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28 Djokovic delight at stroll to semis after Nishikori retires



India approves Kuwait pact on hiring domestic workers

Move to benefit over 300,000 Indians, including 90,000 female helpers

Amir attends luncheon at Azayez Farm



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, flanked by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and other senior sheikhs, cut a ceremonial cake during a luncheon hosted by Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at the Azayez Farm in Abdaly yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 3)

NEW DELHI: The Indian cabinet yesterday approved signing an agreement between India and Kuwait for cooperation on recruitment of domestic workers, a move that will benefit over 300,000 Indians. The memorandum of understanding provides a structured framework for cooperation on domestic worker related matters and provides strengthened safeguards for Indian domestic workers including female workers in Kuwait, a statement said.

The pact is initially valid for a period of five years and incorporates a provision for automatic renewal. A joint committee will be set up to follow up the implementation of the MoU, which will also promote bilateral cooperation in domestic worker related matters between the two countries. "Around 300,000 Indian domestic workers are deployed in Kuwait. This includes around 90,000

female domestic workers," the statement added. Kuwait and India had signed a memorandum of understanding on domestic workers following a meeting between the two countries' foreign ministers in October last year. According to an Indian Embassy official who spoke on the condition of anonymity, the MoU covers a wide gamut of issues concerning Indian domestic workers in Kuwait, such as non-payment of salaries, ill-treatment of maids, etc. According to the MoU, salary payment will be subject to verification in order to avoid possible non-payment, and sponsors will be contacted to ensure on-time payments.

The official said the agreement also envisages proper insurance protection for workers. If a dispute arises, a time-bound solution will be found in order to avoid delaying a solution indefinitely. — Agencies

BJP faces defeat in UP; Priyanka enters politics

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party could be crushed by an opposition alliance in the country's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh in a general election, which is due by May, according to an opinion poll released yesterday. The India Today-

Karvy Insights Mood of the Nation poll forecast that the number of seats held by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and an ally could plummet to just 5 from the 73 it won in the last election in 2014 if most of the opposition parties, including the Congress party, team up to take on Modi.

That would mean they would have to agree on only one opposition candidate to fight the BJP in each constituency. A recently formed alliance between three regional parties in the state could win 58 seats without Congress joining it, the poll showed. BJP and its ally would win 18 seats in that scenario and Congress would have 4.

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News in brief

Student absence permits

KUWAIT: In a bid to prevent manipulations, the general directorate for residency affairs instructed all its sub-departments not to issue 'absence permits' for expat students residing in Kuwait and studying abroad unless they provide 'to whom it may concern' certificates from their universities after endorsing them from Kuwaiti embassies in the country they are studying in. Security sources explained that expat students studying abroad are usually given a three-month absence permit after staying abroad for six months in order to maintain the validity of their residency visas, provided they include endorsed certificates from their universities. — A Saleh

Tracking postal parcels

KUWAIT: The ministry of services launched a new service to track postal parcels by SMS, said undersecretary Kholoud Al-Shehab, noting that once a parcel arrives in Kuwait, a text message will be sent to the recipient's registered mobile number in both English and Arabic including the parcel's details and post office information for pickup. — Meshal Al-Enezi

Burial of expats

KUWAIT: The technical committee of the Municipal Council postponed discussion of a proposal by councilman Humoud Al-Enezi on burying expats according to their address in the civil ID until the next meeting, when the funerals department will be invited. Director of the department Dr Faisal Al-Awadi said Municipality had approved the proposal, and cemeteries will be divided as follows: Deceased expats who resided in Capital governorate will be buried in Sulaibikhat cemetery; those from Hawally, Farwaniya and Jahra governorates in Jahra; and those from Mubarak Al-Kabeer and Ahmadi governorates in Subhan. Enezi said the percentage of expats buried in Sulaibikhat varies between 40 to 50 percent. — Al-Rai

Iran discovers oil in Abadan

GENEVA: Iran has discovered oil in the southwestern Abadan region for the first time, Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh was quoted as saying by the Mehr news agency yesterday. The oil was found at a depth of 3,570 m in an exploratory well and is "very light and sweet", Zanganeh said. "This is the first time we've reached oil in the Abadan region," the minister was quoted as saying. He gave no estimate of how much oil the well might contain. Iran cannot be shut out of global energy markets because of its vast oil and gas reserves. President Hassan Rouhani said yesterday, according to the official presidency website. — Reuters

Slain Arab Israeli student buried in her hometown

BAQA AL-GHARBIYA: Thousands of mourners attended the funeral yesterday of Aiaa Maasarwe, an Arab Israeli student killed in Australia, in her hometown of Baqa Al-Gharbiya in northern Israel. The 21-year-old was raped and murdered in Australia's second-largest city Melbourne shortly after midnight on Jan 16 when she was on her way home from a comedy show. Her body was found by passersby in bushes near a tram stop.

Police in Australia, who have described the attack as "horrific", have arrested and charged a suspect, 20-year-old Cody Herrmann, with her rape and murder. The murder of Maasarwe, who had been studying in Australia for a year, shocked the country and sparked a huge outpouring of grief that saw thousands attend vigils in her memory. "I appreciate the support of all these people, in the whole world and also in my town," said her father, Saeed Maasarwe, with Australia's ambassador to Israel, Chris Cannan, by his side.

Thousands of people gathered in silence at Baqa Al-Gharbiya, a town with a Muslim majority, as mourners carried the coffin containing Maasarwe's body to her

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BAQA AL-GHARBIYA: Mourners carry the coffin of Arab Israeli student Aiaa Maasarwe during her funeral in this Arab-Israeli town yesterday. — AFP

Bleeding may offset aspirin heart benefits

TAMPA: Should healthy people take aspirin to ward off heart disease? The notion has been controversial, and the medical advice mixed. But a review of scientific data on the topic Tuesday showed that any benefits are slight, and are counterbalanced by a matching rise in bleeding risks. Aspirin is a blood thinner and can help prevent clots that may lead to heart attack or stroke. But aspirin also boosts the risk of hemorrhage in the brain, stomach and intestines.

"When considering the totality of evidence, cardiovascular benefits associated with aspirin were modest and equally balanced by major bleeding events," said the report in the Journal of the American Medical Association. The meta-analysis examined 10 prior studies involving a total of more than 164,000 people with an average age of 62.



MIAMI: In this file photo illustration taken on April 12, 2016, St Joseph 81 mg aspirin tablets are seen. — AFP

Comparing aspirin users to those who don't take aspirin, researchers found "significant reductions" in strokes, heart attacks and deaths from cardiovascular disease among those who took aspirin.

Aspirin use was also linked to an increased risk of "major bleeding events compared with no aspirin," it said. Statistically, the benefits were close to the risks. If 10,000 people without heart disease took no

aspirin for a year, 61 of them would have a heart attack or stroke, explained Kevin McConway, emeritus professor of applied statistics at The Open University. If 10,000 similar people took aspirin for a year, 57 of them would have a heart attack or stroke.

"Only four fewer in 10,000, but that still has some importance given how common such diseases are and

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Prosecution refers MoI case to court

KUWAIT: The public prosecution has completed cross-examinations in a libel suit presented by the interior ministry dealing with "seizing and facilitating the seizure of public funds" in one of its departments. The prosecution announced that it has referred the case to the chief judge of the court of appeal to set a hearing by the criminal court. The prosecution said in a press release yesterday that it had ended the probe and handling of the case based on a notification by the interior ministry, charging personnel and officials with seizing public funds and facilitating embezzlement of these funds, in light of a report by the Audit Bureau about financial irregularities in the guests' accommodation category of the ministry's budget during 2014-2015 and 2015-2016.

Public Prosecutor Dherar Al-Asousi had tasked a team of investigators from the department of public finances, headed by a public attorney, to look into the case. The panel questioned more than 40 witnesses, including the chief and members of a panel that had been formed by the interior minister for this case. The investigators examined tens of thousands of documents, solicited specialists' expertise from the Audit Bureau, the Central Bank of Kuwait and commercial banks.

The prosecution had issued prison warrants against nine of the indicted persons pending the conclusion of investigations. The prosecution has indicted 24 persons, including eight who remain at large. — KUNA

Local

Britain proved to be great partner in good and bad times: Foreign Minister

Kuwait, UK celebrate 120 years of friendship



KUWAIT: A general view of guests in attendance of a ceremony held to celebrate the 120th anniversary of friendship between Kuwait and the United Kingdom. —Photos by Joseph Shagra



Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah delivers a speech.



The British Ambassador to Kuwait Michael Davenport addresses the audience.



Information Minister Mohammad Al-Jabri speaks during the event.

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Kuwait celebrated the 120th anniversary of friendship between Kuwait and the United Kingdom yesterday at the Sheraton Hotel. During the opening speech, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah praised the high level of the strong, strategic and historical ties between Kuwait and the UK during their extended relationship for more than 250 years. He said Kuwait celebrates today the 120th anniversary of the signing of the Kuwait-British Friendship Treaty (protection agreement) by the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Mubarak bin Sabah Al-Sabah with the British government in 1899, as this treaty was one of the most famous agreements between Kuwait and Britain. "Kuwaiti-British relations have continued to develop and strengthen till the present day thanks to the efforts of the two countries and the two friendly peoples to support and strengthen bilateral relations in all aspects," he said.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said Great Britain proved to be a great partner in difficult and good times, adding that traveling to the UK is easier now, especially with a decision to facilitate e-visa procedures and an increase in the number of direct flights to 14 between the two capitals. "Kuwait has made steady growth in the UK since the establishment of the Kuwait Investment Office in London in 1953," he said. "This office is the first investment fund to be opened in the British capital, reflecting Kuwait's confidence in the British market and the status of London as an international financial center where total investments, both public and private, reached \$65 billion."

He pointed out that the volume of trade between the two friendly countries is witnessing a remarkable increase on an annual basis. For example, during the past few years, it has increased at a steady rate of about 10 percent annually, with trade exchange in 2018 amounting to more than \$4.5 billion.

In the education field, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said it is growing significantly, as the number of students enrolled in prestigious



Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah receives a memento.

educational institutions in the United Kingdom during the past three years rose by 140 percent to reach 6,500 students. In the field of healthcare, the confidence of Kuwaiti citizens is clearly reflected in the efficiency of British medical institutions and the provision of excellent medical services and facilities to

Remarkable increase in trade volume

Kuwaiti patients.

Minister of Information Mohammad Abdullah Al-Jabri stressed the Kuwaiti people will not forget the permanent stances of the United Kingdom, most notably during the Iraqi invasion in 1990, where it contributed to

the war to liberate Kuwait. He added that the ministry of information affirms its constant commitment to media and cultural relations through the establishment of cultural activities in the UK as well as the exchange of experiences in various media fields, along with training media cadres and inviting British media to participate to attend conferences and media seminars in Kuwait throughout the year. British Ambassador to Kuwait Michael Davenport said: "On behalf of Her Majesty's government, I should like to express our heartfelt thanks to the government of Kuwait and to Their Excellencies the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Information personally for hosting today's event to mark the anniversary of the first treaty between our countries signed on this very day 120 years ago."

He added that the British commitment to Kuwait continued beyond Kuwait's independence in 1961. In that very year, Britain responded to the then Amir's request for military support, fulfilling its enduring commitment to Kuwait by deploying armed forces

amounting to half of a brigade under Operation Vantage. "When your country was invaded, overrun and occupied by Iraq in August 1990, Britain under PM Margaret Thatcher played a leading role in securing a UN mandate for an international coalition to be formed for the liberation of Kuwait," he said. "Kuwaitis invest in properties all over the United Kingdom and not just in London, and there are now more Kuwaitis studying at British universities than ever before. Indeed, more Kuwaitis are now traveling to Britain than ever before. A key outcome of the state visit to Britain by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in 2012 was the establishment of a new framework for our bilateral relations in the form of the Joint Steering Group, as part of my government's new Gulf strategy. This Joint Steering Group has helped us deepen our defense and security cooperation. In the year ahead, our armed forces will be exercising and training together more than ever before. We are close allies in the International Countering IS Coalition," Davenport said.

On the government-to-government level, he said they are working together in highly sensitive areas, for example, to safeguard passengers flying out of airports and protect the integrity of data and communications against cyber-attacks. "Last week's visit by the Lord Mayor of the City of London highlighted new opportunities in trade and investment - in both directions - including in support of His Highness the Amir's exciting new plans for Madinat Al-Hareer in pursuit of Kuwait's Vision 2035," Davenport noted.

On the education level, he revealed the Kuwaiti Minister of Education will attend the Education World Forum in London, where he will hold consultations on cooperation in the area of curriculum reform. "In the cultural sphere, the 120th anniversary has helped to stimulate fresh co-operation in music and the arts between the British Council and the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra will be making its first-ever visit to Kuwait in April to perform at the remarkable Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre," he said.

FM to participate in UNSC sessions



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah leaves to New York yesterday. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah left Kuwait yesterday to partake in sessions held at the UN Secretary Council in New York City. Kuwait has a non-permanent seat in the council and continues its membership throughout 2019. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled's delegation consists of Assistant Minister for the Affairs of the Foreign Minister's office

Ambassador Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Kuwait's Permanent Representative at the UN headquarters in New York Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi, and a number of senior officials at the Foreign Ministry. The Foreign Minister was seen off by a number of Foreign Ministry officials including Assistant Minister for Protocols Affairs, Ambassador Dhari Al-Ajran and others. — KUNA

Kuwait seeks more media cooperation with UK, Russia

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri discussed yesterday with visiting British and Russian media delegations means of boosting mutual cooperation. Minister Jabri discussed with the two delegations, including a ranking

team from 'Russia Today' television network, some media issues of common concern. He also explored with the two delegations means of enhancing the media cooperation, such as training journalists and cadres in the sector in the three countries. — KUNA

Zain strategic partner of Int'l Invention Fair



KUWAIT: Kuwait Science Club Chairman Talal Al-Kharafi, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti and Director of Scientific Culture at KFAS Dr Salam Al-Ablani during the press conference.

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its Strategic Partnership of the 11th International Invention Fair in the Middle East under the theme 'Where Inventors Meet Investors.' The event, which runs from 27-30 January 2019 at Al Raya Ballroom in the Courtyard Marriott Hotel, is held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Zain took part in the press conference that was held in the Kuwait Science Club headquarters to announce the event's latest preparations, which witnessed the attendance of Kuwait Science Club Chairman Talal Al-Kharafi, Director of Scientific Culture at the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS) Dr Salam Al-Ablani, Zain Kuwait's Chief Corporate Communications and Relations Officer Waleed Al-Khashti, as well as the event's organizing committee and sponsors.

During the press conference, Khashti said: "today we are proud to announce Zain's Strategic Partnership of the 11th International Invention Fair in the Middle East. The fact that this scientific initiative comes under the patronage of His Highness

the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah makes this event more proud."

Khashti explained: "Zain's continuous support to this unique event since its inception comes in line with our Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy, which aims at supporting the scientific arena and contributing to the further development of the scientific field in Kuwait and the Arab region. The fair's success in recent years greatly contributed to highlighting Kuwait's rich cultural involvement in the inventions and scientific areas."

Khashti added: "we value the distinguished role played by the Kuwait Science Club in offering Arab and Kuwaiti youth, especially Kuwaiti inventors, with the proper environment to highlight their scientific talents and skills side by side along with the international inventors who visit Kuwait from all around the world to showcase their inventions, innovations, and bright ideas for a better future."

Khashti concluded: "Zain will spare no efforts in offering its support and encouragement to any entity that adopts creativity and innovation within the community and contribute to the further

progress of national economy. I would like to wish the event's organizing committee and the talented Kuwaiti inventors all the best of luck in their upcoming participation."

Zain is keen on encouraging Kuwaiti and Arab talents in the fields of science and innovation, and the company supports such events as it believes they offer a valuable opportunity for young inventors to benefit from the expertise and knowledge of international inventors, especially that the 11th edition of the fair will feature over 150 inventions from 41 different countries. The company will continue to foster young talents, believing that the current generation of youngsters holds the keys to the future development of Kuwait.

The International Invention Fair in the Middle East, organized in collaboration with the International Exhibition of Inventions - Geneva, is one of the most significant and major specialized exhibitions of inventions in the Middle East region, and is considered the second largest exhibition of its kind in the world after the Exhibition of Geneva. The event offers an opportunity for inventions from different cultures to be exhibited and for inventors to build connections with investors.

Local

Amir attends luncheon at Azayez Farm in Abdali



KUWAIT: 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 members of Al-Sabah family gather for a group photo at the Azayez Farm in Al-Abdali. —Amiri Diwan photos

KUWAIT: 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, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and members of Al-Sabah family attended a luncheon in honor of His Highness the Amir, hosted by Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at the Azayez Farm in Al-Abdali. —KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attend the gathering.



A group photo with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and other senior Al-Sabah family members are seen in attendance.



Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah delivers a speech.



A group photo with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



Children take a group photo with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is welcomed upon his arrival.



Sheikh Ali Al-Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah welcomes His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



Members of Al-Sabah family attend the luncheon.

Local

Awqaf ministry raises awareness on domestic helpers' rights

Minister orders advanced life support training for medical staff

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs announced launching a new campaign to raise awareness on proper treatment of domestic helpers as per the guidance of Islam. The awareness campaign, titled 'A Safe House' and held under auspices of the ministry's undersecretary Fareed Assad Emadi, will officially be launched in a special ceremony tomorrow at Al-Slayil shopping complex in Jahra. In this regard, the head of the national project to boost domestic helpers' awareness (Barirah) and the undersecretary's office manager Abdul Hameed Jaber Al-Mutairi said the project provides guidance to heads of families on how to deal with domestic workers through the principles of moderation in Islam. He further explained that the project has a strategic plan to boost awareness regarding the rights of domestic helpers and 'improve the efficiency' of their work while ensuring their loyalty and sense of belonging to families they work with. The campaign further includes visits to schools and speaking with students about the project's goals, he added.

Life support

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah issued a ministerial decision mandating all doctors, dentists, nursing staff members and technicians to undergo

ACLS and BLS training courses to obtain the skills needed to provide immediate action to help save lives during emergencies. The decision also conditioned undergoing those courses before being promoted to any higher positions and including these courses as basic evaluation elements in the annual performance evaluation reports effective 2019. In addition, the decision conditioned undergoing these courses for those newly appointed in any of the abovementioned specialties.

Practicing medicine

Kuwait Medical Association (KMA) Chairman Dr Ahmad Al-Thuwaini announced that the new draft law on practicing medicine and patients' rights will be launched on Saturday at KMA's headquarters with the attendance of the medical board, members of the parliamentary medical affairs committee, Interior Ministry's investigations committee and Kuwait Lawyers Association. Thuwaini added that the draft

law was fully studied by KFAS and supported by the general policies center at the Supreme Planning Council. He also invited MoH officials and doctors to take part in an open questionnaire to be offered to attendants on Saturday. Thuwaini reminded that the medicine practice law had been the same since 1981 and that the old law had no rights for patients or protected doctors against possible complications and medical errors.

Council member calls for shisha ban



Image Credit: Matthijs de Bruijne via <http://gdr.cascoprojects.org>

Shisha ban

Municipal Council member and head of Ahmadi committee Fahd Al-Muwaizri stressed the need to stop serving shisha in cafes for families, noting that smoking shisha is unfamiliar in Kuwaiti traditions. Expressing his full support to a proposal made in this regard, Muwaizri stressed shisha is harmful to health, especially to children accompanying families to such cafes.

Eggs export ban

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) yesterday issued a ban on exporting local eggs and re-exporting imported ones for a month pending the conclusion of a survey about local market needs. The ministry added that the decision will be effective on issuance and that it would be published in the official gazette.

Driving license renewal devices to operate in March

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Interior completed distributing the devices needed to renew driving licenses automatically to various traffic departments, said informed sources, noting that the new service will be launched in March and would be limited to citizens pending setting special rules to include expats later.

PAAET reappoints Awadhi

The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) announced reappointing Dr Nabil Al-Awadhi as a teaching staff member in the Islamic Education department at the Basic Education College, as earlier.

Notably, an Amiri decree was issued to re-grant Awadhi the Kuwaiti citizenship along with others after his citizenship was revoked back in 2014.

Projects' investigation

The Ministry of Public Works (MPW) decided to extend the tenure of the committee formed to investigate a number of construction projects till March 31, 2019, said informed sources. The sources added that the concerned projects had already been executed and handed over to beneficiaries through MPW committees, and that according to their respective contracts, they are currently subject to periodic maintenance.

Former minister Hossam Al-Roumi had formed a committee to investigate eight projects including a laborers' hostel in Shadadiya, the construction, furnishing and maintenance of Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialties, the experts building in Rigga, a supermarket in Gamata, the criminal investigations building, the second phase of Jaber Hospital, Arabizing health sciences and the Ministry of Education's new headquarters in South Surra.

MP says National Assembly should not debate court ruling

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition MPs yesterday stepped up their campaign against the constitutional court ruling that considered article 16 of the National Assembly's internal charter as unconstitutional with one lawmaker saying the ruling should not be even debated by the assembly.

MP Mohammad Al-Dallal said the ruling violated the constitutional court's powers which do not apply to decisions taken by the national assembly. Article 16 is crucial because the assembly depended on it to vote to keep the membership of MPs Waleed Al-Tabtabai and Jamaan Al-Harbash although

they were handed a jail term for taking part in storming the national assembly in 2011.

Dallal said that the court ruling not only abolished article 16, which is under its powers, but also exceeded that to cancel the assembly decision to keep the membership of the two lawmakers which is not under the court's powers. He stressed that the court ruling does not apply to the assembly decision over the lawmakers' membership and accordingly the assembly should not discuss the issue and the membership should stay.

The assembly is expected to take up the issue at its forthcoming meeting on January 30 unless the constitutional court takes an unexpected decision over the issue after a lawyer demanded that the court should explain its ruling.

Commodities' prices

In another development, MP Askar Al-Enezi yesterday submitted a proposal calling on the commerce minister to present a report every six months to the national assembly about the prices of essential commodities and

price rises in the country. The proposal also calls on the minister to outline measures adopted by the ministry to contain any price hikes especially with regards to essential commodities.

Enezi also said that the minister should attach to the report a list containing the current prices of the most important 30 essential commodities and their previous prices to allow the assembly to compare if the ministry measures were successful enough to curb price increases. The lawmaker said he submitted the proposal because prices of essential commodities have been rising steadily while the ministry made no effort to stop them and curb price rises. Enezi said the ministry failure to curb price hikes has negatively impacted food security in the country.



MP Mohammad Al-Dallal

Multiple injuries in two reported fires

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: After a fire broke out in a Mahboula building, 10 ambulances were dispatched to the scene and Adan and Mubarak Hospitals were placed under high alert. Four people including a fireman were injured and taken to hospital, while seven others were treated on the scene. Meanwhile, a citizen suffered burn injuries on his foot after fire broke out in the ground floor bedroom of a Salwa building. The fire was put out and paramedics dealt with the injured.

Drugged cop held

A suspended policeman put on his uniform after abusing Lyrica tablets and manned a checkpoint in Ahmadi, Al-Rai reported yesterday. A citizen became suspicious when he did not see a police car nearby, so he called interior operations. When policemen arrived at the scene, they asked for the suspect's ID, but he refused to give it to them and was incoherent, so they arrested him despite fierce resistance. Police found Lyrica tablets on him. He was taken to concerned authorities. In a separate case, paramedics rushed a man who did not have an ID to Mubarak Hospital under police guard after an Egyptian national found him near the staircase of a building he does not live in. He was found to be heavily under the influence of drugs, reported Al-Rai.



KUWAIT: A group photo of trainees and officials at the conclusion ceremony of a beginners' course in aircraft security and protection.

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A beginners' course in aircraft security and protection concluded yesterday in a ceremony held under the patronage of Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Essam Al-Nahm. Acting Assistant Undersecretary for special security Maj Gen Shukri Al-Najjar, KAC Chairman

Abdelhameed Al-Jassim, KAC CEO Kamel Al-Awadhi, Kuwait Air Force Commander Maj Gen Adnan Al-Fadhli and representatives from embassies of participating countries attended the ceremony, which featured honoring 40 trainees who attended the course.

Separately, a graduation ceremony was held for Kuwait National Guard men who

attended a beginners' firefighting course held from Oct 21, 2018 until Jan 10, 2019. The graduation was held in the presence of Deputy Director General for Manpower Development Maj Gen Khalid Al-Tarkeet. Tarkeet said the course was held in cooperation with the Kuwait National Guard command and as an activation of the cooperation protocol.

Kuwait's Rekaaz, Qatar's Hadara sign agreement

DOHA: Rekaaz foundation signed a partnership agreement with Abdullah Abdulghani Civilization integration foundation (Hadara) and Amjaad International Academy, aimed at promoting Rekaaz's Gulf campaign, which highlight Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) as the role model to follow. Dr Mohammad Al-Awadhi, supervisor of Rekaaz campaign, which would be launched in March, said that it would have a great impact in changing behavior of individuals in a way that would positively impact "our society and its future." Rekaaz the campaign was based on a scientific study and surveys that covered religious, educational, social and media domains. Salman bin Abdulghani, Chairman of Board of Trustees of Hadara, said Hadara was keen on supporting cultural and social projects, as well as sustainable development programs. He said the partnership agreement with Rekaaz aimed at promoting good morals among society members. The campaign aimed at shedding light on virtues like honesty. — KUNA



DOHA: Dr Mohammad Al-Awadhi, supervisor of Rekaaz campaign (center), speaks during a press conference to announce the signing of the agreement. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Extensive damage seen inside a Salwa building where a fire was reported.

Local

Kuwait-based organization supports Palestinian farmers' determination

Campaign succeeded in planting 2.6 million trees in different parts of Palestine



KUWAIT: Lulwa Al-Mulla, President of Women's Cultural Social Society and a member of the Kuwaiti Committee for Jerusalem (left), with the President of the Arab Network for Food Sovereignty (ANFS) Razan Zuayter. — Photos by Joseph Shagra



ANFS President Razan Zuayter speaks during the event.



By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Arab Organization for the Protection of Nature in Kuwait launched the 'One Million Trees' campaign to support the resoluteness of Palestinian farmers. The event was sponsored by the Women's Cultural Social Society (WCSS), Kuwaiti Committee for Jerusalem and Kuwait Alumni Association and was held on Tuesday at Diwan Al-Mulla in Sharq.

President of the Arab Network for Food Sovereignty (ANFS) Razan Zuayter thanked the WCSS for hosting them and allowing them to meet with other WCSS members and share with them the ANFS pioneering experience in promoting the peaceful and positive steadfastness of the Palestinian people "that constitutes for

future generations."

"I was dreaming of planting one million trees in Palestine, but this has reached 2.6 million trees in different parts of Palestine. We grow as the Israelis uproot," she said. Zuayter added that they are carrying out a campaign in Palestine to re-cultivate olive trees under the slogan of green resistance. "They are cutting down one tree and we are planting 10 trees," she said, pointing out that they launched this campaign in 2000.

She added that the Israeli occupation was uprooting a tree every minute, as they have uprooted three million olive trees since 2000 till today, including a large number of perennial trees, indicating that their campaign has succeeded in the cultivation of 2.6 million trees and they aspire to double this number.

Zuayter noted that volunteers and members of the movement are increasing and are currently working to support Palestinian farmers so that they are able to maintain their land and agriculture, explaining that

“We grow as the Israelis uproot”

the way to get support for Palestinian farmers is through agricultural organizations and non-profit associations in Palestine.

"We trust and buy seedlings from Palestinian plantations," she added.

"There are priorities in selecting the beneficiaries, like prisoners or widows, in cooperation with our partners in Palestine, where we send fact-finding missions to see the results of what we do," Zuayter said, adding "around 24,000 farmers have benefited from this campaign until now and about 240 people receive an income from these projects. Those people depend on the support of Arabs who are interested in the Palestinian cause and have not taken any foreign funding for this campaign."

On the biggest obstacles to their work, Zuayter said there is no unified strategy for aid workers for Palestine in all fields, in addition to financing, since most foreign funding that comes to Palestine is condi-

tional and is more harmful than beneficial. "The division between the Palestinians has had a great impact on the mechanism of our work, and on the aspirations of the Palestinian people. The division is frightening, but as a Palestinian, we do not despair," she said.

Lulwa Al-Mulla, President of the Women's Cultural Social Society and a member of the Kuwaiti Committee for Jerusalem, recalled an incident in which she said that they provided shelter to a Palestinian militant and her husband. She further stressed that steadfastness is not only shown through use of weapons, but by supporting food, nature, and agriculture in the Palestinian territories, and also by helping farmers sell their crops and creating decent work for Palestinian farmers.



A general view of people in attendance.



Kuwait renews support for Palestinian rights

NEW YORK: The State of Kuwait renewed its support for the Palestinian people to attain their legitimate political rights in an independent state, East Jerusalem as the future capital, and a full membership of their nation in the UN. This affirmation came during a speech delivered by Kuwaiti Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi during the UN Security Council's briefing on the situation in the Middle East.

Ambassador Otaibi said that the UNSC is yet again holding a meeting to discuss what has occurred in the Middle East especially in Palestine. He indicated that 2018 had witnessed a surge in violence against Palestinians carried out by the Israeli aggressors who continued to build illegal settlements on Palestine's land especially in East Jerusalem. Forced evictions and violence against Palestinians increased and the situation in the Gaza Strip is not better with the continuation of the ruthless blockade entering its 12th year, said the Kuwaiti diplomat.

Ambassador Otaibi added that the UNSC must move to end such horrible practices against Palestinians; however, such action is not undertaken, green-lighting further Israeli oppression and eliminating any prospect of peace and security for the people of Palestine. The global community stands hopeless in solving the conflict entering its sixth decade and such inaction is met by an utter defiance on part of Israel who failed over and over to find a solution to the dilemma it created through continuous violations against international laws and norms. Some 5,618 illegal settlements in the West Bank were built in 2018 with no real objection as usual, said the Kuwaiti diplomat who indicated that the number of Jewish settlers have increased by three percent to 448,000 not including 200,000 settlers who already reside in the region.

Ambassador Otaibi reiterated calls to implement the 2016's UNSC resolution 2334 regarding the illegality of settlements on Palestinian



NEW YORK: Kuwaiti Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi speaks during the UN Security Council's briefing on the situation in the Middle East. — KUNA

lands especially in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. A number of 460 building in the West Bank and Jerusalem were demolished, leading to the displacement of around 7,000 Palestinians, indicated the Kuwaiti envoy who noted that the demolishing was part of a 13,000 order to level down Palestinian houses and buildings including 50 schools. All of the Israeli actions are against any chances for peace in the Middle East and these policies are contrary to the possible peace agreement based on the 1967 borders, said Otaibi.

The Kuwaiti Ambassador said that last year saw an increasing Israeli military action against Palestinians with an estimated 4,318 violations carried out, around 11 each day. Settlers, said Otaibi, also took part in attacking Palestinians with such incidents increasing by 60 percent in 2018 from numbers in previous years. Israel is a clear violator of the Geneva 1949 conventions with 295 Palestinians killed in Israeli propagated violence and 29,000 injured. The Gaza Strip did not fare any better with 257 Palestinians killed in the rallies of great return, which began on March 30, 2018. Around 6,000 people were arrested during the rallies including children and women.

Kuwait condemns all acts of aggression

carried out by Israel, stated Otaibi who called on implementing UNSC resolutions 904 and 605 concerning the protection of civilians from aggression and war. The Kuwaiti diplomat took the chance to thank the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for his efforts to call for covering the deficit of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), affirming that many nations, including Kuwait, had heeded the call. Kuwait's representative to the UN called on all nations to halt any actions to give legitimacy to Israel by moving their diplomatic missions to occupied Jerusalem based on resolution 478, which forbade such policy.

Ambassador Otaibi renewed calls for just peace in the Middle East through Israeli withdrawal from all lands it occupied, stressing that peace would not be achieved until parties of the conflict agree upon the 1967 borders, the UN resolutions concerning the matter, and the Arab initiative for peace in the region. In the conclusion of his statement, Otaibi congratulated Palestine on being chosen to lead the group of 77 and China, hoping that such step would send a clear message on the legitimacy of the Palestinian cause for independence and peace. — KUNA

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Thailand to hold first election since 2014 coup on March 24

In Greek region of Macedonia, anger at imminent name deal

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A Syrian child stands next to a pail of water outside a tent at Abu Al-Khashab camp for the displaced from the eastern province of Deir Ezzor, northwest of the city of Deir Ezzor. —AFP

Kurd forces overrun last Syrian IS village

Heralds a new phase in the fight against the jihadists

BEIRUT: Kurdish-led fighters overran the last village held by the Islamic State group in Syria yesterday, confining its once vast cross-border "caliphate" to two small hamlets, a war monitor said. It is the culmination of a broad offensive launched by the Syrian Democratic Forces last September with US-led coalition support in which they have reduced the jihadists' last enclave on the north bank of the Euphrates valley near the Iraqi border to a tiny rump.

The capture of the village of Baghouz leaves the few remaining diehard IS fighters holed up in scattered farmhouses among the irrigated fields and orchards on the north bank of the Euphrates River. "Search operations are continuing in Baghouz to find any IS fighters who are still hiding," the head of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Rami Abdel Rahman, told AFP. Redur Khalil, a senior Kurdish official, said the latest gains only heralded a new phase in the fight against the jihadists.

"Geographically, the noose is tightening around IS," he told AFP. "But we have to repeat it: the geographical end of IS does not mean the organization is terminated." "Our battle is still long and will be waged in several phases," The

Observatory said late on Tuesday that around 4,900 people, mostly women and children but including 470 IS fighters, had fled the jihadists' fast dwindling enclave in two days. Of those 3,500 surrendered to the advancing SDF on Tuesday alone. They were evacuated on dozens of trucks chartered by the SDF.

'Diehard fighters'

The fall of Baghouz follows the SDF's capture of the enclave's sole town of Hajin and the villages of Al-Shaafa and Sousa in recent weeks. The last two hamlets still under IS control are Safafna and Sajla, on which Kurdish-led operations are expected to focus in the coming days. The new wave of departures means that nearly 27,000 people have left former IS areas since early December, including almost 1,800 jihadists who have surrendered, the Observatory said.

The whereabouts of the ultra-elusive IS supremo Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who has made just one public appearance — in Iraq's then IS-held second city Mosul in 2014 — are unknown. The US-led coalition declined to be drawn on when it expected its SDF allies to overrun the final sliver of territory still under IS control. "It is difficult

to say how much longer, despite the progress," coalition spokesman Colonel Sean Ryan said. "We try to stay away from timelines as it is more about degrading the enemy's capabilities."

"We are seeing a lot of enemy fighters fleeing. The Syrian forces are less than 10 kilometers from the Iraqi border but still fighting against a resistance of diehard fighters." The remaining jihadists are well within artillery range of Iraqi forces stationed along the border, who are determined to prevent fugitive IS fighters from slipping across. On Saturday, Iraqi shelling and air strikes on IS positions in an around Baghouz killed at least 20 jihadists, according to the Observatory.

Trump controversy

The coalition has stepped up its own air strikes against IS since the jihadists killed four Americans and 15 other people in a suicide bombing on a restaurant in the flashpoint northern town of Manbij on January 16. The US losses were the biggest since Washington deployed troops in Syria in 2014 in support of the SDF.

Previously it had reported just two combat losses in separate incidents. The Manbij bombing rekindled con-

troversy triggered by President Donald Trump last month with his surprise announcement of a full withdrawal from Syria. The US president justified the order with the assertion that the jihadists had now been "largely defeated" in Syria, a claim that the attack threw into renewed question.

It is a far cry from the jihadists' peak in 2014, when they overran large parts of Syria and neighboring Iraq, and IS proclaimed a "caliphate" in areas under their control. The gains have come at the cost of heavy losses for the mainly Kurdish fighters of the SDF and despite their sense of betrayal by their US ally after Trump's withdrawal announcement.

Neighboring Turkey has threatened repeatedly to launch a cross-border operation to crush the Kurdish fighters of the SDF and the autonomous region they have set up in areas of northern and northeastern Syria under their control. Turkish troops had been held at bay by the intervention of US troops who set up observation posts along the border and mounted joint patrols with Kurdish fighters. But with those troops gone, the Kurds fear they will be exposed to the full might of the Turkish military. —AFP

France won't enter a 'stupidity contest' with Italy: Minister

PARIS: Paris will not be drawn into a "stupidity contest" with the populist government of Italy, where officials have launched several verbal attacks on President Emmanuel Macron, France's Europe Minister Nathalie Loiseau said yesterday. "Our intention is not to have a stupidity contest," Loiseau said, indicating that the government would not wage a war of words or otherwise seek to retaliate against Rome.

But working meetings and visits between the two countries are largely out of the question for now, she added. "There are several things we need to do with our important neighbor Italy, and we want to continue to be able to work together," Loiseau

said. "Does that mean the current environment permits ministerial visits as if nothing has happened? I will go to Italy once things have settled down," she said.

Tensions have flared between the two countries since the Five Star Movement and far-right League party came to power in a coalition in Italy last June.

Macron targeted the populist government specifically last year as he sought to form a pro-Europe alliance of parties ahead of European Parliament elections in May, raising the hackles of politicians in Rome. On Monday, Deputy Prime Minister Luigi Di Maio accused Paris of fuelling the migrant influx to Europe by continuing to "colonize" Africa. That prompted France to summon Italy's ambassador in protest over Di Maio's comments that "the EU should sanction France and all countries like France that impoverish Africa and make these people leave".

Italy's Interior Minister Matteo Salvini poured fuel on the fire Tuesday by referring to Macron and

saying he hoped French voters would soon free themselves from a "terrible president". Salvini, who is also deputy prime minister, said in a Facebook video that he felt "close, with all my heart... to the French people, the millions of men and women who live in France under a terrible government and terrible president".

Di Maio and Salvini have also voiced support for the "yellow vest" protesters who have been demonstrating against Macron's government since November. Macron himself said last year that European populist leaders including Salvini were right to see him as their "main opponent," denouncing in particular Italy's hard-line stance on refusing migrants. But in recent months French officials have largely refused to respond to the provocative statements. "Do (such comments) help the Italian people, or contribute to their well-being? I don't think so," Loiseau said Wednesday. "Have they had any influence on the political situation in France? I don't think that's the case either." —AFP

Modi recounts self-discovery solo jungle trips

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has claimed he used to spend days "reflecting" alone in the jungle, in a new interview seeking to burnish his religious credentials as tough elections loom. Modi, who secured a landslide poll victory in 2014, has long touted his remarkable backstory that saw him rise from humble origins as the son of a tea seller to become India's devout Hindu leader.

His nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took office after tapping into the country's strong Hindu faith and conservative traditions, personified in the 68-year-old premier. Modi shared further details of his hardscrabble life on Tuesday, telling the popular Humans of Bombay Facebook page that he regularly left home to seek solitude during the Hindu festival Diwali. "Not many people know this, but I would go away for the five days... somewhere in a

jungle," Modi said. "I would pack enough food to last for those five days. I would reflect... People often asked me, 'Who are you going to meet?' And I would say, 'To meet myself.'"

Modi also spoke candidly about his early life, saying he grew up with "a great need to look sharp and groomed" despite his family's meager earnings. "Even though we couldn't afford an iron, I would heat some coal, use an old 'lota' (rounded vessel)... This was the beginning of everything that I am today and I didn't even know it at the time," he said. Modi has used his simple origins to contrast himself with Rahul Gandhi, the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty that has dominated Indian politics for decades, who is leading a resurgent opposition to polls expected by May.

The prime minister has been a champion of Hinduism and Indian culture, last year publicising the yoga exercises he said were key to his fitness regimen. But Tuesday's interview drew a mixed reaction from readers, with praise for Modi's "inspiring" story tempered by critics. "I thought this platform was for genuine people and genuine stories. Why the sudden need for this political propaganda," wrote one user. —AFP

International

Netanyahu pledges 'lethal' response to Gaza violence

Also responded by blocking \$15 million of Qatari aid

GAZA CITY: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Palestinian Islamist group Hamas yesterday of a "lethal" reaction to any renewed Palestinian violence on the Gaza border, after blocking aid to the strip in response to the wounding of a soldier there. Weeks of relative calm in the Gaza Strip ended Tuesday when Israeli soldiers were fired on along the border with the enclave in two separate incidents. An officer was lightly wounded when a bullet hit his helmet.

In response Israeli tanks struck two Hamas positions in Gaza, killing one militant, while overnight Israeli warplanes struck what the army said was a Hamas military camp in northern Gaza. Netanyahu responded by blocking \$15 million of Qatari aid that was expected to be transferred to Gaza, and told Israeli soldiers he would respond with force to any further hostilities. "Maybe there is someone in Gaza who thinks he can stick his head up; I suggest that they understand that the response will be lethal and very painful," Netanyahu said. "We are ready for any scenario and escalation," he said at a military exercise in southern Israel, quoted by his office.

Israel and Hamas have fought three wars since 2008 and fears of a fourth round remain. However violence has abated since November as a result of an informal truce between the parties. Under that agreement Israel has permitted Gulf state Qatar, a Hamas ally, to bring in aid to the strip, including \$15 million a month to pay salaries of Hamas civil servants and assist impoverished residents.

Conditions desperate

The January payment had been expected to enter Gaza today but Netanyahu blocked it after the flare-up, an Israeli official confirmed. This is the first time that Israel has admitted to obstructing the transfer, which was

already delayed by two weeks. The payment would be the third of six planned tranches, totaling \$90 million, in connection with the truce.

Israel's permission is required since the cash must be delivered via its territory. Hamas is labeled a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union, and banks are hesitant to make the transfer. At the funeral of the Hamas fighter Wednesday, mourners called for revenge as the body was accompanied by members of Hamas's military wing. Israel maintains a crippling blockade of the Gaza Strip, the cramped territory wedged between Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean. The Jewish state says it is necessary to isolate Hamas but critics say it amounts to collective punishment of the enclave's two million residents. The Qatari payments are controversial in Israel, where they have sparked opposition from right-wing activists and politicians. In November Israel's defense minister Avigdor Lieberman resigned after accusing Netanyahu of being soft on Hamas following a flare-up.

'Mr Security'

The right-wing premier is running for a fifth term in April 9 elections, having long portrayed himself as "Mr Security" to Israelis. Widely shared images of suitcases of cash being sent into Gaza through Israel could prove awkward for Netanyahu. The father of Hadar Goldin — an Israeli soldier killed in the 2014 Gaza war and whose body Hamas is still believed to hold — told army radio Tuesday he believes the funds are ultimately going to Hamas. "That's what happens when you capitulate to terrorism," Simha Goldin said. Gaza has seen weekly Hamas-backed demonstrations along the border since March 2018, with demonstrators calling for Palestinian refugees in Gaza to be able to return to their former lands now inside Israel. Israel accuses



Masked Hamas gunmen carry the body of Mahmoud Al-Nabahin, 24, during his funeral in the Bureij refugee camp, in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

Hamas of using the protests as cover to carry out violence. At least 244 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire since March, mostly during border clashes but also by tank fire and air strikes. Two Israeli soldiers have been killed.

Hamas said in a statement it "never accepts shedding the blood of the Palestinian people to fuel the Israeli elections

advertising." United Nations envoy Nickolay Mladenov warned Tuesday that living conditions in Gaza remained desperate and the risk of new conflict was high. "There is no status quo; there is only a deterioration that, if left unchecked, without a vision and the political will for peace, can only lead to endless conflict," he told the UN Security Council. — AFP

Brazil leader says son will 'pay the price' if wrongdoing proved

DAVOS: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, elected on promises to stamp out graft, said in an interview yesterday that a politician son of his under scrutiny for suspicious financial transactions will "pay the price" if wrongdoing is found. Bolsonaro made the remark about his son Flavio Bolsonaro, a senator-elect in Brazil's new Congress, to the financial news agency Bloomberg as he attended the annual Davos gathering of the globe's political and corporate chiefs.

"If by chance he erred and it were proven, I regret it as a father, but he'll have to pay the price for those actions we can't accept," Bolsonaro said. It was his clearest statement yet that he was leaving Flavio to face the mounting suspicions alone. The burgeoning scandal at home has badly embarrassed the president, who has taken a strong stand against graft. Brazil's COAF agency that fights financial crimes reportedly discovered 48 deposits made to Flavio's bank account over a few days in June-July 2017, some of them just minutes apart, for a total 96,000 reais (\$25,000 at the current exchange rate).

The agency is also looking at over \$300,000 in transactions made in the name of Flavio's former driver and bodyguard, Fabricio Queiroz, that far exceeded the aide's salary as a police officer. Two of those transactions, amounting to around \$6,000, were deposits to an account held by President Bolsonaro's wife. The leader said they were repayments of an undeclared loan. Brazil's supreme court, at Flavio's request, last week ordered a suspension of the probe against Queiroz, who for medical reasons has not testified.

Brazilian media have reported that property investments by Flavio — previously a lawmaker in Rio de Janeiro's state legislature — have soared exponentially in recent years. They have also highlighted that Flavio's office hired relatives of a fugitive former policeman wanted for allegedly leading an armed gang controlling territory in some of Rio's lawless slums. Flavio, in television interviews over the weekend, said none of the deposits to his account were illicit. He also said the transactions related to Queiroz were his former aide's responsibility. — AFP

Three arrested at US airport, charged with supporting IS

CHICAGO: Three American citizens of Kenyan descent have been charged with conspiring to support the Islamic State group after an arrest at a Michigan airport foiled their alleged plot, authorities announced Tuesday. The three men, all in their 20s and related to each other, allegedly recorded videos pledging their allegiance to IS and discussed a potential car attack in the United States if one of them was unable to travel overseas to fight for the terror group.

FBI agents employed undercover agents to communicate with the suspects and multiple search warrants of their social media accounts to monitor the suspects' communications between each other, according to an affidavit filed in federal court. The three were arrested Monday at Gerald Ford Airport in the city of Grand Rapids as Muse Abdikadir Muse, 23, also known as Muse Muse, was going through the TSA security screening process. Authorities said he had checked in for a trip that would eventually take him to Mogadishu, Somalia, with the goal of joining IS.

In an online exchange with an undercover FBI agent, Muse allegedly said he wanted to join IS in Somalia and "fight in the front lines," according to the affidavit. Police also arrested at the airport terminal the men said to be Muse's co-conspirators: his brother Mohamad Abdikadir Muse, 20, and another relative, Mohamed Salat Haji, 26. The two are alleged to have purchased the airline ticket and driven Muse to the airport. — AFP

Trump vows not to 'cave' on 32nd day of shutdown

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump had a message Tuesday for Democrats hoping he'll relent in the political arm wrestling that has seen funds blocked to parts of the government for a record 32 days: "No Cave!" Trump's defiant tweet again blamed congressional Democrats for the chaos, insisting he will not lift his shutdown on federal government funding unless they approve his \$5.7 billion plan for more walls along the US-Mexican border.

"Without a Wall our Country can never have Border or National Security. With a powerful Wall or Steel Barrier, Crime Rates (and Drugs) will go substantially down all over the US," Trump tweeted. "The Dems know this but want to play political games." Trump triggered a partial government shutdown on December 22 — refusing to sign off on funding everything from FBI salaries to the National Park Service — as a way of pressuring the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives to back the wall project.

But with Democrats refusing to give in and Trump sticking to his hardball tactics, political paralysis in Washington has morphed into growing day-to-day pain across the country as some 800,000 federal employees adjust to life without salaries.

Tensions rising in Venezuela ahead of rival protests

CARACAS: Opposition supporters and regime loyalists in Venezuela are set to hold competing mass street rallies two days after a failed mutiny by soldiers hoping to spark a movement that would overthrow President Nicolas Maduro. "We have a historic appointment with our country, with the future of our children," said National Assembly president Juan Guaido, the driving force behind the opposition protest.

"Venezuelan military, tomorrow we have a historic appointment with the people," he said Tuesday during a session of the legislature, which the regime has stripped of power. Guaido, 35, called for the demonstration earlier this month after Maduro was sworn in for a second term of office over objections from both the opposition and large sections of the international community.

Maduro earned his second term by winning snap elections in May that were boycotted by the opposition and dismissed as a fraud by the European Union, the United States and many Latin American countries. The opposition protest aims to support Guaido's bid to set up a transitional government ahead of new elections. He received support on Tuesday from US Vice-President Mike Pence, whose country has sanctioned top regime figures. Pence wrote on Twitter: "As the good people of Venezuela make your voices heard tomorrow, on behalf of the American people, we say: estamos con ustedes. We are with you."

'Coup d'etat'

Maduro responded by accusing the US, through Pence, of trying to engineer a coup. Venezuela's government ominously predicted there would be violence against opposition protesters, although claiming it would be self-inflicted in a bid to portray the regime as brutal. Venezuela's Communications Minister Jorge Rodriguez even said Monday's mutiny, in which soldiers took over a command post in the north of Caracas and called on the public to head to the streets in repudiation of Maduro, was merely a ruse to steal weapons.

US Senator Marco Rubio warned of manipulation by

Trump's main opponent, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, was adamant that the president is to blame. "#EndTheShutdown now," she tweeted. Pelosi, speaker of the Democrat-led House, argues that border security funding cannot even be discussed before the shutdown ends, accusing Trump of "holding Americans hostage."

Senate to vote

The Senate is set to vote on two bills this week that would in theory break the deadlock, even if both have little chance of passing. The first is on Trump's compromise offer made Saturday, when he told Democrats he would extend temporary protection to about a million immigrants currently risking deportation if he gets his wall funding.

Pelosi sent out a rejection before Trump had even officially laid out his proposal. The president also caught backlash from the right wing of his own party, which accused him of wanting to give amnesty to large numbers of people living in the country illegally. Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced that a vote on Trump's plan would take place this week, saying the chance to end the shutdown is "staring us in the face."

However, the bill looks doomed, with the senior Democrat in the Senate, Chuck Schumer, describing the Trump offer as "going nowhere fast." "President Trump and leader McConnell need to come to their senses," he said. The Senate was also expected to reject a second, Democrat-backed bill to restart funding for the government. Even if it did get through Congress, "the president won't sign it," a senior Senate Republican aide said. Both votes are expected today.



WASHINGTON DC: In this file photo taken on January 14, 2019, US President Donald Trump speaks to the media as he departs the White House. — AFP

Political fight, real consequences

Extending the existing border fences has been at the top of Trump's domestic agenda since his 2016 campaign. Democrats accuse his campaign against illegal immigration of ignoring more complex humanitarian issues on the border and stoking xenophobia. But the disagreement over walls has expanded into a much broader test of political strength in divided Washington, with each side desperate to prevent the other from declaring victory.

Meanwhile, the hundreds of thousands of unpaid federal employees and many more contract workers are collateral victims, facing the start of a second month of

going unpaid. Full-time employees will get their back pay eventually, but in the meantime they still have to meet mortgage payments and other monthly costs. Contractors, however, won't receive the lost payments.

"If you're not going to pay our bills, then send us back to work. That's all we're asking," said Yvette Hicks, 40, a contractor at the Smithsonian museum complex. "People are losing their houses, people are losing their cars and everything." "Right now, this shutdown is really destroying me and my family," added the single mother of two. "I'm the mother and the father in my household, and my children depend on me." — AFP



CARACAS: Venezuelan opposition supporters take part in a march on the anniversary of 1958 uprising that overthrew military dictatorship. — AFP

Venezuela's intelligence service, urging them to "reconsider the plan they have for tomorrow before it's too late." Monday's mutiny was quickly put down. Twenty-seven soldiers were arrested and Rodriguez claimed they confessed to handing out weapons to opposition activists "so they can carry out acts of violence, (cause) injuries and deaths during the protest." The mutiny sparked at least 30 small protests in different parts of Caracas, according to a non-governmental organization monitoring social conflict. Police used tear gas against some of the demonstrators. "We leave the violence to others," Guaido said. "Tomorrow is about reuniting as a people to tell the world about the steps we're going to take to end the usurpation, to achieve a transitional government and a free election."

Although Guaido insists he has the backing of the constitution in his bid to overthrow Maduro, the National Assembly has been impotent since 2017 when the Supreme Court, dominated by regime loyalists, stripped it of all its powers. Guaido has acknowledged as much. He says he needs the help of the people and the military to achieve his aims. Analysts say the opposition is not united and faces huge challenges. The scale of its public support will be seen on Wednesday, symbolic because on that day in 1958 the military dictatorship of Marcos Perez Jimenez fell. In calling on government supporters to take part in a counter-rally, Maduro's right-hand man Diosdado Cabello suggested the regime would hold fast. "The only transition is to socialism," he said. These will be the first mass street rallies since 125 people died during protests between April and July, 2017. — AFP

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International

In Greek region of Macedonia, anger at imminent name deal

'How can another country have Macedonia's name? What are we, then?'

VERGINA: As lawmakers in Athens are poised to approve a landmark name deal between Greece and Macedonia, there is relief in many European capitals that a 27-year diplomatic dispute is nearing its end. But in Greece's Macedonia region, home to the ancient Greek-speaking kingdom made famous by Alexander the Great, there is mostly outrage.

"How can another country have Macedonia's name? What are we, then?" wonders Eleni, a 39-year-old souvenir shop owner. "It's like taking away our soul, our history and culture," she adds. Eleni's shop is a few metres away from the necropolis of ancient Macedonian kings in Vergina 485 kilometers north of Athens, one of Greece's top archaeological sites. Among the Macedonian royals buried there is Philip II, Alexander's father.

The agreement expected to be approved on Thursday will rename Greece's neighbor as the Republic of North Macedonia, a move which the government in Athens says will encourage trade and benefit both countries. But critics here say the deal, brokered by Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and Macedonian counterpart Zoran Zaev in June, will merely create confusion and sow new problems. A key sticking point for them is Greece's recognition of a Macedonian language and identity north of the border.

Many homes in this small village are adorned with blue flags bearing the Vergina Sun, an ancient Macedonian symbol believed to be the mark of Philip's royal family. But souvenir seller Eleni said most people outside Greece are more familiar with the red-and-yellow flag adopted by Skopje in 1995, which also bears a sun. "Tourists come from various European countries asking to buy the flag of Macedonia. When I show them the (blue) flag, they tell me that I'm wrong and that it should be red and yellow," she says angrily. "This is what our politicians have achieved: make people believe that Macedonia is not in Greece!" she adds.

'We cannot accept this'

North of the border there is also opposition, with some

loath to change the country's name to placate Greece, and rallies against the agreement have been held in both countries. Tsipras' nationalist allies bolted from the government earlier this month over the deal. His leftist government says the protests have been fanned by far-right hardliners, and several lawmakers say they have received death threats. Another demonstration is scheduled for today in Athens.

"Hang the traitors," several protesters shout at a demonstration against the agreement held in the northern Greek city of Veria this week. A local mayor tells the 1,000-strong crowd Greece had been "pressured" into signing the agreement by our "so-called allies", the US and Germany. "There must be a referendum. Most Greeks do not want this agreement. Soon (the Macedonians) will start claiming (ancient Macedonian) cities," argues Nikos Kalaitzidis, a 37-year-old protester.

At the archaeological museum of Vergina, local staff view visiting tourist groups from neighbouring Macedonia with suspicion, says a staffer. "If they have a guide with them, we send someone to find out what they are told about the archaeological finds," he told AFP. "Since they claim to speak Macedonian, we ask them to read what is written on the (ancient Greek) grave markers," the employee adds. To most Greeks, Alexander the Great is an integral part of their heritage — one of history's greatest conquerors who toppled the Persian Empire and took Greek culture as far as Egypt and India in the fourth century BC. The Romans later created an enormous province called Macedonia that included parts of modern-day Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria. Slavs subsequently migrated to the area of present-day Macedonia from the 6th century AD onwards.

Angelos Syrigos, a professor of international law at Athens' Panteion University, notes that the Macedonia issue is visceral to the Greeks, as the country has been invaded three times via its northern border over the last century. "The Greeks are not specifically worried about any possible irredentist ambitions by Skopje, but by that of other foreign powers who could use the neighboring state to assert their



VERIA: People dressed with a traditional costume take part in a demonstration against the agreement with Skopje to rename neighboring country Macedonia as the Republic of North Macedonia. — AFP

influence in the region," he says. Under Zaev's predecessor Nikola Gruevski, Macedonia had riled Greeks by naming its main airport and highway after Alexander the Great. Zaev's government revised the Macedonian constitution to promote the name change agreement, and has pledged to end

all appropriation of ancient Greek symbols. But many here still fear this could be easily reversed by a future administration in Skopje. "We cannot accept this. We will continue our struggle even if this agreement is approved," says Vangelis Mavridis, a Vergina villager. — AFP

EU urges crackdown on 'golden visas and passports'

BRUSSELS: The European Union urged member countries yesterday to crack down on schemes granting "golden visas and passports" to foreign investors, warning they can bring corruption and money laundering in their wake. The European Commission, the EU executive, published a report urging members to curb the practice of giving foreigners — often Chinese, Russians and Americans — residency or citizenship in return for investment.

"We speak about opening (a) golden gate to Europe for some privileged people who have the money to pay for citizenship or residence," EU justice commissioner Vera Jourova said at the report's publication. "We are looking at it with concern," Jourova told a news conference in Brussels. The commissioner said investor residence and citizens schemes, known as "golden visas and golden passports," should not be a weak link in EU efforts to curb corruption and money laundering.

The report said wealthy candidates for residency or citizenship do face insufficient security and background checks to prevent them from posing a security risk, laundering money or evading taxes. EU countries set conditions for granting and withdrawing nationality but must do so with respect for EU law, enforced by the European Court of Justice, officials said. The bloc's laws are important as a citizen of one EU country has the right to travel to others, exercise economic activities within the 28-nation internal market, and vote in local and European elections. "Crime has no borders," said Jourova, a Czech politician. The Commission complained that Bulgaria, Cyprus and Malta run schemes granting foreign investors citizenship without requiring them to live in those EU countries or show "genuine connections" to them. The investor citizenship schemes, known as "golden passports," offer less strict requirements than those for foreigners seeking to become naturalized citizens.

'Transparency and oversight'

The Commission also said residence permits pose serious security risks to member states. An EU residence permit gives a third-country national the right to live in the member country and to travel freely in Europe's passport-free Schengen area. Britain, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia run these schemes.

The Commission said there was a lack of "transparency and oversight" of the residence schemes, including too few statistics on how many people obtained a residence permit in this way. The Commission warned "it will take necessary action as appropriate" if member countries fail to comply with EU law and rules on border checks, money laundering and tax avoidance. It said it will set up a group of experts from member countries to improve the transparency, governance and security of the investor schemes. The aim is to develop a common set of security checks for investor citizenship schemes by the end of 2019. The problem of "golden visas and golden passports" has been flagged by non-government organizations. In October last year, Berlin-based Transparency International and London-based Global Witness called EU citizenship and residency as "just like a luxury good" which "can be bought".

"By their very nature, golden visa schemes are an attractive prospect for the criminal and the corrupt," they wrote. Several EU members have used such schemes to give passports to around 6,000 people and residency rights to around 100,000 people in the past decade, securing about 25 billion euros (\$29 billion) of foreign direct investment in return, the NGOs said. They said Spain, Cyprus, Portugal and Britain are the countries that have received the most investment in return for visas. Spain received 976 million euros annually compared to 498 million euros in Britain. — AFP

Youth meet offers Pope a respite from scandals

PANAMA CITY: Pope Francis jets into Panama yesterday for a gathering of young Catholics that will likely see him speak out in defense of Central American migrants and human rights. The festive five-day meeting with an expected 200,000 young people from around the world offers the 82-year-old pontiff a brief respite from a torrent of sex scandals that have jolted his papacy.

Groups of young pilgrims have been flocking into the small Central American country for days. Wrapped in the flags of their nations, many resemble soccer fans on the eve of a major tournament, except this is one event in which they will be shouting for the same side. At a Mass to open the festivities on Tuesday evening, tens of thousands of young pilgrims stood to chant, "this is the youth of the pope."

Panama's archbishop, Cardinal Jose Domingo Ulloa, told the future of the church lay "in your vision of a better world". Ulloa said he prayed the gathering "will be a balm for the difficult situation in which many... live without hope, especially the indigenous youth and youth of African descent, the youth who migrates after receiving almost no response from their countries of origin."

Tens of thousands of young pilgrims attended the colorful open air mass, near the capital's historic ramparts overlooking the Pacific end of the Panama Canal. The pope's plane took off from Rome Tuesday evening and was scheduled to arrive in Panama City at 4:30 pm local time (2130 GMT), after a 13-hour flight.

Defending migrants

Caravans of Central American migrants have travelled north through Mexico to the US border since October, stirring a debate over illegal immigrants and President Donald Trump's plans to build a border wall. Francis previously criticized plans for the wall during a trip to Mexico. He used the 2016 World Youth Day event in Poland to call on conservative governments in Central and Eastern Europe to soften their resistance to migrants seeking refuge from conflict in the Middle East. "Many of the



PANAMA CITY: Pilgrims confess at the Youth Park in Panama City on the eve of the arrival of Pope Francis for the World Youth Days. — AFP

young people who are participating in the WYD are immigrants themselves." Vatican spokesman Alessandro Gisotti said, adding that Francis could be expected to speak out on the issue.

The Vatican bills World Youth Day as a chance for the pope to reach out to young Catholics who he says "can change the world." It is the sort of colorful event the people-friendly Argentine pope revels in — a world away from the strains of sex scandals that have rocked his six-year papacy. The most recent scandals struck in the United States, where priests and bishops in several dioceses are under investigation for decades of sex abuse of minors.

The pope met with victims of clerical sex abuse during his last visit to South America, to Chile and Peru, a year ago. The Vatican says there are no formal plans to do so on this trip. However, two abuse survivors from neighboring

Costa Rica have asked to meet with Francis on the sidelines of the WYD. Michael Rodriguez, 38, and Anthony Venegas, 33, told AFP they sent a letter to Francis requesting a meeting but received no reply.

"We managed to deliver a letter to the pope with the help of another person. We told him that we would love to have an audience with him, tell him face to face what we have experienced, give him conclusive proof," said Rodriguez. Francis will hold two open-air masses in Panama City. Among the other highlights of his five-day visit will be a trip to the Good Samaritan home for young HIV and AIDS patients on Saturday, after the closing mass. He will also take a short helicopter trip outside the city to Pacora to visit a youth detention center and hear the confessions of inmates, including one serving time for murder. — AFP

S Sudan urges foreign partners to fund peace deal

JUBA: South Sudan yesterday called on the international community to fund efforts to implement a peace deal, which is already four months behind schedule due to lack of money. In an address to diplomats, deputy foreign minister Deng Dau Deng said the money was needed to move warring forces into cantonment areas, a move seen as vital to addressing security in the country.

"Our specific appeal is for our partners and for the diplomatic community in Juba to give support to plug the gaps... so that we can move," Deng said. Goc Mokwach, deputy finance minister, told AFP that parliament last year approved estimated spending of \$20 million (17 million euros) to implement the peace deal, however an overall budget has not been announced. But Deng said the government only had \$1.6 million for peace efforts. "If you don't have resources, you cannot move," he said. "It is availability of the resources that will actually enhance the process itself."

From the fight for independence until it was achieved in 2011, foreign partners — especially the United States — have poured billions of dollars into the country. Meanwhile investigations by the Enough Project advocacy group has shown how elites have looted government coffers to enrich themselves and fund the war. Since the signing of the peace agreement, President Salva Kiir had had series of foreign visits to South Africa, Egypt, and China to lobby for resources, Deng said.

The peace agreement signed in September 2018 is the latest effort to end a nearly five year war that began when Kiir accused his former deputy, Riek Machar, of plotting a coup. During the conflict, nearly 400,000 people were killed and millions forced out of their homes or to the brink of starvation. But since the agreement was signed, diplomats say there has been a significant reduction in fighting,

although pockets of fighting have continued between government forces and rebels who didn't sign the deal, especially in the Equatoria region.

Deng said the National Pre-Transitional Committee, comprising representatives of the different parties to the agreement, have met six times and established five technical committees. — AFP



DOHA: A handout picture released by the Qatar News Agency (QNA) yesterday shows Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir (L) being received by Qatari Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sultan bin Saad Al-Muralkhi. — AFP

International

Thailand to hold first election since 2014 coup on March 24

A blizzard of names are tossed up as likely future prime ministers

BANGKOK: Thailand will hold a general election on March 24, authorities said yesterday, the first national poll since a 2014 coup knocked out the civilian government of Yingluck Shinawatra. The military has since rewritten the constitution, muzzled all dissent and appointed junta allies across the bureaucracy in a bid to scratch the Shinawatra clan from the Thai political scene and embed its own influence in the country's future.

"March 24 will be the election day," Election Commission head Ittiporn Boonpraong told reporters, hours after the publication of a decree signed by King Maha Vajiralongkorn empowered the his agency to give a date. Thailand's history is pockmarked by coups, short-lived civilian governments and political crises. The poll date is set to ignite campaign season in a country where colorful and boisterous political rallies have often tipped into deadly violence. The office of Prayut, who is also prime minister, called for an "environment of orderliness, civility and unity" — although violence is unlikely among a public tired of political conflict.

An array of new parties — including some aligned to the military, others to the still powerful Shinawatra family — have already begun meetings and recruitment as a blizzard of names are tossed up as likely future prime ministers. Those include Prayut, who has spent months touring the country as he rebrands himself from a gruff man-in-khaki to an avuncular civilian leader with a common touch. Yet he is deeply unpopular among many Thais, who have wearied of his hectoring style as well as a junta accused of running down the economy and doing little to address graft, poor education standards and the kingdom's chasmic social inequality.

Even if the junta's rivals do well in elections, any new civilian government is expected to be hamstrung by the military-scripted constitution. It allows for a fully appointed upper house and embeds 20-year strategies governing everything from the economy to education. "You can call it

hybrid democracy," said Somjai Phagaphasvivat, a political analyst at Thammasat University. But he cast doubt on whether the caustic divisions of the past had been healed. "Under the coup... polarisation remained under the carpet: if you take the carpet up, the polarization remains," he added.

Shinawatras still in the game?

Thailand last held a successful election in 2011. That catapulted the then-political neophyte Yingluck, the younger sister of billionaire Thaksin Shinawatra, into office as head of the Pheu Thai party. Questions remain over Pheu Thai's enduring electoral pull among its vote banks in the poor, rural north and northeast without the star power of the brother-sister duo, both of whom are in self-exile. The party is "ready" for the vote, spokeswoman Ladawan Wongsriwong said.

"Pheu Thai is a big party and we have been trusted across the country for a long time." But the long years of junta rule have decimated the networks of the Thaksin-affiliated "Red Shirts", while scores of key Pheu Thai politicians have been co-opted into the army-linked Phalang Pracharat party. The Shinawatra clan sits at the core of Thailand's political rupture. Their supporters say they are the first political dynasty to address the aspirations of Thailand's poor in a sharply hierarchical kingdom where wealth is hoarded by the Bangkok business elite.

To their enemies among the ultra-royalist, conservative elite, they toxified Thai politics and society with graft, nepotism and populist handouts. Thaksin, a policeman-turned-telecom billionaire, was toppled by a coup in 2006 and went into self-exile in 2008 over a graft conviction. Yingluck fled Thailand in 2017 before she could be sentenced for criminal negligence linked to a rice subsidy scheme. The siblings have crept back to prominence in step with the approach of elections. Thaksin has launched a weekly podcast, sharing his views on everything from Bangkok's pollution crisis to the global economy.



BANGKOK: This photo taken on January 19, 2019 shows a Thai demonstrator displaying a banner calling for an election decorated with a toy military tank during a rally. — AFP

"He still figures in Thailand as a popular hope," Chris Baker, a Thai history expert said, despite the "extraordinary myth" of the billionaire businessman as a kindred spirit of the common man. Many Thais hold little enthusiasm for elections,

widely seen as stacked in favor of the military. "Under the junta the country is just going from bad to worse," said news vendor Lek, declining to give her full name. "Even if there is an election, it will likely be the same prime minister." — AFP

Chinese authorities detain students, labor activists

BEIJING: Chinese authorities have detained a dozen labor activists over recent days in the latest clampdown on efforts to organize workplaces in China, rights groups said. Beijing has taken an uncompromising line against efforts to establish independent labor unions in southern Guangdong province, the epicenter of China's high-tech manufacturing sector.

The campaign is backed by campus Marxist groups at some of China's most prestigious universities — several leaders of which have been arrested or disappeared in recent months. Another seven students and recent graduates from two elite Beijing universities were arrested on Monday, according to labor rights organization Jasic Workers Solidarity. The students were rounded up hours after publishing a statement accusing police of recording forced video confessions of previously detained student activists who had supported the Guangdong union campaign, the rights group said.

They had accused police of organizing recent screenings of the videos, in which their subjects confessed to using worker issues to "subvert the state", on several campuses in an effort to deter further student activism. The viewings targeted students who were members of Jasic

Workers Solidarity — a group which rose to prominence last year when it attempted to form a workers' union at a welding machinery company in Guangdong. Dozens of people who had supported the Jasic Technology strike last summer remain in detention.

A day earlier, five labor activists were taken into custody on Sunday as part of a crackdown targeting trade union organizing in Shenzhen, the Hong Kong-based China Labor Bulletin (CLB) said Tuesday. Three were then charged with disturbing public order while the status of the other two was unclear, CLB said, adding that all five were veterans of workers' rights campaigns in Shenzhen. It was unclear whether the raid was linked with Monday's arrests in Beijing. The detained activists were not directly involved with the ongoing Jasic dispute, but the incident has made authorities nervous about future labor campaigns, CLB spokesperson Geoffrey Crothall told AFP.

Shenzhen has seen more than a dozen strikes and protests in the city since October last year, Crothall said, adding that authorities in the region were nervous about labour activism in the city. Chinese police and the Shenzhen public security bureau did not respond to requests for comment on the arrests. — AFP

Philippine lawmakers back bill to jail 12-year-olds

MANILA: Children as young as 12 years old could be incarcerated under a bill backed by Philippine lawmakers yesterday which has been attacked by the UN and rights monitors. The proposed law was among measures sought by President Rodrigo Duterte to further extend his deadly crackdown on drugs and crime, which has killed thousands since mid-2016.

Duterte's allies had originally proposed lowering the "age of criminal liability" to nine, but after mounting outrage the lower House of Representatives raised it to 12 and passed the bill on the second reading. The current age at which children are held criminally liable in the Philippines is 15. If the Senate — where the bill has attracted greater opposition — approves it the Philippines would join countries like Afghanistan which punish 12-year-old children for criminal acts. "We still think that 12 is a very young age for children to be held criminally responsible," Human Rights Watch campaigner Carlos Conde told AFP Wednesday. "The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has stated that the age of criminal responsibility should be at least 14 years, and should under no circumstances be reduced below that," he added. The bill passed by the House calls for "mandatory" confinement at a special "youth care facility" for children who commit serious crimes like murder, rape and arson — but also for car theft. If the court determines they did not reform at the juvenile holding facility, they can be put in adult prison — which are notoriously overcrowded and dangerous — when they turn 18 years old.

Duterte claimed yesterday that drugs gangs exploit the current law to use children to deliver methamphetamines. "They are the ones who deliver the drug to customers, and they are the same ones who collect the payment," the president said. "That's how children are hooked into it, children as young as six, eight, nine, 14." However, the Philippine office of the UN Children's Fund said the proposed law "goes against the letter and spirit of child rights". "Lowering the age of criminal responsibility will not deter adult offenders from abusing children to commit crimes," it said in a statement Friday, adding it was "an act of violence against children". — AFP

S Korean prosecutor jailed in #MeToo case

SEOUL: A former senior South Korean prosecutor was convicted of abuse of power and jailed for two years yesterday in connection with a high-profile case that triggered the country's #MeToo movement. Ahn Tae-geun was accused of repeatedly groping a female junior colleague at the funeral of another co-worker's father. After Seo Ji-hyun filed a formal complaint, he had her transferred to a provincial position and her career went nowhere.

She suffered in silence for years until she went public with a tearful live television appearance last January, detailing her experiences. The interview was a rarity in a still conservative society where female victims of sexual assault are often reluctant to come forward due to fears of shaming. But it triggered a flood of similar accusations against powerful men in fields ranging from art and literature to politics and religion that grew into a South Korean #MeToo movement.

Ahn — who was separately fired for corruption in 2017 — could not be charged with sexual abuse because the one-year statute of limitations had expired, but prosecutors indicted him for abuse of power for having Seo transferred. Announcing the verdict at the Seoul Central District Court, judge Lee Sang-ju said there was sufficient evidence that Ahn transferred Seo away from Seoul "because he was afraid of the consequences of her internal complaint". The move "caused significant psychological distress to Seo", the judge added.

Ahn has always maintained that he had no recollection of the initial incident as he was drunk at the memorial ceremony, but the judge said he was necessarily aware of an internal investigation at the time his accuser was moved. — AFP

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Braving dangerous waters, Iranians seek better life in Britain

The traffickers told Fardin Gholami that a fishing boat would take him from France to England at midnight, but when he and five other Iranian asylum seekers got to the beach, all they found was an inflatable dinghy with nobody to sail it. Gholami had paid 16,000 euros to human traffickers to take him from Kamyaran, in western Iran, to Britain. But on the seashore near Calais he realised he and his compatriots would now have to fend for themselves.

"They showed us a red light on the horizon and said we should sail towards that," said Gholami, 31, one of hundreds of Iranians who have risked their lives to cross the English Channel. The Channel is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, and the migrants' inflatable boats are not equipped to cross it, especially in treacherous winter weather. "Sometimes there were big ships. It was scary. We knew if we crashed into them, that would be the end of us," he said.

Mohammad Salehi Bakhtiari, 47, crossed the Channel in October. "The waves were coming from all directions. It was a nightmare. We saw death many times in the four hours it took to cross. Those four hours felt like four months," he told Reuters. More than 500 migrants - mostly Iranians, some of them children - attempted to travel to Britain in rubber dinghies in 2018, four out of five of them in the last three months of the year. Some were turned back to France.

British Home Secretary Sajid Javid cut short a family holiday to address the issue. Britain has doubled the number of patrol boats in the Channel to four, along with a naval ship. One month after he was arrested near the port of Dover, Gholami lives in a hostel in Liverpool, temporary accommodation provided by the government while his asylum claim is being processed. His roommate, Babak Hajjipour, 40, also crossed the Channel in December. "We thought that if we did not succeed we would die and it would be over once and for all," he said.

British media described the Iranian exodus as a final effort to reach Britain before it leaves the European Union. But all the asylum seekers that Reuters spoke to said Brexit was not a factor for them. One had not even heard of it. Gholami, a teacher, left Iran after his environmental activist friends were arrested and he feared he would be too. Bakhtiari, an electricity project manager, spent two years in prison for distributing information about labour rights in factories. He fled the country while on temporary release.

Hajjipour, a plumber and electrician, left after being beaten by police on the street for wearing shorts. "I think sanctions, the economic situation on Iran, and mixing religion with politics are the main reasons why people are leaving the country," he said. He hoped eventually to bring his family to Britain, including his 7-year-old daughter. "She will not have a bright future in Iran," Hajjipour said.

Dead end

Other Iranian asylum seekers in Europe and Turkey told Reuters they decided to leave Iran after giving up hope in the face of growing economic and political difficulties. Last summer, US President Donald Trump pulled out of an international agreement to restrict Tehran's nuclear program, imposing sanctions that caused prices to soar in Iran. In 2018, more than 21,000 Iranians left the country to seek asylum in Europe, Turkey, the United States, Canada and Australia, United Nations figures show.

Iran's Armed Forces Chief of Staff, Major General Mohammad Baqeri, said: "Foreign enemies are encouraging young people to leave Iran and turn their backs on the values of the Islamic Revolution, persuading people that resisting superpowers will lead to war." In the third quarter of 2018, the number of Iranian asylum seekers in Britain increased more than 30 percent from the previous year. The Home Office said most asylum applicants last year came from Iran.

"Here and maybe in other countries, there are more Iranian refugees than Syrians," Gholami said. "The situation in Iran is worse than a country at war. Especially recently, because of the country's nuclear ambitions, the economic situation has deteriorated and I think there will be a new wave of Iranian economic refugees," he said.

A 37-year-old Iranian, who asked not to be named because he feared for the safety of his family in Iran, said he sold his house to come to Britain. "I never dreamed of coming to Europe. I had a decent life in Iran, a car, a small factory with workers." He said he felt humiliated queuing for food in Liverpool, where he receives £35 a week from the British government. But a bus ride in the city costs £2.50 and he has to pay more than £30 for an Internet connection on his phone to talk to his family back home. There, a worker earns only enough in a day to buy half a kilo of meat. "Because of sanctions, people are at a dead end," he said.

Economic hardship might have triggered an exodus from Iran, but Roya Kashfi of the Association of Iranian Researchers believes Iranian refugees should be considered political, not economic migrants. "Iranian asylum seekers are mostly middle class and educated. Some are affluent enough to pay \$16,000 to human traffickers," said Kashfi who works with the Home Office on Iranian asylum seekers. — Reuters



Former US vice president Al Gore delivers a speech at the World Economic Forum (WEF) on Tuesday in Davos. — AFP

Jet-setting Davos elite frets about climate

A diehard environmentalist and head of a polluting company walk into a conference center... The World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos is one of the few places where environmental activists attend the same events as the private jet crowd, and get a chance to try to convince them to change their ways face-to-face. To come or not to come to the swanky forum in the Swiss Alps? That is the question that Greenpeace asks itself each year. Coming is "not for us a given, because this is a group of elites who have gotten us into the lot of messes that we have around the world right now," the environmental organization's executive director Jennifer Morgan told AFP.

Last year, US President Donald Trump came to address the WEF just months after announcing he would abandon the Paris climate agreement. This year, Brazil's new far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro - another climate skeptic - headlined the event, to the chagrin of NGOs who have warned about the impact his economic development projects will have on the Amazon rain forest and indigenous peoples.

Despite her misgivings, Morgan is attending this year's event alongside the likes of chimpanzee expert Jane Goodall, veteran wildlife documentary maker David Attenborough and former US vice president Al Gore. They have their work cut out for them: From the oil industry to the agrifood business, there are plenty of executives walking the WEF halls who have yet to be fully convinced of the merits of converting to renewable energy and alternatives to plastic.

US airlines tap army copter pilots to ease shortage

US Army pilot Shaun Perez spent ten hours flying an Apache helicopter over Afghanistan, providing gun cover for Special Forces soldiers on the ground as they hunted for high-value targets, guns and weapons. Returning to his base at dawn, he donned a fresh uniform before shutting himself into a small room to secure the next stage of his career - as a commercial airline pilot.

He would win the job in a video interview that day in Aug 2017, joining hundreds of other US military helicopter pilots who have taken attractive offers from domestic airlines trying to ease a global pilot shortage. Perez took advantage of one of the tightest labor markets in the United States, created by years of slow hiring, a wave of pending retirements at major US airlines, and Federal Aviation Administration rules that in 2013 increased the number of required training hours from 250 to 1,500.

The industry's aggressive recruitment of military helicopter pilots is one of the most striking examples yet of the contortions required to quickly train new commercial aviators since the FAA increased the minimum flying requirement. The pilot shortage threatens the industry's growth just as travel demand booms. Airlines have been forced to more than double starting salaries to \$54,000, excluding bonuses, in 2018 from \$21,000 a decade ago, according to aviation consultant Kit Darby.

Perez, 38, now flies under the banner of United Express, the regional branch of United Airlines, at a strong starting salary with his training costs covered. Ten US regional carriers are offering helicopter pilots like Perez up to \$50,000 to pay for commercial airplane training, and in some cases additional signing bonuses, according to a survey by Reuters. "This is the first time that the industry is committing direct funds, basically a subsidy, to get that training quickly," said Bryan Simmons, president of Coast Flight Training, which pioneered the so-called rotor transition program for helicopter pilots with American Airlines Group Inc's regional subsidiary, Envoy, in San Diego.

Perez was offered \$38,000 by Trans State Airlines for training that cost him \$20,000. He got to keep the difference, and within months of leaving Afghanistan, was flying a 50-seater regional passenger jet. He said he is taking home about \$3,200 a month with the prospect of earning far more once he moves up to a large US carrier. "Even if you had to pay \$100,000 for training, you're going into a field where you know you're going to make that money back and more," Perez said.

Regional airlines' helicopter transition programs offer flow-through agreements with mainline carriers, providing new pilots an interview - and in some cases, a job - with a

major within a few years. To fly a multi-engine passenger jet - which can travel about five times faster than helicopters and has more complex control panels - helicopter veterans need to complete fixed-wing FAA ratings and required flight time. The transition feels natural to Perez. "We took multiple ground fire; we had hard missions," he said. "But once we step into that (airline) cockpit, we're humble and we work hard."

But although the Davos elite told a WEF survey that they are more worried than ever about climate change, selling them on shifting to a more environmentally friendly approach may not be easy, judging from the record number of private jets chartered for this year's event. The company Air Charter Service forecast nearly 1,500 private jet flights over the week to airports near the ski resort. That is up from more than 1,300 aircraft movements seen at last year's forum, indicating the convenience of flying privately continues to outweigh any concerns about the outsized carbon footprint it involves.

Please walk

The WEF meanwhile is trying hard to "green" its annual event, providing electric limousines to transport many of the big names between events, while it strongly recommends that others bundle up and brave the icy streets on foot. All plastic straws have been banned, plates are made of recyclable cardboard and soda bottles are all in recyclable glass. "The Forum is committed to reducing and compensating for the event's carbon footprint," read signs sprinkled around the conference area.

WEF organizers insist they are making the annual forum environmentally sustainable, offsetting the carbon emissions generated by private aviation as much as possible through their own initiatives on the ground. And the program is full of sessions with titles like "Plastic pollution: an end in sight?" alongside a screening of Attenborough's documentary "Our Planet".

Clever workaround

A key reason airlines are chasing military pilots is because the new FAA training rules only require them to have 750 hours of additional training, half the 1,500 required of civilians seeking a commercial pilot license. Military helicopter pilots from the military only need additional training in flying fixed-wing aircraft, which takes about 90 days. For civilians, obtaining a commercial pilot license can take years and cost more than \$100,000.

"We've stumbled upon the quickest solution to the pilot shortage," said Erik Sabiston, an Army veteran turned commercial pilot who founded Rotary to Airline Group in Dec. 2017 to help helicopter, or rotor, pilots make the transition to passenger jets. The not-for-profit group, with more than 7,000 pilots and mechanics, also assists airlines in designing rotor transition programs.

American Airlines' regional carrier Envoy said more than a quarter of its 701 new pilots in 2018 came from military helicopters, compared with 11 percent in 2017 and 5 percent in 2016. It plans to hire 626 pilots in 2019, with about a quarter of those expected to come through its rotor program. "It's an untapped pool of pilots that hadn't been brought to anyone's attention before," Envoy pilot recruiter Megan Liotta said.

Former military helicopter pilots generally adapt quickly to the differences in a jet's speed and controls and have a higher success rate in landing jobs than other aspiring aviators, recruiters said. "They come from an environment that has trained them to think on their feet and be very adaptable," said David Tatum, director of pilot recruitment for American.

For former military pilots, the surge in interest from airlines helps replace the shrinking number of jobs flying helicopters to offshore oil rigs. A Envoy pilot hired today makes about \$60,000 or more in their first year as a first officer. They can expect to upgrade to captain, at a higher pay scale, within two years before moving on to No. 1 US carrier American within six years, the company said. Top-end salaries at American surpass \$300,000.

As regional airlines pay more to attract and retain pilots, their services are becoming more expensive for major national airlines that have increasingly used the regionals for domestic routes to cut costs. Under those contracts, called capacity purchase agreements, labor costs are factored into the prices that the mainline carriers pay the regionals for their service. "Their cost saving method is losing a bit of steam," said Andrew Watterson, chief revenue officer for Southwest Airlines Co, which does not partner with regional carriers. — Reuters

After years of lobbying, the message is starting to sink in, according to Marco Labertini, head of environmental group WWF. "I think many this year who are coming to Davos understand that the conservation of the environment ... is not any more a nice-to-do or a nice-to-have thing, it's actually fundamental for the sustainability of their business," he told AFP. "Climate change, extreme weather, floods, drought, crop failures, overfishing, deforestation, are all issues that are affecting their bottom lines, their businesses."

Some executives are sold on the message. "I think all businesses should start doing something," Ken Allen, head of DHL Express, said following a screening of "Our Planet", where dramatic images of icebergs high as skyscrapers crashing into the sea left many visibly shaken. "Nothing can change without legislation, but it should start with us," he said, before heading off to a meeting with an expert on alternatives to plastic.

'Double-speak'

Bolsonaro meanwhile told the crowd he believed environmental and development policy issues "should go hand-in-hand". Greenpeace's Morgan was not convinced. "There is a lot of double-speak going on," she said. If the WEF really wants to make a difference, she said, they should "get all the energy guys" around the table to discuss "how you decarbonize". "That's not happening here, and it's at best a lost opportunity and at worse a lack of taking responsibility for the problem that this group has caused for the world." — AFP

Op-Ed

Message on Int'l Day of Education



By Antonio Guterres
UN Secretary-General

Today we celebrate the first International Day of Education. Education transforms lives. As United Nations Messenger of Peace Malala Yousafzai once said: "one child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world". Nelson Mandela rightly called education "the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

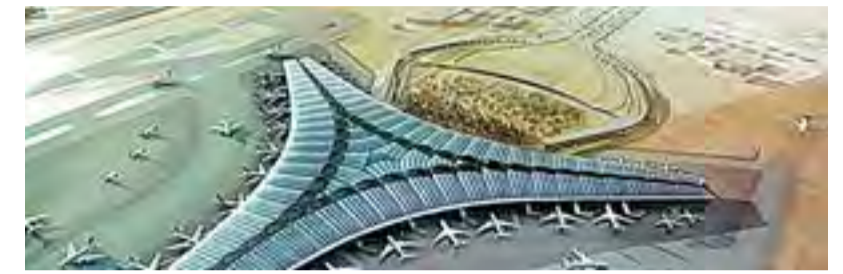
Long before I served at the United Nations or held public office in my own country, I was a teacher. In the slums of Lisbon, I saw that education is an engine for poverty eradication and a force for peace. Today, education is at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals. We need education to reduce inequalities and improve health. We need education to achieve gender equality and eliminate child marriage. We need education to protect our planet's resources. And we need education to fight hate speech, xenophobia and intolerance, and to nurture global citizenship.

Yet at least 262 million children, adolescents and youth are out of school, most of them girls. Millions more who attend school are not mastering the basics. This is a violation of their human right to education. The world cannot afford a generation of children and young people who lack the skills they need to compete in the 21st century economy, nor can we afford to leave behind half of humanity.

We must do far more to advance Sustainable Development Goal 4, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Education can also break and reverse cycles of intergenerational poverty. Studies show that if all girls and boys complete secondary education, 420 million people could be lifted out of poverty. Let us prioritize education as a public good; support it with cooperation, partnerships and funding; and recognize that leaving no one behind starts with education.

Business

THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 2019

12 ABK honored with two awards at IFM Awards 2019 in Dubai**13** MSRY Behbehani Co unveils GMC's most popular premium truck in Kuwait**14** Kuwait Airport adopts Microsoft Azure solutions to streamline its operations

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan, Vice Chairman of CMA Board of Commissioners Othman Al-Issa and other officials attend the fourth annual conference titled "Capital Market Reforms Through Regional Initiatives" held at the Jumeirah Messilah Hotel and Spa yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

CMA lists gains, outlines regional initiatives

Fourth annual conference holds workshops on capital market reforms

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Capital Markets Authority (CMA) highlighted some of its achievements in various fields in the past few years at its fourth annual conference titled "Capital Market Reforms Through Regional Initiatives" held at the Jumeirah Messilah Hotel and Spa yesterday. The conference was attended by a number of local, regional and international experts. "CMA's achievements include upgrading the stock market with various indexes such as FTSE index, S&P index, DJI index and MSCI index. Also, having all these international experts coming from abroad to participate in this conference is a great addition to Kuwait," said Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan.

"We in the government respect the independence of CMA and we support their work. This has economic and commercial reflections that affect the economic situation in general. We have witnessed great success at the Kuwait stock exchange which has received a huge foreign money flow, and we aim to improve this market even more," added Roudhan.

Othman Al-Issa, Vice Chairman of CMA Board of Commissioners, opened the conference with a speech in which he pointed to the importance of "securing and developing financial markets" and enabling them to possess the necessary elements to cope with the rapid changes in capital markets and keep pace with the latest developments in the field of securities.

Issa stressed the importance of three topics which represent some of the current trends in the development of capital markets. "The first topic is incentives and initiatives to promote listings across the Middle East and Africa region, the most important recommendations and what has been achieved locally in this area. The second is SME financing, its mechanisms and methods, the limitations and challenges facing it, and the role that this financing can play in the national economy. The last topic is regional responses to emerging fintech risks and the limitations and challenges facing it locally, regionally and globally," he pointed out.

He also spoke about the most important strategic approaches of the CMA for the development of the capital market currently being implemented. "These include privatization of the securities exchange, the market development project and other initiatives related to the development of capital market infrastructure such as clearance and settlement, as well as initiatives to stimulate qualitative listing and long-term financing mechanisms, establish effective sukuk and bond trading platforms, diversify investment instruments and improve the level of risk management of licensed persons as well as the disclosure system by adopting a modern project in

the field of disclosure using the language of XBRL," explained Issa.

The conference had three panels focused on three main issues. The first panel was on "Incentives and Initiatives to Promote Listings across Africa and the Middle East Region." The implications of such recommendations and their impact were discussed, along with other recommendations. The panel was chaired by Keith Kalyegira, CEO, CMA Uganda, with the participation of Noura Abdulkareem, Director of Product Development at Kuwait Bourse and Mohammed Alrumaih, Chief of Markets of the Saudi stock exchange (Tadawul).

Dr Nawaf Al-Abduljader, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Administrative Sciences, Kuwait University, headed the second panel discussion, with the participation of Ibrahim Al-Kandari, Director General Kuwait National Fund for SME Enterprise Development, and Daniel Tetteh, Director General, SEC Ghana, who reviewed the mechanisms and means by which the financing of the SME sector can be supported, as well as the experience of the National Fund for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises in Kuwait and its role in national economy. The panel also highlighted challenges faced by them. Tetteh reviewed his country's experience in improving support for small

and large enterprises and the most important actions taken in this framework.

Panel discussions

The conference concluded with a panel headed by Phillippe Richard, Director Abu Dhabi Global Markets FSRA, with the participation of Paul Muthaura, Chief Executive (CMA Kenya) and Joe McHale, Regulatory Affairs Specialist at Bloomberg, in addition to Dr Bander Alsajjan, Strategy and International Affairs Deputy (CMA Saudi Arabia). The panel was on "Regional Responses to Emerging FinTech Risks" with the emergence of encrypted assets, automated learning and artificial intelligence, and the efforts of regulators to keep up with such developments.

The Bloomberg representative presented a clear vision of the trends, growth and development prospects of financial technology, while the representatives of Abu Dhabi International Market, the Saudi Capital Market Authority and the Capital Market Authority of Kenya presented what was accomplished in their countries in keeping pace with the development of financial technology either through the issuance of new legislation or the development of innovation hubs or sandboxes, or other initiatives that

have been implemented within this framework.

The fourth annual conference of CMA has received special importance for several reasons. It follows an exceptional event which takes place in Kuwait for the first time, which is hosting the meetings of one of IOSCO's committees. This is considered a major milestone in the course of local securities activities, in which exceptional achievements have been made and the work of strategic initiatives on the other hand has begun. On Tuesday, the 42nd annual meeting of AMERC was held in Kuwait as the first of its kind. Othman Al-Issa stressed Kuwait's keenness to activate its role in the various committees of IOSCO after obtaining membership in AMERC. Currently, in addition to AMERC, the CMA is a member of the GEMC, C2 and C3 committees.

The main topics of the meeting, the deliberations and discussions on the subject of sustainability financing, the opportunities and risks arising from fintech and supporting economic growth through long term finance were highlighted by Muthaura in his opening remarks. Such topics "not only cut across the priorities of the region, growth and emerging markets, but also the priorities of the whole organization under the leadership of the board", he said.

Gulf Bank launches personalized prepaid cards

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced the launch of its personalized Prepaid Card. Gulf Bank's new Prepaid card now offers Prepaid cardholders with one of the lowest issuance fees in Kuwait.

The cards can be used locally and internationally across ATMs, POS machines and online, with a maximum limit of KD 3,000. Customers can apply for a personalized Prepaid Card through online and mobile banking or by visiting one of Gulf Bank's 58 branches. The new Prepaid card pro-



Ahmad Al-Amir

vides customers with the freedom and convenience of reloading the card multiple times through different channels such as online and mobile banking, IVR and branches. The Prepaid Card to any of his family members and friends.

Since customer experience and satisfaction is the main focus of the Bank's products, a number of benefits have been added to the Prepaid Card to enhance customer experience. These benefits include fraud protection with Gulf Bank 3D secure, online shopping, and instant discounts of up to 20 per-



cent at over 300 renowned restaurants and coffee shops, up to 25 percent at over 150 retail outlets in Kuwait, across travel and entertainment, health and beauty, and lifestyle segments.

Ahmad Al-Amir, Assistant General Manager for External Communications at Gulf Bank, said: "Gulf Bank prides

itself on meeting customers' needs and providing a seamless experience. The new personalized Prepaid Card gives customers the tools to easily manage day-to-day expenses, while providing a more convenient and safer method of payment than cash that can be used by family members of all ages."

Business

ABK honored with two awards at IFM Awards 2019 in Dubai

Best Digital Transformation in Kuwait and Most Innovative Bank in Egypt

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), was honored with two awards at the recently held International Finance Magazine (IFM) Awards 2019 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. ABK-Kuwait won the title of 'Best Digital Transformation' having successfully integrated a number of digital services for its customers through the year, while ABK-Egypt was awarded the 'Most Innovative Bank' for introducing new products into the market while raising the bar on customer service excellence and market positioning. Receiving the award on behalf of ABK-Egypt was Ali Marafi, Chairman of ABK-Egypt and Khaled El Salawy, CEO & MD of ABK-Egypt and on behalf of Kuwait, Salem Hussein Al-Sarraf (CTO) and Sridhar Kasisomayajula (CIO).

strategy of 'simpler banking' through a broad range of new digital services designed to make the banking experience more accessible and convenient for customers.

ABK has invested tremendous energy and effort in the last two years to deliver enhanced quality and simplified solutions to support each individual's requirements. The award is a testament of the Bank's strong reputation and underlines their commitment towards creating and developing services that are built on their unwavering philosophy of 'Reimagining a Simpler Bank'.

The IFM award recognizes exceptional individuals and institutions who have exhibited contributions in their respective domains that generated international resonance. The winners are selected by a qualified research team that identifies unique accomplishments.



DUBAI: Ali Marafi, Chairman of ABK-Egypt and Khaled El Salawy, CEO & MD of ABK-Egypt and on behalf of Kuwait, Salem Hussein Al-Sarraf (CTO) and Sridhar Kasisomayajula (CIO), with the awards.

China blasts US 'bullying' with Huawei CFO extradition bid

BEIJING: China yesterday accused the United States of "bullying behavior" after US authorities confirmed plans to seek the extradition of a top Chinese telecom executive detained in Canada.

The United States faces a January 30 deadline to file an extradition request for Huawei chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou, whose arrest last month sparked diplomatic tensions.

"We will continue to pursue the extradition of defendant Ms Meng Wanzhou, and will meet all deadlines set by the US/Canada Extradition Treaty," said US Justice Department spokesman Marc Raimondi on Tuesday. Meng, the daughter of Huawei's founder, was arrested at Vancouver airport on December 1 at the request of the United States, which says she violated American sanctions on Iran.

She has since been freed on Can\$10 million (US\$7.5 million) bail and is awaiting a hearing on her extradition. According to the agreement between the two countries, the United States has 60 days after an arrest made at its request in Canada to formalize an extradition request.

Once a request has been submitted, the Canadian justice ministry has 30 days to begin official extradition proceedings, though the process can take months or years.

China, which has defended both Huawei and Meng since the CFO's arrest, criticized the US extradition request as without "legitimate reason" and "not in conformity with international law". "This is a type of technological bullying behavior and everyone can clearly see the real purpose," said Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying at a regular press briefing.

The US "will stop at nothing to suppress Chinese high-tech enterprises and restrain China's legitimate development rights", she added. Meng's arrest has sparked an escalating diplomatic crisis between Ottawa and Beijing.

Two Canadians have since been detained in China on national security grounds, in what is thought to be retaliation for the arrest. A Chinese court also this month sentenced a Canadian man to death for drug trafficking following a retrial, a drastic increase of his previous 15-year prison sentence. —AFP

Trump won't soften hard line on China to make trade deal: Advisers

WASHINGTON: As much as US President Donald Trump wants to boost markets through a trade pact with China, he will not soften his position that Beijing must make real structural reforms, including how it handles intellectual property, to reach a deal, advisers say.

Offering to buy more American goods is unlikely by itself to overcome an issue that has bedeviled talks between the two countries. Those talks are set to continue when Chinese Vice Premier Liu He visits Washington at the end of January. The United States accuses China of stealing intellectual property and forcing American companies to share technology when they do business in China. Beijing denies the accusations.

With a March 1 deadline approaching to reach an agreement or risk an escalation of tariffs on another \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods, the two sides are still far apart on key, structural elements critical for a deal, according to sources familiar with the talks.

"We're not yet in a position where our concerns have been addressed sufficiently," one US official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The official said the Trump team, led by hardline US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer,

was focused on such structural issues as well as trade imbalances.

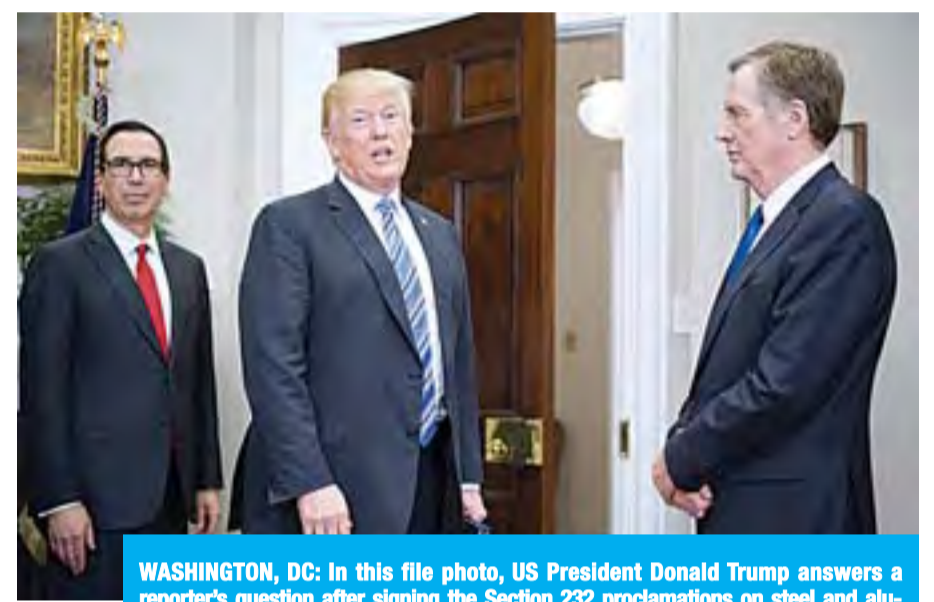
White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow told Reuters that forced technology transfers, IP theft and ownership restrictions remained a top priority for Trump. "The president's said many times how crucial that is, and he's not going to back down," Kudlow said.

Lack of progress led the Trump administration to decline an in-person meeting with a lower-level Chinese delegation for preparatory talks ahead of Liu He's visit, a source familiar with the situation told Reuters.

The Financial Times also reported that an offer for preparatory meeting was rejected, but White House officials pushed back on the suggestion that any meeting was canceled.

"With respect, the story is not true," Kudlow told CNBC, referring to the FT report. "The teams remain in touch in preparation for high-level talks with Vice Premier Liu He at the end of this month," said White House spokeswoman Lindsay Walters. Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed on a ceasefire in their trade war at the G20 meeting in Buenos Aires last year, setting a 90-day period to discuss differences and agree a deal.

Those talks have yet to produce anything on paper. "There's progress in that the two sides are talking. But I look at it like this: there's still nothing agreed on in writing," said one source familiar with the discussions. Trump has painted developments in the U.S.-China trade talks as largely positive, aware of the effect that the tensions have had on



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo, US President Donald Trump answers a reporter's question after signing the Section 232 proclamations on steel and aluminum imports in the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington, DC. —AFP

stock markets.

The S&P 500 registered its biggest four-week percentage gain since 2011 on Friday after dropping nearly 20 percent from its record September close on Christmas Eve. The benchmark index lost ground on Tuesday after a national holiday on Monday.

"We've really had a very extraordinary number of meetings, and a deal could very well happen with China. It's going very well," Trump told reporters at the White House on Saturday.

China has offered more than \$1.2 trillion in additional commitments on trade, Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said

last month. That is not sufficient for Trump or his team.

"To think that this is going to end with simple 'commitments,' I think, is overlooking the historical experience that we've had," the US official said.

Chinese officials pledged to buy enough US products to wipe out the US-China trade deficit at talks in Beijing earlier this month but also hedged its position, saying it depended on the demands of Chinese companies, said Scott Kennedy, director of the Project on Chinese Business and Political Economy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. —Reuters

BoJ lowers inflation forecasts again

TOKYO: Japan's central bank again revised down its inflation forecasts yesterday, a further sign that authorities are losing the battle to boost prices in the world's third-largest economy. After a two-day meeting, the Bank of Japan's policy board left its mammoth monetary easing programme in place, as expected, and lowered the inflation forecast for the fiscal year ending March next year to 0.9 percent from 1.4 percent. BoJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda said the decision to revise down the forecast was "due primarily to the decline in crude oil prices", but added it would only be temporary.

"It is true that it will take some time for us to achieve the two-percent target," he told reporters, referring to the bank's long-held goal. "It is our belief that the most appropriate way is to patiently continue the existing monetary easing." The downward revision follows a previous downgrade in late October. In 2013, the BoJ embarked on a huge bond-buying program in a bid to stimulate long-dormant prices with the stated aim of hitting the two-percent mark within two years.

But while the plan—which ran in tandem with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's big-spending drive to ramp up the economy—showed

early promise, the bank has been forced to delay several times the date for hitting its target. It has in the past blamed the "deflation mindset" of consumers and employers used to long periods of low growth and falling prices. While the bank said Japan's economy will likely continue to expand, it added that "the mindset and behavior based on the assumption that wages and prices will not increase easily have been deeply entrenched". Officials have pointed to other factors, including cautious wage and price growth from firms, and increased technological progress that has reduced costs and intensified competition. "It has been taking time to resolve these factors that have been delaying price rises," the bank said.

Yen weakens

The tepid inflation rate has meant the BoJ has had to maintain its easy money policy, even as other central banks begin to tighten. However, the safe haven status of the yen and growing global economic uncertainty have helped the Japanese currency hold its strength against the greenback. On Wednesday, it was slightly down at 109.65 per dollar compared with 109.37 Tuesday.

However, in the longer-term, firms will shift toward raising wages and prices and the country's inflation rate "is likely to increase gradually toward two percent", it insisted. The bank also slightly lowered the inflation forecast for the current fiscal year ending March 2019 to 0.8 percent from 0.9 percent, and



TOKYO: Bank of Japan (BoJ) governor Haruhiko Kuroda speaks during a press conference at the BoJ headquarters in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

reduced the projection for the year ending March 2021 to 1.4 percent from 1.5 percent.

Those figures do not factor in the effects of a consumption tax hike expected to go into effect in October. The BoJ also adjusted forecasts for year-on-year economic growth. —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.		Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd		BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL		CURRENCY		BUY		SELL	
Yemen Riyal/for 1000		1.222		Turkish Lira		57.425		Europe			
Tunisian Dinar		103.810		Singapore dollars		223.081		British Pound		0.386498	0.400398
Jordanian Dinar		428.830						Czech Korune		0.005450	0.014750
Lebanese Lira/for 1000		2.028						Danish Krone		0.042189	0.047189
Syrian Lira		0.000						Euro		0.337962	0.351662
Morocco Dirham		32.356						Georgian Lari		0.113737	0.113737
								Hungarian 0.000994		0.001184	0.001184
								Norwegian Krone		0.031318	0.036518
								Romanian Leu		0.055383	0.072233
								Russian ruble		0.004568	0.004568
								Slovakia		0.009088	0.019088
								Swedish Krona		0.029653	0.034653
								Swiss Franc		0.298211	0.0309211
								Australasia			
								Australian Dollar		0.208603	0.220603
								New Zealand Dollar		0.199800	0.209300
								America			
								Canadian Dollar		0.222670	0.231670
								US Dollars		0.300050	0.305350
								US Dollars Mint		0.300550	0.305350
								Asia			
								Bangladesh Taka		0.003027	0.003828
								Chinese Yuan		0.043422	0.046922
								Hong Kong Dollar		0.036678	0.039428
								Indian Rupee		0.003740	0.004512
								Indonesian Rupiah		0.000017	0.000023
								Japanese Yen		0.002697	0.002867
								Korean Won		0.000259	0.000274
								Malaysian Ringgit		0.070284	0.076284
								Nepalese Rupee		0.002607	0.002947
								Pakistan Rupee		0.001581	0.002351
								Philippine Peso		0.005816	0.006116
								Singapore Dollar		0.218289	0.2288260
								Sri Lankan Rupee		0.001350	0.001930
								Taiwan		0.009727	0.009907
								Thai Baht		0.009227	0.009777
								Vietnamese Dong		0.00013	0.00013
								Arab			
								Bahraini Dinar		0.792194	0.808694
								Egyptian Pound		0.017254	0.019854
								Iranian Riyal		0.000084	0.000085
								Iraqi Dinar		0.000208	0.000268
								Jordanian Dinar		0.424686	0.433685
								Kuwaiti Dinar		1.000000	1.000000
								Lebanese Pound		0.000151	0.000251
								Moroccan Dirhams		0.021717	0.045717
								Omani Riyal		0.783682	0.789362
								Qatar Riyal		0.079252	0.081320
								Saudi Riyal		0.080020	0.081320
								Syrian Pound		0.001289	0.001509
								Tunisian Dinar		0.096066	0.104066
								Turkish Lira		0.050363	0.061863
								UAE Dirhams		0.081384	0.083084
								Yemeni Riyal		0.000989	0.001069

The all-new Sierra 2019

MSRY Behbehani Co unveils GMC's most popular premium truck in Kuwait



General Motors delegates with Behbehani management



Adel Behbehani greeting Sheikh Mohamed Abdullah Al-Sabah



KUWAIT: Sheikh Mohamed Abdullah Al-Sabah inspecting the new Sierra 2019

KUWAIT: Mohammad Saleh & Reza Yousif Behbehani Co, is presenting the game-changing all-new Sierra truck for the first time in the Middle East at the prestigious 2019 Kuwait Motor Show.

First unveiled in Detroit, USA, in March 2018, the American brand's most popular pickup truck has been taken to the next level with a complete redesign which sees enhanced exterior design, all-terrain capability and luxurious levels of refinement.

GMC display has provoked a huge crowd from the very first moment of the opening with the presence of group of local and regional media press. The All-New Sierra generated a noticeable traffic at the display venue with GMC lovers, where they got busy to explore the All-New Sierra that have impressed them with its completely new outstanding exterior design. A significant achievement of success is predicted for The All-New GMC Sierra 2019 for its enhanced design and its cutting-edge technology, knowing it is a leading in its segment.

The all-new 2019 Sierra Denali in the popular four door crew cab variant was unveiled for the first time at the Kuwait Motor Show alongside other GMC models including the full-size SUV Yukon Denali and mid-size crossover Terrain Denali with the presence of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah Mubarak Al-Sabah the Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs, Adel Behbehani - Director at MSRYB, the company managers and General Motors delegates.

Adel Behbehani delivered a speech to welcome the guests and representatives of the media and the press, where he expressed with gratitude about the new generation of Sierra Denali 2019 new features, mentioning "It is with great pleasure and pride that Mohammed

Saleh & Reza Yousif Behbehani took the opportunity to reveal the all-new Sierra 2019 for the first time outside the united states of America in a very unique and distinctive event in the world of cars The Kuwait Motor Show 2019 and being able to communicate with our customers through it."

The All-New GMC Sierra 2019 is truly distinctive and sophisticated and captures the eye with its new exterior design, enhanced cabin spaces and advanced technologies that will strengthen its leading position in its class and meet the demands of our aspiring customers of innovation and for the highest levels of performance, luxury and uniqueness.

Molly Peck, Chief Marketing Officer, General Motors Middle East, said, "The original Sierra was a trailblazer in the premium truck segment when it was first launched 17 years ago. Now, almost two decades on, we are redefining the sector once again with an even more commanding design, class-leading technologies and premium levels of refinement.

The Sierra is a popular choice amongst GMC's customers in the region thanks to the extensive customization options available. I'm confident the next generation 2019 Sierra is setting a new, even higher, benchmark amongst premium pickups and we are looking forward to seeing our customers' feedback as we launch it in our showrooms in the second quarter of 2019.

The all-new Sierra Denali retains its signature exterior proportions and robust, distinctive design. The completely redesigned 2019 model is taller, with a more confident stance complemented by hallmark detailing such as a striking chrome grille and more



GMC displays new Sierra truck at Kuwait Motor Show in 360 Mall



pronounced C-shaped 'light blade' LED headlights.

Powered by new versions of GMC's proven 6.2L and 5.3L V-8 engines, the all-new 2019 Sierra will feature stop/start technology and new Dynamic Fuel Management that enables the engine to operate on one to eight cylinders, depending on demand, to optimize power and efficiency. The available 6.2L engine is paired with a 10-speed automatic transmission.

Inside, the Sierra Denali cabin has been designed to focus on the drivers' comfort and convenience with a raft of luxurious and premium materials, improved interior space and cutting-edge technologies - making it the most premium Sierra ever built.

When it comes to space, the 2019 Sierra Denali's crew cab offers almost three inches more rear-seat legroom than the previous model and clever storage spaces have been added. Its cargo boxes also offer best-in-class cargo volume - 63 cubic feet (1,784 liters) in its industry-first carbon fibre box, as well as additional tie-downs and a new 220-volt power outlet.

The redesigned Sierra Denali offers a full suite of advanced segment leading safety features, and chassis technologies - which are exclusive to the new model - such as Adaptive Ride Control, multi-color head-up display, and, an industry-first MultiPro tailgate.



All-new Sierra Denali 2019



Business

Kuwait Airport adopts Microsoft Azure solutions to streamline its operations

DGCA drives digital transformation with Microsoft-trusted cloud solutions

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Airport, an entity managed by the government's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has announced that it has adopted Microsoft Azure cloud solutions to streamline the airport's operations. The move enables DGCA to drive digital transformation in every facet - engage passengers, empower employees, optimize operations and transform airport services.

Located 10 miles south of the city, Kuwait International Airport is home to a traffic of 13.7 million passengers annually, up by 17 percent since 2016. The growing operations called for DGCA to modernize the airport into a new state-of-the-art facility that can handle 25 million passengers a year and provide a remarkable customer experience. To address these needs, DGCA decided to partner with Microsoft and bring technology at the heart of this effort keeping up with the continual changes in the aviation industry.

"The Government of Kuwait wants to better address issues that many international airports face: high traffic, long lines, and inefficient gate assignments," explains Mohammad Al-Mutairi, IT Operations Manager of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. "Kuwait's Aviation sector has undergone an orbit shift and has played a vital role in development of the economy. By implementing the latest Microsoft technology, the Kuwait International Airport will further enhance its servicing competences and drive transformation in the industry."

To handle ever-increasing volume of flights and passengers, DGCA adopted the Microsoft Azure Cloud to gather, manage, and analyze airport data, and transform it into actionable business intelligence and data visualizations. This enables the airport's employees to avoid time-consuming manual data analysis tasks, and managers gain real-time information that they can use to streamline airport operations.

For example, leveraging Azure-based advanced data management capabilities, airport operations experts

can now stream the information into Power BI dashboards, a business analytics tool that provides real-time information about the number of passengers, the number of airplanes they're flying on, the wait time at the airport, how many workers are needed to transfer luggage to what types of aircraft, and the number of open ticket counters.

"Our employees are now empowered with the insights they need to make the best decisions possible, as quickly as possible," says Al-Mutairi, "our mission is to give the right people everything they need to know 'right now,' to take the right action at Kuwait International Airport. The way Power BI brings together information in Azure Data Warehouse into one insightful, visually engaging experience - is better than anything manual methods could ever do."

Microsoft and DGCA have enjoyed a partnership for over two years to drive digital transformation in the aviation sector of the country. In 2016, the latter migrated 3,000 field workers to Microsoft Office 365, as well as implemented Microsoft Teams to improve collaboration, productivity and communication with and among field workers. In the near future, DGCA also plans to automate much of the decision-making process by using Azure Machine Learning, which will help amplify human ingenuity and reduce the risk of any possible errors.

"Every improvement in the airport's operation is an important milestone in the directorate's modernization. We're optimizing our airport's operations, which gives us an elevated position compared to other airports, and that attracts more business. Microsoft cloud technology is helping to lift us to a higher level in the aviation industry," concludes Al-Mutairi.

"DGCA is one of the impressive examples of our customers that are truly leveraging technology to transform their operations and improve the services they provide," said Charles Nahas, General Manager,



Microsoft Kuwait. "It is exciting to see how they are adopting the latest technologies and tools to drive change. In particular, the DGCA recognized the power of data as a strategic asset and leveraging the cloud to make more powerful and intelligent decisions. We are proud to support the Digital Transformation journey of DGCA and we stand forth to support the Government

of Kuwait in such crucial efforts."

"Microsoft appreciates the partnership with the government of Kuwait represented by the Central Agency for Information and Technology (CAIT) that allowed us to provide these digital transformation technologies to the government entities in country and the DGCA in specific," added Nahas.

VIVA launches VIVA App with face ID login



KUWAIT: VIVA, Kuwait's fastest-growing and most developed telecom operator, launched the new face recognition feature on the VIVA App on Apple Store and Play Store that uniquely identifies users by looking at the device and analyzing patterns based on the facial textures and shape, with 'more' ease.

The new facial scan feature is a technology that allows users to rapidly access their account following easy steps and flexible features without the hassle of passwords to manage their account and conduct their transactions. In addition, it provides them high level of security to protect their data and information.

On this occasion, Abdulrazzaq Bader Al-Essa, Corporate Communications Director at VIVA said: "This new technology is part of our promising digital experience for our customers to always address their needs and aspirations."

Panasonic to speed up your food preparation with new blenders

KUWAIT: Panasonic has introduced two new innovations in fresh food preparation and kitchen convenience for the Kuwaiti market - the MX-KM5070 and MX-KM3070 blenders. Built with high-quality Japanese craftsmanship Panasonic has always been known for, these blenders boast a wide range of programs and easy-to-use features to help users enjoy a variety of flavors from gourmet dishes to succulent desserts to the most refreshing drinks any time of the day.

Featuring a 1.5 L capacity glass jug, the blenders are built with powerful motor - 800 W for MX-KM5070 and 600 W for MX-KM3070 - offering unprecedented performance.

In addition to the high-performance motor, a key highlight of the blenders are the 4 stainless steel sawtooth blades that are uniquely designed. The upper blade

is designed for powerful crushing while the lower blade is built to further cut the ingredients after the crushing process.

Another ingenious feature of the blenders is the Power Circulation by V&M technology that ensures the ingredients are dynamically mixed. The 'V' motion lifts the ingredients, while 'M' movement strikes them against the four-ribbed jug wall and lets them drop for a perfectly thorough blending. Katsuki Nishimura - Manager, PMMAF, said, "Both models of the blender can definitely ease your food preparation in the kitchen. The technology behind the sawtooth blade will be truly appreciated as it ensures any ingredient will be finely cut as desired."

"Panasonic has built a legacy of kitchen appliances that has no doubt revolutionized our meal preparation and cooking habits. The MX-KM5070 and MX-KM3070 blenders are easy and convenient solutions for those who would like to incorporate fresh, healthy food into their diets. Recognizing the shift amongst Kuwaiti consumers towards healthy eating, these new Panasonic blenders are indeed great additions to your kitchen counter,"

Panasonic

BLENDER

MX-KM5070 / MX-KM3070



added Omar Massouh - Director, Corporate Marketing & Public Relations at Easa Husain Al-Yousifi Company.

The blenders also come with two 2 Dry Mills offering users the freedom of having a dedicated mill for specific ingredients, that is, one for spices and another one for coffee beans. On the safety front, Panasonic ticks all the boxes

starting from the four-sealing lips on the jug cover for leak prevention, safety lock for mounted jars, and an overload circuit breaker to prevent motor failure.

The Panasonic MX-KM5070 and MX-KM3070 Blenders are now available in Kuwait at all Best Al-Yousifi Electronics Showrooms and authorized distributors.

KFH Capital arranges \$1.6bn sukuk issuances for FAB and DIB

KUWAIT: Chief Investment Banking Officer at KFH Capital, an investment arm of KFH Group "KFH", Abdullah Al-Haddad said that KFH Capital has succeeded in arranging two issuances worth \$1.6 billion Sukuk for First Abu Dhabi Bank (FAB) and Dubai Islamic Bank (DIB), with a group of regional and international banks. Sukuk issuances have been fully subscribed within record time and attracted investors from the region and the world. This step reiterates KFH Group's pioneering role in the Sukuk market, and establishes Sukuk as a vital source of finance for governments, companies and major development projects.

With orderbooks climbing above \$2.8 billion, FAB has raised \$850 million through Sukuk, marking it the first issuance to be announced and subscribed in a single day, which is a major achievement and unprecedented in corporate Sukuk. As a lead arranger, KFH Capital attracted

the participation of more than 110 investors, where 72 percent of the participants came from the Middle East, while the remaining banks, investment companies, fund managers and wealth managers were from Asia and Europe. This reflects KFH Capital's keenness to provide a balanced, diversified and comprehensive coverage of the issue, establishing trust and cooperation with investors, risk distribution and high prevalence and acceptance of Sukuk. The diversity of investors reflects the great trust placed in FAB and KFH Capital's capabilities to manage the issuance process. It also reflects international investors' interest in Sukuk products, Al-Haddad indicated in a press release.

He said that the Sukuk tenor will be 5 years with a periodic distribution amount of 3.875 percent, adding that the issuance is expected to be rated at Aa3 by Moody's and AA- by Fitch and will be listed on the London Stock Exchange. As a lead manager, KFH-Capital succeeded in arranging another Sukuk issuance of \$750 million for Islamic Dubai Bank, in cooperation with 167 regional and international investors. The Tier 1 Sukuk are perpetual. KFH-Capital received \$3.7 billion in orders and the books were 5-times oversubscribed. DIB, rated A by Fitch and A3 by Moody's listed the non-rated Sukuk (based on Mudarabah type) on Nasdaq Dubai. Al-Haddad added.

He said that a growing issuance trend is expected in

2019 due to increased interest and trust by companies and governments who have expressed their interest in the Sukuk product as a premier finance instrument. As many countries, corporate and financial institutions consider tapping the market in order to meet their finance needs, a growing momentum in the Sukuk issuances is anticipated.

Al-Haddad reiterated that KFH Group plays a leading role in the Islamic Finance sector by innovating new Islamic products and services which are introduced as an alternative to traditional banking products. He indicated that the vast experience of KFH Group in the Sukuk issuance has positioned it as a trustworthy and highly recognized organization by major corporates and governments globally. The various structures used by KFH Group in arranging Sukuk, Ijara, Wakala or others, have made Sukuk highly competitive against conventional finance instruments.



Abdullah Al-Haddad

First Bahrain appoints Omar Altemiemy as CEO

KUWAIT: The Board of Directors of First Bahrain Real Estate Development Company yesterday announced the appointment of Omar Faysal Altemiemy as Chief Executive Officer. He will assume responsibilities immediately, taking over the duties from Chairman Waleed Alkhaja, who had served as the acting CEO since July.

With the selection of Altemiemy as CEO, the Board sends a message of stability and confidence to the market, appointing one of their own members who had served the shareholders with distinction since his appointment in May 2014. During his term on the

board, the Company has doubled the value of its income generating assets and quadrupled its net rental income, as it developed a series of new projects in Janabiya and Seef, actively converting raw lands into income generating investments. The Company has clear plans for expansion as it begins work on the first phase of a retail project in Seef and looks closely at opportunistic acquisitions.

The announcement of this leadership transition was made at the start of the new year to signify the new season for the Company as it looks to the future after completing its recent mixed-use development in Janabiya. Commenting on this announcement, Chairman, Waleed Alkhaja stated, "We are very pleased with the appointment of Altemiemy and expect that he will bring wise leadership and energy to the First Bahrain team. His long relationship with the shareholders and keen insight as an investment manager will be most useful as the Company prepares for

future growth and diversification of its investments. We are particularly pleased to see him lead us forward with our new projects in the Seef district."

In response, Altemiemy added, "It is a tremendous honor to be appointed to this position of responsibility and trust. By God's grace and help, I will guide the Company towards a new season of growth and sustainable returns. I look forward to this new challenge with great excitement and energy and I promise to work in a manner worthy of the confidence that you have placed in me. To the existing management team, I am eager to begin working together with you to build on your previous achievements and achieve new levels of success."

Altemiemy is formerly the Vice President in the Investment Banking Department at Global Investment House in Kuwait. Having been a member of the Global Investment House team since 2003, Altemiemy brings significant experience in investment analysis and management. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics,



Omar Faysal Altemiemy



Waleed Alkhaja

with a specialization in Finance, from the International Islamic University of Malaysia and a Master of Business Administration from the Kuwait Maastricht Business School.

Health & Technology

At Alibaba's futuristic hotel, robots deliver towels and mix cocktails

HANGZHOU: Gliding silently through Alibaba Group Holding Ltd's futuristic "FlyZoo" hotel, black disc-shaped robots about a meter in height deliver food and drop off fresh towels. The robots are part of a suite of high-tech tools that Alibaba says drastically cuts the hotel's cost of human labor and eliminates the need for guests to interact with other people.

Formally opened to the public last month, the 290-room Fly Zoo is an incubator for technology Alibaba wants to sell to the hotel industry in the future and an opportunity to showcase its prowess in artificial intelligence. It is also an experiment that tests consumer comfort levels with unmanned commerce in China - a country where intrusive data-sharing technology is readily tolerated and often met with enthusiasm.

"It's all about the efficiency of the service and the consistency of service, because the robots are not disturbed by human moods. Sometimes, we say we are not in the mood, but the system and the robot will always be in the mood," said Andy Wang, CEO of Alibaba Future Hotel Management, the unit that oversees the hotel project. Inside the hotel, softly-lit white paneled walls bring to mind the interiors of Hollywood spaceships. Guests check in at podiums that scan their faces, as well as passports or other ID. Visitors with a Chinese national ID can scan their faces using their smart phones to check in ahead of time.

Elevators scan guests' faces again to verify

which floor they can access and hotel room doors are opened with another face scan. "It's very quick and safe. I haven't used it for a long time yet, but basically, I can be in my room in one minute," said guest Tracy Li. Li added that safety was one of her priorities and she was pleased her room could only be entered with a scan of her face. In the rooms, Alibaba's voice command technology is used to change the temperature, close the curtains, adjust the lighting and order room service.

At the hotel's restaurant, taller capsule-shaped robots deliver food that guests have ordered via the FlyZoo app while at a separate bar, a large robotic arm can mix more than 20 different types of cocktails. Facial recognition cameras add charges to the room rate automatically. To check out, guests press a button on the app after which the room locks and they are automatically charged through Alibaba's online wallet. Once this is done, the guests' facial scan data is immediately erased from Alibaba's systems, said Wang.

Celebrating 'the empty'

FlyZoo - whose name derives from a pun in Chinese for 'it's a must to stay here' - is located in the city of Hangzhou, 170 km southwest of Shanghai, and is within walking distance of Alibaba's headquarters. Room fees start from 1,390 Yuan (\$205) a night. It does employ humans, though Alibaba declined to specify how many. This includes chefs and cleaners as

well as reception staff, who will assist with conventional check-in procedures for guests unwilling to have their faces scanned and want to use electronic key cards.

But advanced technology involving personal data - including facial recognition - has become increasingly common in China, where regulation is minimal and the government has rolled out public surveillance projects that use biometric data. "For Chinese consumers, there's this real glee in having exposure to things that seem like futuristic technology developments, and then beyond that, I think there's a much greater comfort level with data sharing," said Mark Natkin, managing director at Beijing-based technology consulting firm, Marbridge Consulting.

Alibaba has launched other highly automated projects for book stores and grocery stores. Though most projects are not necessarily intended to be springboards to big forays in those industries, its grocery stores called Hema have been well received and now number about 100 nationwide. The aim of such projects is twofold - develop AI and other high-tech expertise which will propel Alibaba's e-commerce offerings forward, as well as develop new areas of business at a time when e-commerce revenue growth rates are slowing, in part due to the US-China trade war.

Alibaba intends to build some other hotels but they will primarily be used by company staff on business trips to head offices in



DAVOS: Alibaba Group co-founder and executive chairman Jack Ma gestures during a panel session at the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting yesterday in Davos, eastern Switzerland. — AFP

Beijing and Shanghai. Wang also acknowledged that FlyZoo still had plenty of issues that needed upgrading.

Some of its services, for example, only worked for guests with a Chinese national ID. But he said the initial reception from guests

was encouraging. "When they experience the robot and the voice butlers, they say 'Wow!'. When they enter into the lobby they say 'Wow!'," said Wang. "It's such a different lobby. It's empty - but maybe it's the kind of empty of the future." — AFP

Migrants need better access to healthcare in Europe: WHO

COPENHAGEN: Europe must guarantee migrants better access to medical care, the World Health Organization urged Monday, and highlighted massive disparities in access to health services in different countries. "To improve their (migrants') health, it is important to fill the gap for access to basic care," Santino Severoni, the head of the WHO's Migration and Health Program, told AFP.

In the WHO's Europe region, which covers 53 countries, migrants represent almost 10 percent of the population, or 90.7 million of 920 million inhabitants. But the proportion varies widely from country to country-migrants account for 45 percent of Malta's population compared to just two percent in Albania, for example. Depending on the country and migrants' status, they may enjoy full access to the health care system or none at all.

In 15 European countries, including Austria, Turkey, and Britain, asylum seekers have access to the same care as the local population, whereas in Germany and Hungary they

are only entitled to emergency care. "People, and some governments, have been reacting emotionally when it comes to newcomers because of the lack of information and data," Severoni said.

Contrary to what some may believe, "there is a very low risk... of transmitting communicable disease from the refugee and migrant population to the host population," he said. The bigger health risk is for migrants themselves, with a large share of HIV-positive migrants contracting the disease only after arriving in Europe, said Severoni.

Depression and anxiety

New arrivals are also more likely to develop chronic illnesses as a result of their new lifestyle - less physical activity and too much fast food-and the poverty conditions some encounter. Cancer tends to be diagnosed at a later stage among migrants, which can make treatment more difficult, the report said, while migrant children are at greater risk of being overweight and having psychological problems than peers in their host country. Refugees and migrants are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety, added the WHO. This was due to a combination of risk factors, including the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among refugees who endured treacherous journeys, as well as lengthy asylum application processes and difficult socio-economic conditions, such as unemployment, poverty and isolation. — AFP

French watchdog sounds alert over chemicals in diapers

PARIS: A French public health watchdog issued a warning yesterday about the risks of several chemicals found in disposable nappies, particularly artificial perfumes, leading the government to demand that manufacturers withdraw them from their products. The Anses health body stressed there was no medical study which had proved health problems caused by disposable diapers.

But "we cannot exclude a risk... because we have recorded some substances that are above healthy limits," the deputy director of the Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety (Anses), Gerard Lasfargues, said. The chemicals identified in the study-described as the first of its kind-include two artificial perfumes as well as other complex aromatic products that are refined from oil, and potentially dangerous dioxins.

The French government called a meeting of nappy manufacturers yesterday morning and gave them 15 days to remove the products identified by the watchdog. "I want to reassure parents: Anses says that there is no immediate risk for the health of our children," Health Minister Agnes Buzyn said after the meeting. "Obviously we should continue putting nappies on our babies. We've been doing that for at least 50 years," she said, while adding that the report does not exclude "a health risk for children in the long term".

"That's why as a precaution we want to protect our children from possible effects," said Buzyn, who met the manufacturers along with the economy and environmental ministers. In a statement on Wednesday, market leader Pampers, which belongs to US consumer products group Procter & Gamble, said its diapers "are safe and have always been so." Scientists working for Anses tested 23 types of nappies in real-life conditions as they were worn by children, which it said was a world first.

"We calculated the amount (of chemicals) absorbed, calculated according to the time a nappy is worn, the number of nappies worn by babies, up to 36 months, and then we compared the results with toxicology standards," Lasfargues said. — AFP

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What's On



10,000 students participate in art competition under the slogan of 'COLORS OF PALESTINE'

The General Coordinator of this competition announced that more than 10,000 students from over 167 schools participated in art and painting competition 'Colors of Palestine'. The contest aimed to make students in Kuwait gain knowledge of the heritage, cultures and civilizations of Palestine. The contest's slogan motivated students to express their knowledge of the Palestine State through art.

The juries for the competition were Mrs Ezvelana Arndut, Mr Abed Al-Kareem Al-Enizi and Mr Asaad Bunashi - both of which are from the Kuwait Formative Art Association and they have more than 20 years of experience in this field. Mrs Ezvelana Arndut graduated from Ukraine Art University and she is the President of Kuwait & Ukrainian Friendship Association. The top 10 winners from each category will be given valuable

prizes and certificates with their names. The last day to send in the art sheets is on 28th January. The closing ceremony will be held at Gulf University for Science and Technology on Sunday 10th of February 2019 at 4:30 under the patronage of Minister of Education. Invitation is open for all sponsors, school principals and art teachers. The event sponsors are Gust University, Sebamed, Qurqasha and Al-Sanabel Al-Thahabya.



Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) recently sponsored the 22nd Annual Al-Salam Girl Scouts Camp for the school year 2018-2019 held under the slogan of "All For Peace" in the period of January 6-12, 2019 at the Girl Scouts Society headquarters. KAC's PR and media manager, Fayeze Al-Enzi said that KAC was pleased to co-sponsor the camp as part of its social responsibility activities and out of its belief in the significance of scouting movement.

SpongeBob SquarePants shows arrive at Al Kout Mall

Al Kout Mall, one of Al Kout Project's six bespoke experiences, will host the world-famous Nickelodeon's SpongeBob SquarePants shows, beloved by children and adults, from Tuesday 22nd January to Saturday 26th January 2019. Al Kout Mall, owned and managed by Tamdeen Group, Kuwait's leading mixed-use property developer, invited the American TV network Nickelodeon to present four daily shows titled "I Heart Dancing" with everyone's favorite character, SpongeBob.

There will be a variety of activities included in the program such as the "Under the Sea World" area which features immersive educational games for children. In addition to winning giveaways from the children stores at the mall, visitors will also meet Nickelodeon's SpongeBob and have their



pictures taken. This show is a celebration of SpongeBob SquarePants' 20th anniversary as Nickelodeon's longest running cartoon show.

Commenting on the upcoming extravaganza, Nermeen Bishady, Marketing Manager at Al Kout Mall, said: "As is customary at Al Kout Mall, we constantly seek to present internationally acclaimed and exceptional events and activities for visitors of all ages. It is our pleasure to host

Nickelodeon's SpongeBob and allow our visitors, both young and old, to meet one of their favorite characters exclusively inside our mall." She added: "We invite all fans of this fun-loving character, which presents many educational values that focus on preserving the environment and helping others, to join us and enjoy the first-of-its-kind show to be held in Kuwait in a wonderful festive atmosphere."

Sevika Sangam. Programs included Magic show, Fusion music, Skit, Bollywood-Kathak Fusion dance, Solo Singing and Group songs. For the break fillers in between each performance, the audience were kept entertained and engaged with tricky funky questions which also had rewards for the right respondents. The event also marked as an official, the very first send-off meet for Rev Georgie Varghese. Thomas Varghese (Sunny Maramon) gave felicitation speech and handed the memento to the vicar for his valuable service during his tenure. The event was sponsored by our silver sponsors New India Assurance Co. and AMCO Gen Trdg Co Also Redberry Stationery Salmiya was among the sponsors. Event also had Ganamela conducted by Rhythm Orchestra. Parimanam Manoj (Program Convener) proposed the vote of thanks. The program ended with a sumptuous dinner amidst the melodious and feet tapping numbers by the ganamela team.



Mar Thoma Parish's Family Meet & Greet

Mar Thoma Parish's Salmiya Prayer groups conducted their 11th annual Kudumba Sangamam with diverse colorful events at Indian Community School, Sr Branch, Salmiya. Rev Georgie Varghese (Vicar - Kuwait City Mar Thoma Parish) gave the presidential address & inaugurated the function by lighting the lamp along with the other conveyors. Mathew P Thomas (General Convener) welcomed the guest & members. Nitya John hosted the event.

There were choral renditions by Salmiya Zone prayer groups, Edavakamission and

Nespresso launches two limited edition coffees

This January, travel back in time with Nespresso and embark on a journey to the historical roots and the lively ambience of the very first coffee houses. Nespresso is launching two new Limited-Edition coffees, Cafe Istanbul and Caffe Venezia that are inspired by the world's very first coffee houses and aim to bring the vibrant and bustling atmosphere directly to your homes.

Istanbul has always been the entry point from Asia to Europe. A melting pot of colliding cultures, flavors, tastes and ideas. With no printing press, Istanbul's coffee house was seen as the mouthpiece of the city, where wild, and rich theories were challenged, with coffee as the natural elixir. Venice has always been the creative gateway to Europe. Home for the arts, music and experimentation, which often made the coffee houses, the tastemakers. This fusion of cultures and expressions made the coffee houses wild, complex and elegance places.

Follow the footsteps of the past and enter the birthplace of the coffee houses in Istanbul with Cafe Istanbul. With its intense, black and oriental notes, Cafe Istanbul will inspire any black coffee lover taking them directly into the heart of the wild and bustling atmosphere of that time. Caffe Venezia, with its elegant and

delicate profile, is the perfect muse and inspiration in a cup. Journey to Venice and enjoy a short get away to the home for arts and music.

To fully immerse yourself in a lively blend of history, the artist Young Rascal juxtaposed contemporary, stylish Nespresso drinkers with evocative illustrations of the first coffee houses and merged today's drinkers in yesterday's world.

Young Rascal explained: "I was really inspired by the idea of taking a typical coffee lover from today, complete with headphones, and placing them into a scene from the past. Being a lover of history, this appealed to me immensely. The coffee houses of Venice and Istanbul were the hubs of society and a real melting pot. Placing our modern day coffee drinkers with the citizens of that time, made me think - would they fit in? Of course, they would! Their clothing would differ, but the age-old art of conversation and laughter would remain. Something I hope I've managed to convey in these pictures."

Cafe Istanbul

Arabian Mocha coffee from Yemen mixes with East Indies and Indian treasures to create this cup, reminiscent of the mystery of the oriental bazaar. Evocative of historical blends, it has an exotic character carrying intense roasted and black pepper spicy notes.

Caffe Venezia

A taste of history as coffee from the ancient Ethiopian city of Harrar mixes with Indian Arabica to create a cup rich with the exotic perfume of the East. Wild and floral notes combine with a roasted character in this potent and complex coffee.

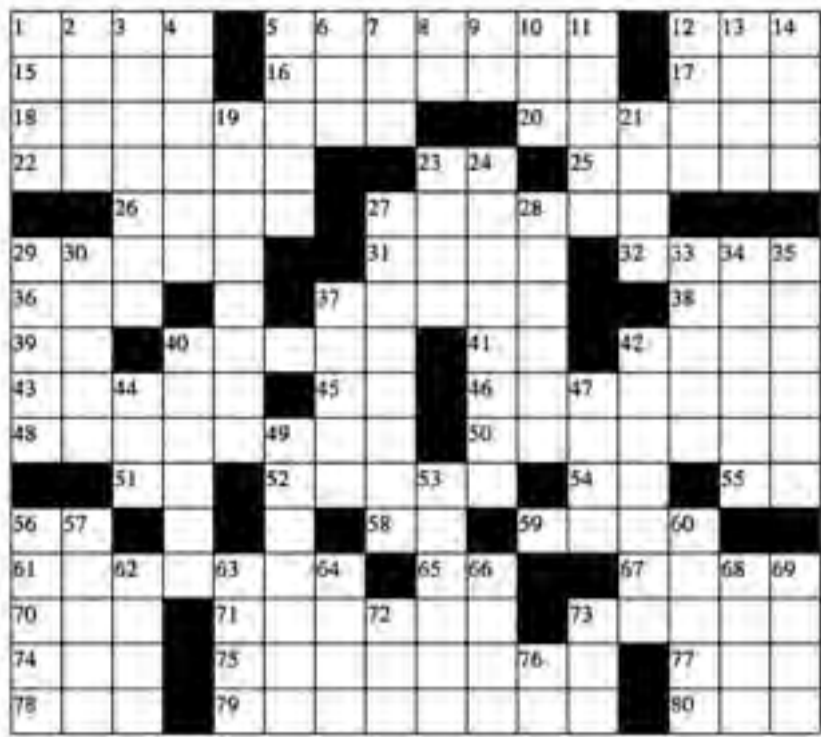
Announcement from Embassy of India

The Embassy of India will be celebrating the Flag-hoisting ceremony on the occasion of the 70th Republic Day on Saturday, 26th January 2019 at the Embassy premises. The program will commence at 0830 hrs. On the occasion, Hon'ble Ambassador of India will

unfurl the National Flag and interact with community members. A small cultural program will also be organized where school children will sing patriotic songs. All community members are cordially invited to come and participate in the celebrations of the 70th Republic Day of India.

Stars

CROSSWORD 2118



- ACROSS**
1. A slender double-reed instrument.
 5. Moving quickly and excitedly.
 12. What you can repeat immediately after perceiving it.
 15. A city of central China.
 16. A small railroad car propelled by hand or by a small motor.
 17. An independent agency of the United States government responsible for collecting and coordinating intelligence and counterintelligence activities abroad in the national interest.
 18. Stubbornly resistant to change or improvement.
 20. Make steady.
 22. State categorically.
 25. Type genus of the Ardeidae.
 26. Any of a group of antidepressant drugs that inhibit the action of monoamine oxidase in the brain and so allow monoamines to accumulate.
 29. Attractiveness that interests or pleases or stimulates.
 31. A member of a rural Finnish people living in eastern Russia.
 32. Having or denoting a low vocal or instrumental range.
 36. Adult female chicken.
 38. East Indian tree bearing a profusion of intense vermilion velvet-textured blooms and yielding a yellow dye.
 39. A Russian river.
 41. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
 43. Red Bordeaux wine from the Medoc district of southwestern France.
 45. 1/1000 gram.
 46. Of or pertaining to or affected by albinism.
 48. Perennial subshrub of Tenerife having leaves in rosettes resembling pinwheels.
 50. Waterfall in Canada is the Horseshoe Falls.
 51. The branch of computer science that deal with writing computer programs that can solve problems creatively.
 52. Appeal or request earnestly.
 54. A nonmetallic largely pentavalent heavy volatile corrosive dark brown liquid element belonging to the halogens.
 55. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
 56. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
 58. A metric unit of volume equal to one tenth of a liter.
 59. South African term for 'boss'.
 61. A woman cowboy.
 65. A soft heavy toxic malleable metallic element.
 67. An anxiety disorder associated with serious traumatic events and characterized by such symptoms as guilt about surviving or reliving the trauma in dreams or numbness and lack of involvement with reality or recurrent thoughts and images.
 70. A group of African language in the Niger-Congo group spoken from the Ivory Coast east to Nigeria.
 71. Pertaining to or associated with agony (especially death agonies).
 74. An international organization of European countries formed after World War II to reduce trade barriers and increase cooperation among its members.
 75. Family of erect mosses with club-shaped paraphyses and the hexagonal cells of the upper leaf surface.
- DOWN**
1. A law passed by US Congress to prevent employees from being injured or contracting diseases in the course of their employment.
 2. Slanting diagonally across the grain of a fabric.
 3. Someone who rows a boat.
 4. Make attractive or lovable.
 5. A long loincloth worn by Hindu men.
 6. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
 7. The compass point that is midway between north and northeast.
 8. Being one hundred more than three hundred.
 9. Being nine more than ninety.
 10. Tag the base runner to get him out.
 11. Relatively large in size or number or extent.
 12. Any of a number of fishes of the family Carangidae.
 13. A flat thin rectangular slab (as of fired clay or rubber or linoleum) used to cover surfaces.
 14. Informal terms for a mother.
 19. A prehistoric megalith typically having two upright stones and a capstone.
 21. Baby bed with high sides.
 23. Tropical woody herb with showy yellow flowers and flat pods.
 24. Music composed for dancing the sara-band.
 27. Distributed or sold illicitly.
 28. The capital and largest city of Rwanda.
 30. A populous province in northeastern China.
 33. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
 34. A member of the Dravidian people living in southern India.
 35. United States space station.
 37. The 3rd letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
 40. The act of rowing as a sport.
 44. A nucleic acid consisting of large molecules shaped like a double helix.
 47. A small cake leavened with yeast.
 49. A large table centerpiece with branching holders for fruit or sweets or flowers.
 53. Wool of the alpaca.
 57. Frightened into submission or compliance.
 60. An ancient upright stone slab bearing markings.
 62. A city in east central Texas.
 63. A metrical unit with unstressed-stressed syllables.
 64. A cut of meat taken from the side and back of an animal between the ribs and the rump.
 66. (pathology) An elevation of the skin filled with serous fluid.
 68. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
 69. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
 72. A coenzyme derived from the B vitamin nicotinic acid.
 73. The starting place for each hole on a golf course.
 76. A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

It may seem as if your life has taken on a somewhat mystical quality at an emotional and instinctive level. You find your dreams take priority over your realities. Forgiveness is on your mind and you long to have harmony in all of your relationships. A sense of true peace is what you desire. You may find with minimal effort today is a day that you are able to dissolve barriers. Fences may be mended, and awkward relationships may fall right back into place. You long for peace and it may seem as if peace is longing to return to your life. Wishes do come true and today will be proof of this in your world. Enjoy all this day has to offer.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Whether a surprise to day is good or bad depends on your interpretation. Look on the positive side of things. Assume the situation will have a good outcome, and then work to make it happen. You can do anything you set your mind to do. You have tremendous powers that are waiting to be activated. Believe in yourself. Taurus. In addition to convincing others, you may have to convince yourself.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Forgiveness and understanding are two awesome qualities to possess. You are able to put both of these to great use today. Both mending fences and repairing relationships are on the top of your priority list. You seem to be focused not only on the past but also on the future. You know to move forward and be at peace you need to let by gones be by gones. This will be a very emotional but empowering time in your life. The decisions you make today will have lasting effects on your life. You seem to really be in touch with a psychic ability you possess today. You are able to read the reaction of the people you approach. Love and luck are in your favor today.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You have the ability to get outside yourself and see what is going on with others. This may mean you see things others are unable to see. It is a gift that could serve you well in journalism or crime detection. Or, you may just find it useful in personal relationships. You can see beyond the "what" and identify the "why" in the behavior.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

This is a time of healing in your life. You may see barriers seem to dissolve and relationships repaired. Life is so short to hold grudges and you seem to be willing to do whatever it takes with anyone you feel as wronged you. This will bring peace and harmony into your life.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

People are attracted to your non-judgmental attitude. You always give the benefit of the doubt. This leads people to trust you when you make suggestions for change or improvement. Your friends and coworkers all know they can depend on you to come through for them. The downside may be that you don't see character flaws. This can lead to deep disappointments. Don't change your attitude Virgo. It's a valuable asset. Just watch for the clues!



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You feel for others. You may find that you take on the emotions of those that surround you on a deep and personal level. Your focus should be on keeping your own feelings and emotions in check. It is ok to listen to and help others in times of trouble. Be sure to not take things so personally. No one can succeed while carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders. Take time to step back and take in the beauty of the world that surrounds you. Feed your soul with positive vibes.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You may find your life taking on a kind of mystical quality on the emotional and instinctive levels. Dreams and illusions, forgiveness and understanding of human frailties are the things that arouse deep feelings. The past and the future come together—thankfully the stumbling blocks between people go away. This is the key to the greater psychic and spiritual sensitivity that you may be feeling now. This a great time for you to be in group setting and be able to express yourself with great understanding of your audience. You value your own life situation at this time. You take pleasure in being with others and planning and enjoying fun times with those closest to you this evening. Scorpio. Be sure and do not allow anyone to steal your joy today.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

It seems as if your job requirements could stifle your sensitivity and hold you back from growing. Do not let all the seriousness take away your emotion. Take special care when handling this situation. It seems as if everything is bringing out the best in you. Your unique and unusual qualities seem to shine now. You are blessed to find someone close to you shows you much support. They may find your eccentricities refreshing and find that they are drawn to you. This would be a great time to find new solutions to old problems or great inventions.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Call it intuition or psychic ability. Whatever label you choose, now is a time you clearly see what the future holds, the next move others are about to make, and the consequences before the action occurs. You are in touch with your spiritual side. You are extremely sensitive to all that is around you. The feelings of others seem to weigh heavily on you, as if they were your own. You may feel as if you are weighted down with emotional baggage. This is not from personal issues, rather from the negative energy you seem to be absorbing from others. This is a good time for you to make arrangements to spend some time alone. This is a time to remember, the only person you can change is you.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Life seems to take on a mystical quality for you now. You may find you develop a greater understanding of just how fragile life is. A wake-up call seems to make you realize each day you are alive is a blessing. You are determined to live life to the fullest. This is a time you may start living as tomorrow will not come. Life is short and you are determined to love hard. This seems to influence you to be more affectionate and loving to those you are close to. You are in love with your life and all those in it.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You are sensitive and understanding. This makes you a friend that others want to have. Not only do you find others turning to you for advice, but you feel loved and admired. You are in a great position for your voice to be heard. You will be able to share your opinions on the matters that mean the most to you and will find that you will easily gain support and backing for your cause. You feel great about who you are and what you stand for and are eager to have others join your team. Pisces, keep your focus positive and know you have the support from the ones that matter most.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Songs From the Year 2001

Find and circle all of the songs from 2001 that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 22 letters spell an additional song title from 2001.

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

AGAIN ALL FOR YOU DRIVE EMOTION KRYPTONITE PLAY PROMISE
 AMERICAN PIE BACK AT ONE ANGEL AUSTIN BE LIKE THAT BEAUTIFUL DAY BUTTERFLY CONTAGIOUS CRAZY DANCE WITH ME DIFFERENCES DIG IN
 EVERYWHERE FAMILY AFFAIR FIESTA FILL ME IN FOLLOW ME HERO I WISH IRRESISTIBLE JADED
 LOVE MISSING YOU MOST GIRLS MUSIC MY BABY ONE MORE DAY ONLY TIME OOHIE WALLY OUTSIDE
 RIDER WITH ME SOUTH SIDE STUTTER SURVIVOR THANK YOU U REMIND ME VIDEO WALK ON WHO I AM

Yesterday's Solution

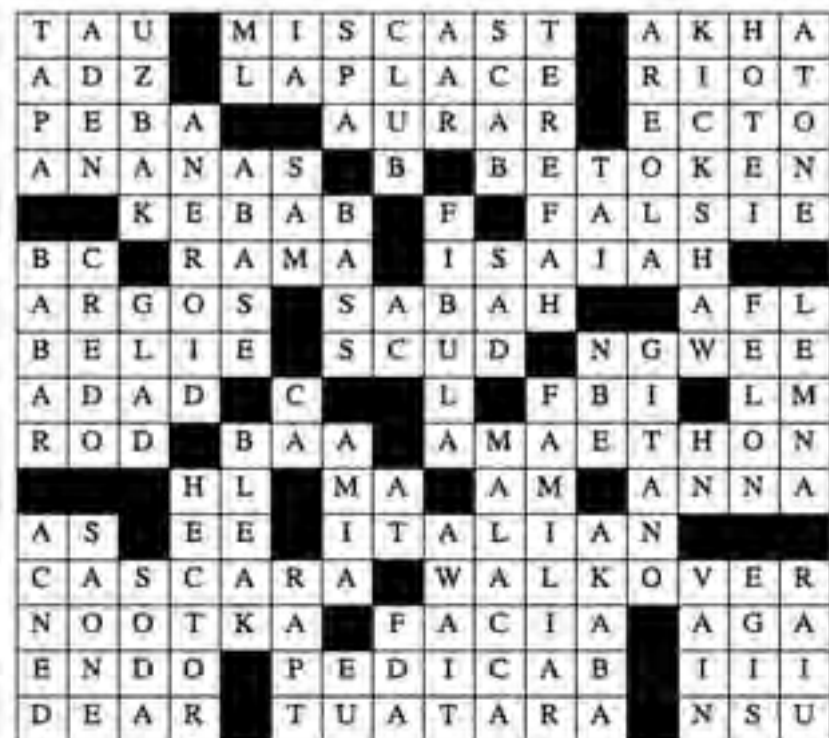
Songs From the Year 2000

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

AMAZED CALIFORNICATION UNCOMBATE PINCH ME
 AMERICAN PIE DESERT ROSE JUPITER JUPITER SAY MY NAME
 BACK AT ONE FADED RHYTHM SEPARATED
 BACK HERE GBL OR TV LUCKY SHE SANG
 BAG LADY HIGHER MARIA MARIA SMOOTH
 BE WITH YOU HOT BOYZ MEET VIRGINIA STAN
 BEAUTIFUL DAY I LIKE IT MURDERITY STRONGER
 BENT I NEED YOU MOST GIRLS THERE YOU GO
 BRATHE TRY TRY TRY THANK YOU TWY-AGIN
 BRADAWAY I TRY I WANNA KNOW NO MORE WIFEY
 BYE BYE BYE I WISH OTHERSIDE WONDERFUL

The hidden message is: SHOW ME THE MEANING OF BEING LONELY

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 2019



A woman takes a picture of an artwork by street artist Artur Bordalo II in Paris, ahead of the opening of his exhibition on January 26. — AFP

ALL SHOOK UP: HOW **ELVIS** KEEPS AUSSIE OUTBACK TOWN ALIVE



Elvis fans leaving from Central Station in Sydney as they head to the Parkes Elvis Festival.



An Elvis fan performing at Central Station in Sydney before boarding a train to the Parkes Elvis Festival.



Elvis fans posing at Central Station in Sydney before boarding a train to the Parkes Elvis Festival.

Once a year Parkes, a sleepy mining town in rural Australia, explodes into color and song—a veritable Graceland in the outback hosting a five-day extravaganza to celebrate 'the King'. Die-hard fans don their polyester jumpsuits, thick black wigs and gold-coloured necklaces, hopping on the "Elvis Express" and "Blue Suede Express" trains to the event, now billed as the southern hemisphere's biggest tribute to the superstar. The town's transformation extends beyond the superficial—organizers estimate this year's Parkes Elvis Festival generated Aus\$13 million (US\$9.3 million) for the local economy as more than 27,000 people visited attending some 200 themed events. "It's just crazy," said North Parkes Motel owner Andrew Porter of the frenzied growth in tourists. "It's just gotten busier and busier over the years. It's helped the whole economy," he added.

Elvis, who died in 1977 aged 42, never travelled to Australia and the event, held to coincide with his January birthday, runs at the height of summer when temperatures top 40 degree Celsius (104 Fahrenheit). But neither fact deters the fans: What was a sleepy summer period has turned into full occupancy during the festival. Accommodation is fully booked years in advance, caravan parks fill up quickly and sporting fields are packed with tents. "A lot of people do come here and they spend hell of a lot of money. I know that for a fact," said Elvis Lennox, who changed his name from Neville Steven and has a huge collection of memorabilia that he exhibits in a private museum.

Return to splendor

Parkes, which is some 300 kilometers (190 miles) west of Sydney, began as a gold-mining town before becoming a flourishing farming community. But by the 1990s, it and similar rural towns began to struggle as agricultural work declined. Keen to draw in more customers during the quiet summer, when even townsfolk flee to the coast to get relief from the heat, restaurant owners Bob and Anne Steel organized a birthday party for their idol. The first Elvis celebration in 1993 drew 200 participants, and the Steels



Australia's Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack (left) and Parkes Mayor Ken Keith (right) taking part in the street parade during the 2019 Parkes Elvis Festival.

had so much fun they made it an annual event.

At first there was little impact on the local economy, town mayor Ken Keith said. But as visitor numbers rose, so did revenues. Parkes is now so full that towns up to two-and-a-half hours drive away have started to cash in by offering accommodation and transport for revelers who missed out on a place to stay near the festival. "They get up at 5am, travel to Parkes to be here at 7am, leave here to go back after shows at midnight. It's a big toll but they do it. It's Elvis himself that's drawing them here," Lennox added. The New South Wales state government is projecting an injection of Aus\$43 million into the wider region surrounding Parkes this year due to the festival, a much-needed source of income amid a severe drought.

Elvis lives?

While locals still get work from the farming, mining and transport sectors throughout the year, the event has helped develop Parkes' service economy—and its numbers.

The population has increased by four percent to around 12,000 in the past decade, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in sharp contrast to the declining or static trend in other regional and rural towns. Parkes has become a model for how rural regions can re-invent themselves, said University of Wollongong human geography expert Chris Gibson.

Inspired by the success, other small towns have started their own events such as the ABBA Festival in nearby Trundle and the Bob Marley Festival in Kandos, said Gibson, who has compiled a database of some 2,800 festivals across the country. The Elvis festival has a uniquely Australian flavor. "We don't take ourselves too seriously," said Keith, decked out in a sky blue jumpsuit, aviator sunglasses and pompadour wig as he danced with jumpsuit-clad Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack ahead of the event's street parade.

This extends to the sporting field with another regular fixture—a rugby game—featuring teams of Elvis look-alikes all wearing copies of his trademark white jumpsuit. "The festival's celebrating an artist who has never visited Australia, let alone Parkes, in the depth of the summer heat where it's really quite uncomfortable to wear polyester jumpsuits," explained Gibson. "So that invites a sense of playfulness that's really part of why it works so well."

A growing number of young people are attending the event, but more than half of festival-goers are aged 55 or older. "Some women have come out, tears in their eyes. And I said, 'What's the matter?', and they said, 'He's not dead, he's alive, you can see him in there!'" Lennox told AFP of visitors to his museum. "I said 'Yes, I know, we try to keep him alive as much as possible. He'll never die while we're alive.'" — AFP



Vintage Kombi vans taking part in the street parade during the 2019 Parkes Elvis Festival in Parkes.



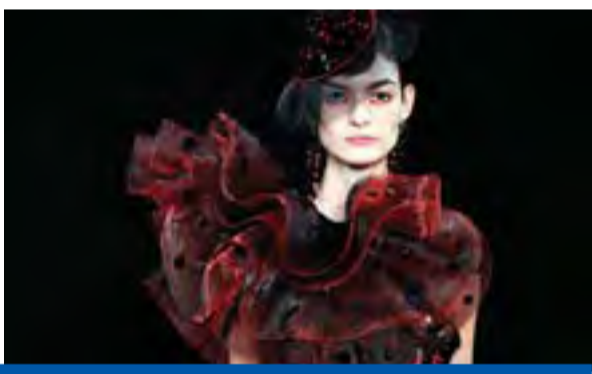
This photo shows children dressed as Elvis dancing in the street during the 2019 Parkes Elvis Festival in Parkes west of Sydney in outback Australia. — AFP photos

'He's not dead, he's alive, you can see him in there!'



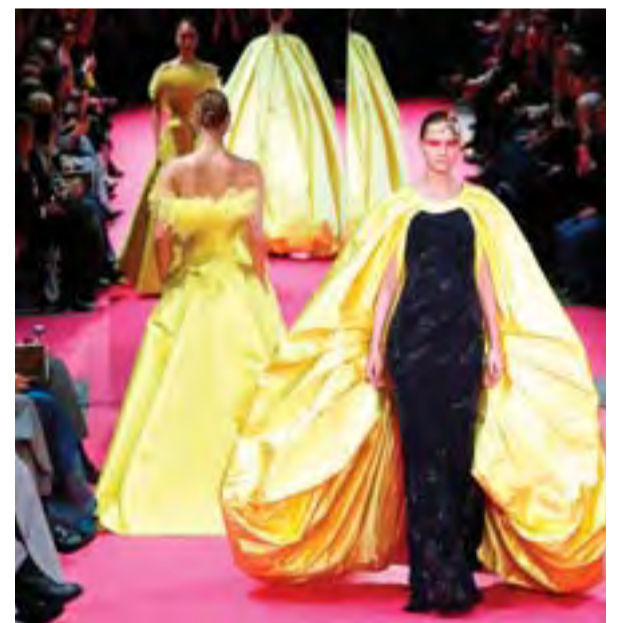
Models present creations by Giorgio Armani during the 2019 Spring-Summer Haute Couture collection fashion show in Paris. — AFP photos

Armani's glittering Art Deco fashion draws stars in Paris



Italy's Giorgio Armani played off bright reds against dazzling blue tones in his Haute Couture fashion collection in Paris on Tuesday, in an Art Deco-inspired feast of feathers, sequins, patent leather and crystals. The designer's gowns have long been red carpet favorites, and the catwalk show drew Hollywood actresses Uma Thurman and Dakota Fanning to the front row, along with Canadian singer Celine Dion.

Beaded caps sported by some models gave outfits a 1920s-era flapper twist, as swaying, fringed skirts succeeded slinkier numbers and intricately textured jackets which caught the light at certain angles. Clunky earrings and patterned gowns recalled the geometry of Art Deco architecture, and models walked to the sultry soundtrack of Bernardo Bertolucci's 1970 film *The Conformist*. Some outfits in the label's high-end Armani Prive range had an oriental air, in the rounded necklines of some dresses, flowing silk styles, or a kimono-style cloak. The brand said it had also drawn on Chinese lacquer as an inspiration and to enhance some looks. Haute Couture Fashion Week, which runs until Jan 24, celebrates an elite club of designers turning out elaborate, one-of-a-kind looks.



Models present creations by Alexis Mabille at the end of the 2019 Spring-Summer Haute Couture collection fashion show in Paris.





Models present creations by Giambattista Valli during the 2019 Spring-Summer Haute Couture collection fashion show in Paris.



Italian actress Asia Argento presents a creation by Antonio Grimaldi during the 2019 Spring-Summer Haute Couture collection fashion show in Paris.

Alexis mabile's versatile bow
French designer Alexis Mabille's signature bow made a recurrent appearance in varying sizes, styles and colors at his demure couture display Tuesday. It began as a front detail on a truncated, shoulder-less little black dress. Then, the mischievous item cropped up as a cinched belt on a coral red gown or a long pink satin one with divergent stripes. Going retro, the bow was conjured up as a '70s jabot collar on a Farrah Fawcett-like blue silk column dress. But the piece de resistance was the detail's cameo as an oversized bust detailing, giving the feeling that the model in a red tulle gown could be unwrapped. Other great ideas in the 45-piece display included a look that used swathes of bright yellow ruffled silk to cocoon its wearer. It was, however, the versatile bow that stole the show.

Tattooed lady
Feminism was the big theme of the day on the Paris catwalks, with Italian actress and #MeToo campaigner Asia Argento taking a starring role in her Roman neighbor Antonio Grimaldi's spring/summer collection. She wore an asymmetrically cut white sleeveless dress adorned with ostrich feathers designed to show off her tattoos as a cheeky take on the wedding dresses that traditionally close couture shows. While Grimaldi praised her courage and "unconventional spirit", Argento told AFP that she "loved his sculptural couture". Few designers anywhere, however, can match the sculptural verve of the Dutch Iris van Herpen, whose gravity-defying creations were the fruit of collaboration with New York artist and former NASA engineer Kim Keever.

Azzaro and Giambattista Valli rounded off the first day of the Paris haute couture shows that follow a week of menswear collections. Both went with a leggy look, with tight bow mini dresses from Valli—some with parachute sleeves—that he developed out into full ball gowns. He also topped a series of full-length sheath dresses with fezzes. Azzaro too toyed with bows in a mostly two-tone black and white riff on the short skirt and the classic "le smoking" dinner jacket. — Agencies



Models present creations by Antonio Grimaldi at the end of the 2019 Spring-Summer Haute Couture collection fashion show in Paris.



Models present creations by Azzaro Couture at the end of the 2019 Spring-Summer Haute Couture collection fashion show in Paris.

Capernaum: Oscar's most pleasant surprise

By Nasma Younes

The long-awaited 2019 Oscar award nominees have been declared on Tuesday, with Alfonso Cuarón's "Roma" in the lead, scoring a total of 10 nominations including Best Picture, which makes this movie Netflix's first ever Best Picture nomination. This semi-autobiographical take on Cuarón's early life, made an estimate of \$2.8 million by its ninth week in the box office with a budget of about \$15 million, proving once again that the film industry is evolving by the

year. The academy is broadening its horizons by offering Oscar award nominations to Netflix Originals, something that wouldn't have been imaginable ten years ago. But this isn't the only surprise for this year's selection: for the first time ever, we have a Superhero Best picture nomination for Ryan Coogler's "Black Panther". The Academy has never considered any superhero movie ever worthy of a nomination beforehand with the exception of Christopher Nolan's "The Dark Knight" in 2008.

This nomination sets a more serious tone for

the Superhero genre and is the first step towards broadening the spectrum of possible genres to be nominated for the future to come, such as horror, animation, etc. Yet another surprise for this year's shortlist, is the Best Picture nomination for nostalgic cash-grab "Bohemian Rhapsody", The Queen biopic starring Rami Malek as the legendary lead singer of the band, Freddie Mercury and directed by Bryan Singer. This movie has been nominated in efforts of appealing to the masses. The Oscars are trying to boost ratings by acknowledging films that a majority of viewers

have actually seen, it's not surprising that one of the highest-grossing films of the year clicked with the Academy. Finally, the most pleasant surprise of this year's list of contenders is Nadine Labaki's "Capernaum" landing Lebanon its second Foreign-Language nomination and hopefully its first win, allowing the middle-east a definite entry into the international film industry.



Mexican actress Yalitza Aparicio speaks to the media outside her trailer near the US-Mexico border where she is taking part in a production, in Tijuana, Baja California state, Mexico. — AFP

Grammy nominee blasts designers for dubbing her 'too big' to dress

An American pop star up for Best New Artist at next month's Grammys says she's struggling to find a dress for the ceremony, with designers calling her "too big." Bebe Rexha—a singer who also nabbed a nomination for the tender country pop duet "Meant to Be"—called out designers on social media for refusing to craft her a custom gown, highlighting what has become a perennial issue on the red carpet. "I had my team hit [up] a lot of designers," the 29-year-old said. "And a lot of them do not want to dress me because I'm too big." "If a size 6/8 is too big, then I don't know what to tell you. Then I don't want to wear your f***g dresses," Rexha said.

"You're saying that all the women in the world that are size 8 and up are not beautiful and they cannot wear your dresses." An American size 8 converts to approximately 40 in Europe and 12 in Britain. Celebrities including singer Adam Lambert and model Tyra Banks tweeted their support for Rexha, who said her "size 8 a**" will still be attending the Grammys gala on February 10. Rexha did not specify which designers had turned her down, but her rant underscored the enduring challenge faced by women artists who can't shimmy into samples, generally limited to runway model sizes 0-4.

A handful of designers responded to the singer's post offering to lend a hand. High-profile designer Christian Siriano, who has made a point of dressing curvier stars in the past, tweeted that "we have dressed @BebeRexha a few times and would love to do it again!" And eveningwear specialist Elizabeth Kennedy said, "I'd love to make you a dress for the Grammys!" "I'm a size 8 too, and yes it is a beautiful size."

Not a sample size

Dressing celebrities on the red carpet offers designers a platform to promote their work and houses often loan

stars outfits for A-list events—but a number of stars have admitted to buying their own dresses off the rack. Television star Megan Mullally, who is set to host the Screen Actors Guild Awards this weekend, posted on Instagram last month: "looks like i will be buying my dress online." "even though there is literally a 100 percent chance that i will be on camera, because I'M HOSTING IT," she said, adding that "designers do not send me dresses." "oh, the glamor of it all."



In this file photo Bebe Rexha performs during 106.1 KISS FM's Jingle Ball 2018 presented by Capital One at American Airlines Center in Dallas, Texas. — AFP

Mexico celebrates as 'Roma' grabs 10 Oscar nominations

Mexicans celebrated Tuesday as "Roma" grabbed 10 Oscar nominations—none more exuberantly than the film's breakout star, Yalitza Aparicio, who melted hearts and went viral with her ecstatic reaction to her best actress nomination. Aparicio, an indigenous schoolteacher with no acting experience who landed the part when she accompanied her sister to the audition, posted a video on Twitter of the moment she got the news. Watching the announcements on a laptop in what appeared to be her hotel room in Tijuana—where she had traveled for a photo shoot at the US-Mexican border fence—Aparicio let out a scream when her name popped up, then pressed her hands to her face, choking back tears, in a gesture of pure joy no actress could feign.

The video went viral, garnering tens of thousands of likes and countless replays on Mexican TV. "I'm so happy. I was not expecting this news when I woke up so early today," Aparicio wrote. Filmed in Spanish and the indigenous Mixtec language, set in Mexico City in the 1970s and filmed in black and white, "Roma" is not supposed to be the kind of movie that finds huge success in the United States—especially not in the Mexico-bashing era of President Donald Trump. But Alfonso Cuarón's intimate portrait of his childhood and the two women who raised him—his nanny, played by Aparicio, and his mother, played by best supporting actress nominee Marina de Tavira—garnered the most Oscar nominations of any film this year, together with Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos's "The Favourite."

"Roma" scored several firsts in the process: first Spanish-language film nominated for best picture, and the first nominations for streaming giant Netflix in the directing, original screenplay, foreign language film and best picture categories, among others. For Mexico—where the film triggered a national conversation on race, class and the traumas of the past—the news was celebrated by figures from the president on down. Cuarón "is a first-rate filmmaker, a source of pride for Mexico. I

congratulate him and all the actors and production team.... We should all see the film," said President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador—admitting that he himself had not watched it yet.

'Viva Alfonso!'

"We're all happy! What can I say? It's been a very intense morning," said Eugenio Caballero, the production designer on "Roma" who famously recreated Cuarón's boyhood home and street in minute detail for the film. "I'm so happy to see the nominations for Yalitza, Marina, Alfonso and the entire team," he told AFP. Mexican filmmakers have racked up an impressive string of successes at the Academy Awards in recent years.

The trio of Mexican directors known as the "Three Amigos"—Cuarón, Guillermo del Toro and Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu—have won the best director award four of the past five years. Cuarón, who won in 2014 with "Gravity," now stands to make that five of the past six. The Mexican film community was jubilant. "VIVA ALFONSO!!" tweeted del Toro, whose film "The Shape of Water" won the most statuettes at last year's Oscars with four, including best picture and best director.

"I can't believe it!! I can't take the excitement," tweeted Gael Garcia Bernal, one of Mexico's best-known actors, who became a Hollywood heartthrob after starring in Cuarón's last Spanish-language film, "Y Tu Mama Tambien" (2001). "Roma" is making history for Mexican film, on an international level," said the president of the Mexican Academy of Film Arts and Sciences, Ernesto Contreras. Mexicans will no doubt be watching in droves when the Oscars ceremony is held on February 24. "The great value of 'Roma,' besides its visual beauty, lies in the questions it asks us as Mexicans, about who we are, where we come from and our shared wounds," said Maria Novaro, head of the Mexican Film Institute (IMCINE). — AFP

Tissot Heritage Visodate Quartz a legacy of elegance

This is the watch that every young man dreams of wearing on his wrist: a piece that is passed on from generation to generation. Inspired by the 1950s collection, the Tissot Heritage Visodate Quartz symbolises a smooth combination of sentimental classicism and youthful passion which is expressed in its design: a nostalgic dial with a modern twist, the Tissot logo in the original font, delicate faceted hour markers, the essential date counter at 3 o'clock and a new feature - a quartz movement.

The 1950s heralded the Tissot Heritage Visodate with its avant-garde design: a streamlined dial; crisp, angular lines; finesse in wear; an original style; and the essential date function at 3 o'clock. The Tissot Heritage Visodate Quartz takes inspiration from its predecessor while adding elegant touches from its own time, including a domed case made stately by a range of distinctive straps. The young man who wears it embodies the values, hopes and aspira-

tions of the 21st century, while showing affection for a piece that makes reference to history.

This piece could have belonged to his grandfather, and it possesses a unique patina; but it is also the ideal daily companion. From urban life to the office, from the airport terminal to weekends on the road, the Tissot Heritage Visodate Quartz embodies all the qualities required for the pursuit of purity to which we all aspire. It has that surprising spirit - a blend of retro and modernity - that makes ordinary life extraordinary: a way of reminding us that in life, yes, there is always a new experience somewhere to be discovered. And a new chapter to write.

Features

Swiss-made quartz ETA movement
Domed scratch-resistant sapphire crystal
Water resistant to 3 bar (30 m / 100 feet)
316L stainless steel milanese bracelet or leather strap



Cocaine found in Chris Brown's hotel room 'was not his'

French police probing rape claims against American R&B star Chris Brown found cocaine and cannabis in his Paris hotel suite, his lawyer said yesterday, while denying that the cocaine belonged to the singer. Brown's French lawyer, Raphael Chiche, confirmed that the 29-year-old was found in possession of cannabis during his arrest at the luxury Mandarin Oriental hotel on Monday night over claims that he assaulted a woman a week earlier.

But the Grammy Award-winning singer had a note from his American doctor covering his use of the drug for medicinal purposes, Chiche said. The cocaine found "was not his" and "belonged to those who had come to party in his suite on the night of January 20-21," the lawyer added. Brown, his bodyguard and a friend were arrested after a 25-year-old woman accused them of raping her in the Mandarin Oriental, where he was staying while attending shows during men's fashion week in the French capital.

After being held for 24 hours the three were released without charge on Tuesday night. Chiche said his client wanted to bring a defamation lawsuit. "He says he had no sexual

relations of any sort with the complainant," Chiche said. The singer, who denies the allegations, posted a picture on his Instagram account after his release that read "This Bltch Lyin". "I WANNA MAKE IT PERFECTLY CLEAR..... THIS IS FALSE AND A WHOLE LOT OF CAP! (sic)." he posted next to the picture.

Still under investigation

The prosecutor's office said the three men were still under investigation on suspicion of aggravated rape and a drugs offence. The alleged victim told police she met Brown in a nightclub near the Champs-Élysées avenue with a group of other women on the night of January 15. She then agreed to go back to the singer's hotel, on the glitzy boutique-lined Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honore. Chiche said that his client was now free to return to the United States but would continue to cooperate with investigators and "will come back if he has to".

Brown has been in the news more for his legal troubles than his hit releases in recent years. In 2009 he was convicted of beating fellow singer Rihanna, his girlfriend at the time, who was forced to miss the Grammy Awards because of her injuries. Brown was sentenced to five years' probation and six months of community service for the assault. In 2014 he pleaded guilty to assaulting a fan in Washington and two years later he was arrested and charged with assault with a deadly weapon following a standoff with Los Angeles police officers. He is best-known for his hits in the mid-2000s such as "Kiss, Kiss" and "Run It". — AFP



Chris Brown

Shyamalan's 'Glass' shatters N American box office

"Glass," a superhero thriller both financed and directed by M Night Shyamalan, shattered the North American box office over the holiday weekend, taking in \$46.5 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Tuesday. The Universal film, a sequel to Shyamalan's "Unbreakable" (2000) and "Split" (2016), stars Bruce Willis as the superhuman known as "The Overseer" locked in a psychiatric ward with nemesis and mass murderer Samuel L. Jackson, AKA "Mr Glass." Its four-day take over the Martin Luther King Jr holiday weekend in the US saw it vault past the previous weekend's leader, "The Upside" from STX Films, which took in \$18.4 million for second spot.

"The Upside" features Bryan Cranston as a wealthy quadriplegic who hires ex-convict Kevin Hart as his caretaker. Critics have called the script, a remake of a 2011 French film, "corny" but praised the two lead actors. In third was Warner Bros's superhero film "Aquaman," down one spot from last weekend, with a take of \$12.7 million. The film, starring Jason Momoa as the Atlantean king, has generated more than \$1 billion in box office revenues worldwide. Fourth spot went to a surprise entry—anime



In this file photo (from left) US actor Samuel L. Jackson, US director Night Shyamalan, US actress Sarah Paulson and British actor James McAvoy pose on arrival for the European premiere of "Glass" in central London. — AFP

film "Dragon Ball Super: Broly" from Funimation Films, with \$11.5 million. The fantasy martial arts movie is the 20th "Dragon Ball" film and appears to be having one of the best showings of any in the series. And in fifth was "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse," still performing well in its sixth week out at \$10.2 million. The Sony movie won the Best Animated Movie award at the recent Golden Globe ceremony.

Rounding out the weekend's top 5 were: "A Dog's Way Home" (\$9.9 million)
"Escape Room" (\$6.8 million)
"Mary Poppins Returns" (\$7.2 million)
"Bumblebee" (\$6.1 million)
"On the Basis of Sex" (\$4.8 million)—AFP

Classifieds

Thursday, January 24, 2019

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Cool with light to moderate variable wind to northerly wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h and some high clouds will appear.

BY NIGHT: Cold with light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 20 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 23/01/2019 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	19 °C	11 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	19 °C	06 °C		
ABDALY	20 °C	06 °C		
BUBYAN	20 °C	06 °C		
JAHRA	20 °C	09 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	18 °C	10 °C		
SALMIYAH	18 °C	12 °C		
AHMADI	18 °C	12 °C		
NUWASIB	19 °C	09 °C		
WAFRA	20 °C	06 °C		
SALMY	18 °C	06 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Thursday	01/24	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear.	20 °C	08 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 26 km/h
Friday	01/25	Warm and Partly cloudy with a chance for fog forming over some areas.	24 °C	12 °C	SE	08 - 35 km/h
Saturday	01/26	Warm and Partly cloudy with a chance for fog forming over some areas.	25 °C	13 °C	SE	08 - 45 km/h
Sunday	01/27	Warm and Cloudy to partly cloudy with a chance for scattered rain.	27 °C	16 °C	SE	11 - 30 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:19
Sunrise	06:41
Zuhr	12:00
Asr	14:58
Sunset	17:18
Isha	18:38

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	17 °C
MIN. Temp.	-08 °C
MAX. RH	86 %
MIN. RH	29 %
MAX. Wind	N 25 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

REQUIRED

Restaurant Manager

- Preferably with knowledge of Vegan Meal
- Experience from 5 - 7 years
- Presentable
- Good command of English
- Transferable residency
- Experience and commitment to timings are must
- Preferably Lebanese / Jordanian / Syrian / Indian

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Airlines

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Jazeera Airways	177
Wataniya Airways	22 066 536
Turkish Airlines	1884918
American Airlines	22087425
Jet Airways	22087426
FlyDubai	22924455
Qatar Airways	22414400
KLM	22423888
Royal Jordanian	22425747
British Airways	22418064/5/6
Air France	22425635
Emirates	22430224
Air India	22921555
Sri Lanka Airlines	22438184
Egypt Air	22424444
Swiss Air	22421578
Saudia	22421516
Middle East Airlines	22426306
Lufthansa	22423073
PIA	22422493
	22421044

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Departure Flights on Thursday 24/1/2019					Departure Flights on Thursday 24/1/2019				
Airlines	Fit	Route	Time		Airlines	Fit	Route	Time	
JZR	254	Amman	00:05	KAC	792	Madinah	14:05		
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:15	KNE	231	Riyadh	14:10		
THY	766	ISL	00:30	JZR	602	Baku	14:10		
BAW	157A	London	00:30	KAC	500	Jeddah	14:15		
KAC	504	Beirut	00:45	FDB	059	Dubai	14:20		
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	KAC	672	Dubai	14:25		
SAI	441	Lahore	00:50	FDB	8065	Dubai	14:40		
KA	C102	Heathrow	00:50	GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40		
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	KAC	618	Doha	14:40		
PGT	858	Istanbul	01:00	KAC	412	Bangkok	15:00		
DLH	625	Dammam	01:25	KNE	529	Jeddah	15:05		
RJA	642	Amman	01:35	KAC	788	Jeddah	15:10		
UAE	853	Dubai	01:45	ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15		
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	IRA	667	Esfahan	15:30		
IGO	1757	Kochi	01:55	JZR	222	Riyadh	15:30		
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	OMA	645	Muscat	15:35		
JZR	722	Alexandria	02:15	KAC	562	Amman	15:35		
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	KAC	304	Mumbai	15:40		
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	JAE	857	Dubai	15:45		
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	UAE	732	Cairo	15:50		
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	SAW	705	Damascus	16:00		
KKK	1268	Istanbul	03:05	KAC	118	New York	16:05		
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05	ABY	127	Sharjah	16:05		
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	JZR	212	Jeddah	16:25		
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	KAC	542	Beirut	16:30		
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	KAC	502	Cairo	16:30		
JZR	724	Alexandria	04:00	QTR	1072	Doha	16:35		
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	FDB	051	Dubai	16:40		
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	FEG	341	Sohag	16:55		
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:30	JZR	114	Doha	17:10		
JZR	406	Kochi	04:45	SVA	510	Riyadh	17:15		
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30		
KAC	382	Delhi	05:05	JZR	104	Bahrain	17:45		
THY	770	Istanbul	05:10	JZR	214	Jeddah	17:45		
KAC	1544	Cairo	05:10	FDB	8191	Dubai	17:50		
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	UAE	875	Dubai	18:00		
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:15	FDB	063	Dubai	18:15		
JZR	112	Doha	05:25	JZR	124	Dubai	18:20		
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:40	QTR	1080	Doha	18:30		
KAC	344	Chennai	05:50	MSR	620	Cairo	18:30		
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	RJA	640	Amman	19:00		
KAC	302	Mumbai	06:25	ABY	123	Sharjah	19:25		
KAC	678	Dubai	06:55	RBG	555	Alexandria	19:25		
BAW	157	London	07:05	GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30		
JZR	708	Luxor	07:15	NIA	161	Cairo	19:30		
KAC	354	Bengaluru	07:35	KAC	616	Bahrain	19:30		
KAC	206	Islamabad	07:35	KAC	156	Istanbul	19:30		
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	KAC	662	Abu Dhabi	19:30		
QTR	8511	Doha	08:00	FDB	057	Dubai	19:50		
KAC	384	Delhi	08:00	KAC	776	Riyadh	19:50		
KAC	358	Kochi	08:05	JZR	126	Dubai	19:55		
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KNE	381	Taif	20:00		
MSC	411	Asyut	09:00	KAC	620	Doha	20:15		
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05	OMA	647	Muscat	20:20		
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	QTR	1088	Doha	20:35		
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30	KAC	674	Dubai	20:35		
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	DLH	624	Frankfurt	20:45		
IAW	157	Al Najaf	09:55	KAC	174	Munich	21:15		
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:20		
SYR	341	Damascus	10:00	ALK	229	Colombo	21:20		
JZR	410	Delhi	10:00	MEA	402	Beirut	21:20		
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	KAC	164	MXP	21:25		
IRA	675	Lar	10:50	KAC	168	Paris	21:30		
JZR	122	Dubai	11:10	UAE	859	Dubai	21:35		
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	RBG	551	Alexandria	21:40		
JZR	216	Jeddah	11:45	GFA	219	Bahrain	21:45		
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	KAC	676	Dubai	21:45		
KAC	614	ahrain	12:25	FDB	8739	Dubai	21:50		
JZR	252	Amman	12:30	KLM	445	Amsterdam	21:50		
JZR	714	Sohag	12:35	KAC	564	Amman	21:55		
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	JAI	574	Mumbai	22:00		
KAC	742	Dammam	12:50	MSC	405	Sohag	22:00		
ABY	121	Sharjah	12:55	QTR	1082	Doha	22:05		
KIS	6032	Mashhad	13:00	ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:15		
MSR	610	Cairo	13:10	AIC	981	Chennai/Ahmedabad	22:25		
AXB	393	Kozhikode	13:15	RBG	213	Sohag	22:30		
KNE	531	Jeddah	13:20	KAC	622	Doha	22:30		
QTR	1078	Doha	13:35	KAC	786	Jeddah	22:45		
IAW	157B	Al Najaf	13:55	KAC	692	Muscat	22:55		
IAW	157A	Al Najaf	13:55	BBC	043	Dhaka	23:00		
KAC	774	Riyadh	14:00	MSC	501	Alexandria	23:05		
KAC	204	Lahore	14:05	GEC	8456	Frankfurt	23:10		
				JZR	128	Dubai	23:15		
				FDB	071	Dubai	23:45		

Construction without coordination: How ants build megaprojects

PARIS: Leafcutter ants build super highways to transfer food and building materials hundreds of meters without communicating with each other, scientists claimed yesterday, in findings that could prompt a rethink about how some insect communities organize themselves. Each leafcutter colony can carve out nearly three kilometers of trails from the forest floor every year, investing an average of 11,000 hours into constructing and maintaining them.

It had long been thought that the ants, which are native to South and Central America, organize megaprojects by communicating with one another, assigning specialists to remove debris and retrieve leaf matter. But an international team of researchers made a startling discovery while investigating the behavior of one of nature's most impressive engineers. Far from communicating individual tasks as part of an overall plan, the ants appear to manage large-scale infrastructure projects with no coordination at all. In other words: Each ant seems to act alone, solving environmental problems such as removing obstructions as they are encountered.

"Although many thousand individuals contribute to the construction of infrastructure, there is no communication or organization between them - the massive foraging trails are a byproduct of the foraging behavior," said Thomas Bochynek, from Northwestern University's department of electrical engineering and computer science. "This is surprising, because many collective behaviors are organized by communication," he told AFP.

The behavior of social insects such as ants, bees and termites is usually considered to be governed by stigmergy - self-organization through direct or indirect communication among individuals. Ants, for example,

were long thought to organize building projects via pheromones left behind by each insect as a set of instructions for other colony members. But several studies have since cast doubt on this theory.

Bochynek and his team monitored colonies of leafcutter ants in the lab and in nature to see how fast they cleared a transit path through debris and how many ants pitched in at a given time. They also built a computer model to hypothesize a typical, randomized rate of clearance based on each ant's likelihood of encountering an obstruction by chance and then clearing it.

If the ants communicated specific commands between themselves to clear a particular blockage, the removal rates would speed up or slow down, depending on whether they were chatting it up or working together. But the opposite was true: The team found a virtually linear increase in the number of removed objects over time, something that would be "inexplicable" were the ants coordinating.

'Minimum complexity'

The notion that some collective behaviors - even the kilometer-long ant highways - can be achieved without any communication is relatively new, and yesterday's study in the journal *Proceedings of Royal Society B* lends it weight. Bochynek said the research could point to the simple, evolutionary energy-saving principle of: "If you do not need to communicate, don't!" "It saves the energetic expenditure of performing the behavior and reduces the required complexity in the individual animals," he said.

Traffic clearing, while costly in terms of time, has been proven to be "energy-cheap" for ants as it greatly reduces the future costs of obtaining food. Bochynek hopes for further inquiry into how insects



PARIS: A handout photo shows leafcutter ants transporting leaves. — AFP

maximize energy and conduct large-scale projects without any apparent instruction. "Biologists and computer scientists are impressed by the fact that complexity in a group can come from simple individuals, because it is so different from our own society," he

said. "Showing that we can further reduce the minimum amount of complexity required in an individual to still see complex group behavior is hence exciting, and makes the trail clearing example more impressive in our opinion." — AFP

Qatari amir hosts Bashir, backs unity in restive Sudan

DOHA: The ruler of Qatar offered support for Sudan's "unity and stability" yesterday at a meeting with President Omar Al-Bashir on his first foreign visit in more than a month of protests against him, a statement said. The tiny but wealthy Gulf state vies with regional rivals for influence in Sudan, strategic in part for its access to the Red Sea, and last year agreed a \$4 billion deal to jointly develop Suakin port. But no new financial assistance was announced yesterday.

Bashir arrived in Qatar on Tuesday as protests raged at home. Anger at inflation and shortages has coalesced into calls for an end to his 30-year rule. "President Bashir briefed the Amir on the latest updates regarding the situation and challenges facing the country," said a statement from the court of Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani. "The Amir affirmed Qatar's firm stance on Sudan's unity and stability, and they discussed the latest developments in the Darfur peace process."

Bashir, who came to power in a 1989 military coup, has blamed the unrest on foreign "agents" and rebels from the western region of Darfur. The official death

toll from the unrest stands at 26, including two security personnel. Rights groups say at least 40 have died.

Sudan has looked to maintain good relations with parties on both sides of a bitter Gulf region dispute. A Saudi Arabia-led bloc launched a boycott of Qatar in 2017, accusing it of supporting terrorism, a charge Doha denies. Bashir has contributed troops to a Saudi-led coalition's war efforts in Yemen, but also struck deals and kept close ties with the Saudi bloc's rivals Qatar and Turkey.

Analysts and diplomats saw Bashir's trip as a chance to tap Qatar for assistance in shoring up the country's meager finances, which have been drained since the south seceded with the lion's share of oil output in 2011. Qatar has long played a mediating role in Sudan's Darfur conflict and was among the first countries to express support after protests broke out on Dec 19, with Sheikh Tamim calling Bashir to offer "all that was necessary", according to Sudan.

"For Omar Al-Bashir to make his first visit since the protests to Qatar and not to other traditional allies is big," said Ibrahim Fraihat, a professor of international conflict resolution at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. "He obviously needs help and they (other allies) haven't been able to provide it," said Fraihat. However, Sudan said yesterday it had received unspecified assistance from the United Arab Emirates, plus offers from Russia and Turkey of fuel and wheat. The scale and timing of that aid was unclear. — Reuters

Rahul, 48, said he was "very happy that my sister, who is very capable and hardworking, will now work with me", as Congress campaigns in a tough election. "Congress is not going to be on (the) back foot. It will be on the front foot," the opposition leader told reporters. Priyanka is expected to assume her duties in February, the party said in a statement.

She will oversee the party's campaign in eastern Uttar Pradesh, home to Modi's constituency in the holy Hindu city of Varanasi. But the region is more than just symbolic. Uttar Pradesh is the heartland of Hindi-speaking India, a bellwether state and the country's most populous. Victory in Uttar Pradesh is a key stepping stone to forming a national government.

Though she has campaigned informally in past elections, Priyanka's official elevation to a key Congress post was seen as a long time in the making. Some party loyalists see Priyanka as more affable and charismatic than her older brother, and had long lobbied for her to play a bigger role. Rahul's leadership credentials were hampered in the wake of 2014, when Congress was thumped in the polls by Modi and his BJP.

Modi won a record mandate and stormed to victory with the Hindu nationalist BJP, gaining ground with decisive wins in key states including Uttar Pradesh, as Gandhi's stewardship took a battering. But the Congress leader has bounced back, with the party taking back three heartland states from the BJP in December, delivering momentum as the national election looms. Priyanka's appointment comes as Congress was left out of an opposition alliance against Modi between two regional parties in Uttar Pradesh in recent weeks. — Agencies

prayers from loudspeakers. Youths marching in a procession held up black banners that read "It's time to say: stop killing women" and "Women have the right to live in peace" in both Arabic and English. A crowd of mourners then followed Maasarwe's coffin as it was taken to the Al-Sarat mosque and cemetery where she was laid to rest.

Hours earlier, the town's mayor, Khaled Abu Mukh, and Israeli Arab MP Ahmad Tibi accompanied Maasarwe's father as her coffin arrived at the airport. In a video posted on social media, Tibi said Maasarwe was now the daughter of all Arab Israelis. Arab Israelis are descendants of Palestinians who remained on their land following the creation of Israel in 1948. They account for some 17.5 percent of Israel's population and largely support the Palestinian cause. — Agencies

BJP faces big defeat in UP...

Continued from Page 1

Uttar Pradesh sends 80 lawmakers to the lower house of parliament, the most for any state in India. A total of 2,478 people were polled in Uttar Pradesh, which has a population of about 220 million, for the survey.

The shock poll comes after the BJP lost elections in five state assemblies late last year, including three that it had controlled, largely because of rural anger about low farm incomes tied to weak crop prices and amid concerns about a lack of job creation. Following the losses, Modi is considering a series of vote-catching measures, including directly transferring money to farmers, that may cost more than 1 trillion rupees, according to government sources.

Congress, meanwhile, appointed its President Rahul Gandhi's charismatic younger sister to a senior party position that party officials say will help to energize its campaign. Priyanka - whose father, grandmother and great-grandfather were all prime ministers - was appointed Congress party chief in the east of Uttar Pradesh. She will report to Rahul, a fellow scion of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, who heads the main opposition party that ruled India for much of its post-independence history. Priyanka, 47, is popular within Congress but the reigns were passed to her older brother Rahul when their mother Sonia stepped back from the helm in 2017.

Slain Arab Israeli student buried...

Continued from Page 1

family home. Near the family's front gate, neighbors had hung signs reading "Stop picking our flowers". Another banner read: "Killing the dream and killing education is killing ambition and humanity." As relatives wept, girls held banners in Arabic and English saying: "Aia, your beautiful soul will never be forgotten." The only sound that could be heard was of Muslim

Erdogan holds talks with Putin on Syria zone

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan met for Syria talks in Moscow yesterday, with Turkey saying they would focus on Ankara's so-called "security zone" in northern Syria. Russia and Turkey have agreed to coordinate ground operations in Syria following US President Donald Trump's shock announcement last month about pulling 2,000 American troops out of Syria.

At the start of their meeting in the Kremlin, Putin addressed Erdogan as "dear friend," saying that their countries "work on issues of regional security and actively cooperate on Syria". Erdogan used the same term for Putin in translated comments and said "our solidarity makes a weighty contribution to the security of the region."

The warm rhetoric came despite the fact that the two leaders are on opposite sides of the Syria conflict: Russia provides critical support to the Syrian government, while Turkey has backed rebel groups fighting

President Bashar Al-Assad's forces. Despite this, they have worked closely to find a political solution to the seven-year conflict.

Turkey has welcomed Washington's planned withdrawal from Syria but the future of US-backed Kurdish militia forces labelled terrorists by Ankara has upset ties between the NATO allies. Erdogan said Monday he would discuss with Putin the creation of a Turkish-controlled "security zone" in northern Syria, suggested by Trump. The US-allied Kurds, who control much of the north, have rejected the idea, fearing a Turkish offensive against territory under their control.

Moscow, a long-term supporter of Assad, is likely to oppose the plan, with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov last week saying Damascus must take control of the north. Nearly eight years into Syria's deadly conflict, the US pullout has led to another key step in Assad's Russian-backed drive to reassert control. Kurdish forces who were left exposed by Trump's pledge to withdraw have asked the Syrian regime for help to face a threatened Turkish offensive.

The Kremlin hailed the entry by Syrian forces into the key northern city of Manbij for the first time in six years after Kurds opened the gates. Moscow plans to organize a three-way summit with Turkey and Iran at the beginning of this year as part of the Astana peace process, launched by the three countries in 2017. — AFP



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin meets his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the Kremlin yesterday. — AFP

Bleeding may offset aspirin...

Continued from Page 1

how serious cardiovascular disease is," said McConway, who was not involved in the study. Heart disease is the top killer of people worldwide, taking 17.9 million lives around the planet each year, for one-third of all deaths, says the World Health Organization. "The downside is the increase in major bleeding events, including bleeding inside the skull and brain or major bleeds in the stomach or gut," added McConway.

In a non-aspirin-taking pool of 10,000 people, 16 would have such an event in a year, compared to 23 among aspirin-takers. In other words, about seven more major bleeds annually, which McConway described as a "substantial increase", even though the annual risk of a hemorrhage "is still not high".

According to Jeremy Pearson, associate medical director of the British Heart Foundation, the meta-analysis "valuably updates our knowledge, but does not change the current perspective". "It confirms that the average risk of harm exceeds benefit, so that guidelines should not be changed."

Aspirin is not recommended in Britain for prevention of heart disease. But in the United States, the US

Preventive Services Task Force recommends "initiating low-dose aspirin use for the primary prevention of cardiovascular disease (CVD) and colorectal cancer in adults aged 50 to 59 years who have a 10 percent or greater 10-year CVD risk, are not at increased risk for bleeding, have a life expectancy of at least 10 years."

According to a recent nationwide survey of US adults, about half reported regular aspirin use. Sean Zheng, a cardiologist at King's College Hospital and lead author of the JAMA report, said the public may not understand that taking low-dose, or baby aspirin, carries significant risks. "In my opinion, there is no place for routine use of aspirin in patients who are healthy," he told AFP. "Maybe it's because it's over the counter and it's described as a baby aspirin, but actually our data show that there is a very real risk, and you shouldn't take it with the expectation that it's completely benign and safe."

The study also delved into aspirin's preventive benefits when it comes to cancer, and found "no overall association between aspirin use and incident cancer or cancer mortality". The review pointed out one study that had found a 15 percent reduction in cancer death associated with aspirin use after five years of follow-up. However, the same findings were not replicated in a second trial, which followed almost 500 patients for seven years. "The findings of this study suggest that the association of aspirin with cancer outcomes is neutral, with no suggestion of harm or benefit from the available current evidence," said the JAMA report. — AFP

Sports

Westbrook 14th triple double of the season as Thunder edge Portland

Rolling Raptors rout Kings

LOS ANGELES: Russell Westbrook bagged his 14th triple double of the season as the Oklahoma City Thunder overpowered Western Conference rivals the Portland Trail Blazers on Tuesday. Westbrook finished with 29 points, 10 rebounds and 14 assists—to reach double digits in three key statistical categories—while teammate Paul George led the scoring with 36 points in a 123-114 victory at the Chesapeake Energy Arena. The win saw the Thunder improve to 29-18, tightening their grip on third place in the West ahead of fourth-placed Portland, who slipped to 29-20 with the defeat. While Westbrook and George led the Thunder's scoring, they received support throughout the lineup, with every starter posting double-digits. New Zealand's Steven Adams and shooting guard Terrance Ferguson had 14 points apiece while Jerami Grant had 11 points. Dennis Schroder added 13 off the bench in his 22 minutes on court. "It's very important to get everyone involved," Westbrook said. "We've got so many guys in this team that are talented. We try to get everyone involved and into the game." The burden of Portland's scoring was once again shouldered by Damian Lillard, who had 34 points. C.J. McCollum added 31 points while Bosnian international Jusuf Nurkic added 22 points.

RAPTORS 120, KINGS 105

Fred VanVleet scored 19 points and added seven rebounds and seven assists Tuesday night as the Toronto Raptors defeated the visiting Sacramento Kings 120-105. Kyle Lowry added 19 points and nine assists for the Raptors, who won their season-best

10th straight home game and are 9-2 in January. Pascal Siakam had 18 points and Serge Ibaka had 15 points and 10 rebounds for the Raptors. C.J. Miles added 15 points and Norman Powell had 11 points. Marvin Bagley III scored 22 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for the Kings, who have lost two in a row. Bogdan Bogdanovic added 16 points, eight rebounds and nine assists.

MAVERICKS 106, CLIPPERS 98

Disillusioned guard Dennis Smith Jr., returning from a six-game absence, scored 17 points and grabbed a season-best eight rebounds to lead Dallas past visiting Los Angeles. Smith missed three games with a sore back and an illness before leaving the team for another three games, upset over his role playing alongside rookie sensation Luka Doncic. Amid trade rumors, Smith stayed away from the club as it lost four of the six games. The explosive guard's return provided a burst of offense that Dallas needed in snapping a four-game losing skid. Patrick Beverley paced the Clippers with 16 points and nine rebounds.

TIMBERWOLVES 118, SUNS 91

Karl-Anthony Towns scored 25 points, grabbed 18 rebounds and handed out seven assists to lead Minnesota to a win at Phoenix. The Suns were seeking payback after Derrick Rose's buzzer-beating shot on Sunday lifted the Timberwolves to a 116-114 win, but Towns and Minnesota had other ideas. Josh Okogie scored 21 points for the Wolves. Josh Jackson finished with 27 points and 10 rebounds for the Suns. — Agencies



OKLAHOMA CITY: CJ McCollum #3 of the Portland Trail Blazers shoots the ball against the Oklahoma City Thunder on Tuesday at Chesapeake Energy Arena in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. — AFP

Woods raring to go ahead of 2019 bow

LA JOLLA: Tiger Woods makes his 2019 debut here today, having replaced the trepidation of a year ago with an eagerness to capture an eighth Farmers Insurance Open crown in California. Woods got his first look at the Torrey Pines course on Tuesday when he played a nine-hole practice round in the company of Jordan Spieth.

It was a happy return to the cliff-top course overlooking the Pacific Ocean, where he won the last of his 14 Majors at the US Open more than a decade ago. "I haven't played on the Tour since September, so it's been a while and looking forward to getting started, looking forward to getting out there and playing," said Woods.

"This is a golf course property that I've always loved. Jordan asked me today as we were playing, he said, 'How long have you been coming down here?' I said, 'Well, 10 years longer than you've been alive,'" the 42-year-old quipped.

"I've been coming out here quite a bit. This is the first PGA Tour event that I ever attended with my dad when this was the old Andy Williams tournament. "To have won on this property and had

the success I've had, it's been a lot of fun and looking forward to getting out there this week."

Twelve months ago, Woods didn't know what to expect as he returned here in his attempt to come back from a near two-year injury absence. He eventually finished 23rd. It took just three events to silence those critics when Woods fell one shot shy of forcing a play-off in the Valspar Championship.

Woods then led, albeit for two holes, during the final round of the Open Championship at Carnoustie while he drew record crowds to Bellerive when he got himself into contention a few weeks later at the PGA Championship.

'A MOVING TARGET'

Woods finally ended a more than five-year winless drought amid emotional scenes at the Tour Championship in suburban Atlanta. "My expectations are now way different to a year ago," he said Tuesday.

"I know what my body can and cannot do. So last year was very fluid and it was like trying to hit a moving target. "It was quite interesting to try and figure it all out as the year progressed and it evolved.

"This year I have a great understanding of what I can and can't do. There's not uncertainty that I had going into the year last year after what I did at the end of last year. Playing seven out of nine weeks was quite a bit. Body held up better than I thought it would, even though I



MELBOURNE: In this file photo taken on December 5, 2018 US golfer and captain of the US Presidents Cup team Tiger Woods attends a press conference in Melbourne, one year ahead of the 2019 edition to be held at the Royal Melbourne Golf Club. Tiger Woods will make his 2019 debut at next week's Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines. — AFP

got pretty tired at the end. Overall, it held up pretty good.

Woods revealed his back now feels so strong he spent part of his off-season deep-sea diving in the Bahamas and off the coast of Florida, using scuba tanks for the first time in years.

"One of the best things I did in the off-season was get back into diving again and be able to do some spear fishing and free diving is something that I truly missed," he said. "Even tank diving,

I haven't tank dived in years. I just couldn't afford to have that weight on my back and compressing my disk and my disk was already screwed up.

"So whenever you put any weight on it, it made it worse. I haven't tank dived in years and to be able to do that again, to be able to get in the water and free dive, put the fins on and load the body up and drop down like that, that was something I truly missed. I love being in the water." — AFP

DeChambeau has world domination in mind at Dubai Desert Classic

DUBAI: Bryson DeChambeau returns to the Dubai Desert Classic three years after his debut as the top-ranked player in the field at world number five, but the American has made it clear that he is far from satisfied with his meteoric rise.

The 25-year-old, popularly referred to as the 'Mad Scientist' because of his use of scientific methods in trying to improve his game, was the leading amateur and shot 12-under par on his first Dubai appearance in 2016.

However, he is one of the hottest players in the professional game right now, having won four times on the PGA Tour last year, including three in his last eight starts.

DeChambeau headlines a stellar field in the tournament, which is celebrating its 30th edition this year and starts at Emirates Golf Club today. All of DeChambeau's six wins as a professional have come on American soil and he quickly established what he wanted to achieve, saying: "It's an honour to be back here and super excited.

"Obviously, played well on this golf course here a couple years ago. Didn't putt very well but I think we figured out why for this year. "I am looking forward to a really good week. The game is in great shape... I am hitting it well, putting it well. I'm honestly just excited to try and capture an international victory. That's really what I want to do this week."

Winner in back-to-back weeks of the

FedEx Cup playoffs in 2018, DeChambeau said he is still not satisfied with the progress he has made since his last visit. "Not satisfied. There's more to learn. There's more to achieve," said DeChambeau.

"For me, it's not necessarily about being the number one. I mean, that's the result of all the hard work, right? But for me, it's more about understanding the game at a whole other level that's never really been done before.

"I want to achieve different insight into all the different variables that go through you having to adjust properly to the course at hand."

China's Li Haotong is the defending champion this week in a field that also includes 2017 champion Sergio Garcia. Garcia is enjoying a great run of form and has not finished outside the top 10 in his last six starts, including a win at the Andalucia Valderrama Masters.

"I've always looked at it that you can't get victories without being up there and finishing in the top 10 or anything like that," said the 2017 Masters champion when asked if he was frustrated his form and consistency has not led to more wins.

"If you're fighting to finish 25th, you don't have a chance of winning. Winning has become tougher and tougher as the years went by... all the kids are much better now than they used to be.

"At the end of the day, the only thing I can do is give myself the best chance and try to play the best way possible. If I'm around the top 10, I have my chances of winning. If it happens, great, and if not, it's still a great week."

Also in the field are European Ryder Cup star Tommy Fleetwood, 2007 champion Henrik Stenson and Ireland's Shane Lowry, winner of last week's tournament in Abu Dhabi. — AFP

Pouille credits coach after reaching s-final

MELBOURNE: Lucas Pouille hailed new coach Amelie Mauresmo for bringing him "a lot of confidence" after yesterday becoming the first Frenchman to reach the semi-finals of the Australian Open since Jo-Wilfried Tsonga in 2010.

The 28th seed fought back from a break down in the first set to stun 16th seed Milos Raonic 7-6 (7/4), 6-3, 6-7 (2/7), 6-4 and reach the last four of a Slam for the first time. The 24-year-old had never won a match at Melbourne Park before this year but will on Friday face Novak Djokovic for a place in the final.

"I think she's bringing a lot of confidence to my game, to my personality, to my state of mind," he said of the Frenchwoman, who won the singles crown at Melbourne Park in 2006. "As I said at the beginning, the goal is not to reach the final, the semi-final, the goal is to improve my tennis, to put into a match what I work on during practice.

"That gives me less pressure. I'm just trying to focus on my game, not on the consequences and the results." Pouille recruited the double Grand Slam title winner Mauresmo to his team in the off-season after a splitting with long-time coach Emmanuel Panque.

Mauresmo, who also won Wimbledon in 2006, had in the past been the subject of criticism on social media while coaching Andy Murray, with some saying men could not be coached effectively by a woman.

"Men are coaching women, so why not the contrary? I mean, they don't get it," Pouille said, adding that more men should hire female coaches. "As I said again and again, it's not about being a man or a woman, it's about knowing tennis," said Pouille, who in March last year broke into the top 10 of the ATP Tour rankings for the first time. "She's a champion. She's a great coach."

MAKE HIM PLAY

Currently ranked 31, Pouille arrived in Melbourne in poor form: he had lost all three of his singles matches at the Hopman Cup and suffered a first-round exit at the Sydney International. "I just kept working hard. All the matches I decided to take step by step, give everything on every point and here I am."

Former world number three Raonic raced to a 3-0 lead after breaking Pouille's first service game as the Frenchman seemed to take a few minutes to adjust to the magnitude of the occasion on Rod Laver Arena.

Pouille soon settled into the match so effectively that he broke back at 5-3 down and took the set in a tiebreak on the back of 18 winners to only five unforced errors. "I really wanted to return as much as possible and make him play, take care of my serve and not put too much pressure on myself," said Pouille.

Pouille had equalled his best Slam performance by reaching the quarter-final and was aiming to become the first Frenchman to reach the last four at any major since Gael Monfils at the 2016 US Open.

An early break in the second put him in the driving seat. Raonic had to dig deep at 3-3, 15-40 in the third set with his famed huge serve coming to the rescue before clawing one set back in another tiebreak. But Pouille put Raonic's serve under increasing pressure in the fourth set and converted his third match point to close out the match in 3hr 2min. — AFP

Olympic champ Pendleton reveals suicidal thoughts

LONDON: Former Olympic champion Victoria Pendleton revealed on Tuesday she once considered committing suicide. British cyclist Pendleton has suffered with mental health issues in the past and she has exposed just how bleak the situation became.

The 38-year-old, who retired from cycling after winning gold at the London 2012 Olympics, was diagnosed with severe depression after returning home from an aborted charity climb of Mount Everest.

She also separated from Scott Gardner, her husband for five years, in 2018, saying the couple had "grown apart". "I had accumulated one-and-a-half times the dose of drugs to kill myself," Pendleton told the Daily Telegraph.

"I had it there, in front of me, and I knew how much it would take. And how long I would have to be left for it definitely to work. "It wasn't even like I was really upset about it. I just felt numb.

"I felt horribly guilty for even considering it (killing herself). "I said to my mum: 'Please would you forgive me (if I killed myself)?' Obviously, it was very upsetting for her to hear that. "But I really wanted my family to be able to forgive me. Because... I wouldn't do it to hurt them on purpose. You just can't understand how much I was suffering on the inside."

After suffering a panic attack at a friend's house, Pendleton sought help. She also turned to former British Cycling psychiatrist Steve Peters, who she telephoned during her darkest moment.

"It must have been about 6.30am," she said. "I had been awake for hours. "I remember lying there with tears rolling down the side of my face. Not really crying, but just feeling a sense of hopelessness. I was so low. So helpless.

"And I just thought: 'I don't want to see tomorrow'. I'm so grateful that he (Peters) picked up (her phone call). Because I don't think I would be here if he hadn't." Pendleton, whose weight had dropped considerably, moved in with her mother in Hertfordshire for a time.

A subsequent holiday in France made her feel she had "turned a corner" before she embarked on a surfing trip to Costa Rica. "I guess it was a very unconventional thing to do," she added. "It was against the recommendation of my family and almost everyone else. — AFP

Sports

Hertl nets hat trick as Sharks top Capitals in OT

Flames stay hot by beating Hurricanes in overtime

WASHINGTON: Tomas Hertl completed a hat trick by scoring 1:48 into overtime to give the visiting San Jose Sharks a come-from-behind, 7-6 victory over the Washington Capitals on Tuesday night. Evander Kane (two goals) knocked in a loose puck with one second left in regulation to force overtime, and Hertl then won it for San Jose, which ended a three-game losing streak. Hertl, taking an OT pass from Logan Couture, beat Washington goalie Braden Holtby from the right circle on a shot just inside the far post. Hertl notched his second career hat trick and added an assist. Alex Ovechkin registered his 23rd hat trick for the Capitals, who have dropped six straight (0-4-2). With his first goal, Ovechkin moved past Dave Andreychuk (640) and into 14th place all-time for goals.

FLAMES 3, HURRICANES 2 (OT)

Mikael Backlund scored 15 seconds into overtime, and David Rittich made 33 saves in a sparkling performance as host Calgary beat Carolina. Backlund added an assist in a two-point game. T.J. Brodie finished with two assists, and Oliver Kylington and Mark Jankowski also scored for Calgary. The Western Conference-leading Flames head into the All-Star break riding a three-game winning streak and an 8-0-1 run. Dougie Hamilton and Sebastian Aho had goals for the Hurricanes, who fell to 1-2-1 in their past four games. Petr Mrazek made 22 saves.

BLACKHAWKS 3, ISLANDERS 2 (SO)

Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane scored on Chicago's only two attempts of a shootout, and the hosts edged New York in the final game for both teams

before the NHL All-Star break. Toews scored the final goal of regulation late in the second period for the Blackhawks, who have won two straight. Dylan Strome scored earlier in the second period. Goalie Cam Ward made 34 saves in regulation and overtime before turning back both Islanders attempts in the shootout. Valtteri Filppula and Mathew Barzal scored for the Islanders, who had their five-game winning streak snapped but will still end the first half of the season atop the Metropolitan Division. New York is 15-3-1 since Dec. 15.

COYOTES 3, SENATORS 2

Vinnie Hinostroza scored twice and added an assist as Arizona continued its hot streak with a victory at Ottawa. Derek Stepan also scored for Arizona, which is 6-1-1 in its past eight games. Coyotes goaltender Darcy Kuemper made 25 saves. Bobby Ryan and Ryan Dzingel scored for the Senators, who had won four of their previous six games after an eight-game skid. Goalie Craig Anderson, making just his second start since missing 11 games with a concussion, stopped 30 of 33 shots.

RED WINGS 3, OILERS 2

Luke Glendening scored two goals, and visiting Detroit handed Edmonton its third consecutive loss. Glendening raised his season total to eight goals. Dylan Larkin also scored for Detroit while Andreas Athanasiou added two assists. Jimmy Howard stopped 32 shots for the Red Wings, who won for just the fourth time in 15 games (4-9-2). Leon Draisaitl had a goal and an assist for the Oilers. Matthew Benning also scored while Mikko Koskinen made 24 saves. — Reuters



WASHINGTON: Alex Ovechkin #8 of the Washington Capitals is checked by Tomas Hertl #48 of the San Jose Sharks during overtime at Capital One Arena on Tuesday in Washington. — AFP

Bangladesh recall Sabbir for NZ ODIs

DHAKA: Bangladesh yesterday recalled middle-order batsman Sabbir Rahman for February's three-match one-day international series against New Zealand after reducing his suspension by one month.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board had suspended Sabbir for six months from international cricket in September for abusing a fan on social media. But chief selector Minhajul Abedin said the BCB had informed them that Sabbir's suspension would be lifted at the end of the month, making him eligible for the New Zealand ODI series.

"So we had no problem in selecting him for the series," Minhajul added. "His name was strongly recommended by the skipper (Mashrafe Mortaza)... Mashrafe wanted someone who could handle fast bowlers well in the lower order," he said.

Sabbir last played for Bangladesh against West Indies in July and August and has struggled in domestic cricket while serving his international ban. The 27-year showed sign

of returning to form only last week when he struck 85 off 51 balls during a Bangladesh Premier League Twenty20 match for the Sylhet Sixers.

Bangladesh selectors also rewarded pacer Taskin Ahmed for an impressive show in the BPL with recall to both the ODI and Test squads.

Opening batsman Imrul Kayes, all-rounder Ariful Haque and pacer Abu Hider have been axed from the ODI squad while off-spinner Nayeem Hasan, who played two Tests against West Indies late last year, was also picked up for the ODIs. Bangladesh will play three ODIs and three Test matches in New Zealand between February 13 and March 20.

ODI squad: Mashrafe Mortaza (Capt), Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Liton Das, Somuya Sarkar, Mohammad Mithun, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad, Mehidy Hasan, Nayeem Hasan, Mustafizur Rahman, Rubel Hossain, Mohammad Saifuddin, Taskin Ahmed, Sabbir Rahman.

Test squad: Shakib Al Hasan (Capt), Mahmudullah Riyad, Tamim Iqbal, Shadman Islam, Mominul Haque, Liton Das, Mohammad Mithun, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mehidy Hasan, Nayeem Hasan, Taijul Islam, Mustafizur Rahman, Abu Jayed, Khaled Ahmed, Taskin Ahmed. — AFP

India-inspired S Lanka seek history in Australia

BRISBANE: Sri Lanka, inspired by India's recent breakthrough triumph, are dreaming of their own maiden test victory in Australia this week when their two-match series gets underway in Brisbane today.

India justified their top ranking by beating Tim Paine's men 2-1 earlier this month, ending their agonising 71-year wait for a test series victory in Australia. Captain Dinesh Chandimal confirmed the Sri Lankans closely followed how India got the better of an Australia side missing top batsmen Steve Smith and David Warner through ball-tampering suspensions.

Sri Lanka have personnel issues of their own with all-rounder Angelo Mathews and paceman Nuwan Pradeep missing through injuries but Chandimal was confident they could emulate their neighbours Down Under.

"India played some outstanding cricket throughout the series," said Chandimal who was particularly impressed how India's Cheteshwar Pujara wore down the Australian attack. "One of my dreams is to win a Test match here, as a captain and as a player. But that's not an easy thing. It needs a lot of hard work. Hundred percent is not enough, you have to give 200 percent and that has to



BRISBANE: Sri Lankan's Roshen Silva (L) speaks with team batting coach Jon Lewis (R) during a practice session at the Gabba Cricket Ground in Brisbane yesterday, ahead of their first day-night Test match against Australia today. — AFP

come from all 11 players.

"It's really a good opportunity to make history and we want to do that." Since 1988, Sri Lanka have played 13 tests in Australia, managing two draws while succumbing to defeat in others.

Even in Mathews' absence, Chandimal's team have a decent batting unit with Dimuth Karunaratne and Kusal Mendis sharing their scoring responsibility with their captain. They are likely to miss Pradeep but Lahiru Kumara's lively pace and Dilruwan Perera's off-spin will keep alive their hopes of winning a test match in Australia.

Smarting from the loss to India, Australia have been further pegged back by a back

injury to Josh Hazlewood which will keep the paceman out of the series. The hosts have named debutants Kurtis Patterson and Jhye Richardson in the playing XI for the match.

Paine could take heart from the fact that Australia have not lost a test at Gabba since 1988 and the home captain hinted at a bouncer barrage in the pink-ball contest under lights to stretch that streak.

"I'm hoping it's nice and fast - I'm hoping it's a usual sort of Gabba wicket," Paine said.

"It looks like it's got a little bit of grass on it, so hopefully there's plenty of bounce and it's good to watch." Canberra hosts the second and final test for the Warne-Muralitharan trophy from Feb 1. — Reuters

Empty seats dampen Asian Cup atmosphere

ABU DHABI: Football managers used to screaming themselves hoarse during games are finding little need to reach for a post-match lozenge at the Asian Cup where their voices echo around sparsely-populated stadia.

This month's tournament in the United Arab Emirates has struggled to attract crowds, with some coaches grumbling about the swathes of empty seats at the continent's showpiece competition.

"I personally think the atmosphere of the Asian Cup could be a little more enthusiastic, more exciting," Iran boss Carlos Queiroz told reporters.

"To be honest not only me but the Chinese, everyone, has been talking about it. (They) expected much better and a more enthusiastic atmosphere all over the country and at all the stadiums."

Hosted under the slogan "Bringing Asia together", the Asian Cup has so far fallen short of persuading enough of the region's fans to turn up and watch games.

Iran look one of the teams to beat, but barely 5,000 watched them thrash tournament first-timers Yemen 5-0 in their opening game at Abu Dhabi's

Mohammed bin Zayed stadium—a venue that seats 40,000.

Barely a thousand more showed up to watch holders Australia and four-time champions Japan reach the quarter-finals, while even hosts UAE have played at half-empty grounds.

"We were expecting a bigger turnout," Mohammed Khalfan Al Romaihi, chairman of the UAE General Authority for Sports, told AFP.

"We are surprised by the lack of UAE fans too," he admitted in an interview. "This is a culture that I hope will change. Loyalty must always be there—win or lose." Teams have complained of poor facilities with one from the Middle East accusing organisers of "cultural insensitivity" for suggesting their players use the hotel pool to recover from games despite many of the deck-chairs being occupied by bikini-clad holiday makers.

Meanwhile Fans have spoken of being asked by Asian Cup officials to leave their allotted areas to fill seats directly opposite the television cameras. Just a couple of hundred witnessed Qatar's 6-0 demolition of North Korea in Al-Ain as locals snubbed the game and the long-running blockade of the Gulf state by its neighbours meant it was played in an eerie silence.

UAE coach Alberto Zaccheroni bizarrely blamed "cold weather" for another disappointing turnout when his side beat Kyrgyzstan 3-2 in extra time to reach the last eight this week. "Maybe they preferred to stay home and watch it on television," shrugged the Italian, opening another can of worms. — AFP

Test specialist Pujara brushes off advertisers' snubs

NEW DELHI: India's prolific batsman Cheteshwar Pujara has admitted his status as a Test specialist means he fails to bag lucrative endorsements—but said he doesn't care. Old-school Pujara was the hero in India's historic first Test series win in Australia, amassing 521 runs including three centuries, but is regularly overshadowed by more glamorous teammates including captain Virat Kohli.

"Being a (specialist) Test cricketer, I accept that there haven't been many endorsements. I am someone who doesn't go after endorsements," Pujara told The Indian Express daily in comments published yesterday.

"For me, the true thing is the love of the game. My father has taught me that I don't just play for myself but for the entire country," he said. "What I like is the appreciation from this country and from (the) cricketing fraternity, which is more than any endorsement I might get in my life," he added.

Pujara, 30, won man of the series in Australia, keeping the opposition bowlers at bay with his stubborn batting as he faced well over a thousand deliveries. India legend Sachin Tendulkar hailed Pujara's "concentration and understanding of the game" and felt the efforts of the top-order batsman was the "difference between the two teams"



SYDNEY: File photo taken on January 3, 2019, India's Cheteshwar Pujara kisses his helmet after reaching his century (100 runs) during the first day of the fourth and final cricket Test against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground in Sydney. While Cheteshwar Pujara was the hero for India in Australia, other players get the advertising money. — AFP

Down Under.

"The RESPECT you get as a cricketer for what @cheteshwar1 is doing in TEST CRICKET, is GREATER than any wonderfully skilful T20 innings. Youngsters - look, learn & listen!," former England batsman Kevin Pietersen wrote on Twitter.

But unlike many Indian players who sign up with brands and become stars in a cricket-crazy nation, the unassuming Pujara returned from Australia to quietly get on with domestic cricket.

In a list of India's top 20 valuable celebrity brands published by advisory firm Duff &

Phelps earlier this month, Kohli topped the list but Pujara was nowhere to be seen. Kohli, who has advertised everything from motorbikes to toothpaste to whisky, recently even became the face of a line of traditional clothing. "The Virat Collection".

Pujara has not been signed up by any Indian Premier League (IPL) team and is unlikely to be part of India's one-day international side in this year's World Cup in England and Wales. Pujara has scored 5,426 runs at an average of 51.18 in 68 Tests since making his debut in 2010. He has just played just five ODIs. — AFP

Sports

Asian Cup quarter-finals, four matches and video ref

Socceroos are heavy favourites to win

AL-AIN: AFP Sport's guide to the Asian Cup quarter-finals, which begin today and will see the video assistant referee (VAR) system used in the tournament for the first time.

VIETNAM V JAPAN

Japan should brush Vietnam aside but the four-time champions have been so unconvincing that a defeat would not be a major surprise.

Hajime Moriyasu's side have stumbled through the tournament, winning by a single-goal margin in each of their four games and conceding twice in their 3-2 Group F victory over Turkmenistan, ranked 127th in the world. They allowed more than 75 percent possession to Saudi Arabia in a dire last-16 outing that was settled by Takehiro Tomiyasu's header from a corner against the run of play.

Meanwhile Vietnam, fresh from winning the Southeast Asian title last month, beat a well-organised Jordan side on penalties and could prove a handful for the stuttering Japanese.

CHINA V IRAN

The end looks nigh for Marcello Lippi's China as they run into the tournament's only consistently dangerous team.

Iran are Asia's top-ranked side and have yet to concede at the tournament, rattling in nine goals their four matches as they moved confidently into the quarters and only being stopped in a goalless Group D draw with arch rivals Iraq.

It's the sort of form that has made them the team to avoid-which is bad luck for China, an ageing team with injury problems and few options in attack.

In their favour, however, is the acumen of Lippi, who won the World Cup for Italy in 2006 and may have a few more cards to play before his expected departure post-tournament.

SOUTH KOREA V QATAR

Son Heung-min's belated arrival gave South Korea a significant boost in their final group game, a 2-0 win over China, but needed extra time to beat Bahrain's part-timers 2-1 in the first knockout round.

Injuries could prove critical for the Taeguk Warriors, who in recent days have lost Newcastle midfielder Ki Sung-yeung to a hamstring problem.

Meanwhile 2022 World Cup hosts Qatar have gone from strength to strength, upsetting political foes Saudi Arabia in the group phase thanks to a brace from the tournament's top scorer Almoez Ali-who has seven goals to his name-and knocking out Iraq in the 1-0 win that took them to the quarters.

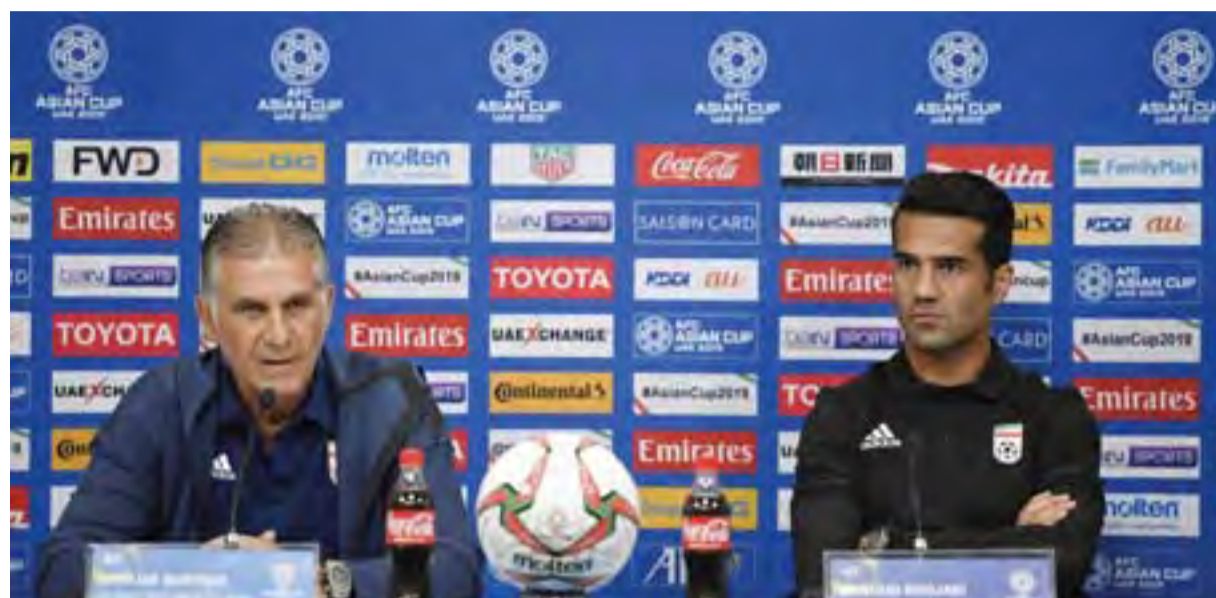
With Qataris largely banned from UAE thanks to the ongoing Gulf blockade, and boos greeting their anthem, it's been a quietly defiant tournament for Felix Sanchez Bas' team.

UAE V AUSTRALIA

Defending champions Australia finished second in their group but it's worked out well, with a favourable draw and no chance of meeting Iran until the final.

Despite only just squeezing past Uzbekistan on penalties, the Socceroos are heavy favourites to extinguish the hopes of Alberto Zaccheroni's lifeless UAE.

The hosts, who are a world away from the dynamic football that lit up their appearance in the 2015 edition, have had some eccentric refereeing decisions to thank



ABU DHABI: Iran's coach Carlos Queiroz (L) and Iran's Masoud Shojaei (R) attend a pre-match press conference on the eve of their AFC Asian Cup match against China at Mohammed Bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi yesterday. — AFP

for keeping them in the tournament.

With home fans staying away in droves, Australia have even less reason to fear the fixture in Al Ain, where they have played three of their four games so far.

VAR ARRIVES

The technology that shook up the World Cup in Russia will be used for the first time at an Asian Cup from the quarter-finals. Decisions on whether the ball

crossed the goal line, penalties, red cards and mistaken identity can all be video-reviewed before the on-field referee makes the final decision.

It could have been a very different competition if VAR had been used all along: two late penalties for UAE, and two goals in Australia's win over Syria are among the incidents which may have faced scrutiny. It will bring an extra element of interest and, as defenders will be keenly aware, potentially more penalties. — AFP

Hopes fade for Sala as final message emerges

ST PETER PORT: Hopes faded yesterday of finding a missing plane carrying Cardiff City's record new signing Emiliano Sala, as it emerged the Argentine striker had sent relatives a desperate message shortly before the light aircraft disappeared over the Channel.

Floating objects have been found in the water, and police on the British island of Guernsey, which sits off the north coast of France, have warned the chances of the passengers surviving were "slim".

As rescuers in three planes and a helicopter scoured the sea, Argentine media reported that Sala sent a final message before the plane disappeared from radar around 20 kilometres (12 miles) north of Guernsey on Monday night. "I'm on a plane that looks like it's going to fall apart, and I'm leaving for Cardiff," the 28-year-old said in a rambling WhatsApp audio message. "If in an hour and a half you have no news from me, I don't know if they will send people to look for me, because they will not find me, you know... I'm so scared," he added.

The player's mother, Mercedes, told Argentine television channel C5N that the plane belonged to Cardiff chairman Mehmet Dalman, but he disputed the claim. "I can say to you categorically that the plane had nothing to do with Cardiff City," he said.

Dalman said the club had offered to pay for his flight but Sala had "made his own arrangements". "I can't tell you who arranged the flight because I don't know," Britain's Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB), which is investigating, said the single-engine Piper PA-46 Malibu plane was registered in the United States. But the identity of the pilot, the only other person in the plane, has not been officially confirmed.

Sala, who signed with the Premier League club on

Saturday from French Ligue 1 club Nantes for a reported fee of 17 million euros (\$19.3 million), was due to attend a training session with Cardiff on Tuesday.

Rescuers on Tuesday said they had covered an area of 1,155 square miles (3,000 square-kilometre) in the Channel spotted "a number of floating objects in the water". In an update yesterday, Guernsey Coast Guard captain David Barker said there was "as yet no trace today of the missing aircraft".

The pilot had requested to lower his altitude shortly before air traffic control in neighbouring Jersey lost contact with the plane. Rescuers' hopes rest in the possibility that the passengers are in a life raft, which has so far evaded detection.

But Ken Fairbank, a former AAIB investigator, said it was "extremely unlikely now that anyone would be found alive, even assuming the aircraft made a controlled ditching". Fairbank said details were still sketchy but weather "may have been a factor... as it seems to have been overcast and with some mist at the Channel Islands airports".

FANS HOLD VIGIL

In Sala's Argentine hometown of Progreso, his father Horacio told the press that as "the hours go by and I don't know anything, it makes me fear the worst". Sala, who had been at Nantes since 2015 and had scored 13 goals in all competitions this season, had signed a three-and-a-half-year contract with relegation-threatened Cardiff subject to receiving international clearance.

Cardiff's executive director Ken Choo said they were all "very shocked" at the news. "We continue to pray for positive news," he said. Cardiff called off Tuesday's training session, and stunned supporters laid flowers and scarves outside the club's stadium.

"The excitement of a new signing arriving at your club can bring so much happiness. That's how we felt about Sala," said Cardiff fan Josh Thomas, 24.

"He was the one who was going to turn our fortunes around and score the goals that would keep us up. He was going to be the one adored by the fans, including me. But within a few hours so much has changed."

Argentine football legend Diego Maradona said he



Emiliano Sala

was hoping the plane had simply gone astray. "I hope it went to the wrong airport and we find him alive, that's all," he said in an audio message. Real Madrid coach Santiago Solari, also an Argentinian, said: "We feel great sadness of course and we send all the strength and love in the world to the relatives, close friends, and people that know him."

"And of course we never lose hope until the end," he said. With his former teammates in shock, Nantes have postponed their French Cup tie against third-tier side Entente Sannois Saint-Gratien on Wednesday until Sunday. Hundreds of fans gathered for a vigil in the western French city on Tuesday, placing flowers, scarves and flags on a fountain and chanting the striker's name. "I still have hope, he is a fighter," Nantes president Waldemar Kita tweeted. — AFP

Injured Vonn to miss Garmisch training

BERLIN: Lindsey Vonn has pulled out of today's downhill training for the women's World Cup race in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, but is "hopeful" she can keep racing despite talking about retirement last weekend.

After failing to finish Sunday's super-G in Cortina d'Ampezzo, an emotional Vonn told reporters it may have been her final race, because "there's only so much my body can take".

It was a bitterly disappointing weekend for the 34-year-old US ski star, a four-time overall World Cup winner, who had finished ninth and 15th respectively in the



Lindsey Vonn

two downhill races on the preceding days in Cortina after skiing with knee braces.

However in an Instagram post on Wednesday, Vonn revealed she suffered an impact injury while training in Cortina but still hopes to race again, without specifying whether she will ski in Garmisch. "Now that we know the problem, the next issue is fixing it. So far we haven't found a solution and as a result I will not be able to compete in tomorrow's downhill training run (in Garmisch)," Vonn wrote. "However, since this is a new 'injury' per say, I remain hopeful that we can fix it."

"I'm taking things day by day and we will see what happens. I know that I might not get the ending to my career that I had hoped for, but if there is a chance, I will take it. "Thanks for all of the support you have shown me, it helps keep me going." Vonn, with 82 World Cup wins to her name, has set herself the challenge of overhauling Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark's all-time record of 86 World Cup wins before retiring at Lake Louise in December. — AFP

Alonso urges Chelsea to hit back in Spurs showdown

LONDON: Marcos Alonso has challenged his Chelsea team-mates to prove they are motivated to arrest their alarming slide in today's League Cup semi-final showdown against Tottenham. Furious with the latest in a growing list of punchless displays, Blues boss Maurizio Sarri launching a scathing attack on his Chelsea stars after Saturday's 2-0 defeat at Arsenal.

Questioning their mental strength and revealing he finds it "extremely difficult" to motivate his players, Sarri risked alienating a squad that had already rebelled against his predecessor Antonio Conte last season.

The Italian's blast was entirely understandable after so many tepid efforts from Chelsea this term. But Sarri must shoulder some of the blame himself after making a pair of tactical decisions that have contributed to Chelsea's malaise.

Deploying Eden Hazard as a central striker has neutered the Belgian playmaker, who has been far more effective in his natural wide role. That move was born out of Sarri's frustration at the misfiring form of his other forwards Alvaro Morata and Olivier Giroud.

The former Napoli boss hopes to sign his old striker Gonzalo Higuain later this week, but that isn't his only problem. Since bringing Jorginho with him from Napoli, Sarri has felt compelled to use the midfielder in the holding role previously occupied so effectively by N'Golo Kante.

Now Kante is a fish out of water on the right side of a three-man midfield, leaving him tasked with attacking duties that aren't his strength. Making matters worse, Jorginho is becoming a target for frustrated Chelsea fans after failing to live up to his reputation as the man who makes his manager's "Sarri-ball" vision come to life.

Sarri reportedly called a clear-the-air meeting with his squad on Monday in a bid to resolve any lingering bad feeling after his remarkably blunt assessment of their performances.

'SILLY MISTAKES'

And, amid suggestions several players are unhappy with Sarri's tactics, Chelsea left-back Alonso claimed the team must heed their manager's criticism and use it to salvage their season in the second leg against Tottenham.

"When you lose, you learn. We have to analyse the game and improve quickly because there is no time to think. We have to perform again in four days," Alonso said. "It was a good opportunity (against Arsenal). We wasted it and now we have to work even harder to stay in a Champions League position and win games. It has to motivate us. "We made silly mistakes. We provoked them to gain confidence and come to press us because we were making mistakes." Chelsea have lost their last three games against Tottenham dating back to last season, with two of those defeats coming under Sarri.

The Blues saw their unbeaten start to the Premier League season come to a thudding halt when Mauricio Pochettino's side romped to a 3-1 win at Wembley in November.

The League Cup first leg was a much tighter affair that left Sarri bemoaning the use of VAR after Harry Kane was controversially judged to be inside in the build-up to the penalty decision that settled the game in Tottenham's favour.

Since then, Chelsea have laboured to an unconvincing 2-1 win over Newcastle before shooting themselves in the foot in the listless flop at Arsenal. They might be facing Tottenham at the right time however as their London rivals are hampered by injuries to Kane and Dele Alli. — AFP

Fans baffled as Salah goes offline

CAIRO: Fans were left baffled yesterday after Liverpool's star Egyptian striker Mohamed Salah appeared to have deleted all of his social media accounts where his followers number in the millions.

The Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts of Salah, who is idolised in Egypt and Liverpool, went offline without warning a day after he posted a cryptic tweet. "2019 Resolution: Time to get in touch, for real," said the final tweet, screenshots of which were shared widely on social media.

Those navigating to his Twitter account yesterday could only see a message reading "Sorry, that page doesn't exist!". On Instagram, the message read "The link you followed may be broken, or the page may have been removed." A similar message appeared on Facebook.

It was not immediately clear whether the shutdowns were deliberate. Some fans speculated that Salah deleted his accounts due to a dispute he has had with the Egyptian Football Association over his image rights.

Others saw it as a possible new year's resolution. Salah has taken the Premier League by storm since signing for Liverpool in the summer of 2017, scoring 50 goals for the English club in just 72 appearances. Earlier this month, Salah was named the African Player of the Year for the second consecutive year. — AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH LEAGUE CUP		
Chelsea FC v Tottenham Hotspur	beIN Sports	22:45
SPAIN COPA DEL REY		
RCD Espanyol v Real Betis	beIN Sports	21:30
Real Madrid CF v Girona	beIN Sports	23:30
ASIAN NATIONS CUP 2019		
Vietnam v Japan	beIN SPORTS	16:00
China v Iran	beIN SPORTS	19:00

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Djokovic delight at stroll to semifinals

Serena dumped as Pliskova reaches Open semis



MELBOURNE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic plays a forehand return to Japan's Kei Nishikori during their men's singles quarter-final match on day ten of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. —AFP

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic was delighted to get back into the semi-finals at the Australian Open after missing out for two years as Kei Nishikori retired injured yesterday. The world number one eased into a showdown with French 28th seed Lucas Pouille as Nishikori retired after just 51 minutes when behind 6-1, 4-1 in the quarter-final.

"Feels great. This has been my most successful Grand Slam throughout my career, the first one that I won back in 2008," said Djokovic, who is chasing a record seventh Melbourne Park title. "I have a lot of beautiful memories from Rod Laver Arena. "Yeah, past two years have been a bit tough with the elbow injury and everything. Over the past 10 years, I've had plenty of success here."

"Australia has been really kind to me throughout my career." Eighth seed Nishikori had endured three five-set epics during 13hr 47min on court before the quarter-final clash and suffered a thigh strain in the first set as his previous exertions took their toll.

After a medical timeout and three minutes of treatment from the physiotherapist, Nishikori emerged for the second set with his right thigh strapped and taped, and courageously attempted to carry on.

He seemed to be moving a little more freely, but the recovery did not last long. After being broken to go 2-1 down by the Serbian 14-time Grand Slam champion Nishikori became almost immobilised. When Djokovic broke again to go 4-1 ahead it proved the last straw for Nishikori's brave challenge.

"After third game or fourth game when I was serving, I felt pretty heavy to my right leg," Nishikori told reporters. "After that I couldn't really bend my knees and couldn't jump up. Yeah, I decided to stop."

Djokovic wished his old foe Nishikori a speedy recovery after beating him for the 16th time in 18 meetings. "I'm really sorry to see him go through pain. He's had some tough injuries in the last couple of years. I'm sure he's not feeling great about ending the Grand Slam this way," said the Serb.

Earlier, Serena Williams was sensationally bundled out of the Australian Open yesterday after an epic three-set fight with Czech seventh seed Karolina Pliskova for a semi-final spot. Pliskova won 6-4, 4-6, 7-5 to set up a final four clash with Japanese fourth seed Naomi Osaka, ending the American great's dream of claiming a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title at Melbourne Park this year.

The 26-year-old survived four match points in a rollercoaster third set that Williams led 5-1 before collapsing to defeat in two hours 10 minutes.

"I was almost in the locker room, now I'm standing here as the winner. It's a great feeling," an exhausted Pliskova said. "My mind was in the locker room. I wasn't playing very well in the third set but I thought let's try, this game at 5-2. She got a little bit shaky in the end so I took my chances and I won."

Williams, 37, had blazed through the early stages of the tournament, seeing off world number one Simona Halep in the fourth round.

But against Pliskova she lacked the intensity she had previously displayed and was soon trailing for the first time during her campaign after a slew of uncharacteristic errors.

Pliskova, who entered this year's tournament on a high after winning the Brisbane International warm-up, came out firing and out served Williams to take the first set.

Williams rebounded in the second set before imploding in the third when she had the finish line in sight. Former world number one Pliskova has made the quarter-finals in her last two appearances at Melbourne Park and made the final at the US Open in 2016.

She has been a regular in the second week of Grand Slams in recent years, reaching the quarters or better six times since late 2016, but is still searching for a breakthrough win. The Czech said the win over Williams was a huge confidence booster before facing US Open champion Osaka. — AFP

Spin twins set up crushing victory for India over NZ

NAPIER: A match billed as a runfest was turned upside-down by India's spin twins Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal yesterday, as New Zealand were crushed by eight wickets in the first one-day international in Napier.

India arrived at the ground with captain Virat Kohli expecting 300-plus to be par but when his bowlers rolled New Zealand for 157 the outcome became a formality. "When I lost the toss I thought it's going to be 300 plus but the way the guys bowled and created pressure turned out to be absolutely opposite," he said.

"You know, 150 on that kind of a wicket was quite an easy total to chase down and it all boils down to the effort of the bowlers." Yadav and Chahal delivered a spin bowling

masterclass, mesmerising New Zealand with six wickets between them, while Mohammed Shami claimed three as New Zealand folded for a mere 157 with 12 overs to spare.

The target was reduced by two runs and one over for India following a 30-minute break when the setting sun blinded the eyes of players and umpires. But the interruption made no difference to Shikhar Dhawan, who was unbeaten on 75 after leading India to mow down the target in 34.5 overs.

A disappointed New Zealand captain Kane Williamson blamed his side's effort on an inability to handle the precision Indian attack. "Usually you come here and you're thinking 300-plus, sometimes mid 300s, but it certainly wasn't that and required a bit more graft," he said.

"Judging by some of the dismissals it showed we didn't adjust as quickly as we would like to." Coming off a series win against Australia, India showed they are building nicely as a well-balanced unit four months out from the World Cup, while for New Zealand there is work to be done.

The New Zealand innings folded so quickly that India had time to bat for nine overs

before the scheduled break, reaching 41 with Dhawan on 29 and Sharma on 11. Sharma went on the second ball after the interval, with Doug Bracewell making the breakthrough, before the players left the field again when the setting sun reached a dangerously low angle.

When India's innings restarted again, Dhawan on 31 was dropped by wicketkeeper Tom Latham. It was a costly error for New Zealand as the left-hander, who passed 5,000 ODI runs in the course of the innings, went on to make his 26th half century.

Kohli, a day after becoming the first player to clinch all three top International Cricket Council honours including cricketer of the year, was caught behind for 45. Ambati Rayudu finished not out 13. When New Zealand elected to bat, it took Shami only eight deliveries to clean out openers Martin Guptill and Colin Munro before Yadav and Chahal worked their magic.

Ross Taylor's run of six successive half-centuries came to an end when he was caught and bowled by Chahal for 24. Tom Latham, reputedly New Zealand's best player of spin, went the same way for 11.—AFP



NAPIER: India's Shikhar Dhawan plays a shot during the first one-day international (ODI) cricket match between New Zealand and India at McLean Park in Napier yesterday. —AFP

Special Supplement

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Kuwait Times
ESTABLISHED 1961
THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF



Republic Day of
INDIA

South Africa President Cyril Ramaphosa chief guest at celebrations



by corruption scandals including those involving the Indian-born Gupta brothers, said people aware of the matter. Ramaphosa, like Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has listed skill development, health services and digitization of governance and services as his priorities. The upcoming visit on January 25-26 will enable Ramaphosa to seek alignment in policies in areas of common priorities.

Arms deals on the agenda

South Africa has Africa's most thriving defense industry and the two sides are keen to explore partnership in joint production. South African defense firm Denel, which had been blacklisted prior to September 2018, will explore joint ventures with Indian firms under the Make in India program. The ban was lifted following a May 2018 judgment of the Supreme Court, which dropped all corruption charges against the defense company. It came after a personal request from Ramaphosa

to Modi during a July meeting in Johannesburg on the sidelines of 2018 BRICS Summit. Denel was blacklisted in 2005 by the then UPA government over allegations that the company paid kickbacks to secure a deal for the Indian Army's global tender to purchase of 1,000 NTW-20 anti-materiel rifles along with 398,000 rounds of ammunition.

Ramaphosa to turn on the charm to Indian business community

During his stay, Ramaphosa will also seek to engage the Indian business community and invite it to take advantage of South Africa's pre-eminent position in conducting trade with several other African countries. South Africa is the biggest African economy and there is substantial potential for trade growth between the two countries, according to experts. South Africa has a 1.5 million strong Indian-origin community, which

accounts for about 3% of the country's population. Ramaphosa's visit comes at a time when, saddled with Chinese loans, many countries from western, eastern and southern Africa are looking at India owing to its goodwill and non-interfering approach to untangle themselves from the debt trap. Africa has been a foreign policy priority for the Modi government and there have been several high-level engagements with countries in the continent since May 2014.

South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa heads to Delhi as the chief guest for the India's Republic Day. The time will be spent in efforts to improve existing ties between the two countries including social and defense sectors. It is understood that President Ramaphosa is working towards improving relations with India and move past the era of the erstwhile President Jacob Zuma, who resigned from his post in February last year after a nine-year reign tainted

India and the evolving geopolitics of the Middle East

The geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East have been changing in an unprecedented manner over the past few years. These changes pose multiple challenges for India with respect to New Delhi's agenda for a stronger cooperation with the Middle East under the ambit of the Modi government's "Link West" policy. Some of the changes in the Middle East brought countries closer to India, reciprocating the Link West policy, but fluctuating regional stability has been a concern for New Delhi.

For both military and civilian purposes, India is energy hungry. In 2013 India had already become the third largest energy consumer in the world. Such a condition has always directed India to the Middle East, which is both geographically close and strategically important. As per a report by Indiaspend, more than 63 percent of India's oil imports are from the oil rich powers of the region, and the Middle East is also home to more than 7 million Indians.

Considering these factors, a strong India-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) relationship has been mooted by several scholars considering India's rising economic interests and India's aspirations to exert its influence beyond the Indian Ocean. The fact that, amid all the regional tensions, Indian migrants in the GCC countries alone generated remittances worth \$40 billion in 2018 highlights the need for India to stabilize its interests in the region.

Strategic influence

One of the most important pillars for India's great power aspiration is widened strategic influence. New Delhi has to increase the bandwidth of its foreign policy and find more areas of mutual interest and strategic convergence in the Middle East without disrupting the balance it has created in the region in terms of both bilateral and multilateral engagements. So far India has been engaging with Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel simultaneously without making any political comments that could affect any bilateral engagements.

The Middle East region has seen a series of important changes in the last decade. The rise of Saudi

Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and his Vision 2030 plan has gained much momentum in an attempt to diversify the Saudi economy, improve its education and health sectors, and develop the overall infrastructure. The plan also seeks to improve the overall image of the conservative kingdom to an outward-looking, prosperous, and growing regional power. Yet amid the efforts of the Prince, the murder of Saudi journalist Jammal Khashoggi and the Saudi-led war in Yemen have received a lot of flak from the international community.

The unprecedented turn of events in the region raised concerns for India. The Indian government refrained from offering aid to any military or political coalition amid the conflict. As the crisis escalated, the government carried out an evacuation operation in Yemen named Operation Rahat in 2015. India began evacuating and rescuing hundreds of citizens on April 2, 2015 with the help of a commercial liner docked in the port of Aden. These citizens were evacuated from Sana'a to Djibouti and from there more than 4,600 Indian citizens and more than 900 foreign nationals were rescued.

'Internal matter of GCC'

Another major turnover of events in the region was the Qatar crisis, which erupted when nine countries including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain cut off all kinds of diplomatic ties with Qatar. The crisis has its genesis in Qatar's link to Islamist political parties like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which the Saudi government calls a terrorist group. Saudi Arabia also had problems with the way Qatar engaged Iran and has been signaling Saudi distress over that relationship for a long time.

India responded to the Qatar situation by stating it was an "internal matter of GCC," as External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj put it in a tweet. The Ministry response also focused on its efforts to enable smooth and uninterrupted travel for the Indian diaspora in the country, which included the initiation of additional flights services and subsequently an Indian-Qatar express service for the shipment of food products and



other essentials from India.

Deepening engagement with Saudi Arabia and the UAE could be noted as a galvanizing point for India's Link West policy. The decision of ADNOC (Abu Dhabi National Oil Company) and Saudi Aramco to jointly invest \$44 billion in a refinery in India was a major leap forward. Aramco signed the agreement to develop nearly 1.2 million barrels per day in the Ratnagiri refining and chemicals complex. India's engagement with the UAE has also moved to other areas like defense and strategic partnerships. In May 2016, Manohar Parikkar became the first Indian defense minister to visit the UAE. Experts pointed out a new momentum in the relationship between the countries after the inking of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Under this, the two sides have forged a strong strategic partnership while highlighting counterterrorism cooperation and defense partnerships.

India's elevating strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia affirms New Delhi's priorities in the region. In July 2018 when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Riyadh and met King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, it was reported that the two leaders engaged in talks that lasted for more than two hours. Five key agreements were signed that addressed issues ranging from anti-money laundering to drug trafficking. Both the countries also agreed on the need to strengthen bilateral defense cooperation primarily through the exchange of visits by experts and military officials and suggested conducting joint military exercises and supplying

arms and ammunition.

Fast growing economy

The fact that India has been one of the world's fastest growing economies since the 2000s helped New Delhi get leverage in dealing with Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel simultaneously without being criticized by any countries. Countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia have slid their regional agendas under the carpet while dealing with India since they ascertain that Asian markets like China, Japan, South Korea, and India are going to be their premier customers in the coming years. India is also investing in large natural gas fields and is developing the Chabahar port in Iran, which is expected to be a major turning point in the Iran-India trade relationship and a strategic counterbalance to the Chinese-run Gwadar port in Pakistan. Maintaining a close relationship with the Sunni monarchs of the Arab world without disrupting the relationship with Iran, and refraining from getting politically involved in any conflict in the region, could be seen as continuity in terms of India's engagement with the Middle East. However, there have also been major changes in the form of deepening strategic partnerships and accelerated economic and trade ties with the UAE and Saudi Arabia in recent years. The engagement with Israel and the mutual visits by Modi and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also can be seen as changes in India's Middle East policy.

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Big guns on display at India's 70th Republic Day

The Republic Day parade walks away with the cake. It has the pride of place among all military parades in Bharat and the surrounding areas. In 2019, there will be three big guns on the parade. One is the Guest of Honour or the Chief Guest and the other two will have the focus of attention as they would augment the fire power of the Indian artillery in the battlefield.

The Indian Army needed them so badly and after faux pas of the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress government in their financial management that their effectiveness in battle, especially the Kargil battles of 1999, took a backseat. Consequently, the regiment of artillery of the Indian Army was starved of long range fire power for almost three decades.

First thing first, our Chief Guest for the 70th Republic Day is an eminent person, Cyril Ramaphosa, the President of South Africa. It is a matter of significance that Bharat chose to invite a Black President from a non-aligned country where Mahatma Gandhi had begun his political career during the apartheid rule of the Whites. By the way, Bharat is celebrating 150th birth anniversary of Gandhi ji this year, a happy coincidence indeed.

It is a well known fact that the government of India had initially invited Donald Trump, President of the United



States of America as the Chief Guest for the Republic Day parade but he declined on account of being preoccupied with matters of State. Barak Obama is the only President of USA who has been our R Day Chief Guest and that was in 2015.

Cyril Ramaphosa became the President of South Africa after his predecessor was asked to quit office under political pressure because of his personal indiscretions. Ramaphosa married three times, one wife at a time, and is known to have five children. He is an intellectual and pursues his hobbies with single minded attention. It is hoped that his brief sojourn in our country will strengthen the political ties between Bharat and South Africa.

Let us now shift the focus to the military hardware, the artillery guns. The one that attracts me most is the US made M777 ultra light howitzer that can be airlifted to difficult terrains by a military helicopter. Thus, its strategic deployment is a prime factor in its favour besides its range of 28 km and capability to pound the enemy position incessantly without giving them breathing time. Thus, both the inimical troops on our eastern and western borders will remain in mortal fear of these American howitzers.

The schools performing at the celebrations have a special theme

At the upcoming Republic Day celebrations, the Directorate of Education (DoE) has announced that as many as 616 school children will be performing at Rajpath in New Delhi. According to reports, three schools have been selected by the Directorate of Education and the Defence Ministry to perform at the function and children from East Zone Cultural Centre will also be participating in the event, DoE Assistant Director Romi Johri said. The theme of this year's celebrations is principles of Mahatma Gandhi. "As many as 616 boys and girls will be performing at the upcoming Republic Day celebrations. Preparations for these performances have been going on for nearly three months," Johri said in a recent PTI report.

List of participating schools:

Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalaya, Kishan Ganj, Delhi

The father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi throughout his life preached about Ahimsa—avoiding violence not only external physical violence but also removing the aggression in our spirit. But with recent occurrences, it appears that people forget this important message. Students at Rajkiya



Pratibha Vikas Vidyalaya will have a special dance performance through which they aim to share the message of Ahimsa.

Navy Children School Chanakyapuri, New Delhi Students at Navy Children School Chanakyapuri, will have

a special dance performance on the theme of 'Jai Ghosh'; an acclamation of faith and assurance in the principal of the divine soul. It is reported that the performers will conduct Jai Ghosh, Ram Bhajan, the values and attribute of Vaishnava, through their dance on "Bapu Mahan." These children will honour Gandhi's principles.

Kendriya Vidyalaya, Paschim Vihar, Delhi

The children of Kendriya Vidyalaya, Paschim Vihar, will pay tribute to Bapu's ideology through a captivating dance performance on Republic Day 2019. It will indeed be a different experience to those who will witness the performance of students striving to follow Gandhi's footprints and high ideals.

Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, Kolkata

About 150 children of Government schools of Bihar Eastern Zone, Cultural Centre, Kolkata will dance on the song echoing the dream of Mahatma Gandhi for independent India

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Middle East wants to import Train 18 from Indian Railways

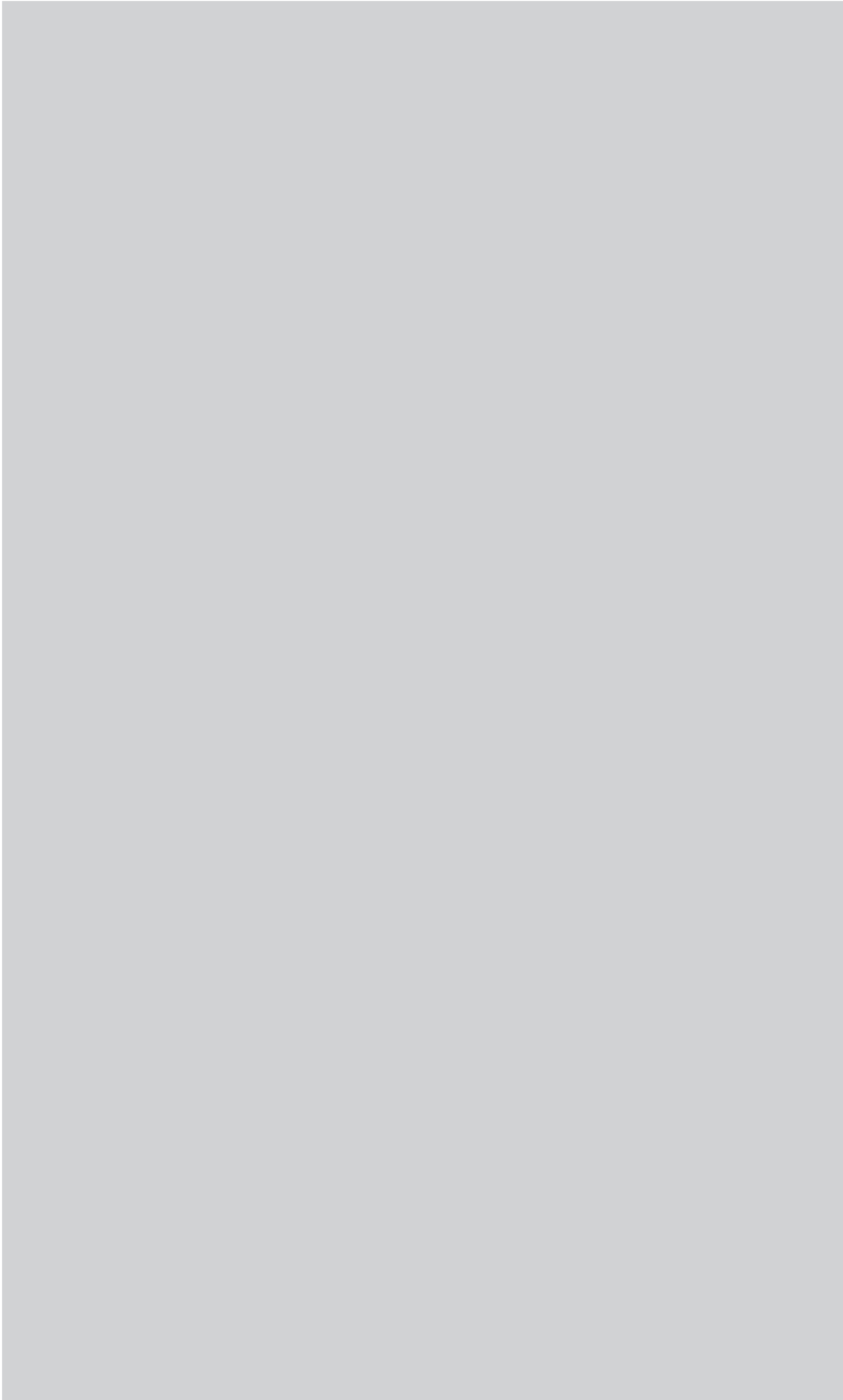
Even as the Train 18 project awaits its first commercial run in India, Some countries like Peru, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and others Middle East companies have shown interest in importing the Indian Railways' state-of-the-art Train 18. India's first engineless semi high-speed Train 18 which has run at a maximum speed of 180 km per hour during its trial run will have its debut journey from Varanasi to Delhi. The Indian Railways is awaiting a green signal from the Prime Minister's Office as the train will start its commercial run between Varanasi and New Delhi.

"Many countries have expressed interest in the train set and we are happy and proud that an indigenously made product is attracting so much interest. The rolling stock market worldwide is worth about 200 billion dollars and we want a significant share of it. Now, the aim is to successfully

run the train," said Rajesh Agarwal, member (Rolling Stock), Railway Board.

According to sources, the train sets available worldwide at the standard of Train 18 at a cost around Rs 250 crore, while the Indian Railway's Integral Coach Factory, Chennai, made the Train 18 in cost around Rs 100 crore. "The production of Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches increased from around 685 coaches in 20142015- to 4,016 coaches during the current year. The actual production up to December 2018 has touched 3,106 coaches with three more months to go. In fact, total LHB production of first 17 years has been exceeded in the last two years which is unprecedented," he added. Agrawal said that Train 18 is our latest creation which has taken us 18 months from the idea stage to completion and manufacturing stage.





Lights, camera, Bollywood: Exploring cinematic Mumbai



Often called mayanagari (city of dreams), Mumbai is synonymous with Bollywood, India's largest film industry and one of the biggest movie machines on earth. As the entertainment hub of the country, it's no surprise that the city is home to hundreds of Bollywood actors, directors, film-makers and wannabes, and the city also appears in the storylines of dozens of critically-acclaimed movies, from local hits such as the Academy-Award nominated Salaam Bombay!, 2013 romance The Lunchbox and crime drama Chandni Bar to international releases such as The Hundred Foot Journey, Slumdog Millionaire and Million Dollar Arm.

If you're interested in the art of film-making and understanding how, over the last century, Bollywood has influenced and shaped Indian popular culture, take time to explore the many movie links in this cinematic city, from Bollywood studios and shooting locations to vintage cinema halls and striking wall art inspired by the stars. Here's a quick guide on how to turn your trip to Mumbai into a blockbuster.

Get behind the scenes in Bollywood

After opening its exclusive doors only to actors for decades, Film City Studio in Mumbai has now partnered with the state tourism department to offer visitors a chance to step into their favorite Bollywood movies, or at least the sets where they were filmed.

One of India's largest film studios, Film City offers weekend bus tours to both indoor and outdoor shooting sets for such hit movies such as Shah Rukh Khan's Happy New Year and Josh, to name just a few. Visitors can get lucky with snapping photographs of celebrities too, as stars regularly visit the canteen on the premises.

For a more detailed look at the industry, tour companies such as Viator, Mumbai Film City Tours and Thrillophilia offer group tours giving insight into different aspects of Indian film-making, including its history and growth, the technical processes of editing and dubbing, and iconic movie locations. As in Los Angeles, you can also take a tour of the lavish, or sometimes humble, homes where some of India's top cinema stars live or were born. Khaki Tours and the Mumbai Darshan Tour (run by Maharashtra Tourism) are reliable options.

Hit the Mumbai theatre trail



Mumbai historians take pride in the fact that the very first Indian movie, Raja Harishchandra, filmed in 1913 by Dadasaheb Phalke using cameras, lights and projectors shipped over from Europe and America, has its origins in the city. In the heyday of Indian cinema that followed the end of WWII, Sandhurst Road - today occupied by the railway lines of the Harbour local line - stretched from Girgaum Chowpatty to Dongri, lined with the grandest movie theatres of its time: the Olympia, the Coronation, the New Alhambra, the Majestic.

Most of these have vanished, or now stand as forlorn shells, lost in time, owing to the onslaught of multiplex culture. However, a handful can still be visited, screening mostly obscure regional movies, in a setting of decaying art-deco grandeur. Cinephiles should seek out the Alfred Theatre near Kamathipura, or the nostalgically dilapidated Nishant

Talkies, New Roshan Talkies and Moti Talkies, dating from the transition away from silent films, dotted between Grant Road and Sandhurst Road.

To catch newly launched Bollywood movies in a classic theatre setting, head to the graceful, art deco Regal Cinema on Colaba Causeway, the rocketship-shaped Eros at Churchgate, or the Metro INOX Cinema (originally built and run by MGM, the Hollywood Studio), still sitting pretty at Marine Lines. Having completed the movie theatre trail, tourists can head to the recently reopened Royal Opera House near Girgaum Chowpatty, an architectural marvel from 1912. As well as hosting the opera talent of its day, the place is also credited with being the making of the Kapoor Khandaan family, the first proper Bollywood dynasty, who grew up watching stage shows and musicals at the opera house in the dying days of the Raj.

Locations, locations, locations

Unless you have an encyclopedic knowledge of Bollywood films, it may help to hire a guide, or at least a taxi and driver, to explore the most prominent landmarks in the city that have doubled up as movie locations. Start with the Gateway of India and the iconic Taj Mahal Palace hotel - settings for many a Bollywood dance routine - or head to the Colaba and Bora Bazaar markets that featured prominently in Aamir Khan's Talaash and Tom Cruise's Mission Impos-



ible 4: Ghost Protocol respectively. Film-makers have long been drawn to the scenic promenade of Marine Drive, where parts of the motorcycle action thriller Dhoom, 2003 comedy-drama Munnabhai MBBS, and coming-of-age film Wake Up Sid were filmed. There's something undeniably cinematic about the crowds of young Mumbaikers gathering on the edge of the urban sprawl to soak up the fresh breezes and calming sunrises and sunsets. Come in the wee hours of morning, when the city wakes up. Next, head on to Bandra, the swanky northern suburb whose boutiques, bars and restaurants cater to many movie stars and icons of the industry. Stroll around Bandstand, Carter Road, Chapel Road, Pali-Hill and the Worli Sea Link and you may spot a star or two in the flesh.

Alternatively, wander through the surrounding backroads and narrow by-lanes, where you'll stumble across larger-than-life murals depicting classic Bollywood movies, such

Off-Beat Bollywood Locations

Not all movie locations are glamorous. A number of agencies run trips to the vast slum area of Dharavi, where parts of Slumdog Millionaire were shot. This doesn't have to be an intrusive experience. However, on the best trips, guides from the community will introduce you to local people and explain not just the area's significance to Bollywood, but also how its fame has helped residents transform their lives. In the process, you'll be providing work and income for Dharavi residents.

Another interesting spot is the Mahalakshmi Dhobi Ghat, where thousands of washermen make their daily living pummeling the laundry of city residents in concrete wash-tubs in the open air. Bollywood paid tribute to their energetic trade in the namesake movie Dhobi Ghat. Any list of popular movie locations in Mumbai would be incomplete without a mention of its beaches: Juhu, Girgaum Chowpatty, and Aksa beaches. An untold number of films have set their stars on the sand, with Juhu the beach of choice for cast-of-hundreds song-and-dance numbers. See it in its prime in the 1971 Rajesh Khanna and Amitabh Bachchan flick Anand.

There's one more cinematic experience we shouldn't overlook. Film-makers periodically drop by Apollo Bunder and the cheap backpacker guesthouses of Colaba when they need extras for crowd scenes, offering a modest daily payment in exchange for a fascinating glimpse at how Bollywood works from in front of the camera. - (www.lonely-planet.com)



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Looking back at Indian cricket's successful summer Down Under

For the first time in the history of cricket, an Indian cricket team finished their tour of Australia without losing any of the series they played, across formats. Virat Kohli's India won their first Test series in Australia since they began touring Down Under in 1947-48. That was preceded by a drawn T20I series and followed by India's first ever bilateral One-Day International series win Down Under (not including the best-of-three finals in the CB series in 2009). Here's how a memorable tour Down Under unfolded.

The T20I series - An appetizer

In what was the only match played on the tour in Brisbane, India were defeated in a close encounter to begin their campaign. With a rain-marred match in Brisbane reduced to 17 overs, the visitors were set 174 to win under the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern system after the hosts made 158-4, Glenn Maxwell top-scoring with 46.

India needed 13 off the last over from Marcus Stoinis, but in a desperate bid to get the runs two wickets fell and they missed the target. After Shikhar Dhawan's blistering innings, Rishabh Pant and Dinesh Karthik needed to score 78 runs off 36 balls. They whittled it down to set up a nail-biting finish before succumbing to the pressure. By all accounts, Kohli and Co appeared a bit jet-lagged.

The second match saw more rain, this time serious enough for the game to be called off after 19 overs in Australia's innings in Melbourne. The hosts could consider themselves lucky as they stuttered to 132/7, courtesy some poor shot selection. Ben McDermott was the one adding respectability to the total, while Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Khaleel Ahmed took two wickets each. It was a get-out-of-jail-free card for Australia as weather ensured they would not lose the series.

The final game of the series saw the definitive arrival of King Kohli. After losing the toss and being told to bowl, India restricted Australia to 164-6, with all-rounder Krunal Pandya taking four wickets. It was then a Kohli masterclass (61* with two fours and two sixes) that saw India win in the last over. The curtain raiser was done away with, it was time for the main event.

Adelaide Test - India won by 31 runs

It did not start well for India. After 10.3 overs, the scoreboard read 19/3 and most worryingly, Kohli was already back in the pavilion. A feeling of "here we go again" was inevitable among India fans. But from there India scored 250 and that was built on the back of methodical Cheteshwar Pujara's grinding 123. It set the tone for what was to follow in the summer. Josh Hazlewood was the pick of the Australia bowlers with 3-52. In reply, Australia were skittled



for 235 with Travis Head's 72 - his highest Test score - the highlight.

Pujara was again the hero for India with a dogged second innings 71 while vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane contributed 70 in their 307. It left Australia requiring a record run chase of 323 at Adelaide Oval. They gallantly battled to 291, with Shaun Marsh knocking 60 in a tense finale. But India came out on top to win their first Test in Australia for a decade. Wicket-keeper Rishabh Pant made history by matching the record of 11 catches in a Test held by England's Jack Russell and South Africa's AB de Villiers.

Melbourne Test - India won by 137 runs

India dumped under-performing openers Murali Vijay and KL Rahul, and new-boy Mayank Agarwal stepped up to the mark, making 76 on debut in front of a packed MCG on Boxing Day. But it was Pujara again who was the rock, making 106 in their first innings score of 443-7 declared. Kohli chipped in with a patient 82 as the pair wore down Australia's bowlers.

The home team's batsmen capitulated in reply, all out for 151 with the devastating Jasprit Bumrah recording stun-

ning figures of 6-33, with the highlight being a slower ball to dismiss Shaun Marsh. India, declining to enforce the follow-on, scraped together to 106-8 declared on a deteriorating pitch to set Australia an unlikely 399 - a record chase at Melbourne - to win. Pat Cummins took a career-best 6-27. Despite a lively 63 from Cummins, Australia's batsmen again failed to rise to the challenge and were all out for 261 to give India an unbeatable 2-1 series lead. But the job was not done yet.

Sydney Test - Match drawn

Kohli again won the toss and batted on a flat wicket, with Pujara once more proving his credentials as perhaps the most reliable number three in the world as he made a stoic 193. Pant added a lively 159 not out before a declaration was called at 622 for seven. Australia blew a strong start with yet another top-order batting collapse, and in a rain-hit Test were bowled out for 300. Opener Marcus Harris made 79 while spinner Kuldeep Yadav grabbed 5-99.

They were forced to follow on at home for the first time in 30 years. But their second innings was curtailed by bad light almost immediately, with the score at 6 for no wicket

after just four overs, and the players didn't return as the entire last day was lost to rain. The rest (of the game) was (India waiting to seal their spot in the) history (books).

The ODI series - When Dhoni dominated column inches


Dropped for the shortest format, and coming off a two-month break, MS Dhoni was the focus of most preview discussions for the ODI series. Is he still good enough? Why was Rishabh Pant sent back? Will India regret sticking with him in the middle order?

At the end of the three matches, the debate has shown no sign of abating. It's more polarized, if anything. But for Dhoni himself, it might not matter that much as he walked away with the player of the series award for his three consecutive half-centuries.

Australia fended off an explosive century from Rohit Sharma to post a morale-boosting 34-run victory over India in the first one-day international in Sydney. The Australians made 288 for five off their 50 overs after winning the toss and restricted India to 254 for nine. Sharma blasted 133 off 129 balls in a scintillating effort to keep India in the contest, while man-of-the-match Jhye Richardson took four for 26 for Australia. The talking point was, incidentally, a 96-ball 51 by Dhoni. But that was as good as it got for Aaron Finch and Co in their retro kits.

Dhoni, rallying around Kohli and Karthik, steered India to a six-wicket victory over Australia in the second one-day international to level the series in Adelaide on Tuesday. Former skipper Dhoni guided India across the line with four balls to spare to back up a dazzling century from his captain. 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.





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