Angeles. Julius Randle scored 27 points and Jrue Holiday had 19 points and eight assists for the Pelicans, who have won four of five. Davis recorded his 14th straight double-double and 31st of the season. Montrezl Harrell had 26 points and 10 rebounds for Los Angeles, which has lost three in a row, the past two at home against teams with losing records. Danilo Gallinari added 25 points and Tobias Harris had 21 for the Clippers.

#### Jazz 100, Pistons 94

Donovan Mitchell scored 28 points, and Rudy Gobert contributed 18 points and a career-high-tying 25 rebounds to lead Utah to a victory over Detroit in Salt Lake City. Kyle Korver scored 19 points off the bench for Utah while



**HOUSTON:** James Harden #15 of the Houston Rockets drives to the basket during the game against the Memphis Grizzlies on Monday at the Toyota Center in Houston, Texas. — AFP

Joe Ingles added 13 points and matched his season high with eight assists. The Jazz earned their fourth win in a row despite committing 17 turnovers. Blake Griffin scored 19 points while Andre Drummond chipped in 15 points and 13 rebounds for the Pistons, who lost for the eighth time in 10 games. Reggie Bullock added 13 points as Detroit fell to Utah for the second time this month, having dropped a 110-105 decision in Michigan on Jan. 5.

#### Kings 115, Trail Blazers 107

Buddy Hield scored 19 points to pace six Sacramento players in double figures as the Kings earned a victory over visiting Portland. Bogdan Bogdanovic added 18 points off the bench and De'Aaron Fox contributed 16 points and nine assists for the Kings, who have won four consecutive home games and four of five games overall. Damian Lillard

scored 35 points for the Trail Blazers, who had won two games in a row.

#### Nets 109, Celtics 102

D'Angelo Russell scored 18 of his 34 points in the third quarter as Brooklyn snapped a 10-game, head-to-head losing streak to Boston by dominating the third quarter in New York. The Nets pulled away by outscoring Boston 44-21 in the third. During the period, Brooklyn shot 65.4 percent (17 of 26) and produced its widest point disparity in a third quarter since outscoring Boston by 24 on April 2, 2005. Rookie Rodion Kurucs added 19 points for the Nets, who won for the 14th time in 19 games. Jayson Tatum led the Celtics with a career-high 34 points while Jaylen Brown added 22. Kyrie Irving (right quad contusion) and Marcus Smart (illness) sat out for the Celtics. — Reuters



2018 winners



Abdo Feghali

## Kuwait kicks off 2019 Red Bull Car Park Drift Series

**KUWAIT:** Red Bull Car Park Drift is once again back to Kuwait! The global qualifiers will be kicked off from Kuwait, moving from one city to another, with the series final hosted in Istanbul later this year.

Only a couple months since Lebanon welcomed elite drifters competing for the 2018 King of Drift thrown at the Red Bull Car Park Drift Series Final, Kuwait is ready to rev-up its engines for the local qualifiers of the 2019 series on February 1 at Sirbb Circuit.

In celebration of eleven years since the first ever Red Bull Car Park Drift event in Lebanon, drifters will be competing to clinch the crown of the Kuwait 2019 King of Drift. Having had hosted a successful adrenaline-filled Series Final in 2017, Kuwait is, no doubt, in the position to impress thousands of drifting and motorsport fans alike.

Red Bull Car Park Drift is organized by Basel Salem AlSabah Motor Racing Club and is sponsored by Falken Tyres, Platinum Gym and Acqua Eva.

Over 2,500 spectators will visit SIRBB Circuit on Friday, February 1, to

witness a hot and thirsty drifters go head to head for the coveted title. With only one drifter from each participating country, Turkey will welcome the 2019 Kuwait King of Drift at the Series Final where he will compete to claim the Series Final thrown.

Kuwait's drifters will face a fierce challenge for the King of Drift title, competing against drifters from twelve other countries that have participated in the series. The 2019 series will be kicked off in Kuwait on February 1 and the competition will continue with qualifiers in Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Algeria, Mauritius, Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey, Georgia, and Jordan.

The competition, first hosted by Red Bull in Lebanon, is back providing drifting amateurs and professionals with the opportunity to highlight their skills and compete for the crown, while capturing the crowd's attention. Last year's final in Lebanon witnessed an exciting turnout, with Lebanese drifter, Oliver El Kik, securing the King of Drift crown after a stellar performance.



Lebanon hosted the first ever Red Bull Car Park Drift event in 2008 making it possible for all underground drifters to put their skills to the test, and placed the spotlight on rally champion Abdo Feghali, making him a drifting legend.

On a global level, the story of drifting goes back to the 1960s on winding Japanese mountain roads. A bunch of

likeminded racers set out to beat their A to B times by exceeding the grip limit of their tires when taking sharp corners. It did not do much to help their racing times but instead evolved into an entirely different discipline. Drifting was born, and a Red Bull manager discovered the sport in 2005 and decided to spark a fire in the Middle East, a fire that still burns to this very day.

A total 10 teams participated in the tournament from academies accredited by the Public Authority for Sport. Each participating academy was represented by 9 players over the age of 17, all of whom have spent some time in these academies amidst an unparalleled spirit of sportsmanship full of challenges.

On this occasion, Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, Nawaf Najia, said: "As a leading national financial institution, KIB has always sought to promote awareness about the importance of sports. Accordingly, we are committed to supporting sports-related events that have a positive impact on people's health and productivity, stemming from our belief that a community's development is heavily dependent on the overall health and safety of its mem-

bers." This sponsorship came as part of KIB's active interest in sports and health awareness. The event was held in cooperation with several sports and health organizations, aiming at promoting the importance of physical exercise in preventing and reducing the risk of diseases; thereby improving the overall quality of life in the community.

Through its leading social responsibility program, KIB is committed to participating in events that serve diverse segments of the local community. Accordingly, the Bank always strives to positively impact the local community, with an impressive roster of activities and initiatives supporting the health sector which plays a key role in the well-being of all members of the community.

## Halfpenny named in Wales Six Nations squad

**CARDIFF:** Wales' first-choice full-back Leigh Halfpenny has been named in the country's Six Nations squad despite a battle with concussion that has ruled him out of their opening match against France in Paris on February 1.

The 30-year-old capped 80 times has been struggling with the head injury since he took a hefty late tackle playing against Australia on November 10 but has been picked for an enlarged squad that will be pruned down to a matchday 23 next Tuesday.

Wayne Pivac, Halfpenny's coach at his Pro14 side Scarlets, warned last week that a specialist had said he would be out for three to five weeks, which would also rule him out of Wales' following match against Italy just over a week later. This has not stopped head coach Warren Gatland from selecting him for what will be the New Zealander's final Six Nations, as he will step down after this year's World Cup in Japan.

Gatland's Six Nations group includes plenty of his tried and trusted old guard—such as veteran lock Alun Wyn Jones, 33, who will skipper the side—as well as fresher faces like Wasps flanker Thomas Young and Leicester back Jonah Holmes. "We have a really experienced squad of players who have been around a number of campaigns together, and we feel we are in a pretty good place going into this huge year," said Gatland in a statement issued by the Wales Rugby Union (WVU).

"We have got a few injuries and have selected a larger squad because of that." Young, who won caps against Tonga and Samoa in 2017, has been among the English Premiership's form players this season.

Holmes made his Test debut earlier this campaign, and he has been a rare shining light in what has been a tough season for Leicester. Bath No 8 Taulupe Faleatu would have made the squad a 40-man one but the 28-year-old backrow forward broke his arm on his return from a similar injury on Saturday. Faleatu is expected to be out for up to eight weeks, which will likely rule him out of the whole tournament as it reaches a climax on March 16.

#### Wales squad

**Forwards:** Rob Evans (Scarlets), Wyn Jones (Scarlets), Nicky Smith (Ospreys), Elliot Dee (Dragons), Ryan Elias (Scarlets), Ken Owens (Scarlets), Leon Brown (Dragons), Tomas Francis (Exeter Chiefs/ENG), Samson Lee (Scarlets), Dillon Lewis (Cardiff Blues), Jake Ball (Scarlets), Adam Beard (Ospreys), Seb Davies (Cardiff Blues), Cory Hill (Dragons), Alun Wyn Jones (Ospreys/capt), Ross Moriarty (Dragons), Josh Navidi (Cardiff Blues), Justin Tipuric (Ospreys), Josh Turnbull (Cardiff Blues), Aaron Wainwright (Dragons), Thomas Young (Wasps)

**Backs:** Aled Davies (Ospreys), Gareth Davies (Scarlets), Tomos Williams (Cardiff Blues), Gareth Anscombe (Cardiff Blues), Dan Biggar (Northampton Saints/ENG), Jarrod Evans (Cardiff Blues), Rhys Patchell (Scarlets), Jonathan Davies (Scarlets), Hadleigh Parkes (Scarlets), Owen Watkin (Ospreys), Scott Williams (Ospreys), Josh Adams (Worcester Warriors/ENG), Hallam Amos (Dragons), Steffan Evans (Scarlets), Leigh Halfpenny (Scarlets), Jonah Holmes (Leicester Tigers/ENG), George North (Ospreys), Liam Williams (Saracens/ENG). — AFP

## KIB sponsors second Kuwait Amateur League tournament

**KUWAIT:** KIB recently sponsored the 2nd Kuwait Amateur League tournament 2018, which was organized under the patronage of the Public Authority for Sport and the Health Assurance Hospitals Company (Dhaman) in cooperation with the Cancer Awareness Nation (CAN).

## Sports

# Serena opens bid for Slam history with crushing win

## Osaka beats the bugs to power into Open second round

**MELBOURNE:** Serena Williams denied yesterday her bid for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title was a distraction as her Australian Open campaign launched with a straight sets mauling of Germany's Tatjana Maria.

In an ominous warning to her rivals at Melbourne Park, the American dismantled Maria 6-0, 6-2 in only 49 minutes, justifying her status as bookies' favourite to claim an eighth Australian title. The 37-year-old won her 23rd major Down Under two years ago while eight weeks pregnant and is now attempting to match Margaret Court's mark of 24 singles Slams on the Australian's home soil. Williams said she was not dwelling on the bid for history, which would confirm her status as the greatest player of all time. "I have been going for the record what seems like forever now, so it doesn't feel any different," she said. Her 2017 triumph in Melbourne gave her the outright Open-era record for singles majors ahead of Steffi Graf's 22, leaving only Court's tally of 24 titles — 13 of which were earned in the amateur era before 1968 — for her to chase.

It was Williams' first outing on tour since her infamous meltdown at the umpire while losing the US Open final to Naomi Osaka in September. "I, like, literally have no comment," she responded when asked about the controversy, which split opinion in the tennis world.

She was unfailingly polite to the chair umpire at Melbourne Park and the centre court crowd greeted her warmly, cheering as she walked out. There was further applause when she removed her black warm-up jacket to reveal her outfit for the tournament—a jade-green jumpsuit matched with fishnet stockings. "It's a Serena-tard," she said when asked to describe the garment.

### 'Right direction'

Her demeanour was steely but calm once play began and the American swatted aside her opponent with ease, making a mockery of her 16th seeding at this year's tour-

nament. She won her first service game to love then effortlessly broke Maria's serve, blasting winners seemingly as well as she claimed the first set 6-0 in just 18 minutes. She eased up slightly in the second set against someone she described as "incredibly tricky", with Maria snatching two games before succumbing to inevitable defeat. It was small consolation for the German, a neighbour of Williams at Palm Beach, Florida, who left the court in tears after the drubbing.

"I'm glad that I was able to come out and do what I needed to do... I feel like I'm in the right direction. We'll see," she said. The win sets up an enticing second-round clash with Canada's Eugenie Bouchard.

The former Wimbledon finalist is on the comeback trail after sliding down the rankings and posted a comprehensive 6-2, 6-1 win over China's Peng Shuai in the opening round. Williams has won her two previous meetings with Bouchard but was wary of the 24-year-old's fighting qualities. "She does everything well, and I really like that she doesn't quit," she said. "People write her off and she doesn't let that bother her. She continues to fight and do what she needs to do. I think that's really good."

Earlier, Japanese fourth seed Naomi Osaka overcame a nervous start and distraction from flying bugs to ease into the Australian Open second round yesterday. The US Open champion downed Magda Linette of Poland 6-4, 6-2 in just under an hour to set up a meeting with Tamara Zidansek of Slovakia in the next round.

"I felt really nervous walking onto the court but then when I started playing I just felt really happy and grateful that I'm able to play in front of such a great crowd," she said of her experience on Rod Laver Arena.

The 21-year-old said she enjoyed the warm Australian conditions but had to call for a ballboy's help when a bug was fluttering on court as she prepared to serve for the match. "I'm not really that great at catching them, I'd accidentally squish it maybe, so it's probably not a good



**MELBOURNE:** Serena Williams of the US hits a return against Germany's Tatjana Maria during their women's singles match on day two of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

idea" she said. Osaka quickly put aside her brush with Australian wildlife and sealed the match with an ace. It was one of six aces she fired down during the match, declaring herself happy with the way she was overcoming jitters about her serve at the season-opening Grand Slam. "There's always a concern for me when I serve, and I have to fix this," she said. "Sometimes I don't know how I'm going to feel when I step onto the line. Some days are really good, then some days are shaky."

Osaka could seal her stratospheric rise by becoming world number one with a run deep into the tournament, but

she said such concerns had not crossed her mind. "For me, that's not really my goal," she said. "I just want to play well in this tournament. I'll see how my ranking is after. Rankings were never that much of a concern for me." Bookies have installed her as second favourite to lift the Australian title after Serena Williams, who she beat in last year's US Open final, sparking the American's infamous meltdown at the umpire. While the controversy overshadowed Osaka's breakthrough moment, she has appeared comfortable in the spotlight and says she is feeling no extra pressure at Melbourne as a Grand Slam champion. — AFP

## Top seed Halep cools Open expectations after early scare

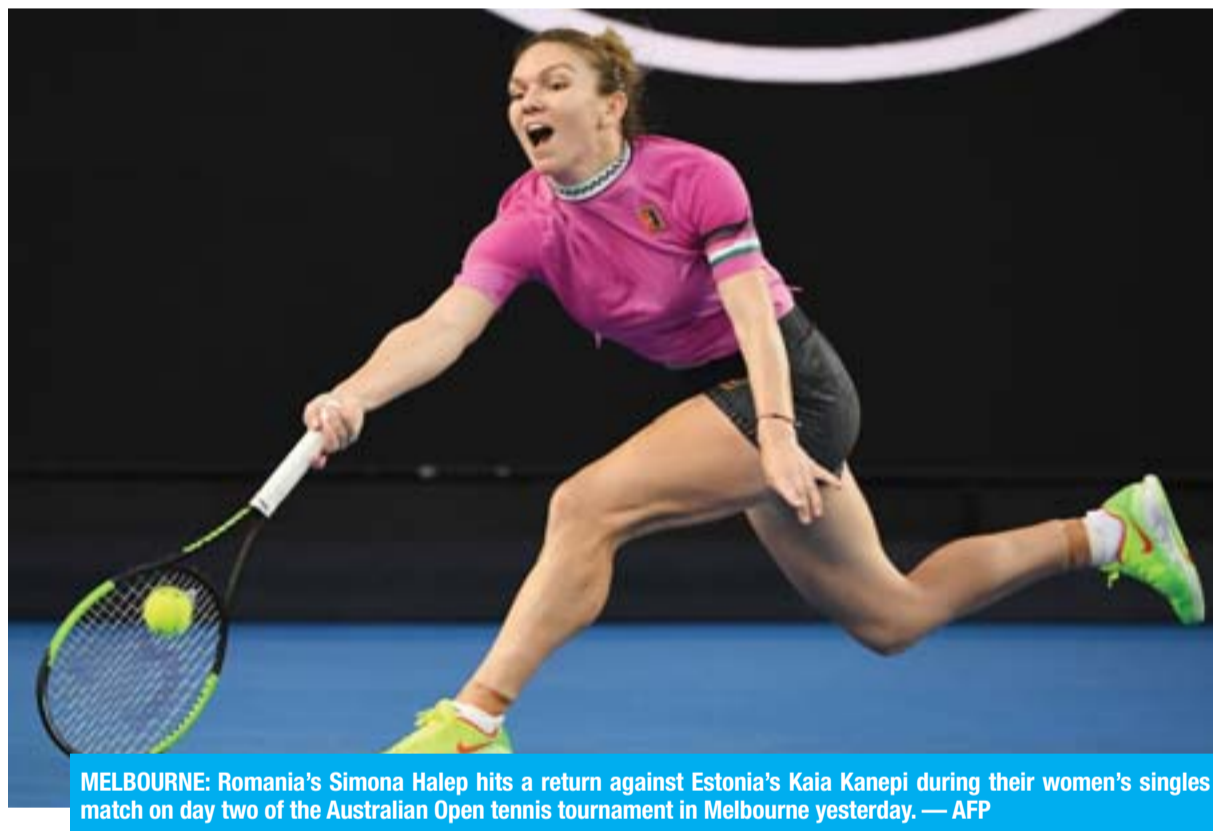
**MELBOURNE:** World number one Simona Halep admitted she was struggling for form after narrowly surviving a first-round scare at the Australian Open yesterday, saying she had "no expectations" about how far she can go at the season-opening Grand Slam.

The Romanian had to dig deep for a come-from-behind win against Kaia Kanepi, the unseeded Estonian who dumped her from last year's US Open first round. Halep said she was proud of the fight she showed grinding out a 6-7 (2/7), 6-4, 6-2 victory, but conceded it was not the type of performance expected of the top seed and French Open champion.

"I'm just happy that I could win," she said. "Nothing else matters because I'm not at the highest level of my tennis. "I'm just trying to feel good on court and to improve day by day." The 27-year-old showed no sign of the back injury that ended her season prematurely last year, instead she simply struggled to cope with the Estonian's powerful groundstrokes. "At one point I didn't know what to do anymore because the ball was coming so strong," she said.

"I just thought I have to be strong on the legs, to be there closer to the line. If I went back, I would not have a chance to return the balls." Halep came to Melbourne Park on a five-match losing streak, equalling the worst run of her career.

Her horror show at Flushing Meadows would have been repeated if Kanepi had not undermined her own cause with a mammoth 62 unforced errors and five double faults. The Estonian outgunned Halep with 40 winners to 25, underlining her opponent's recent struggles. Expectations for her Australian campaign were initially high after she lost an epic final to Caroline Wozniacki last year. Halep later admitted the defeat



**MELBOURNE:** Romania's Simona Halep hits a return against Estonia's Kaia Kanepi during their women's singles match on day two of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

"broke me a little bit" until she claimed her own maiden Slam at Roland Garros.

But the back injury, poor form and an amicable split from Australian coach Darren Cahill—who left to spend more time with his family—have shaken her confidence. She said Melbourne Park seemed "weird and tough" without her local mentor, although they had been in contact since she arrived in Australia.

She said there was no hurry to find a replacement. "I'm just chilling for the moment and we will see after this tournament," she said. "I have no expectations because I'm not at the highest level. But I'm motivated.

So it's just kind of taking out the pressure a little bit."

Halep said her relaxed attitude was partly because she had an extended off-season and arrived in Australia later than usual. "I had a normal life for two months, which is great," she said, explaining she was "exhausted" after last season's breakthrough efforts.

She insisted she was unconcerned about losing the number one ranking if she failed to go deep in the tournament. "It's not in my mind," she said. "I finished three years at number one, the ranking doesn't matter anymore. "I play tennis because I like it. Now my challenge is to win every match I play." — AFP

## India's Manu Sawhney named new ICC chief

**NEW DELHI:** The International Cricket Council yesterday named Manu Sawhney its new chief executive officer to replace David Richardson, who will step down after the World Cup in July. The 52-year-old Indian will join ICC from next month before formally taking over the reins later this year from Richardson, a former South Africa wicketkeeper-batsman.

Sawhney, a former chief executive of Singapore Sports Hub and managing director of ESPN Star Sports, is also a non-executive director and member of the audit committee of Manchester United Limited.

ICC chairman Shashank Manohar ratified Sawhney's appointment after consulting with the nominations committee. "I am delighted to confirm Manu's appointment today," Manohar said in a statement.

"He brings 22 years of outstanding commercial experience to the ICC and will lead the delivery of our new global growth strategy for the game." "Our search produced a host of excellent candidates from around the world, but Manu stood out as the man to work with our Members and take cricket forward.—AFP

## Japan Olympic chief denies corruption allegations

**TOKYO:** The head of Japan's Olympic Committee yesterday denied involvement in a suspect payment made before Tokyo was awarded the 2020 Games, while apologising for any possible impact on the hosting of the event.

French investigating magistrates have indicted Tsunekazu Takeda as they probe two payments of 2.8 million Singapore dollars (\$2.1 million) made before the Japanese capital was chosen to host the Olympics.

During a nationally televised news conference lasting only seven minutes, Takeda said: "I was never involved in any decision-making process" over the payment.

Takeda added that he had already protested his innocence during questioning by French authorities in Paris on December 10. He also said the payment was not corruption but "a consultancy contract signed through appropriate approval procedures". "I'm very sorry that this trouble could possibly affect the Olympic movement," he added, vowing to co-operate with the authorities.

He did not take questions from reporters after making his statement, which was similar to remarks he made on Friday when the charges filed last month emerged.

The affair comes as an unwelcome distraction for 2020 organisers, who have been widely praised for being ahead of schedule with 18 months to go until the opening ceremony next July. In a statement, Tokyo 2020 said it had "no means of knowing the bid committee's activities", which occurred before the organising committee was set up.

"We believe that the Games were awarded to Tokyo



**Tsunekazu Takeda**

because the city presented the best bid," the statement added. "There are just 18 months to go until the Tokyo 2020 Games and we intend to carry on preparing for them." Education Minister Masahiko Shibayama, whose ministry supervises the nation's sports activities, called on Takeda to help lift suspicions by giving clear explanations.

"All we have to do is to go ahead with preparations so that the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics can be an event to be celebrated," Shibayama told a separate news conference. The case comes at a delicate time in Franco-Japanese relations, with the arrest and continued detention of Renault boss Carlos Ghosn on alleged financial misconduct charges sparking criticism overseas of Japan's legal system. A request for Ghosn to be freed on bail was rejected on Tuesday, dashing the tycoon's hopes of an early release. The 71-year-old Takeda, a former Olympic showjumper who led Japan's campaign to win the Games, is also a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The IOC's ethics committee has said it will continue to "watch the situation" but stressed that Takeda was innocent until proven guilty.—AFP

## Emphatic Djokovic lines up Tsonga Aussie Open showdown

**MELBOURNE:** Novak Djokovic began his bid for a record seventh Australian Open title in emphatic fashion yesterday, crushing 230th-ranked American Mitchell Krueger to set up a showdown with Jo-Wilfried Tsonga.

The world number one had reached the Australian Open second round for 13 consecutive years and that streak was never threatened by the qualifier, who caved in 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena. Djokovic, appearing in his 300th Grand Slam match, did drop his second service game to go 1-2 behind in the first set but broke back immediately and went on to record his 259th match win in a major against a gritty but outclassed opponent. "Playing him for the first time I didn't know what to expect," said the Serbian top seed. "He was very competitive and I had to work hard."

Djokovic closed out last season magnificently, making an astonishing climb back from outside the world's top 20 in June, winning Wimbledon and the US Open on the way to reclaiming the number one ranking in November.

It was a stark contrast to the way he exited Melbourne a year ago at the hands of South Korea's Chung Hyeon in the last 16. He then struggled as elbow surgery was followed by a string of poor results.

"It feels great to be healthy and back on this court again," Djokovic told reporters. "Twelve months ago it was quite a different sensation on the court with the elbow injury. Twelve months forward, obviously things are quite different."

"I had a tremendous success in the last six months. It got me to a great position. Hopefully I can follow up on this victory tonight with a good performance." Djokovic will take a trip down memory lane next when he plays old foe Tsonga in the second round.

Frenchman Tsonga was on the losing side in the 2008 Australian Open final as Djokovic won his first of 14 Grand Slams. "It's funny, I mean, 11 years after our first Grand Slam final here, it feels like a lot has happened for both of us," said Djokovic.

Former world number four Tsonga missed seven months of 2018 after knee surgery and needed a wildcard to get into the tournament after his ranking dropped outside the top 200. "He also struggled with injuries lately. It's good to see him playing well," said Djokovic.

The unseeded 33-year-old, who has also reached five Grand Slam semi-finals in his career, will be a dangerous opponent, having enjoyed a run to the last four in his comeback tournament at Brisbane. "Just very powerful, serve, forehand, big weapons," acknowledged Djokovic. "I know what to expect. I've played him many times. I lost to him, as well. In this court, as well, in Rod Laver I think back in 2010."

"I'm going to approach it as any other match, to be honest. Really optimistic, but also respectful, trying to do whatever I can to win it." The superstar Serb is right to be cautious. Tsonga is one of only three players to have recorded wins against Djokovic, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal while the other two were ranked number one. The other two are Andy Murray and Juan Martin del Potro.—AFP

Sports

# Man City ready to pounce on any Liverpool slip-ups: Guardiola

City have scored remarkable 21 goals in four home games this year

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola said his Manchester City team will be poised to pounce if Premier League leaders Liverpool falter, following a comfortable 3-0 win over Wolves on Monday that left City four points behind Jurgen Klopp's side.

Two first-half goals from Gabriel Jesus, either side of a straight red card for Wolves' French defender Willy Boly, allowed City to demonstrate that they had banished their shaky December form. The City manager was in no mood to analyse the table and insisted he is interested only in his own team's performances.

"We cannot play the games against Liverpool, we cannot do anything about them," said Guardiola. "All we can do is win our games and be there. We've spoken to our players about it and the fact we cannot control what they can do. All we can do is be there and maybe one day they fail. But if they don't lose, then they'll be champions."

"We've done incredible numbers after last season, but one team has done better than us so far. All we can do is be there until the end and the results will dictate who will win." Two weeks into 2019, City have scored a remarkable 21 goals in four home games this year and have hit 99 in all competitions already in the current campaign. Jesus had scored just three times in his 16 league games coming into the new year but his two-goal performance against Nuno Espirito Santo's team continued his rich vein of recent form.

He scored once in the seven-goal FA Cup win over Rotherham and hit four in last week's 9-0 League Cup humiliation of Burton, and now has seven goals in his past three outings, although City's task was made easier by a straight red card shown to Boly in the 19th minute.

Jesus's opener came in the 10th minute after a magnificent 40-yard pass from defender Aymeric Laporte exposed the Wolves defence and sent Leroy Sane sprinting down the left.

The German's low cross was judged to perfection, as was Jesus's run, as he slid in and steered the ball into an open goal. Boly's rash challenge, an out-of-control, one-footed lunge at Bernardo Silva, may not have been malicious but was deserving of a red soon after.

"It was quite a bad tackle but I'm fine," said Bernardo. "Yes, he did apologise at the end of the game. These things happen." With Wolves down to 10 men, Jesus's second of the evening, from a 39th-minute penalty, made it hard to see Wolves forcing their way back.

Again, referee Craig Pawson appeared to have made the right decision as Raheem Sterling played a one-two only to be brought down by Ryan Bennett's clumsy challenge. Jesus took a stuttering run-up for his spot kick, but there was nothing hesitant in his confident finish into the bottom right corner.

Kevin De Bruyne, surprisingly left on the bench after his angry reaction to being substituted in last week's thrashing of Burton, was brought on just after the hour.

And, in a lively performance, it was his cross, following a 78th-minute short corner that was deflected into his own goal by Conor Coady. "I don't have a magician's ball to discover when I'm going to lose points," said Guardiola.

"But I said to the players, 'don't look at the calendar for the Liverpool games—forget about it,' because normally when this happens, in my experience, you lose your games, and after that it's over." — AFP



MANCHESTER: Wolverhampton Wanderers' English defender Ryan Bennett (L) vies with Manchester City's Brazilian striker Gabriel Jesus (R) during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Wolverhampton Wanderers at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, on Monday. — AFP

## Rivalry and revenge: Iran face Iraq at Asian Cup

DUBAI: One of football's great rivalries takes centre-stage at the Asian Cup today when Iran play Iraq still smarting from their controversial exit four years ago. Iran played most of the classic 2015 quarter-final with 10 men after Mehrdad Pooladi's hotly disputed first-half dismissal but when it ended 3-3 after extra-time, Iraq edged the penalty shoot-out.

Iran's protest that Iraq yielded an ineligible player was dismissed as Carlos Queiroz's three-time winners were sent packing from the tournament in Australia. Four years on from their clash in Canberra, Iran forward Saman Ghodds said memories were still fresh as Team Melli take on Iraq in their final game of Group D.

"Iraq are tough opponents and I think that this will be a revenge match for us," said Ghodds, according to Iran's Vazresh3 website. "I've been waiting for this match ever since the last Asian Cup. We will win this match for the people."

Football is one of the remaining points of contention between the Middle East neighbours, who fought a bloody war in the 1980s in which hundreds of thousands of people died. Relations between the two countries have warmed since the removal of long-serving Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003, but games between the two are not for the faint-hearted.

The three-time Asian Cup winners, lead Iraq on goal difference at the top of Group D, with both teams already qualified for the next round. Former Real Madrid and Portugal coach Queiroz, linked with a move to the Colombia national team after the Asian Cup, said his prime concern was maintaining Iran's perfect start.

"In football, the most important match is always the next one and every match is like a final for us in the tournament," Queiroz said. "Iraq are a strong team and they are one of the favourites to win the title. We have to be at our best."

Iran have not won the Asian title since 1976 but they have been the most impressive so far among the 24 teams in the newly-expanded tournament. A 5-0 thrashing of Yemen was followed by a clinical 3-0 victory over Southeast Asian champions Vietnam.

Iraq, meanwhile, came from behind to beat Vietnam 3-2, and then defeated Yemen 3-0. Facing Asia's highest-ranked team will be a different challenge entirely, however.

"You can't compare the matches we had with Vietnam and Yemen to the match against Iran," said coach Srecko Katanec, who took his native Slovenia to the 2002 World Cup and joined Iraq in September.

"Vietnam played very fluid football for the first 45 minutes and we came out on top. Against Yemen, we were a little complacent and maybe that's why we need to play a strong team, on paper, like Iran."

The build-up to the game has been closely followed in both countries, with former Iraqi player Imad Mohammad telling AFP that Iraqi media had played up its "political character".

"Iraq's audience is looking at this match with a special lens that distinguishes it from all other matches that it played so far or that it will play in the Asia Cup," said Iraqi journalist Ghazi Shaea. — AFP

## Korean coach admits concern over Son's Asian Cup readiness

ABU DHABI: South Korea coach Paulo Bento fears Tottenham forward Son Heung-min has played too many games over the past month after his star player's arrival in the UAE for the Asian Cup. The Koreans take on China in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday as they continue their quest to end 59 years of hurt in the competition, but Bento will take no risks with his best player despite needing a win to finish top of Group C.

"Of course we know how many matches and minutes he has played over the past month," the former Portugal boss said yesterday. "He's probably never played as many games in a row as he has recently. It's only his second day with us so we will need to check his condition tomorrow before we make any decision on him."

"He's a very important part of the team obviously," added Bento, who took charge of South Korea after last year's World Cup. "But we won't take any risks and we also have other options."

Son has played in 12 matches for Spurs in a little over a month and admitted to feeling some fatigue on his arrival in the Emirates on Monday. "I would be lying if I said I wasn't tired," said the 26-

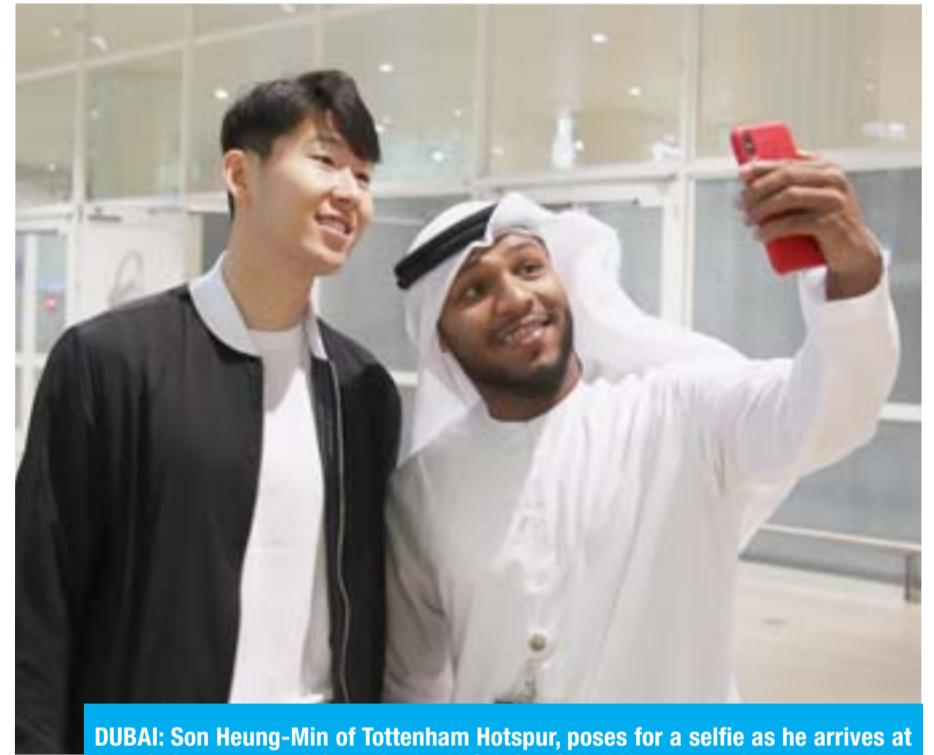
year-old. "But I'm used to playing every three days, so hopefully it will be okay. I'm here to help South Korea lift the Asian Cup."

South Korea have puzzlingly failed to scoop Asian football's most coveted prize since winning back-to-back titles in 1956 and 1960. They beat tournament first-timers the Philippines and Kyrgyzstan 1-0 in their first two games but were less than impressive without star man Son.

But Bento promised to attack Marcello Lippi's Chinese side, who currently lead the group on goal difference after edging Kyrgyzstan 2-1 and thrashing the Philippines 3-0. "We face a good team with a very experienced coach," said the Portuguese.

"But we have to take risks and attack if we are to achieve our ambition and finish top of the group. With or without Son, our goal doesn't change—we will try to win." Lippi is set to ring the changes as China chase a first Asian Cup title, but he denied reports striker Wu Lei would be sent home with a shoulder injury.

"He's had a niggle but he's getting better," insisted the Italian. "He isn't going anywhere—but we won't be risking



DUBAI: Son Heung-Min of Tottenham Hotspur, poses for a selfie as he arrives at Dubai airport to participate in the AFC Asian CUP UAE 2019, on Monday. — AFP

him tomorrow." China finished Asian Cup runners-up in 1984 and 2004 but Lippi, who steered his native Italy to World Cup victory in 2006, backed his side to make a run at the title.

"To become champions you need good players, which we have," said the 70-year-old. "You also have to have complete harmony in the group. You can't have any prima donnas. If we're not all working for the same thing it will be very difficult to win this tournament." — AFP

## Constantine quits as India coach

SHARJAH: Stephen Constantine said he would be stepping down as India's head coach after they were knocked out of the AFC Asian Cup following a 1-0 defeat by Bahrain in Sharjah yesterday. Needing a draw to progress, India finished bottom of Group A after conceding an injury-time penalty which meant Bahrain leapfrogged them into third place. "I'm stepping down after this game," Constantine, who took charge of India for a second time in 2015, told reporters after the match.

"My objective from day one was to qualify for the Asian Cup. I've done that and I'm exceptionally proud of the players for everything they have given. I think my cycle has finished. I did what I was asked to and a little bit more and, after four years, it's time to leave." Hosts United Arab Emirates topped the group ahead of Thailand following their 1-1 draw as both teams advanced to the knockout stage while Bahrain also progressed as one of four best third-placed teams. — Reuters

## Arsenal goalkeeper Petr Cech to retire at end of season

LONDON: Arsenal goalkeeper Petr Cech announced yesterday that he will retire at the end of the season. The 36-year-old, who won four Premier League titles with Chelsea, revealed his decision on Twitter.

He wrote: "This is my 20th season as a professional player and it is 20 years since I signed my first professional contract, so it feels like the right time to announce that I will retire at the end of this season."

The Czech, who arrived in the Premier League with Chelsea in 2004 and moved to Arsenal in 2015, added: "Having played 15 years in the Premier League and won every single trophy possible, I feel like I have achieved everything I set out to achieve."

"I will continue to work hard at Arsenal to hopefully win one more trophy this season, then I am looking forward to seeing what life holds for me off the pitch."



Stephen Constantine

Cech joined Arsenal in 2015 and has made 129 appearances for the Gunners after winning multiple trophies at rivals Chelsea.

Signed from Rennes by Claudio Ranieri in 2004, Cech won four Premier League titles, four FA Cups, the Champions League, the Europa League and three League Cups with the Blues. Cech suffered a serious head injury in 2006 following a collision with Reading's Stephen Hunt. Hunt's knee crashed into Cech's head, leaving him with a fractured skull, but he returned to action four months later wearing what became his trademark protective headgear. Cech became the first goalkeeper to keep 200 Premier League clean sheets in Arsenal's 3-0 win over Watford last season, during which he saved a penalty from Troy Deeney.

He is also the Czech Republic's most capped player, making 124 appearances. Cech is no longer first choice at Arsenal, with Bernd Leno preferred for most of this season so far, but the club were quick to pay their own tribute. Arsenal tweeted: "For your consummate professionalism, for being the perfect role model, for the 50 clean sheets, for your honesty, your integrity and for your inspiring work with @AFC\_Foundation, we want to say... Thank you, @PetrCech!" — AFP

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
FRENCH LEAGUE		
EA Guingamp v Stade Rennais	21:00	
beIN SPORTS		
AS Monaco FC v OGC Nice	21:00	
beIN SPORTS		
Nimes Olympique v FC Nantes	21:00	
beIN SPORTS		
Toulouse FC v Olympique Lyonnais	21:00	
beIN SPORTS		
Saint Etienne v Olympique Marseille	23:00	
beIN SPORTS		
SUPERCOPPA ITALIANA 2018		
Juventus FC v AC Milan	20:30	
KSA Sports 1 HD		
ASIAN NATIONS CUP		
South Korea v China	16:30	
beIN SPORTS		
Kyrgyzstan v Philippines	16:30	
beIN SPORTS		
Iran v Iraq	19:00	
beIN SPORTS		
Vietnam v Yemen	19:00	
beIN SPORTS		

**25** Harden (57) lights up Grizzlies, Mitchell, Jazz drive past Pistons



**26** Serena opens bid for Slam history with crushing win



**27** Man City ready to pounce on any Liverpool slip-ups: Guardiola



AL-AIN: Syria's defender Omar Midani (L) fights for the ball against Australia's forward Jamie Maclaren during the 2019 AFC Asian Cup group B football match between Australia and Syria at the Khalifa bin Zayed stadium in al-Ain yesterday. — AFP

## Aussies down Syria to go through

### Jordan held to a goalless draw by Palestine

AL-AIN: Tom Rogic's injury-time thunderbolt settled an Asian Cup thriller yesterday as defending champions Australia beat Syria 3-2 to reach the last 16 and knock out their war-torn rivals. The result meant the holders finished second in Group B behind Jordan, whose simultaneous 0-0 draw with Palestine gave the Palestinians hope of qualifying as one of the best third-placed teams.

Syria, vocally backed by thousands of their fans in Al Ain, twice fought back from a goal behind before Rogic slammed home the winner in the third minute of injury time. Injury-hit Australia, with only six outfield players on the bench, needed just a draw to go through as they kicked off at the same time as Jordan against Palestine.

Syria looked an early threat before Australia started

to get a grip on the game and Hibernian striker Jamie Maclaren flashed a header just wide. There was drama on the half-hour when a Syrian free-kick bounced through a packed penalty area and into the net, but the goal was ruled out for a foul on Mark Milligan.

But Australia were getting close and Awer Mabil, after seeing one raking shot blocked, unleashed a fabulous effort which curled into the top corner four minutes before half-time. However, the lead lasted just two minutes as Mouaiad Alajaan's cross picked out Omar Khrbin, who on his 25th birthday saw his header saved by Mat Ryan but then gobbled up the rebound.

On 54 minutes, Chris Ikonomidis's shot was hooked away by Omro Al Midani-but the ball was judged to have crossed the line by the additional assistant referee,

who was surrounded by Syrian players.

#### SYRIA PENALTY

The incident silenced the massed ranks of Syrian fans but there was uproar around the stadium shortly afterwards when their team vehemently claimed a penalty for a Milligan handball. Australia looked firmly in control and they could have had a third goal when substitute Apostolos Giannou saw a low shot cannon off the base of the upright.

But Mexican referee Cesar Ramos threw Syria a lifeline when he gave them a penalty after Omar Al Soma went down in the box-and the striker stroked them level once more with 10 minutes to go. It looked like Syria would escape with a vital point before Celtic's Rogic,

playing the tournament with a broken hand, belted Australia's third from distance.

Meanwhile in Dubai, Jordan were held to a goalless draw by Palestine in a fiery clash to preserve their unbeaten record and progress as Group B winners. Twice quarter-finalists, in 2004 and 2011, Jordan stunned holders Australia in their opening game before beating Syria 2-0. But they found plucky Palestine a tougher nut to crack in Abu Dhabi. Abdallatif Al Bahdari header gave Jordan a scare on the hour-mark of a match that was not one for football purists.

Jordan went close when Ahmad Ersan's long-range blast was blocked by Palestine goalkeeper Rami Hamada before the game petered out with both sides content to take a draw. — AFP

### Dhoni, Kohli steer India to second ODI win over Australia

ADELAIDE: Veteran wicketkeeper Mahendra Singh Dhoni steered India to a six-wicket victory over Australia in the second one-day international to level the series in Adelaide yesterday. Former skipper Dhoni, playing in his 334th ODI, coolly guided India across the line with four balls to spare to back up a dazzling century from captain Virat Kohli.

India successfully chased down a target of 299 runs set by Australia who scored 298 for nine with Shaun Marsh scoring 131 off

123 balls. The three-match series now goes to a decider in Melbourne on Friday after Australia won the opening game in Sydney by 34 runs.

"Tonight was an MS (Dhoni) classic," man-of-the-match Kohli said. "He takes the game till the end, when only he knows what's going on in his mind, and he backs himself to hit those big shots at the end. "And hats off to Dinesh (Karthik) too, he came in and took the pressure off him."

When Kohli holed out to Glenn Maxwell at deep mid-wicket to end his stellar knock of 104 off 112 balls, it was 37-year-old Dhoni who took charge to pilot his side home with support from Karthik with an unbeaten 25. Dhoni was physically struggling in the hot conditions and needed treatment from the team physio to finish his match-winning knock and keep India alive in the series. India lost four wickets in their chase after Australia's total.

Shikhar Dhawan hit out before he was

snapped up by Usman Khawaja at mid-wicket off Jason Behrendorff for 32 from 28 balls in the eighth over. India were sailing along before Sydney centurion Rohit Sharma on 43 top-edged Marcus Stoinis to deep forward square where Peter Handscomb, looking into the setting sun, took a safe catch to break up a dangerous 54-run partnership with Kohli.

Ambati Rayudu was the third wicket to fall caught at deep mid-wicket by Stoinis off Maxwell for 24. Kohli was annoyed to get out with the job unfinished and six overs left but Dhoni used his vast experience to get his team safely home. Marsh hammered 11 fours and three sixes, claiming his seventh ODI century and second against India as Australia made the tourists sweat in the field in temperatures hovering around 40 Celsius (104F). India could have been chasing an even higher total if not for the last three overs from Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Mohammed Shami. — AFP



ADELAIDE: Indian batsman Mahendra Singh Dhoni hits the ball during the second one-day international cricket match between Australia and India at the Adelaide Oval yesterday. — AFP