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# MPs walk out as Assembly expels Tabtabaei, Harbash

## Lawmakers approve final reading of early retirement bill

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** In a swift move that hardly took a few minutes, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem declared that the seats of opposition MPs Jamaan Al-Harbash and Waleed Al-Tabtabaei have become vacant based on a constitutional court ruling. The announcement was made without allowing any debate and amid strong protests by opposition lawmakers, who then walked out of the session to protest against the violation of the constitution and Assembly laws.

Ghanem sternly told the house that this decision was an implementation of the court ruling and completely in line with the country's constitution and laws. He then asked those who oppose the decision to raise their hands, and 18 MPs did so. There were 58 MPs and ministers in the chamber. Before walking out, several opposition MPs insisted to talk about the issue to explain their viewpoints, but the speaker declined. The lawmakers later returned to the hall to debate other issues.

Ghanem later told reporters his action was an implementation of a court verdict and that he has adopted the correct constitutional procedures, slamming what he described as MPs who are acting against the people. He vowed to expose such MPs in a television interview today, saying he will reveal many facts about certain people.

The speaker reiterated that his action was not directed

against the persons of the two lawmakers but was an implementation of the law. "These procedures that have been adhered to today have nothing to do with the MPs Al-Tabtabaei and Al-Harbash as persons - whom we deeply admire and respect," he said. "These measures are not against persons and this must be clear to all. None of us desires to strip any of our colleagues of their membership in such a manner; however we have received final verdicts from the court of cassation," Ghanem said.

In quick comments on the Assembly decision, Tabtabaei said that the Assembly had no right to repeat the voting after it had voted to retain their membership in October. Harbash said he has nothing to be ashamed of as he was paying the price of fighting against corruption. The 15 opposition lawmakers who left the session did not take any immediate decision and did not announce any protest plans.

But a number of them criticized the action taken by the speaker, insisting his action is a clear violation of the constitution and the internal charter. MP Adel Al-Damkhi said the speaker did not allow the opposition to speak, which is a violation of the internal charter. He added the action was against the constitution. MP Mohammad Al-Dallal said the voting on the decision was a violation of the law and that the speaker did not allow MPs to speak on the

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**KUWAIT:** HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah attends a parliament session at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Digital giants 'profiting' from settlements; call to oppose Eurovision

**LONDON:** Digital tourism giants Airbnb, Booking.com, Expedia and TripAdvisor are profiting from "war crimes" by offering services in Israeli settlements, rights group Amnesty International said in a report published yesterday. The London-based organization's "Destination: Occupation" report called on the companies to stop listing tourist accommodation, activities and attractions in settlements in occupied territories, including east Jerusalem.

"They are doing so despite knowing that Israel's occupation of the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, is governed by international humanitarian law under which Israeli settlements are deemed illegal," said the report. "In doing business with settlements, all four companies are contributing to, and profiting from, the maintenance, development and expansion of illegal settlements, which amount to war crimes under international criminal law."

Israeli public security minister Gilad Erdan threatened to bar Amnesty from access to the Jewish state over its charge. "The hypocritical Amnesty International speaks in the name of human rights and in practice promotes boycotts against Israeli citizens as part of the anti-Semitic boycott and delegitimization campaign," Erdan said in a statement released Tuesday night. "I instructed the ministry of strategic affairs to examine the possibility of preventing Amnesty personnel from entering, or residing in, Israel," said Erdan who

Continued on Page 24

## Philippine mosque attack kills 2; Amir sends condolences

**MANILA:** A grenade attack on a mosque in the troubled southern Philippines killed two people early yesterday, authorities said, just days after a deadly Catholic cathedral bombing and a vote backing Muslim self-rule in the region. The latest blast prompted worries of sectarian retaliation in the majority Catholic Philippines, with authorities urging inter-faith unity as investigators hunted a motive.

The grenade explosion tore through the mosque as the victims were sleeping before dawn in Zamboanga on the insurgency-plagued island of



**ZAMBOANGA, Philippines:** People look inside a mosque on the southern island of Mindanao yesterday after a grenade attack. — AFP

Mindanao, which is home to the Philippines' Muslim minority. Four people were wounded in the attack.

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## Brutal deep freeze grips US Midwest

**CHICAGO:** A life-threatening deep freeze gripped the American Midwest yesterday as weather colder than Antarctica grounded flights, disrupted travel and brought life to a standstill for tens of millions. Mail deliveries were suspended, schools and business closed, and residents encouraged to stay home in nearly a dozen states where temperatures overnight sank into the negative double digits, the worst cold to grip the region in a generation with all-time records still under threat.

America's third city Chicago - where the morning temperature was -30 Celsius, which felt like -46 Celsius with wind chill - was colder than Alaska's state capital and even colder than parts of Antarctica. More than 1,500 flights were canceled in the city's two major airports while rail operator Amtrak scrapped train services from its Chicago hub. The US Postal Service - known for its commitment to bringing the mail whatever the weather - suspended deliveries in parts of Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, the Dakotas and Nebraska.

Continued on Page 24



**ABU DHABI:** Emirati fans throw bottles and footwear at Qatari players during the 2019 AFC Asian Cup semifinal match between Qatar and UAE at the Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium on Tuesday. — AFP

## AFC to probe shoe-throwing Asian Cup semi

**ABU DHABI:** Asia's football body promised a "thorough investigation" yesterday after the United Arab Emirates' turbulent Asian Cup semi-final loss to archrivals Qatar, during which fans hurled shoes and bottles. Plastic water bottles pelted the turf and several shoes were hurled, an Arab insult, as Qatar celebrated the second goal in Tuesday's 4-0 rout of the tournament hosts in Abu Dhabi.

Akram Afif twice had to delay taking a corner as objects rained down, and Salem Al-Hajri was struck on the head after Qatar's third goal. One plastic bottle struck the crossbar behind Qatari goalkeeper Saad Al-Sheeb. "The AFC (Asian Football Confederation) is conducting a thorough investigation into events at the (semi-final)," a spokesman told AFP. "Once the investigation has been completed the AFC will decide on the appropriate steps."

The defeat was deeply embarrassing for the UAE, who are in the midst of a stand-off with Qatar in which several countries have slashed diplomatic and transport links, claiming Doha supports terrorism - a claim the Qataris deny.

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## Local

# Amir receives state officials at Bayan Palace



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Head of Kuwait's Public Anti-Corruption Authority Abdulrahman Al-Namash.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with the former Chief Executive Officer of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Nizar Al-Adsani.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



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KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak

Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir then received Head of Kuwait's Public Anti-Corruption Authority Abdulrahman Al-Namash, where he presented a document to enhance values such as integrity and fighting corruption. His Highness the Amir also received the for-

mer Chief Executive Officer of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Nizar Al-Adsani. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, Namash, and Adsani. — KUNA

## Zain changes network name in honor of Amir's anniversary

KUWAIT: Zain has announced the changing of the name of its network in Kuwait to SABAH ALKUWAIT for the period of celebrations marking the 13th anniversary of the ascendency of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as the ruler of Kuwait. The move reflects Zain's enthusiasm in sharing the joys of this occasion with the people of Kuwait.

Zain customers will find the network name updated to SABAH ALKUWAIT on their devices during the celebratory period, as the company commemorates the anniversary of a journey full of giving and benevolence. His Highness the Amir has often called for Kuwait's progress, and the adoption of a kind, loving, and the nurturing of a brotherly spirit based on equal rights for all.

Commenting on this auspicious occasion, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi said, "On behalf of the Zain family, I would like to express my sincere congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the occasion of the 13th anniversary of His Highness' ascendency as Amir and ruler of Kuwait. We pray that our beloved nation and leadership remain safe, and that we are blessed with prosperity, security, and progress for many years to come."

Furthermore, Kharafi noted that how His Highness has committed himself to forging a nation based on the values of love, tolerance, and peace and how under His Highness the Amir's wise leadership, "Kuwait continues to play a leading role in many regional and international matters, and changing the name of the Zain network to SABAH ALKUWAIT is in recognition of the tremendous progress that has been achieved in the country over the last 13 years. His Highness' vision and



wisdom has led Kuwait to assume a prominent role in supporting humanitarian causes around the world, resulting in the United Nations selecting Kuwait as a leading nation in international humanitarian aid, and honoring His Highness as a humanitarian leader."

Throughout the reign of His Highness the Amir, Kuwait has taken tremendous strides forward across numerous social, economic, technological, and sporting pursuits. Further

progress has been achieved in areas such as the empowerment and encouragement of women in society, and the expansion of prosperity to wider sections of society, including the digital start-up ecosystem. Today, Kuwait is moving forward united under the umbrella of the ambitious 'New Kuwait 2035' vision, which aims to transform the country into a leading regional and international hub across activities.



## Amir's painting attracts visitors at Qatari art exhibition



DOHA: A painting of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah topped the Qatari artist Reem Al-Obaidli's exhibition 'Glory of Qatar' in Doha. "I made sure to draw a scene of the 'Humanitarian Leader' after putting the details of it in my mind," Obaidli said. The painting, which she considers one of her most important artistic works, presents the fine art of humanity which cannot be forgotten, she added. This work of art can be considered as an artistic documenta-

tion for His Highness' initiative to re-unite the Gulf countries, she noted. The title 'Humanitarian Leader' came because of His Highness the Amir's wisdom, political will, and his balanced and good relations with all countries, the artist explained. Obaidli, who is holding her second private exhibition in the Qatari capital, has a Bachelor's degree in Education and holds a Master's degree in administration, in addition to her releases in the field of fine art. —KUNA



## Local

# Sheikh Mubarak Al-Hamad Journalism Excellence Award winners honored

There is a challenge between traditional media and modernization: Minister



**KUWAIT:** Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah in a group photo with winners of the Sheikh Mubarak Al-Hamad Journalism Excellence Award.



**Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah honors Kuwait Times' photographer Yasser Al-Zayyat.**

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** Sheikh Mubarak Al-Hamad Journalism Excellence Award's higher committee concluded the eleventh edition's activities with a grand ceremony honoring the prizewinners on Tuesday at JW Marriott Hotel. The event was attended by representative of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad A-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled stressed the keenness of His Highness the Prime Minister on the importance of youth in this competition, because they are the starting point for the future. "The competition is witnessing remarkable development, as this year the competition included participants from GCC countries. This step is well thought out, positive and valuable, and we hope to involve Arab youth in the future," he said. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled pointed out there is a challenge between traditional media and modernization, adding that this competition is an opportunity for young people to



**Chairman of the Supreme Committee of Sheikh Mubarak Al-Hamad Award for Journalist Excellence Ayman Al-Ali delivers his speech.**

benefit from the experiences and participation of media organizations.

Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Sheikh Mubarak Al-Duailj Al-Sabah thanked the prime minister for his continuous support to Arab media and his keenness to enhance the role of media institutions in the service of society and the performance of its mission, particularly



**Director General of Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) Sheikh Mubarak Al-Duailj Al-Sabah speaks at the event.**

KUNA. He expressed his congratulations to the winners of the eleventh edition of this competition and wished them continued success. He pointed out that KUNA was honored to embrace and support this competition since its first edition, stressing the continuation of this cooperation in appreciation of its noble objectives and its great impact on the media in the Arab world.

## Winners' list

In the press report (youth category), the winner from the GCC youth group was from an Omani newspaper, Khalsa Al-Shybani. The second place went to Faisal Al-Rashidi from the best Kuwaiti youth news magazine from KUNA, and in the third place was Shahd Kamal from KUNA.

In the investigation category, Youssef Al-Mutairi of Al-Qabas newspaper won the first prize, Mai Sokari from Al-Qabas was second and Mohammad Al-Enzi from KUNA third. The first place in the journalistic interview category went to Rana Salem from Al-Seyassah newspaper, Mohammed Ghazi from Al-Jarida newspaper was second, and the third place was for Musa Diab from KUNA.

In the journalistic reports category, the winner was Mohammed Ahmed from Annahar newspaper, the second was Fawaz Karami from KUNA, and Mohamed Awada from Al-Anbaa newspaper came third. In the photography category, Yasser Al-Zayyat from Kuwait Times won first place, Hosni Ahmed from Al-Qabas stood second, while Asaad Abdullah from Al-Rai newspa-

per came third.

In the investigation (youth category), Fawaz Al-Otaibi of KUNA won first place, Monira Al-Rabia from KUNA was second, and Khaled Al-Ajmi from KUNA was third. In the interview (youth category), Nasser Al-Husayni from Al-Rai won place, Abdullah Al-Misri from KUNA came second and Abdulaziz Al-Majran won the third place.

The first winner in the journalistic reports (youth category) was Khaled Al-Mutairi from KUNA, Faisal Al-Rashidi from KUNA came in second, while Shehad Kamal from KUNA stood third. In the audiovisual section of the youth category, Bibi Al-Khadoury from the electronic Qabas newspaper won first place.

Ahmed Al-Farhan won in the best broadcaster category, with Ali Al-Qatami from Al-Shahed newspaper second and Al-Jaber Al-Saidi third. In the category of caricatures for the youth category, Mohamed Al-Mashmoum from Al-Erada won first place, the second was Mona Tamimi from Farnas newspaper and the third went to Mohammed Al-Obaidi from Al-Ghad newspaper.

## Jordan King underscores necessity of Arab coordination

**AMMAN:** King Abdullah II of Jordan yesterday affirmed necessity of coordination among Arab states toward diverse issues and crises concerning the Arab nation. The Royal Court (Diwan) said in a statement that the monarch made the assertion during a meeting with the visiting Kuwait Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, along with the latter's counterparts from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt. The meeting was held at Al-Hussainiyah Palace in Amman, on margins of the Arab ministerial consultative meeting. King Abdullah emphasized during the meeting depth of the brotherly bonds between the kingdom with the "Arab brothers." He also underlined necessity of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on basis of the two states and the Arab peace initiative.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled had arrived earlier yesterday in Jordan, heading a delegation that would participate in an

Arab ministerial consultative meeting scheduled for today in the Dead Sea region. Upon arrival, he was received by Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayman Safadi, Kuwait Ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Daihani and members of the diplomatic mission at the embassy. The Kuwaiti delegation includes Acting Assistant Foreign Minister for the Office of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ambassador Saleh Al-Loughani and a number of officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Jordanian Foreign Minister is scheduled to meet counterparts from Kuwait, Bahrain, KSA, Egypt and UAE to discuss issues of common interests. UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Bahraini Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa, Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubair are also participating at the consultative meeting. — KUNA

## Speaker underlines fighting corruption

**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem yesterday underlined that anti-corruption is the responsibility of the two parliaments and stressed the importance of boosting integrity concepts. Speaking after inaugurating a workshop organized by the Arab Region Parliamentarians Against Corruption (ARPAC) organization at the assembly's building, Ghanem welcomed Arab legislators participating in the workshop that is mainly about battling corruption as first priority. The parliamentary workshop, which concludes today, groups members of shura councils and parliaments, the organization's chair Dr Nasser Al-Sane said in a statement to 'Al-Dostour' news network. The workshop is organized in cooperation with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and several organizations in Kuwait, such as Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS), he



**KUWAIT:** National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem speaks during the workshop. — KUNA

said. The workshop aims to focus on the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). — KUNA

## Health Ministry signs deal with New York hospital

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

**KUWAIT:** Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah received, along with secretary general of Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialists Dr Ibrahim Hadi and head of heart diseases at the institute Prof Mohammad Zubaid a medical delegation from Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. The minister said due to a generous donation by HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Sabah Al-Ahmad institute for treatment of irregular heartbeat in New York, and based on his initiatives during his previous visits, the Amir encouraged the institution to train Kuwaiti doctors. He emphasized on the importance of continued medical cooperation between the two sides, including exchange of expertise and information, especially in academic and research fields.

The health ministry coordinated with Mount Sinai and bilateral meetings were held to discuss the cooperation mechanism and sending doctors through the heart college at the institute for delicate specialties in heart disease. A memorandum of understanding was signed that included details of training, which is supposed to start in July 2019 to send Kuwaiti doctors for training for CT and MRI scans of the heart for two years, and it will include heart ultrasounds. The minister concluded his statement by thanking HH the Amir, who did not spare any effort or support to develop his country and ensure his people's prosperity at all levels.

### Land allocation

An informed source said Municipality Minister Fahd Al-Shula is expected to reject Municipal Council members' decision to approve the proposal of member Ali bin Sayer to allocate the land of Abu Halifa Park to the Public Authority for Housing Welfare for distribution to housing applicants because it does not agree with the technical opinion of the structural plan. The source said the executive apparatus explained in a memo to the council that the advisor specialized in modernizing and development of the fourth structural plan said the third structural plan recommended that no new residential areas be created in urban areas. The source said there is also a decision by the director general of Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources not to allow any takeover of lands allocated to it. Municipal council members may, if minister Shula rejects the decision, use article 25 and send it to the Cabinet for consideration.

## Belgium supports Kuwait's efforts to resolve Gulf crisis

**BRUSSELS:** Belgium's Ambassador to Kuwait Piet Heirbaut praised yesterday the Kuwaiti mediation efforts directed by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to resolve the Gulf conflict. In an interview, Ambassador Heirbaut said Belgium and the European Union are supporting Kuwait's role of mediation in the region. "We believe Kuwait is the best mediator due to its good relations with its neighbors", Ambassador Heirbaut, who participated in a luncheon held for Belgium ambassadors working in Arab countries and Arab ambassadors in Belgium, organized by the Belgium-Luxembourg Arab House of Commerce in Brussels, said. He described His Highness the Amir as "One of the architects of the Gulf Cooperation Council who knows the value of this organization," expressing appreciation for the efforts of His Highness to resolve the Gulf dispute.

"Kuwait is one of our best partners and friends in the region. Belgium and Kuwait are so close in having the same commitment to multilateral diplomacy," he said. "Kuwait and Belgium are members of the UN Security Council, we work together on different issues, we want to work through compromise and peaceful solutions to the important humanitarian file on Syria," he noted. The bilateral relations between the two countries are grow-

ing and expanding day after day, he said, pointing out that the two sides are constantly exchanging views and positions on regional and international issues. "The past 18 months witnessed significant developments in the relations between the two countries, as there have been high-level visits from both sides," he said, referring to the visit of the President of the Belgian Senate Christine Defraigne to Kuwait, while many Kuwaiti dignitaries visited Belgium, including officials from the Direct Investment Promotion Authority. The Ambassador said the "Economic relations are growing stronger. Kuwait has shown interest in the oil and gas sectors in Belgium, while Belgian companies have shown increasing interest in Kuwait's manufacturing and food industries."

In the meantime, Director of the Middle East and North Africa division at the Belgian Foreign Ministry, Raul Delcord said "We have strong and stable relationship with all the GCC countries, and we appreciate these relations." Meanwhile, Secretary General of the Arab-Belgian Chamber of Commerce - Luxembourg, Caesar Hijazin said that this event coincides with the tenth anniversary of the launch of the first edition of the Arab-Belgian diplomatic working Luncheon. He stressed that the Chamber works in close cooperation with the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote economic and trade relations with the Arab world.

On the occasion, Governor of the Banque du Liban Riyad Salama addressed the audience to discuss the low oil prices, pointing out that it has led to a decline in growth in the Middle East and North Africa. He said that Lebanon is seeking support to deal with the flow of refugees, pointing out that there is a good response from the European Union and the international community to protect stability in his country. — KUNA



**BRUSSELS:** Kuwait's Ambassador to Belgium, EU, NATO and Luxembourg Jassem Al-Budaiwi with Belgium's Ambassador to Kuwait Piet Heirbaut. — KUNA



# Authority credits national strategy for Corruption Perception Index improvement

## Auditors given ‘excellent impressions’ about anti-corruption measures

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

**KUWAIT:** Commenting on the seven-rank jump Kuwait made in 2018 on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, where Kuwait ranked 78th out of 180 countries, 8th in the Arab world and 5th in the GCC, official spokesperson of the Public Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) Mohammed Buzubar stressed that the ranking was based on the latest reports and questionnaires from 2016 and 2017 about the reforms conducted by both the government and Nazaha through the project of the national strategy to enhance transparency and fighting corruption set in collaboration with UN organizations, the private sector and NGOs.

Buzubar added that the report was also based on the excellent periodic audit reports made by the State

Audit Bureau, the remarkable work done by Kuwait Transparency Society, the consultations Nazaha held with Kuwaiti NGOs while preparing the national strategy, the constant improvements achieved by Kuwait on the e-government index and the progress made on the ease of doing business index, in addition to passing law

number 13/2018 on preventing interest contradictions and receiving financial disclosures from 94 percent of public officials. "All these elements gave both local and foreign auditors excellent impressions about the government's serious anti-corruption measures," he underlined.

Further, Buzubar explained that the CPI measures the perception of corruption and its prevalence within a government from the point of view of private sector experts and executives. He added that reports are usually made based on data collected from a maximum of 13 and minimum of three

### Spokesman highlights anti-corruption efforts



sources of information and reports made by international specialized institutions. He also noted that annual indexes are usually based on information collected during the two previous years at least.

Moreover, Buzubar elaborated that indicators measured by the index include bribery, bureaucracy, the effectiveness of court orders passed against corrupt officials, protection of whistleblowers, law sufficiency and citizens' access to general information.

## Who represents non-Kuwaitis in National Assembly?

By Mohammad Hisham Hatahet

This question is a worthy one, as article 7 of Kuwait's constitution says "justice, liberty and equality are the pillars of society," while article 29 says "all people are equal in human dignity and in public rights and duties before the law, without distinction to race, origin, language or religion". This calls for a serious stand by members of the National Assembly, who are chosen by the people to work according to the interests of Kuwait and its people. Article 100 of the constitution says "a member of the Assembly represents the entire nation and cares for the public interest."

The annual report on human rights in Kuwait for 2018 issued by the Kuwait Human Rights Society said hatred is rising towards migrant laborers, and expressed worries about the rise of verbal discrimination to a point that it sometimes reaches contempt of workers and incites against them. Item 12 in this report, titled 'notes and recommendation in regards to health care,' indicates that "Kuwait should guarantee health care for all individuals who fall under its jurisdiction equally."

Another report by the Kuwait Association of the Basic Evaluators for Human Rights (KABEHR) said in 2011 that despite what article 29 of the constitution says, Kuwait's law is still devoid of any items that criminalize and punish racism and discrimination of all types.

Kuwait is a country with a just judiciary, and any non-Kuwaiti can demand their rights through it, but non-Kuwaitis are in need of what protects them from the negative repercussions resulting from economic and social procedures that are applied only on them. I do not exaggerate if I describe expat residents in Kuwait as a "minority" from the point of their very limited ability to participate in decisions that affect their social and economic lives, as there is no representation for them in any union or association regulated by Kuwaiti law.

Among the rules of wise governance is caring for the rights of the minority in any decision issued by anybody that issues legislative decisions. Many meetings of Arab parliaments, under the patronage of the United Nations, emphasize the importance of constitutional institutions and their role in instilling comprehensive governance and achieving social cohesiveness because representative institutions cannot work effectively and responsibly in absence of social harmony, while on the other hand social harmony cannot be fulfilled without representative governance. — *Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Qabas*

### Crimes

#### Ardiya thief arrested

**KUWAIT:** Farwaniya police arrested a Kuwaiti man who broke into vehicles parked in front of multipurpose halls in Ardiya and stole items left inside. Police found tools that the suspect used in the process, along with drug paraphernalia. He was also found to have a criminal record. Patrolmen noticed suspicious movements near the hall, so they went closer and found a man in an abnormal condition trying to break into a car. Police found phones and bank cards in addition to the tools and drug paraphernalia. The suspect was handed to detectives for further investigations and legal action.

#### Stabbed on the back

A Kuwaiti man was admitted to Farwaniya Hospital's ICU after suffering a deep stab in his back during a fight between two men he doesn't know, who were likely to have been under the influence of drugs. The fight took place on Kabd Road, so police and paramedics responded and found the victim in a critical condition, while the suspects had fled. Eyewitnesses provided police with descriptions of the suspects' vehicle, as detectives took over the case.

#### Body found

Criminal detectives are investigating the case of a decomposed body of an Egyptian man found in his Fintas apartment. The coroner took the body to determine the cause of death. — *Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai*

## NBK platinum sponsor in Maker Faire Kuwait 2019

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) participates as a platinum sponsor in Maker Faire Kuwait 2019, organized by Kuwait Investment Company under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with the attendance of the Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudan, from 5 to 9 February at Kuwait International Fairground.

Manal Al-Mattar, NBK Assistant General Manager, Public Relations and Communications, said: "NBK's sponsorship reflects its belief in the importance of building human capabilities as part of its sustainability approach and corporate social responsibility strategy. At NBK, we believe in investing in Youth as well as enabling these young 'makers' develop their crafts

## Ministry names temporary Siddiq Co-op manager

By A Saleh

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Social Affairs issued a decision to appoint a temporary manager for Siddiq Co-op Society to replace the founding board of directors, the ministry's official spokesman and assistant undersecretary for cooperation affairs Abdelaziz Shuaib said yesterday.

and innovative ideas."

"In addition to sponsoring the event and setting up a booth, NBK will be a part of the judging committee that will evaluate the innovative creations by the end of the exhibition," Mattar added. She noted that NBK is always committed towards supporting youth and young 'makers' through their small and medium enterprises that deal with technology and crafts.

It is worth mentioning that Maker Faire Kuwait is organized by Kuwait Investment Company for the third year in a row. Originated in the United States, the Maker Faire gained global popularity and is held in multiple countries around the world, including the GCC region with Kuwait as the only exclusive host from the parent exhibition. The event will hold participants from Kuwait and the Arab region with innovative creations in different fields combining modern technology and manual crafts.

The new manager is Yousuf Abdelaziz Al-Nughaimshi, who will have many duties during the next two months, including preparation of election lists and calling for electing the first elected board by area residents since it broke away from Salam Co-op Society in 2016.

#### Authorizations withdrawn

Informed sources said Oil, Electricity and Water Minister Khaled Al-Fadhel issued a decision withdrawing several administrative authorizations given to Electricity and Water Ministry Undersecretary Mohammad Bushehri. The decision said the authority to appoint, transfer or loan workers will be taken away from Bushehri, in addition to the authority to give permissions to assistant undersecretaries.



Manal Al-Mattar

## Kuwaiti, Egyptian forces in joint drills



Arrival of the Egyptian navy forces.



KUWAIT: Egyptian air forces arrive at the Ahmad Al-Jaber airbase.

**KUWAIT:** Troops of the Kuwaiti and Egyptian armies began two drills, code-named 'Al-Yarmouk-4' and 'Sabah-1,' yesterday. The Defense Ministry indicated in a statement that the mock battles, scheduled till February 8, involve elite personnel, F-18 warplanes from the Kuwaiti Air Force and F-16 jet fighters from the Egyptian Army. The exercise includes reconnaissance, theoretical and practical courses. — KUNA

## PAAET honors former director

**KUWAIT:** The legal department at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) held an honoring ceremony for former director Nabila Burabee in the presence of Director General of PAAET Ali Al-Mudhaf and other officials. Mudhaf lauded the efforts of Burabee during the previous years and appreciated her role in developing the work mechanism at the department. Director of the legal department Fahd Al-Jumaa thanked Burabee for her contributions during the years she spent at the department. Burabee thanked Mudhaf and his deputies for honoring her.



KUWAIT: Ali Al-Mudhaf and Fahd Al-Jumaa present a memento to Nabila Burabee.



# Souq Mubarakiya shop owners face uncertainty after losing rent cases in court

## Long-time owners protest new investor's 'inflated rent' demands

By Nawara Fattahowa

KUWAIT: Many shops in Souq Mubarakiya are facing the possibility of shutting down after the investor in the market - Real Estate House - demanded a huge rise in rent, which in many cases reached 1,000 percent. The investor acquired the rights to Souq Mubarakiya after beating 17 other companies with a bid of KD 3.671 million per year. According to the management of Real Estate House, this figure was submitted based on a feasibility study of the rents in the area.

Real Estate House signed contracts with 64 percent of the total of 529 shops in Souq Mubarakiya, while the remaining 36 percent rejected the inflated rents and went to court to pay the old rent. The investor signed the contract on March 1, 2017 and is collecting the new rent since then. It said the old contracts with the previous company have expired and it has final verdicts from the supreme court.

### Eviction orders

More than 10 of the shops that are paying rent at the court recently lost their case, and are now facing eviction orders. This led the shop owners to down their shutters on Friday in protest against the improbable increase in rent values. Abu Mohammed, owner of a mobile phone accessory shop, explained his objection to Kuwait Times, saying he has been running his shop for over 20 years. "My earlier rent, which I'm currently paying to the court, is KD 413 a month, which is suitable for my small business. The new investor demanded KD 4,500, which is over a 1,000-percent increase, and I couldn't accept it. During the best and busiest days, I make KD 50 maximum, so how can I pay that rent," he asked.

Abu Mohammed believes that the new investor wants to get rid of them and wants to replace these shops with trendy restaurants or other businesses. "I tried to resolve the problem with the investor and reach some compromise, but they completely refused to cooperate. Instead they proposed unrealistic conditions, saying I have to pay the full amount of KD 4,500 per month retroactively for the past period and they won't give me a receipt for that payment. In addition, they told me that all the rent I paid at the court for the past almost two years won't be deducted from this payment," Abu Mohammed said.



KUWAIT: People walk down an aisle at Souq Mubarakiya in this file photo. — KUNA

"And even if I agreed to these unreasonable conditions, they still will submit my shop to a committee which has to agree that I sign an investment contract for only three years. This contract does not protect the investor (me). So we went on strike as all the negotiations were unsuccessful," he added.

The investment contract of the earlier investor of Souq Mubarakiya (Kuwait Commercial Market Complex Company) with the ministry of finance expired in 2015. "Although their contract already expired, that company still received rent from us in 2015, 2016 and 2017, and also increased it by 300 percent. They also signed contracts with us that are valid till 2020 for some shops," concluded Abu Mohammed.

Ammar is the owner of Waleema Restaurant, one of those paying at the court who didn't sign the contract with the new investor. He is also running his restaurant in the souq for over 20 years. "I don't know what will happen with my restaurant if I lose my case at the court. My previous rent was KD 600 with the yard in front of the restaurant. The new investor demanded a

rent of KD 6,000 and without the yard too. We hope that somebody will help us," he said.

**Violations committed**

Anwar Al-Qinaei is the spokesman of the 36 percent of the shops that are paying at the court. According to him, the new investor committed some violations. "According to the contract signed by the new investor with the ministry of finance, he should collect the rents starting from June 1, 2018, when the effective date of the contract starts after one year of its validity from June 1, 2017. But he started collecting from the date he signed the contract, which is 15 months in advance," he pointed out.

"When the objecting shops filed a case at the court against the unreasonable rent in 2017, all our cases were rejected, and the verdict was that these cases were filed in advance, as the contract was not yet effective. This means he has no right to collect the rent from us. The investor was also renting the parking lot in this period and didn't pay that amount to the min-

istry of finance," Qinaei said.

"The new investor refused to receive the rent from us claiming there is no relation with us, as we are illegally occupying the shops. And he refused to receive the payment from the court. But we discovered that a few months earlier, he received it, which is an indirect declaration of him of the rental relation between us," explained Qinaei.

Attorney Mubarak Mijzea commented that there is no maximum limit of increase for commercial contracts. "It's not the same as residential contracts that cap the maximum increase at 100 percent. The investor has the right to raise the rent according to the prevailing rent in similar locations. The shops that are paying at the court can demand a property expert to evaluate the rent value, who will decide the suitable rent increase. The investor set the high prices in the bid after he calculated the new increased rents," he said.

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<b>4.750</b> <b>3.890</b> Hammour Fish /kg	<b>5.190</b> <b>2.595</b> Ariel Washing Powder 4.5 kg	<b>2.850</b> <b>1.295</b> Dettol Anti-Bacterial Hand Wash 200ml 3's
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Life-threatening arctic chill sweeps over the US Midwest

## US starts returning asylum seekers back to Mexico

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CARACAS: Handout picture released by the Venezuelan Presidency showing members of Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB), listening to Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro, during a military rally with the personnel posted in the REDI Capital and the Superior General Staff of the FANB at Forte Tiuna Military Complex. —AFP

# Maduro: Military deserters plotting coup

## Guaido has called mass demonstrations against the government this week

CARACAS: Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro accused military deserters of having become “mercenaries” conspiring from Colombia to divide the armed forces and plot a coup. “Military deserters have become mercenaries of the Colombian oligarchy and conspire from Colombia to divide the armed forces,” Maduro said, without providing further details, as he led a march of 2,500 soldiers at a barracks in Caracas on the same day as a demonstration called by the opposition.

Maduro is in the midst of a standoff with Juan Guaido, the leader of the opposition-held National Assembly who last week declared himself interim president. Washington threw its weight behind Guaido’s claim, having previously termed as fraudulent the May 2018 election that saw Maduro win a second term. Several European powers meanwhile have given Maduro an ultimatum to hold fresh elections or they too will recognize Guaido.

To keep up the pressure, Guaido has called mass demonstrations against the government this week, and has appealed to the powerful military to change sides, offering amnesty to those who do. Maduro said yesterday he would be willing to negotiate with the opposition and hold early congressional elections, in a concession as

opponents plan another big demonstration.

But at the same time, he dismissed the possibility of holding a new presidential poll anytime soon. At least 40 people have been killed in clashes with security forces nationwide and at least 850 arrested since January 21 when a brief military rebellion was put down in Caracas, according to the UN human rights office in Geneva.

**Guaido barred from leaving**

Meanwhile, Venezuela’s Supreme Tribunal of Justice barred self-declared president Juan Guaido from leaving the country and froze his bank accounts Tuesday, as leader Nicolas Maduro seeks to neutralize the American-backed opposition chief. The 35-year-old head of the National Assembly legislature “is prohibited from leaving the country until the end of the (preliminary) investigation” for having “caused harm to peace in the republic,” high court president Maikel Moreno said. The court is stacked with Maduro loyalists.

The move came after the State Department revealed that Guaido — the National Assembly head and self-proclaimed interim president — has been handed control of Venezuela’s US bank accounts. US Secretary of State

Mike Pompeo signed off on the order last week, which was then followed on Monday by US sanctions targeting Venezuela’s state oil giant PDVSA, the cash-strapped government’s main source of hard currency.

“This certification will help Venezuela’s legitimate government safeguard those assets for the benefit of the Venezuelan people,” State Department spokesman Robert Palladino said in a statement. Guaido shrugged off Maduro’s efforts to choke his progress as “nothing new.”

“I’m not dismissing the threats, the persecution at this time, but we’re here, we’re continuing to do our jobs,” he told reporters as he arrived at the National Assembly. Guaido, who has been recognized as interim president by US President Donald Trump, sent a message to the country’s top court on Twitter warning that “the regime is in its final stage.” “You shouldn’t sacrifice yourselves for the usurper and his gang,” he added.

**‘Serious consequences’**

In Washington, Trump’s national security advisor warned of “serious consequences” if any harm comes to the Venezuelan opposition leader. “Let me reiterate — there will be serious consequences for those who attempt

to subvert democracy and harm Guaido,” Trump advisor John Bolton tweeted.

The opposition-controlled legislature, meanwhile, named “diplomatic representatives” to a dozen countries that, like the US, have recognized Guaido as the interim president. At the White House, US Vice President Mike Pence met with Guaido’s appointed charge d’affaires in the United States, Carlos Vecchio, to discuss the crisis.

The 35-year-old engineer stormed onto the political stage as a virtual unknown on January 3, when he was sworn in as the president of the National Assembly, a body that had been largely neutralized by the Supreme Court. On January 23, he declared himself the country’s acting president and vowed to lead a transitional government that would hold democratic elections.

To keep up the pressure, he has called two more mass demonstrations against the government this week, and has appealed to the powerful military to change sides, offering amnesty to those who do. At least 40 people have been killed in clashes with security forces nationwide and at least 850 arrested since January 21 when a brief military rebellion was put down in Caracas, according to the UN human rights office in Geneva. —AFP

## Irish jihadist tells of dying days of ‘caliphate’

HASAKEH: From detention in northern Syria, alleged Irish jihadist Alexandr Bekmirzaev describes hunger and fear as missiles pounded down on the last shreds of the Islamic State group’s “caliphate”. “I thought we were going to die from the starvation,” the Muslim convert, 46 this year, told AFP in English, captured after fleeing the extremist group’s crumbling last pocket in eastern Syria.

Bekmirzaev said he fled into territory held by Kurdish-led forces, who detained him along with four other alleged foreign jihadists late last month. Backed by air strikes of the US-led coalition, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have since September been whittling down the last IS holdout near the Iraqi border. Brought in for an interview by the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) who are still interrogating him, the detainee described watching the IS stronghold collapse around him. The hundreds of suspected jihadists captured by the SDF are usually keen to be sent home.

The Kurdish administration in northeastern Syria also wants to send the prisoners back for trial, but governments in their countries of origin are often reluctant. France said Tuesday for the first time that French jihadists held by Kurdish forces in Syria could be allowed to return home. “We are examining all options to avoid the escape and scattering of these potentially dangerous individuals,” the French foreign ministry said.

**‘Bombing, bombing’**

Bekmirzaev was detained by SDF forces on suspicion of being a fighter trying to blend in with fleeing civilians, with the aim of escaping and then setting up IS sleeper cells to carry out further attacks. He insisted he had never carried a weapon for Islamic State — but his claim could not be verified by AFP. Since summer, there had been “bombing, bombing, bombing” on a near-daily basis, said Bekmirzaev, who was born to an Uzbek father and Belarusian mother.

With the so-called Hajin pocket encircled by the SDF, there was no flour in the market, and meat was prohibitively expensive, he said. Bekmirzaev said he, his wife and five-year-old son were forced to eat bread made with wheat husks, what little the neighbors gave them, and sometimes grass. “Vegetables? You wish. There is nothing, absolutely nothing. This is grass we eat,” said the bearded man. As US-backed fighters advanced inside the jihadist pocket, taking village after village, Bekmirzaev and his family were



HASAKEH: Alexandr Ruzmatovich Bekmirzaev, a 45-year-old Belarusian native and naturalized Irish citizen who was detained along with four other purported foreign jihadists by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), speaks during an interview. —AFP

forced to flee deeper into jihadist-held territory.

**Kids crying**

“I left my home because the SDF approach probably around 800 meters from my house” in the village of Kishmeh, he said. He and his family fled south along the eastern banks of the Euphrates River to the village of Al-Shaafa, he said, where they slept in a mosque. From there, they again escaped in a large group including women and children, guided by a young man who helped them avoid landmines. —AFP

## Lebanese politicians believe govt will be formed this week

BEIRUT: Lebanon appeared to move closer to forming a new government yesterday after months of wrangling, with politicians from rival political factions indicating they believed it would happen this week. Lebanon urgently needs a government to start addressing its extensive economic ills, which include a public debt equal to around 150 percent of GDP and years of low growth. Asked if the government would be formed within 24 to 48 hours, Abdul Rahim Mrad told Al-Jadeed TV: “I believe it will have been formed, I believe so because the atmosphere today is this.”

He is one of six pro-Hezbollah Sunni Muslim MPs whose representation in the cabinet has been one of several obstacles to the formation of the government to be led by prime minister-designate Saad Al-Hariri, also a Sunni. Hariri said on Tuesday that this week would be decisive in efforts to form the government, but warned that this was “a last chance” to settle things.

Caretaker information minister Melhem Riachi, of the anti-Hezbollah Christian

Lebanese Forces party, wrote on Twitter: “And finally it is concluded on Friday Feb 1 2019,” without elaborating. Discussions over a new national unity government began after May’s national election, the first in nine years, and aimed to distribute cabinet positions among Lebanon’s main political blocs and according to its delicate sectarian balance.

**‘A serious atmosphere’**

There have been several moments when a government seemed close, but ultimately failed to emerge, including in December when Hariri indicated a breakthrough might be hours away. Lebanon’s economy and financial system have shown resilience during previous periods of political paralysis, but Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil said last month that the country faced an economic crisis that was at risk of becoming a financial one.

Concerns over the economy have been reflected in Lebanese bond prices and the costs of insuring against its public debt. The International Monetary Fund warned in June that urgent measures are needed to put Lebanon’s finances on a sustainable footing. The Hezbollah-aligned Sunni MPs met senior Hezbollah official Hussein Khalil on Tuesday night. The heavily armed Iran-backed Shi’ite Hezbollah is the most powerful group in the country. —Reuters



# Hundreds of schools to shut as toxic smog chokes Bangkok

‘The situation will be bad until February 3 to 4’

**BANGKOK:** Toxic smog forced hundreds of Bangkok schools to close yesterday, as authorities struggle to manage a pollution crisis that has stirred widespread health fears and taken on a political edge just weeks before elections. The Thai capital has been shrouded in murky haze for weeks, sparking social media criticism of the uneven response by the government and prompting rare scenes of residents donning masks on streets and on public transport.

Reasons given for the lingering pall include exhaust from traffic, unfettered construction, the burning of crop stubble, and pollution from factories getting trapped in the city. Authorities have seeded clouds to provoke rain, sprayed overpasses with water to catch micro-pollutants and even asked people not to burn incense sticks and paper during Chinese New Year celebrations. The measures so far have drawn derision from many Bangkok residents, while stocks of pollution masks have run out in many shops.

But yesterday, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration stepped up its health warnings, ordering all 437 city-controlled public schools to close from lunchtime through Friday, designating 1,500 square kilometers of the city a “control area”. “The situation will be bad until February 3 to 4, so I decided to close schools,” said Bangkok governor Aswin Kwanmuang, adding he hoped the move would also empty the road of cars on the school run. Three to four of the city’s districts are “severely hit with smog”, he added. A spokesperson for the prime minister’s office said private and vocational schools would be closed as well, but did not give a number.

Public health crisis

At a downtown Bangkok school where parents arrived early to pick up their children, pupils said they knew about the risks posed by the dangerous pollutant particles, known as PM 2.5. “I use a mask wherever I go,” said 12-year-old Chaiwawut Benpalee. “It will not affect us now, but it will in the future.” Fleets of drones are set to be deployed to disperse sugary liquid solution to help clear the air of microscopic particles.

It is not clear how effective that will be given the scale of the smog cloaking the city. Aswin also said City Hall may soon issue a warning against exercising in parks. Air Visual, an independent online air quality index (AQI) monitor, yesterday pegged Bangkok at the



BANGKOK: A young girl wears a face masks as she plays a piano in the central business district. — AFP

“unhealthy” level of 171, up from 156 mid-month. “It’s a public health crisis,” said Tara Buakamsri, Greenpeace country director for Thailand.

Measurements of harmful particulates are higher than some cities in China but well below the Indian capital New Delhi. Siwatt Pongpiachan, a professor of environmental science at the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), said that while the cold dry climate was part of the problem the government should “think seriously” about congestion measures limiting the number of cars on the road.

Pollution politics

The battle against smog comes during Thailand’s key tourist season, with the Chinese New Year getaway looming, in a country where earnings from for-

eign visitors make up around a fifth of the economy. Edward Huang, a 28-year-old tourist from Taiwan who was wearing a mask, said visitors may be deterred from trips to Bangkok. “The air is just so bad,” he said. The haze is also starting to seep into the political conversation.

Thailand is set to hold an election on March 24, the first since the military took over in a 2014 coup. “I don’t see serious measures being taken,” tweeted Chaturon Chaisang, a key member of the Thai Raksa Chart party, urging more to be done beyond the school closures. His party, closely linked to the politically powerful Shinawatra clan, has been quick to launch a “measure the pollution” app, while other parties have handed out masks — leaving the ruling junta appearing flat-footed in its response. — AFP

## Protests fizzle as Bibi expected to leave Pakistan

**ISLAMABAD:** A call by Pakistani religious hardliners for protests fell flat yesterday as Asia Bibi, the Christian woman at the centre of a years-long blasphemy row, was expected to leave the country having cleared a last legal hurdle. The Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), which led days of violent mass demonstrations after Bibi was acquitted of blasphemy last year, announced new protests after the Supreme Court upheld her innocence in a fresh ruling Tuesday.

But its leaders remain in detention after a government crackdown several weeks ago, and police deployed heavily at the junction between the capital Islamabad and neighboring Rawalpindi which the TLP had designated as a protest site, preventing any huge gathering. A mere 20 people demonstrated in Lahore while just eight mobilized in Rawalpindi, despite emotive calls from the TLP that its supporters “cannot compromise on the honor of the Prophet”.

Bibi, a laborer from central Punjab province, was convicted of blasphemy in 2010 and was on death row until her acquittal last year. She has been in protective custody since, and the government has refused to reveal her whereabouts for fear of her being targeted by vigilantes. On Tuesday the Supreme Court threw out a petition seeking a final appeal in the case, which has drawn worldwide attention to religious extremism in Pakistan.

“Is this the face of Islam that we want to show to the world?” Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa asked a packed courtroom in Islamabad as he delivered the decision, expressing frustration at the furious reaction by an extremist minority to Bibi’s case over the years. The ruling has set the stage for Bibi to finally leave the country. Speculation is rampant that she will seek asylum in a North American or European country, and unconfirmed reports suggest her children have already fled to Canada. —AFP



1358

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the Permanent Committee for National Celebrations and Events  
is organizing the flag hoisting ceremony  
at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad cultural Center (Flag Plaza)  
on Thursday the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, 2019 at 3:30 pm

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International

# US starts returning asylum seekers back to Mexico to await court dates

## Critics say the policy is xenophobic and could put refugees at risk

**TIJUANA:** The United States began sending migrants who have applied for asylum back to Mexico on Tuesday to await their court dates under a controversial new policy from President Donald Trump. Carlos Gomez of Honduras, who arrived at the border in a caravan of thousands of Central American migrants last year, was the first to be sent back, Mexican authorities said.

Mexican immigration officials ushered Gomez, 55, who was carrying a blue backpack, into a waiting van and took him to an undisclosed migrant shelter in Tijuana, across the border from San Diego, California. The US embassy in Mexico City confirmed in a statement that Washington had begun implementing the new policy, Trump's latest bid to curb illegal immigration. Critics say the policy is xenophobic and could put vulnerable refugees at risk.

"The United States has begun implementing the Migrant Protection Protocols," the embassy said, using the US Department of Homeland Security's name for the plan — which the administration initially called the "Remain in Mexico" policy. "This action is a response to the illegal migration crisis the United States is facing on its southern border."

It said asylum claims in the US had increased by 2,000 percent in the past five years, "since many migrants know that applying for asylum gives them an opportunity to remain in the United States, even if they do not have a valid asylum claim." The policy will not apply to Mexicans seeking asylum, the US says. Under international law, asylum applicants cannot be sent back to the country they are fleeing.

### 'Catch and release'

Announced last year, the policy aims to curb what Trump calls "catch and release" — allowing migrants

who cross the border without papers and claim asylum to remain in the United States while their cases are processed. The Homeland Security Department says the change is needed because of a "humanitarian and security crisis" on the US southern border, caused by a broken immigration system "exploited by smugglers, traffickers, and those who have no legal right to remain in the United States."

The US says 90 percent of asylum claims are ultimately rejected as invalid by a judge. Most come from migrants fleeing poverty and gang violence in Central America's "Northern Triangle": Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. Many asylum applicants never show up for their court hearings, officials say. The system is badly backlogged, with 800,000 asylum requests currently pending. The process can take months or even years.

### 'Horribly bad idea'

But the new policy has been sharply criticized by opponents on both sides of the border. Migrants have been tortured, raped and killed in Mexico's often violent border regions, and the new policy violates the right of people whose lives are genuinely at risk to seek asylum in the US, activists say. "It's a horribly bad idea to implement this plan," said Melissa Crow of the Southern Poverty Law Center in the US, an advocacy group that has challenged Trump administration immigration policies in court.

"It's not safe for many, if not most, of these asylum seekers to wait in Mexico. Lots of them are fleeing cartel violence and domestic abusers," she told AFP. "There are examples of people being pursued by their persecutors while waiting in Mexico." Mexico has said it "disagrees" with the policy, but will grant the migrants temporary visas for humanitarian reasons



TIJUANA: Asylum seekers wait at El Chaparral crossing port at the US-Mexico border, in Tijuana, Baja California state, Mexico. —AFP

pending resolution of their asylum cases.

"The United States has decided unilaterally to ask them to wait in Mexico while their asylum claims are processed," said Rodolfo Figueroa, head of Mexico's immigration office in Tijuana. "We are also taking a unilateral decision to receive them. They are unilateral,

sovereign decisions by both countries." He said the number of migrants sent back daily would depend on the United States. Mexican authorities have said the US plans to continue presenting 20 people a day at the Tijuana crossing, and eventually extend the policy to other points along the 3,145-kilometer border. —AFP

## Canadian serial killer pleads guilty to eight murders

**OTTAWA:** A Canadian landscaper on Tuesday pleaded guilty to the murders of eight men with links to Toronto's gay community and the mutilation of their bodies, most of them chopped up and hidden inside planters. The plea entered by Bruce McArthur, 67, was a surprise — he had been scheduled to stand trial next year.

He now faces the likelihood of life in prison. A sentencing hearing is scheduled to start on February 4, when family and friends of the victims will have an opportunity to describe how the killings affected their lives. The case shocked all of Canada, and especially the gay community. It sparked a massive investigation in Toronto, the country's largest city, at dozens of properties where McArthur had worked. "Bruce McArthur has pled guilty," Homicide Detective David Dickinson told reporters outside the courtroom. "It's the right outcome."

"Unfortunately, we can never bring these men back. But I'm hoping we can start bringing closure to the families and the communities," he said, describing the "long and traumatic process" to bring McArthur to justice. McArthur was arrested in January 2018. Body parts of seven of the victims were found hidden inside large planters that McArthur stored at a client's home in midtown Toronto. The remains of an eighth victim were later discovered in a ravine behind the property.

The victims in the case were McArthur's former lover, two Afghan immigrants, two refugees from Sri Lanka and another from Iran, a Turkish national, and a homeless sex worker. All went missing from 2010 to 2017. Karen Fraser — the owner of the home where McArthur stored his planters, and who had casually met two of the victims — said she is "haunted" by the case. "Terrible things were done," she said. "To me, he's evil."

### 'A monster'

Prosecutor Michael Cantlon described to the court how McArthur had "staged" the corpses of his victims and photographed them, according to local reports. He also kept mementos such as jewelry and a notebook. The murders were "sexual in nature," according to an agreed statement of facts. The court document said police uncovered a duffle bag containing duct tape, a surgical glove, rope, zip ties, a bungee cord, and syringes — evidence pointing to some of the victims being tied up, confined and sexually assaulted prior to their deaths.

Authorities also located a calendar belonging to McArthur's boyfriend which had the entry "Bruce" on the day in June 2017 that he went missing, as well as video surveillance footage of the victim getting into McArthur's van, where a murder weapon was also found. Few other details of the crimes were revealed in court documents. "We will never get all the answers... unless (McArthur) decides to give us that information," commented Haran Vijayanath of the Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention. In a statement, Toronto mayor John Tory called McArthur "a monster who preyed on the city."

### Pattern of violence

McArthur first came under suspicion in September 2017 in connection with the disappearance of his lover Andrew Kinsman, but police at first rejected suggestions that a serial killer was prowling Toronto's Gay Village neighborhood. Last January, police made a quick decision to enter McArthur's apartment and arrest him when they saw a young man enter his home. They found the man tied up on a bed, but unharmed.

McArthur had not acknowledged his sexual orientation until he was in his 40s. He suddenly left his wife and two children and moved to Toronto in 1997, where he became well known within the gay community. A psychiatric assessment after his first run-in with the law in 2001 said he likely harbored "underlying resentments" but concluded that he was not dangerous. —AFP

## British PM faces improbable Brexit rewrite

**LONDON:** British Prime Minister Theresa May pinned her hopes on persuading Brussels to rewrite the Brexit divorce deal but EU leaders insisted yesterday they would not budge. Having comprehensively rejected the withdrawal agreement last month, MPs late Tuesday backed an amendment saying they would support the deal if its controversial "backstop" clause concerning the Irish border was removed.

Bolstered by the mandate from parliament, May made the decision to revisit a pact she herself sealed with the 27 EU leaders at a summit last month. With Britain otherwise on course for a chaotic exit from the bloc on March 29, May admitted she faces a formidable challenge convincing Brussels to re-open an accord that took 18 excruciating months to conclude. And there was no sign that European leaders were prepared to unpick the backstop in order to salvage the deal.

A spokesman for EU Council President Donald Tusk swiftly insisted the Brexit deal was "not open for renegotiation". Yesterday, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier reiterated: "The position of

the European Union is very clear". German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas told the Funke media group that the existing draft deal was "the best and only solution for an orderly exit".

The backstop insurance policy could legally lock the UK into EU trade rules indefinitely in order to keep the Irish border free-flowing. Guy Verhofstadt, who heads the European Parliament's six-member Brexit steering group, said the backstop clause was "absolutely needed" and there was hardly room to change the deal. Going further, Philippe Lamberts, who is on the group, told BBC radio that hard Brexiters were "believing in a mirage". "There will be a price to pay, but the calculus made on this side of the Channel is the price of hurting the integrity of the single market will be bigger, and if we have a choice to make between two evils, then no deal is the lesser evil," he said.

### 'Throw of the dice'

London stocks rose 0.6 percent in early trade and the pound rebounded slightly Wednesday after suffering heavy losses on worries about a possible no-deal Brexit. The pound "has not collapsed into oblivion because... we are not yet at the no-deal do-or-die moment," said Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Markets.com.

Carolyn Fairbairn, who heads the Confederation of British Industry main business lobby group, said: "I don't think

sub-Saharan migrants that its ship pulled out of the Mediterranean on January 19. Sea Watch 3 is sailing under a Dutch flag and currently sheltering from bad weather off Sicily. It picked up the migrants and asylum-seekers — including eight minors — off the coast of Libya as they made the treacherous crossing.

The Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on Tuesday urged the Italian government to "take all necessary measures, as quickly as possible", to provide migrants on board the Sea Watch 3 with medical care, water and food. Migrants rescued at sea have frequently been left in limbo since Italy's anti-immigration government began turning them away last summer. Europe has been wrestling with divisions over how to handle the problem since the migration crisis of 2015 when more than one million people arrived on its shores, many of them fleeing conflict in the Middle East.

Salvini, who has warned that he was considering legal action against Sea Watch's crew, said Tuesday that the 47 migrants can disembark if they agree to leave for Germany or the Netherlands. French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday called for the need for "humane solutions" for migrant rescue operations and urged that migrants be allowed to disembark at the nearest port, in this case "in Italy".



LONDON: Anti-Brexit activists travel on an old red London Routemaster bus, with EU flags in its windows, as they drive around Westminster. —AFP

there will be a single business stopping or halting their no-deal planning because of last night's Brexit vote. Renegotiation is a throw of the dice. It must succeed or fail fast." The winning amendment calls for the backstop to be replaced with "alternative arrangements to avoid a hard border" — vague wording that did not pin May to any specific approach.

Britain's Brexit Secretary Stephen

Barclay said "the dynamic did change" with the vote, but offered no specifics on what the alternative arrangements might involve, saying London was looking at technological solutions, time limits and exit clauses. Elsewhere in Tuesday's votes, MPs also backed a non-binding measure that "rejects the United Kingdom leaving the European Union without a withdrawal agreement". —AFP



ROME: Some demonstrators hold placards reading "We are not fishes" during a gathering organized by local human rights associations in support of the 47 migrants including minors, stranded aboard the Dutch-flagged rescue vessel Sea Watch 3, in front of Italian parliament. —AFP

He said sharing of the care of migrants came after, and that France was committed to that principal. In a similar case earlier this month, the EU struck a deal to share out between eight European countries nearly 50 migrants stranded aboard two ships, one of which was Sea Watch 3. The Netherlands on Monday rebuffed

Italy's call to take in the 47 migrants, arguing that Dutch-flagged ship had acted "on its own initiative". Some 113,482 migrants crossed the Mediterranean to reach Europe last year, according to the UN refugee agency, which said 2,262 people lost their lives or went missing making the perilous journey. —AFP

## Three Iraqis held for 'Islamist attack' plot in Germany

**BERLIN:** German police commandos yesterday arrested three Iraqis suspected of planning an Islamist attack using explosives, a gun and a vehicle. Two of the men had "decided in late 2018 to carry out an Islamist attack in Germany, a" prosecutors said in a statement. "According

to the investigation so far, the accused had not yet chosen a target for their attack. "Whether the accused belonged to a terrorist group must now be clarified."

The suspects were identified only as Shahin F and Hersh F, both aged 23, and their alleged supporter, the 36-year-old Rauf S. They were detained in early-morning raids in Dithmarschen, Schleswig-Holstein state, near the Danish border. Shahin F had allegedly accessed bomb-building manuals online and asked a contact in Britain to send him a fuse, a plan that was however foiled by UK police. He and Hersh F had also collected explosive material from fireworks, said authorities. And they had asked Rauf to procure a gun, but rejected as

too expensive a Makarov 9mm weapon on offer from a man identified as Walid Khalel in the statement.

Because the Iraqi men had wanted to use a vehicle in their attack, Shahin F had also started driving lessons early this year, said prosecutors. Police also carried out related raids in the states of Mecklenburg-Pommern and Baden-Wuerttemberg. News site Spiegel Online reported, quoting unnamed security sources, that the men had arrived in Germany in the autumn of 2015, at the height of the refugee influx that brought over a million asylum seekers. One of the suspects had allegedly spoken of wanting to target the largest possible group of "non-believers, but not children", Spiegel Online said. —AFP



## International

# Life-threatening arctic chill sweeps over the US Midwest

## Forecast to be the coldest in a generation

**CHICAGO:** Tens of millions of people in the United States are bracing for a potentially life-threatening deep arctic chill forecast to hit swaths of the country today. Companies have told their workers to stay home, schools are closed and hundreds of flights have been canceled. The US Postal Service — known for its commitment to bringing the mail whatever the weather — has even reportedly suspended deliveries in Iowa due to the severe cold.

Temperatures in almost a dozen states stretching more than 1,200 miles from the Dakotas to Ohio were forecast to be the coldest in a generation, if not on record. “One of the coldest arctic air mass intrusions in recent memory is surging south into the Upper Midwest before spreading across much of the eastern two-thirds of the country,” the National Weather Service said.

“Expect frigid temperatures, bitterly cold and life-threatening wind chills, likely leading to widespread record lows and low maximum temperatures from the Upper Midwest to the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley.” The cause is a swirl of arctic air that broke away from the polar vortex that usually encircles the North Pole.

### Frostbite warnings

The National Weather Service forecast temperatures between -10 to -40 degrees Fahrenheit (-23 to -40 Celsius) by Wednesday across the Midwest, with wind chills making it seem as cold as -65 degrees Fahrenheit in one area of Minnesota. Chicago, America's third largest city, was expected to be colder than parts of Antarctica. Authorities in Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin put emergency measures in place to handle the frigid weather. “We need everyone to do your part and make sure you and your families are prepared,” said Illinois Governor JB Pritzker.

Americans were asked to stay home if possible

yesterday, when temperatures are expected to be at their coldest. Scores of schools, businesses and government agencies announced closures in multiple states. “People exposed to extreme cold are susceptible to frostbite in a matter of minutes,” warned the NWS. Lawrence Gottlieb of the University of Chicago Medical Center said the threat was significant “when temps fall below zero, especially when there is a strong wind.”

Some 160 warming centers were opened in Chicago, where temperatures could potentially equal or exceed the all-time record of -27 degrees Fahrenheit. With the wind chill, it would feel like -40 or -50, officials said. “They are life-threatening conditions and temperatures,” Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel told a news conference. In Minneapolis, officials allowed residents to stay on public buses and trains for warmth.

### Snow storm

In the northeastern and southern United States, snow was falling. A cold emergency was declared in the US capital Washington, with additional services put on for the homeless. In Atlanta, some 300 flights were canceled Tuesday as the city prepares for the Super Bowl and more than 400 were canceled in Chicago, a major regional hub for US airlines.

### Global warming?

In Canada, the icy temperatures — stretching from Manitoba in the western Prairies region to the Atlantic seaboard — prompted a rare “hazardous” cold warning from the government. Environment Canada reported record-breaking snowfall at the Ottawa airport, where some 50 flights were canceled, with an accumulation of nearly a meter (more than three feet). An additional 200 flights were canceled at Toronto's airport.



MONTREAL: A cold winter day is viewed in Montreal, on January 29, 2019. —AFP

Scientists say climate change is causing more extreme weather, and one theory for polar vortex chills is that arctic air currents usually trapped around the North Pole are weakened and dislodged by a warming climate. President Donald Trump used the occasion to again voice skepticism about climate change, tweeting:

“What the hell is going on with Global Warming? (sic) Please come back fast, we need you!” But the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which operates NWS, tweeted, “Winter storms don't prove that global warming isn't happening,” with a link to a 2015 explanatory article. —AFP

## Trump tells lawmakers: Don't waste your time

**WASHINGTON:** Republican and Democratic members of Congress will open negotiations today in search of a deal to fund the government and address border security, including the construction of a wall demanded by US President Donald Trump. The team of negotiators from the House of Representatives and the Senate have less than three weeks to come up with legislation to appropriate funds.

The bill needs to be one that the president will accept before money runs out again on Feb. 15 or the government faces the threat of another partial shutdown. “If the committee of Republicans and Democrats now meeting on Border Security is not discussing or contemplating a Wall or Physical Barrier, they are Wasting their time!” he wrote. Even if congressional negotiators forge a deal, it is unclear whether Trump would accept it. Negotiators, who are scheduled to meet for the first time later on Wednesday, must wrap up their work around Feb. 10 in order to pass legislation in time to meet the Feb 15 deadline

He threatened to shut the government down again later this month if Congress cannot come up with a satisfactory deal, or said he would turn to a national emergency declaration to get the wall built — a potential move that both Republicans and Democrats have vowed to fight. —Reuters

## US intel chiefs at odds with Trump claims on N Korea, IS and Iran

**WASHINGTON:** US intelligence chiefs contradicted some of President Donald Trump's most fundamental foreign policy claims Tuesday, underscoring a persistent division in his view of the world and theirs. In a hearing on global threats at the Senate Intelligence Committee, the country's top spies took issue with Trump's assertion that the Islamic State group has been defeated, and that North Korea can be convinced to forego its nuclear weapons.

They also challenged Trump's claim that Tehran is actively seeking nuclear weapons, the justification Trump gave for withdrawing last year from a multilateral treaty on Iran. And they underscored again that Russia meddled deeply on Trump's behalf in the 2016 presidential election — which he has repeatedly denied — and can be expected to do the same in 2020. The hearing took place weeks after Trump cited a victory over Islamic State to justify his sudden announcement of an immediate pullout from Syria — a move that alarmed the US defense establishment and allies in the Middle East.

And it came just weeks before Trump plans a second summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to negotiate a hoped-for denuclearization of the hermit state. Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats told the

committee that the US intelligence community believes it is unlikely that Pyongyang will agree to completely denuclearize. “We continue to assess that North Korea is unlikely to give up all of its nuclear weapons and production capabilities, even as it seeks to negotiate partial denuclearization steps to obtain key US and international concessions,” Coats said in the annual “Worldwide Threat Assessment” report. “North Korea's leaders see having a nuclear weapons capability as “critical to regime survival.”

The report also warned that Islamic State is hardly vanquished and could easily rise again in a vacuum left by departing US forces, resuming global attacks and restarting its propaganda machine. “ISIS still commands thousands of fighters in Iraq and Syria, and it maintains eight branches, more than a dozen networks, and thousands of dispersed supporters around the world, despite significant leadership and territorial losses,” Coats said.

### Iran complying with deal

The Coats report highlighted the broad and increasing threat to the United States from China, a point of agreement across the board in the Trump administration. It characterized the US-China struggle as an ideological battle between the Western model of a democratically-based economy and China's authoritarian capitalism.

“Chinese leaders will increasingly seek to assert China's model of authoritarian capitalism as an alternative — and implicitly superior — development path abroad, exacerbating great-power competition that could threaten international support for democracy, human rights and the rule of law,” the report said.

It also warned of a growing alignment between China and Russia, saying their relationship “is likely to

strengthen in the coming year as some of their interests and threat perceptions converge, particularly regarding perceived US unilateralism and interventionism and Western promotion of democratic values and human rights.” FBI Director Christopher Wray told the panel that the FBI is investigating Chinese economic espionage in nearly all of its 56 field offices around the country. “China writ large is the most significant counterintelligence threat we face,” Wray said.

### Iran adhering to nuclear deal

But the intelligence community showed a distinct divergence on other thrusts of Trump policy. On Iran, Central Intelligence Agency Director Gina Haspel told the hearing that the country is still abiding by the terms of the 2015 nuclear deal, despite Trump's decision to withdraw last year, claiming Tehran had broken it.

“At the moment technically they are in compliance” with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Haspel told lawmakers. “I think the most recent information is the Iranians are considering taking steps that would lessen their adherence to JCPOA as they seek to pressure the European to come through with the investment and trade benefits that Iran hoped to gain from the deal.”

There was no comment from the White House on the Coats report. But analysts said it showed a glaring divide that has existed since the beginning of Trump's term in 2017. “A normal human being listening to the intel chiefs today on Iran and North Korea would conclude that Trump was dead wrong to withdraw from the JCPOA and dead right to negotiate with KJU even though zero nukes was magical thinking,” said Aaron David Miller, director of the Middle East program at the Woodrow Wilson Center think tank in Washington. —AFP

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## FOCUS

## Indian businesses fear opposition's guaranteed income plan, see higher taxes

India's main opposition Congress Party is promising to introduce a minimum income guarantee for the poor if it wins power in an election due by May, alarming some big and small business leaders who are asking: Where will the money come from? The program - which would be one of the world's biggest schemes for poor households, supporting around 300 million people - has yet to be finalized.

But already some business organizations say they fear the tens of billions of dollars it would be expected to cost will mean higher taxes and reduced spending on badly needed infrastructure such as roads and railways. "We are against such freebies," said Pronab Sarkar, head of a tour company in Delhi and the president of the Indian Association of Tour Operators. "These could be funded only through higher taxes on industry and the middle class."

Congress says much of the cost of the guaranteed income scheme could come from savings made by cracking down on tax evasion and ensuring existing subsidies on staples such as food and fuel went only to those who qualified. A senior Congress official, however, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters the party might also consider raising tax rates for the rich to pay for its plan. "Eventually, it boils to transferring the resources to some extent from the rich to the poor people," the official said.

Until a few months ago, the grip of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pro-business Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on power seemed unassailable. But a series of defeats for the BJP in state elections at the end of last year, and some opinion polls suggesting its support has waned, have raised prospects that Congress could take power in alliance with regional parties and those based on specific groups, such as the lower caste Dalits. That has meant the minimum income plan outlined by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi this week - which would be in addition to current welfare programs - is being taken seriously by business groups.

### Modi disappoints

As the BJP's fortunes have waned, disillusionment with Modi's government had been growing among some industrialists, who were stung by a sudden ban on high-denomination banknotes in 2016 and the chaotic 2017 launch of a national sales tax. As the party seeks to win back voters concerned about low farm incomes and the pace of job creation, Modi's promise three years ago to cut the corporate tax rate to 25 percent, from 30 percent, has been shelved for now.

The government is expected to announce a series of spending measures and tax changes in an interim budget on Friday costing at least 1 trillion rupees (\$14 billion). As a result, the budget deficit targets the government had set for the current and the next fiscal years may not be met. Concerns that Modi is backsliding on fiscal prudence pale, though, compared with worries about the Congress plan, according to several business people who spoke to Reuters.

S C Ralhan, former head of the Federation of Indian Exporters Organizations (FIE), and a leading engineering goods exporter through his company Sri Tools, said India could not afford the minimum income guarantee as it would have to be paid for by businesses and individual taxpayers. "Congress party's electoral promise could tilt traders' and urban middle class voters towards Modi, since they would have to bear the economic pressure," said Praveen Khandelwal, secretary general of the Confederation of All India Traders.

The view from the business world was not uniform, though. D S Rawat, head of the Confederation of Organic industries of India, said that "rich businesses should sacrifice" to prevent millions of households from being left behind in India's development. He represents the niche food processing industry with a membership of more than 250 companies. Government economic advisers said it would be difficult to dismantle current welfare programs, such as food subsidies and a rural job guarantee program, to make up for the guaranteed income proposal.

Private economists and the rating agencies, though, warned that Congress's proposed income support scheme, if carried out without replacing current welfare programs, could widen the deficit further. Under Modi, higher spending, along with a shortfall in tax collections, will already push the fiscal deficit up to 3.5 percent of gross domestic product for the year ending in March, overshooting a previous 3.3 percent target, according to sources with direct knowledge of budget discussions.

Devindra Pant, chief economist of India Ratings, an arm of Fitch, estimated that income support of about 5,000 rupees per month for about 260 million people, about one fifth of India's population, could cost about 4 trillion rupees (\$56.24 billion) a year, or about 2 percent of the GDP. "Whichever party comes to power, government finances are likely to remain under pressure for next few years," he said. —Reuters



A man walks past a mosaic depicting late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez (left) and current Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on a wall in Caracas yesterday. —AFP

## New fault line exposed in US-Russia rivalry

The crisis in Venezuela has triggered fresh tensions between Washington and Moscow, with chilly exchanges at the United Nations, but analysts warn against the temptation of seeing the return of Cold War-style divisions. Since Venezuelan parliament leader Juan Guaido declared himself president on January 23 to challenge leader Nicolas Maduro, the rivalry between the US and Russia has returned with a vengeance. Washington, as well as Europe and most of Latin America, has backed Guaido, while Russia, joined by China, has denounced US pressure and insisted that its ally Maduro is the only legitimate head of state.

"There's a Cold War atmosphere," says Thomas Posado, an expert in foreign relations at the Paris VIII university in France, but "it's a lot less ideological". "What is particular about the Venezuelan crisis is that there are very contemporary economic interests at stake, linked to how Venezuela's debt is going to be reimbursed, and to

whom," he added. Russia and China have become the biggest lenders to Venezuela in recent years and the largest foreign investors in the country's oil sector, which sits on the largest deposit of proven crude reserves in the world.

The US has its own interests to protect in the country as the single biggest buyer of Venezuelan oil. "It's not the Cold War, it's not old-style American anti-Communist policy because there isn't any Communism anymore," said Richard Lapper, a Latin American expert from the Chatham House think-tank in Britain. Venezuela is just the latest in a succession of international crises on which Russia and the US have found themselves on opposite sides.

"You can't talk about there being some ideological divide like a new Cold War because you can't consider that Russia and China form a bloc" against the West, said Isabelle Facon from the France-based Foundation of Strategic Research. She said Moscow and Beijing have grown wary of US

and European foreign interventions after their decisions to help topple the governments of Iraq in 2003 and Libya in 2011. "They are very close in their criticism of what they see as the propensity of the United States and Europe to intervene and bring about regime change," Facon said.

### Splintering 'Western bloc'

The West, meanwhile, sees Russia as an increasingly aggressive power after its military interventions in Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014 and Syria in 2015, while China rapidly expands its global influence. Analysts also say that the unilateralist foreign policy choices of President Donald Trump have fractured the traditional Western alliance between the US and Europe, perhaps to the worst degree since World War II. This means the Cold War-idea of a unified "Western bloc" has become obsolete, while the European Union itself is divided on how to respond to the crisis.

At this stage, the EU looks unlikely to fol-

low Washington in imposing additional sanctions against Caracas. "I think it's a very high-risk strategy which the US and the Latin American countries are embarked on. You don't normally appoint an alternative government," Lapper said. "You assume that it's not going to last very long. The problem at the moment is that there's no sign yet of the high command of the armed forces in Venezuela ending their support for Maduro," he added. "And there's no sign that Russia and China will not support him."

Lapper sees the role of China as critical in Venezuela and many other Latin American countries, which is a major change from the Cold War-era. "One thing that's changed over the past few years is that Chinese policy in the region, rather than being accommodative, has begun to become more aggressive," Lapper said. "They're looking to shape things in Latin America as in the rest of the world. China's now the biggest trading partner for very many Latin American countries, and a very big source of investment." —AFP

## Nigerian women embrace family planning ahead of population boom

Modupe Adegbite's grandfather had 22 children, while her father had nine. At the age of just 19, she has decided she wants no more than four. "Why do you have so many children if you cannot feed them?" she asked. It's a question many young Nigerians will face over the coming decades in Africa's most populous country, where a booming population combined with poverty, record unemployment and rolling ethnic conflicts have some fearing a demographic "time-bomb".

Nigeria's population is expected to leap from 190 million today to 410 million by 2050 - and to almost twice that number again by the end of the century - according to the UN's World Population Prospects. That would mean that in just 30 years, Nigeria will be the world's third most populous nation, behind only China and India. For young women like Adegbite, who was born in Bada, one of the poorest neighborhoods in the economic capital Lagos, getting access to sex education and birth control can be difficult.

However Bada, which lacks electricity and paved roads, does have a family planning centre, which opened last year. Condoms, the pill and hormonal implants are freely available at the local 9ja Girls center, run by the US-based non-profit organization Populations Services International.

### Breaking taboos

"Most of the girls here are sexually active at 15, sometimes 14 years old," Naomi Ali of the 9ja Girls center told AFP. "They start very early, whatever their religion. So they quickly become pregnant and they stop going to school." At first teenagers and young women in the area were suspicious, but Ali said hundreds now openly talk in the street about once taboo issues such as sexuality and romantic relationships. "It's difficult, sometimes they believe that contraception will make them infertile, or the parents categorically reject it," she said.

Nigerian women have an average of 5.53 children, according to the World Bank, but the rate fluctuates greatly between major cities like Lagos and rural areas, where it reaches up to eight children per woman.

Mabingue Ngom, the UN Population Fund's regional director for West Africa, said the situation in northern Nigeria was "urgent". "If we do



Young girls listen to an educational talk about puberty at the Bada Primary Health Centre in Lagos on Nov 11, 2018. —AFP

nothing, we are going to face major problems," Ngom said. "Of the 20 million young Africans who enter the job market every year, only two to three million find work." "That's what feeds into conflicts and terrorism," he added, referring to the Boko Haram Islamist insurgency that emerged from northern Nigeria, an area which, along with neighbouring Niger, has the world's highest fertility rates.

Nigeria is fairly small compared to the world's other highly populous nations - at 923,000 sq km it's a 10th the size of the United States - and the fight for space is already causing conflict. In the fertile center of the West African country, clashes between farmers and herders over access to land and water have left several thousand dead last year.

### Booming population, booming market?

Efforts to encourage families to have fewer children have struggled in a country lacking a social safety net. The idea that having more children means elderly parents will more likely be taken care of after retirement remains deeply rooted in Nigerian society. But some analysts say large population growth could be an opportunity for the country, as foreign investors eye a rapidly expanding market.

Charles Robertson, global chief economist at Renaissance Capital, said population growth "should become a dividend for the next 20 years in Nigeria". He said Nigeria's priority should be to develop "a high level of adult literacy with a steady supply of electricity, especially in large cities." "It is the best way for young people to get better paid jobs and sustain their families."

Nigeria's Vice President Yemi Osinbajo seemed to agree at an economic forum last year. "To avoid the time-bomb scenario, we must act with urgency to build an economy that can support that population, provide jobs and economic opportunity, education and healthcare, hope and optimism," he said. —AFP

## Huawei charm offensive runs into buzzsaw of US charges

Fraud, obstruction of justice and cloak-and-dagger trade theft - a US rap sheet alleging systematic skullduggery by Chinese telecom giant Huawei has deepened the company's problems just as it sought to win back global trust. The US Justice Department this week unveiled a raft of charges against Huawei which could see its Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou extradited to the United States and threaten its business worldwide.

Meng's father - 74-year-old Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei - had spearheaded a rare recent charm offensive by the famously secretive company to salvage its reputation amid mounting espionage concerns. But that may be an uphill climb following the US allegations of brazen criminality at Huawei's highest levels. In a case centering on Meng, Huawei is charged with violating US and UN prohibitions on trading with Iran.

A separate case details a sustained effort to steal technology from telecom operator T-Mobile USA, plus the damaging allegation that Huawei rewarded staff for stealing competitors' technology secrets. None of the charges deal with deeper US concerns that Huawei's cheap equipment - used in telecommunications infrastructure across the globe - is a Trojan horse for potential Chinese state spying and sabotage.

### Gathering clouds

But the Justice Department's move strengthens Washington's leverage in isolating the company, said Paul Triolo, a global tech-policy expert with Eurasia Group. "The effort seems designed to make the case to allies... that while there is no smoking gun on cybersecurity, there are a host of other business practice, cultural, and legal issues clouding the company's future," he said. The main case levels 13 charges against Huawei Technologies, Meng - who faces an extradition hearing in

Canada on March 6 - and two affiliates over Iran sanctions violations.

The broader allegations in the case, filed in federal court in New York, were already known. But the charges detail efforts by Huawei and its subsidiaries to trick financial institutions into sanctions-busting activity. They say Meng "repeatedly lied" to bankers and that Huawei obstructed justice by destroying evidence and putting witnesses beyond the reach of US law enforcement. Huawei strenuously denies wrongdoing and Beijing has said the allegations are politically motivated. The charges stand in stark contrast to a narrative pushed by Huawei in recent weeks - perhaps in anticipation of the US revelations. Speaking to foreign reporters, the normally reclusive Ren portrayed Huawei as an unselfish global force for good in comments larded with flattery for President Donald Trump and US tech leaders like Apple. "We stand strongly against any behavior that violates laws and regulations," Ren said on Jan 16, touting a "very sound" compliance system and tough discipline for violators. But the New York charges reveal that Ren, whose background as a former Chinese army engineer has long raised red flags in Washington, was questioned by the FBI years ago, during which he repeatedly lied to US investigators about the nature of the Iran business.

### Trade secrets

A separate case in Washington state cites internal emails and other evidence detailing a 2012-13 effort to steal the technology specs of a phone-testing device developed by T-Mobile, then a partner in Huawei's ultimately failed push to enter the US market. Huawei staff repeatedly and surreptitiously took photos inside a T-Mobile facility and one staffer even stole a key part for the device, the charge sheet says. The company later concocted an "internal report" designed to cover up the theft and blame rogue staff. Perhaps the most damning allegation is that Huawei set up a system of bonuses for technology stolen from rivals. "You are being encouraged and could possibly earn a monetary award for collecting confidential information regarding our competitors and sending it back to (Huawei China)," an internal staff email is quoted as saying. —AFP



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CHICAGO: A locally owned CITGO station in Chicago with the new street image

# Citgo, the last gem of Venezuela's oil sector

## US curbs against PDVSA will freeze \$7bn in US-based assets, block \$11bn in exports

**WASHINGTON:** US sanctions imposed against Venezuela this week have cut off the final "gemstone" of the country's collapsed oil sector. Citgo, the US-based subsidiary of the Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA, was key to President Nicolas Maduro's fight to stay in power.

But Washington's financial pressures applied on Monday against PDVSA will freeze \$7 billion in US-based assets and block more than \$11 billion in export proceeds. With PDVSA in default on debt payments, the US-based refiner and retailer Citgo was a financial intermediary returning revenue to the regime. Venezuela got 96 percent of its hard currency revenues from oil exports, and the US was the biggest cash customer, buying half a million barrels per day.

In contrast, about a third of production goes to China and Russia but is used to pay off debts.

US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said Citgo can continue to operate-but its earnings must be deposited into a blocked account in the United States.

The sanctions aim to cripple Maduro after the US and other countries recognized Juan Guaido, the head of the National Assembly legislature who has declared

himself Venezuela's acting president.

"It will crush the Venezuelan economy. It's going to have a dramatic effect," Christopher Sabatini, adjunct professor of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, said of the sanctions.

In response, Maduro told PDVSA to take action in US and international courts to defend Citgo, his last big overseas asset, which allowed the country to sell its heavy crude into the US market. Citgo is based in Houston and has three refineries that specialize in heavy crude and have a total capacity of 750,000 barrels a day, according to the company website.

Founded as Cities Service Company by oilman Henry Doherty in 1910, it became wholly-owned by PDVSA in 1990. Citgo now employs 3,500 people, operates 48 petroleum product terminals, and has pipelines and a network of more than 5,000 service stations associated with the brand across the US.

Venezuela is a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and sits on the world's largest petroleum reserves, most of it heavy crude that is costly to produce.

But the country's economy has been shrinking since

2014, the year global oil prices collapsed.

### Chronic under-investment

Worsening conditions have forced more than two million people to flee the country, where food and medicine are scarce and the International Monetary Fund forecasts that inflation this year will reach 10 million percent. Venezuelan oil output has fallen from more than three million barrels per day in the 1990s to 1.339 mbd last year, according to OPEC data.

Production has been hampered by chronic under-investment by PDVSA. Sabatini described Citgo as "the last remaining gemstone of the Venezuelan oil empire," a company which was "the anchor to the US market." Since 2017, Washington had already forbidden US citizens and companies from trading debt issued by Venezuela or PDVSA. "When PDVSA began to have default and sanctions, nobody wanted to give credit to PDVSA," said Francisco Monaldi, a fellow in Latin American energy policy at Rice University in Houston.

But Citgo has "a good cash flow" in the United States, which enabled the state oil firm to make purchases without having to pay up-front.

The US company, for example, could buy products such as the diluent required to process heavy oil and send them back to Venezuela. "It is a strategic resource in that sense," Monaldi said, adding that the company also allowed Venezuela to have a lobbying voice in the US oil industry.

Sabatini said that, with the new sanctions, Venezuela will not be able to immediately export to other countries because of the technicalities of processing its heavy crude. It is not simply a matter of re-routing a pipeline to a different market. Rather, he said, it takes time for countries to adjust to the different product.

"There will be lag time," said Sabatini. As for the effect on oil prices in the US-one of the main reasons Washington until now did not want to impose sanctions on Venezuela-Sabatini said this is harder to predict. "Right now, the US is producing enough and the markets are sufficiently flushed that it may not disrupt" the oil market, he said. Rising US oil production late last year left the country a net exporter of crude and petroleum products for the first time in decades. Mnuchin said US gas prices are already "almost as low as they've been in a very long period of time." — AFP

## US, China launch high-level trade talks amid deep differences

**WASHINGTON:** The United States and China were set to try again yesterday to dig out from a damaging trade war with a new round of high-level talks aimed at bridging deep differences over China's intellectual property and technology transfer policies. Cabinet-level officials, led by Chinese Vice Premier Liu He and US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, are due to begin two days of talks at 9 a.m. EST (1400 GMT) next door to the White House. They come with about a month left in a 90-day trade truce agreed in December by President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

People familiar with the talks and trade experts watching them say that, so far, there has been little indication that Chinese officials are willing to address core US demands to protect American intellectual property rights and end policies that Washington says force US companies to transfer tech-

nology to Chinese firms. The US complaints, along with accusations of Chinese cyber theft of US trade secrets and a systematic campaign to acquire US technology firms, were used by the Trump administration to justify punitive US tariffs on \$250 billion worth of Chinese imports.

Trump has threatened to raise tariffs on \$200 billion of goods to 25 percent from 10 percent on March 2 if an agreement cannot be reached. He has also threatened new tariffs on the remainder of Chinese goods shipped to the United States. China has retaliated with tariffs of its own, but has suspended some and is allowing some purchases of US soybeans during the talks. "Clearly on the structural concerns, on forced technology transfer, there remains a significant gap if not a wide chasm between the two sides," a person familiar with the talks told Reuters. Chinese officials deny that their policies coerce technology transfers. — Reuters

## Huawei's founder faces fight for company and family

**BEIJING:** Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei survived food shortages during China's Cultural Revolution, but now the reclusive billionaire identified as "Individual-1" in a US indictment faces an existential fight for his family and company.

Ren, 74, founded Huawei in 1987 with just 21,000 yuan (\$5,600) and watched it grow into a global behemoth with 180,000 employees operating in 170 countries, sales of 206 million smartphones last year, and revenue topping \$100 billion.

But broad criminal charges unveiled in the United States this week are now threatening to wreck his empire and put his daughter, Huawei's chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou, behind bars.

The accusations dealt a blow to Huawei's image just as the famously secretive company had mounted a media blitz to salvage its reputation, with Ren leading the charge to dispute espionage concerns.

Huawei's PR department "says we're at a stage of crisis transition, I need to make our



BEIJING: This file picture shows people walking past a Huawei store in Beijing. — AFP

customers understand us," Ren told Chinese media this month.

"I've been forced" to speak out, he said. Meng, who was arrested in Canada and faces a US extradition hearing in March, was charged with bank fraud and other crimes related to violations of Iran sanctions.

The company was also accused of stealing technology secrets from telecom operator T-Mobile USA.

While Meng's father was not charged, the former Chinese army engineer also made an appearance in the indictment. Identified as "Individual-1", he "falsely stated" to FBI

agents during an interview in July 2007 that Huawei did not conduct any activity in violation of US export laws or dealt directly with any Iranian company, according to the documents.

The US Justice Department says the indictment charges other individuals but they have not been apprehended and their names will remain concealed for now.

"The criminal activity alleged in this indictment goes back at least 10 years and goes all the way to the top of the company," acting US Attorney General Matthew Whitaker said on Monday. — AFP



Business

# French growth slows in 2018 as ‘yellow vest’ protests take toll

## Consumer spending tapers off amid violent protests

**PARIS:** French economic growth slumped in 2018 as consumer spending tapered off toward the end of the year, the victim of violent anti-government protests that kept many shoppers at home ahead of the holidays, statistics office INSEE said yesterday.

GDP expanded by just 1.5 percent last year after the 2.3 percent growth chalked up in the 2017 after Emmanuel Macron swept into the presidency with his pledge to revive the French economy through pro-business reforms.

The 2018 outcome fell short of the government's growth target of 1.7 percent and economists warn of gathering risks that could jeopardize a recovery in 2019.

INSEE said consumer spending was stagnant in the fourth quarter after edging up 0.4 percent in the previous three months, as the "yellow vest" protests over high fuel taxes and low living standards sparked widespread disruption.

Dozens of shops were ransacked and cars burned in Paris and other cities during the weekly Saturday protests that erupted in mid-November. Road blockades also kept goods and supplies from reaching stores and businesses, causing production bottlenecks and shortages.

Even a heavy reduction in residential taxes for millions of French households which came into effect in late 2018, part of Macron's pledges to boost spending power, was not enough to entice the French to shop more. Household spending slumped, falling 0.4 percent in the final three months of the year, INSEE said, while growth in investment by companies slowed to 2.9 percent from 4.7 percent in the third quarter.

The government, which faces increasing difficulties

keeping public spending under control and the budget deficit within EU limits, tried to see the glass as half-full rather than half-empty.

"Despite the deterioration of the international environment and the yellow vest movement, French growth is solid," Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said on Twitter. "Our policies are paying off," he added.

**Clouds gathering**

But most of INSEE's main readings showed a French economy facing increasing headwinds, not least the trade tensions between Europe, China and the US under the protectionist policies of President Donald Trump. French exports rose 3.1 percent last year after a 4.7 percent jump in 2017, while industrial production gained 2.0 percent after 2.6 percent as construction and manufacturing lost steam.

Imports, a key indicator of French willingness to spend, rose just 1.1 percent last year after climbing 4.1 percent in 2017.

Looking ahead, the uncertainty surrounding Britain's looming exit from the EU and higher oil prices could also derail the French government's hopes of a rebound this year.

"The bottom line is that after two years of solid expansion, the world economy is growing more slowly than expected and risks are rising," Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund, said at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland last week. "Does that mean that a global recession is around the corner?" she asked. "No. But the risk of a sharper decline in global growth has certainly increased."

The IMF estimates French growth of 1.5 percent this year, below the government's target of 1.7 percent.



PARIS: French consumer spending was stagnant in the fourth quarter after edging up 0.4 percent in the previous three months, as the "yellow vest" protests over high fuel taxes and low living standards sparked widespread disruption. —AFP

Some economists say such projections may still be too optimistic.

"If oil prices keep rising, if home construction keeps slowing... and if businesses pull back on investing, French growth could plunge," said Patrick Artus, chief economist at the investment bank Natixis. In such a scenario, Artus says French economic growth risks falling "below one percent" for the year. —AFP

## Ghoshn says arrest was result of a ‘plot and treason’: Nikkei

**TOKYO:** Detained auto tycoon Carlos Ghosn believes his arrest and the charges against him are the result of a "plot and treason" at his former employer Nissan, he told the Nikkei newspaper yesterday. The Japanese business daily quoted Ghosn as saying he had "no doubt" that the charges against him were motivated by Nissan executives opposed to greater integration of the firm with its French alliance partner Renault.

It was the first press interview Ghosn has given since his stunning arrest on November 19, conducted in the Tokyo detention center where he has languished ever since.

A Nissan spokesman hit back immediately, saying that current CEO Hiroto Saikawa has "already categorically refuted the notion of a 'coup d'etat'". "The sole cause of this chain of events is the misconduct led by Ghosn and (chief of staff Greg) Kelly," the spokesman added. He said a Nissan probe had uncovered "substantial and convincing evidence of misconduct" and that the firm's focus is "firmly on addressing the weaknesses in governance" that allowed this misconduct to happen. The 64-year-old Ghosn has been denied bail several times, with the court considering him a flight risk and concerned he could attempt to destroy evidence.

But he again stressed that he "won't flee. I will defend (myself)", according to the Nikkei. "All the evidence is with Nissan and Nissan forbids all employees to talk to me," he added.

Even his own lawyer has said it is unlikely he will be released before a trial, which could take up to six months to organize given the complexity of the case. Ghosn faces three separate charges, all of which he denies. He stands accused of under-reporting his income between 2010 and 2015 to the tune of five billion yen (\$46 million) and continuing to do so for a further three years. —AFP

## Siemens boss blasts EU over Alstom rail merger

**BERLIN:** Joe Kaeser, chief executive of German conglomerate Siemens, launched yesterday a rare broadside against the European Commission, complaining that "backwards-looking technocrats" threatened to block a planned rail merger with France's Alstom. Green lights for major tie-ups are usually negotiated quietly behind closed doors in Brussels.

But the Siemens-Alstom battle has been fought out in public, with Kaeser and his backers in the French and German governments on one side and EU Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager on the other.

"It will be interesting to see if the future of mobility will be determined by backward-looking technocrats or future-oriented Europeans," Kaeser told reporters at a press conference on the group's first-quarter results.

That sentiment echoed a tweet he directed at Vestager Monday, telling the Danish politician that "it must be bitter to be technically right but to do everything wrong for Europe"-an apparent acknowledgement the Siemens chief

expects the merger to be blocked.

Kaeser is unusual among German bosses for taking strong public political positions, including against far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD). Now, four months ahead of the European Parliament elections, he has turned his ire on the EU.

"Many people complain that Europe is not establishing itself as a powerhouse", faced with new challenges from abroad, he lamented.

**Outdated rules?**

Liberal politician Vestager has well-known doubts about whether competition from Chinese rail behemoth CRRC is pressing enough to justify waving through the creation of a European giant, which would have operations in 60 countries and annual turnover of 15.6 billion euros (\$17.8 billion).

With its signalling systems and high-speed rolling stock, a combined Siemens-Alstom could crush smaller competitors or undermine market pricing in the rail sector. Several member state competition authorities share Brussels' concerns about the merger. Kaeser insisted that "European antitrust law came into effect in 1989 in a completely different context".

"It is naive to think that individual states can stand by themselves in front of Chinese competition," he added.



MUNICH: Flags of the German engineering giant Siemens are seen in front of the Olympic hall ahead the company's annual shareholder's meeting in Munich, southern Germany, yesterday —AFP.

French Finance and Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire shares that view, arguing ahead of a recent meeting with Vestager that "we can't take industrial decisions in the 21st Century using competition rules set in the 20th".

But competitors like Canada's Bombardier-whose rail activities are based in Berlin-contest the idea of the looming Chinese threat.

Alstom chief Henri Poupart-Lafarge

has admitted doubts that the merger will go ahead, saying in December there was "no certainty" the Commission would give its green light.

Brussels is expected to announce its decision between February 6 and the deadline of February 18.

A Commission spokesperson declined to comment on Kaeser's comments Wednesday when contacted by AFP. —AFP

## Turkmenistan plans to privatize transport sector

**ASHGABAT:** Turkmenistan's authoritarian leader has ordered a giant privatization of the state-owned transport sector, state media said yesterday, as the gas-rich nation struggles to shake off economic woes.

Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov said the move was "designed to help strengthen the competitiveness of the

national economy", boost investment and strengthen small and medium businesses, according to reports. The majority of reclusive Turkmenistan's economy has remained state-owned following independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

The new announcement points to pressures caused by over-reliance on oil and gas revenues in the Central Asian nation. The president did not say whether foreign companies would be able to invest in the new entities.

Berdymukhamedov took power in 2006 after the death of Saparmurat Niyazov, who styled himself as a father of the nation and pledged that transport-along with oil, gas and other sectors-would never be privatized. Before the privatization drive, Berdimukhamedov reversed generous subsidies that allowed citizens to consume water, electricity and gas

effectively free of charge. The president has given the justice ministry three months to propose legislative changes to transform wholly state-owned enterprises in the transport sector into joint-stock companies.

Last week state television showed Berdimukhamedov's son presiding over the groundbreaking for a \$2.3 billion highway that will be built by a little-known private company.

Turkmenistan, which sits on the world's fourth largest natural gas reserves, placed 161st out of 180 countries in anti-graft watchdog Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index released this week. The country's economic future is tied to sales of gas to China, as trade with traditional partners Russia and Iran has weakened in recent years. —AFP

### EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.		Yemen Riyal/for 1000		1.221	Turkish Lira		57.375	Chinese Yuan		0.043686	0.047186
EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES		Tunisian Dinar		103.720	Singapore dollars		224.548	Hong Kong Dollar		0.036972	0.039722
		Jordanian Dinar		428.480				Indian Rupee		0.003713	0.004485
		Lebanese Lira/for 1000		2.026				Indonesian Rupiah		0.000017	0.000023
		Syrian Lira		0.000				Japanese Yen		0.002697	0.002877
		Morocco Dirham		32.295				Korean Won		0.000262	0.000277
								Malaysian Ringgit		0.070496	0.076496
								Nepalese Rupee		0.002606	0.002945
								Pakistan Rupee		0.001564	0.002334
								Philippine Peso		0.005788	0.006088
								Singapore Dollar		0.219526	0.229526
								Sri Lankan Rupee		0.001327	0.001907
								Taiwan		0.010143	0.010323
								Thai Baht		0.009257	0.009807
								Vietnamese Dong		0.00013	0.00013



## Business

# Subject to contract: German firms set own Brexit terms

## Berlin slashes its economic growth forecast

**CHEMNITZ, Germany:** With Brexit less than two months away, and no divorce deal in sight, some German companies are taking matters into their own hands to limit any damage to their businesses. The small and mid-sized firms – albeit a small minority – say they can't wait any longer to see what agreement, if any, will emerge between London and Brussels. They are taking steps to protect themselves should a chaotic British withdrawal lead to traffic tailbacks, heavier customs bureaucracy and rising delivery costs after March 29, the planned break-up date.

Meanwhile, Berlin yesterday slashed its economic growth forecast for 2019, saying it now expects only 1.0 percent expansion for Germany compared with 1.8 percent previously. After GDP growth of 2.2 percent in 2017 and 1.5 percent last year, Economy Minister Peter Altmaier predicted a slow-down “largely due to the international environment”.

An uncertain Brexit outcome, trade conflicts—especially with the United States—and tax competition are weighing on the European powerhouse's prospects, he added. Altmaier's forecast confirms leaks last week to the German press and follows a 0.6 percentage point reduction in the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) outlook for Germany, to 1.3 percent growth.

But the country can continue counting on strong domestic demand, with unemployment expected to fall to 4.9 percent this year after 5.2 percent in 2018 — the lowest levels since reunification in 1990.

Meanwhile incomes are expected to rise 4.8 percent in 2019.

“Germany is on course for growth for the tenth year in a row. It's the longest upturn since 1966,” Altmaier said.

Kieselstein International, a maker of

metalworking machines, has for example successfully introduced a clause into a contract to deliver goods to British Steel that puts the onus on the UK firm to bear the costs of any extra red tape linked to Brexit.

“We included a clause that says if delivery takes place after March 29 the goods cannot be delivered to the buyer's warehouse but are to be picked up in Chemnitz,” managing director Jens Kieselstein told Reuters, referring to the town in Saxony where his business is based.

Others are taking measures such as finding new suppliers in continental Europe, should imports from Britain become more costly, stockpiling parts, or rushing to complete British orders before March 29 to avoid any disruption.

Such precautions are exceptions rather than the rule; among small and mid-sized companies – Germany's so-called Mittelstand – 77 percent believe Brexit will not affect them, according to a survey by the BVMW trade association conducted in December.

“We still have no binding information and have therefore decided to accept new orders and process them normally in the hope that the situation will soon be resolved,” said Jakob Kania, managing director of Support Q, a consultancy firm for suppliers to the automotive industry.

Mittelstand businesses, some of which are big suppliers to Britain's machinery and automotive sectors, are typically family-owned with up to 500 workers and annual revenues below 50 million euros. Many lack the resources for the detailed contingency planning carried out by corporate heavyweights.

Their fortunes are nonetheless crucial to Europe's biggest economy, accounting for more than half of Germany's jobs, a third of

its corporate turnover, and almost a fifth of the nation's exports – 7 percent of which went to Britain in 2017, worth about 84 billion euros (\$96 billion).

Mario Ohoven, president of the BVMW Mittelstand trade body, urged companies to check their contracts for Brexit risks, get to grips with customs procedures and visa formalities, and to consider switching to British haulage firms.

### ‘Orders near standstill’

British politicians continue to quarrel over the terms of Britain's exit from the EU, with parliament in deadlock. It is possible that Britain will leave without any deal to govern its trading relationship with the bloc – a scenario many businesses fear will bring chaos to the world's fifth-biggest economy.

With no visibility about future customs arrangements, Kieselstein, whose firm employs 50 people and has an annual turnover of 8 million euros, told British Steel he may have to add German sales tax of 19 percent onto the bill after March 29. Kieselstein isn't the only Mittelstand firm taking precautionary measures. Zabag Security Engineering, a maker of high-tech security gates and bollards, said it is looking for a new supplier in the EU for the grid mats it currently imports from Britain to avoid any disruptions to its supply chain.

The company, which makes about 10-15 percent of its sales in Britain, predicts difficulties in sending spare parts to Britain if extra customs red tape is introduced, and said this would have a big impact on trade and flexibility.

“The English market has always been a big part of our export business,” said a Zabag spokeswoman. “But the uncertainty of the English over Brexit has increasingly minimized the number of orders placed with



BERLIN: German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier presents the annual economy report to the media yesterday. — AFP

us and almost come to a standstill.” Joerg Daubner, managing director of DHD audio in Leipzig, which builds mixing consoles for radio and TV stations worldwide, said he was preparing to deliver a large order to Britain's BBC before March 29.

“The transition period will be critical so we want to avoid delivering during this time,” he told Reuters.

Even for firms taking precautionary measures, the ongoing uncertainty limits how much they can act.

Max Frank, a Bavarian producer of products to reinforce concrete buildings, has started stockpiling parts at its British subsidiary in Stoke-on-Trent to limit any delays from customs disruption.

“Our plan is to displace the stock of standard goods by roughly 10-20 percent

from mid-February,” said Gerhard Bumes, who runs the subsidiary that employs 65 people.

“However, we produce a lot of goods made-to-order which we can't stock. We hope not to have any delays in our imports, but unfortunately there is no defined political plan at the moment.”

### Hoping for the best

Germany's VDMA engineering association warned yesterday that a no-deal Brexit was getting closer by the day, after the British parliament instructed Prime Minister Theresa May to renegotiate an exit treaty. “Unfortunately even after the vote in the British lower house, there is no new hope of avoiding a disorderly Brexit,” said VDMA head Thilo Brodtmann. — Agencies

## Boeing shares surge on strong Q4 profits, 2019 outlook

**NEW YORK:** Boeing reported better-than-expected fourth-quarter profits yesterday and projected another strong year in 2019 on surging commercial plane deliveries. The aerospace giant, which has been boosted by a multi-year plane building boom amid surging global air travel demand, reported fourth-quarter profits of \$3.4 billion, up 3.1 percent from the same period a year ago.

Revenues were \$28.3 billion, up 14.4 percent. Several of the company's finan-

cial figures were company records, including annual revenues topping \$100 billion for the first time at \$101.1 billion.

“Across the enterprise, our team delivered strong core operating performance and customer focus, driving record revenues, earnings and cash flow and further extending our global aerospace industry leadership in 2018,” said Boeing chief Executive Dennis Muilenburg.

Boeing projected 2019 profits of \$19.90 to \$20.10 per share, well above the \$18.31 seen by analysts. It expects to deliver between 895 and 905 commercial planes, up from 806 in 2018. Boeing's most popular aircraft have moved past the initial production phases when costs are higher into a stage of increased plane delivery that is more profitable. Shares jumped 6.2 percent in pre-market trading to \$386.95. —AFP



PARIS: In this file photo, the Boeing logo on the fuselage of a Boeing 787-10 Dreamliner test plane is seen on the Tarmac of Le Bourget on the eve of the opening of the International Paris Air Show. — AFP

## Fed likely to hold rates steady as it navigates data blind spots

**WASHINGTON:** In the six weeks since a confident US Federal Reserve raised interest rates in response to a “strong” US economy, consumer confidence dropped, wholesale prices weakened, financial markets wobbled and home sales fell.

Further afield, China tried to boost lending for its slowing economy, the European Central Bank acknowledged ebbing growth in the euro zone, and the International Monetary Fund cut its world economic growth forecast and warned that global trade had nosedived as major nations squabbled about tariffs. As they concluded their latest two-day policy meeting yesterday, Fed policymakers will have to decide how big a risk all of that poses to the near-decade-long US economic expansion.

Their task is made more difficult by the delayed release of key economic data due to the recent 35-day partial shutdown of the US government, including important reports on retail sales and gross domestic product.

If the case for caution wasn't strong enough, the sudden onset of a thick economic fog has made it so, analysts said ahead of this week's policy decision.

Fed officials are “clearly sounding as if they are pausing ... They don't know exactly what's happened to the economy because the data hasn't been coming through,” said Melanie Baker, senior economist at Royal London Asset Management. The US central bank is scheduled to release its latest policy statement at 2 p.m. EST (1900 GMT), with investors widely expecting it to leave its benchmark overnight lending rate unchanged in a target range of 2.25 percent to 2.50 percent.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell is due to hold a

press conference shortly after the statement's release.

### Possible spots

Analysts at Goldman Sachs said they expected the Fed to “water down” the language from the December policy statement in which the central bank said “some further” rate increases would be warranted this year. Such a move could pave the way for a possibly extended pause in monetary tightening, buying the Fed the time to see whether unemployment remains low and inflation, which by some measures has weakened, continues to hover around its 2 percent target.

The Fed raised rates four times last year amid unexpectedly stronger US economic growth, spurring sharp criticism from President Donald Trump who accused the central bank of undercutting economic growth. At its policy meeting in December, the Fed signaled it would raise rates twice in 2019, though it is now expected to hold off lifting borrowing costs for at least its next few meetings. Fed policymakers have been clear they plan to be “patient” on this front.

Investors, on the other hand, have fully written off the likelihood of any rate increases this year.

Those expectations could shift in either direction depending on whether the Fed's policy statement continues to characterize economic growth as strong and still describes the risks to the economic outlook as “roughly balanced,” or whether policymakers feel recent events point to slower-than-expected growth.

Financial markets will also be watching how the Fed handles the growing spotlight on its practice of running off up to \$50 billion in Treasury bonds and mortgage-backed securities from its balance sheet each month. Some investors have cited that “taper” as a cause of recent market turbulence, saying the Fed has sent a confusing signal as it tacitly puts upward pressure on long-term interest rates even as policymakers seem ready to halt, for now, any more overt moves to raise rates.

The monthly decreases in the balance sheet are likely to continue, but many investors hope Powell will in his press conference be more precise about how much longer they may go on. — Reuters

### News in brief

#### Alibaba profit up 37%

**SHANGHAI:** Chinese e-commerce leader Alibaba said yesterday that net profit increased 37 percent in the latest quarter as growth in cloud computing and other business lines helped offset a slowing expansion in core online retail. The company's net profit grew to 33.0 billion yuan (\$4.9 billion) in the October-December third quarter, compared to 24.1 billion yuan over the same period in 2017. Alibaba dominates China's emerging consumer culture and its corporate results were widely anticipated for any signs of whether a worsening Chinese economic slowdown and the US-China trade tussle was curbing the country's appetite for shopping. Revenue growth slowed to 41 percent in the quarter, with sales in its core e-commerce business coming in at 40 percent. —AFP



Alibaba Group co-founder and executive chairman Jack Ma

#### Santander 2018 profit rises

**MADRID:** Spanish banking giant Banco Santander yesterday posted an 18 percent rise in 2018 net profit as revenue growth in Spain offset the negative impact of exchange rate fluctuations. The eurozone's largest bank by market value said earnings jumped to 7.81 billion euros (\$8.93 billion) last year, slightly higher than forecasts by analysts polled by financial information firm Factset at around 7.68 billion euros. In Spain, its second-biggest market, Santander's net profit jumped 28 percent to 1.45 billion euros as the number of its clients grew, the bank said in a statement. Santander said it had also began to reap benefits from its acquisition of troubled Spanish bank Banco Popular in June 2017. —AFP

#### LVMH posts record sales

**PARIS:** The world's leading luxury retailer LVMH posted record sales of 46.8 billion euros (\$53.5 billion) in 2018, up 10 percent from 2017 as markets grew in Asia, Europe, Japan, and the United States, it said Tuesday. LVMH, known for high-end brands such as Louis Vuitton leather goods and fashion, said net profit jumped 8 percent from a year earlier to 6.4 billion euros. “LVMH had another record year, both in terms of revenue and results,” a statement quoted chairman and chief executive Bernard Arnault as saying. The wines and spirits division benefitted from an “exceptional harvest both in terms of quantity and quality,” the company said, and “all business groups recorded excellent performances.” The group's brands include Moët & Chandon and Veuve Clicquot champagnes, Hennessy cognac and Chateau d'Yquem wine. —AFP

## Zimbabwe govt, unions in last-ditch talks to avert strike

**HARARE:** Zimbabwe's government will hold last-ditch negotiations with public sector unions yesterday to try to avert a national strike that could trigger more unrest after this month's violent protests.

But the main teachers union said it was not expecting any progress and was already making plans for a Feb. 5 walkout. The president's spokesman said troops would stay on the streets and the state would block the internet again if violence erupted. Teachers and other state workers are demanding wage rises and payments in dollars to help them stave off spiralling inflation and an economic crisis that has sapped supplies of cash, fuel and medicines.

Rights groups say at least 12 people were killed this month after a three-day stay-at-home strike over a fuel price hike led to street protests and a crackdown by security services. The government says three people died. Civil servants unions will meet the government from 1 pm (1100 GMT). “Today is the last meeting but we have already made a decision. We are talking to our constituency because we want this strike to have an impact,” Thomas Muzondo, the deputy president of the Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA) said.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa – who came to power in November 2017 after long-time ruler Robert Mugabe was forced to resign in a coup – has promised to investigate the crackdown on protesters and to bring in measures to tackle the economic crisis. His spokesman said it would take time to rebuild an economy that had been suffering for decades.

“There are key bread and butter questions which government cannot dodge, things are tough,” George Charamba told a state-owned Harare radio station. “But it would be a sad day to think that the only way that we can remedy such a problem is by causing further damage to that already damaged economy through mayhem, through looting, through chaos.” Charamba said police and soldiers would remain on the streets and that government would shut down the internet again if violent protests broke out. He previously said the security crackdown was a foretaste of how the government would react to future protests. — Reuters



## Business

# Gulf Bank hosts 2nd WISE Investment Forum

## Event discusses 'Global & Regional Markets Outlook 2019'

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank hosted the second edition of its annual WISE Investment Forum on Monday. Held at the Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait at Burj Alshaya, the theme of this year's forum was 'Global & Regional Markets Outlook 2019', and saw Chief Economist and Chief Investment Officer, Steen Jakobsen, Saxo Bank and Head of Research and Managing Director, Ahmad Shams El Din, EFG Hermes, share their respective insights.

The event provided guests an overview of Gulf Bank's WISE Investment product journey, while introducing the bank's new online trading service. Kuwait's first digital and advisory portfolio management service, WISE was created to help customers diversify their investments and invest in international markets in an easy, transparent and cost-efficient way.

The evening began with welcoming note to guests from Gulf Bank, followed by keynote speeches from experts, Steen Jakobsen, Chief Economist and Chief Investment Officer, Saxo Bank and Ahmad Shams El Din, Head of Research and Managing Director, EFG Hermes.

Commenting on the event, Tareq Al-Saleh, Assistant General Manager, Consumer Investments, Gulf Bank, said: "WISE Investments was launched as part of Gulf Bank's commitment to delivering world class products and services to our clients, adding both value and convenience. Moving forward we are delighted to be continuously advancing and adapting our offering, and

providing clients with an easy, transparent, and cost-efficient way to safely expand their portfolios and investments in global markets. We would like to thank our clients, and both Steen Jakobsen and Ahmad Shams El Din for their inspiring insights this evening. We look forward to the coming year and helping our clients make the WISE choice, with WISE investments."

Gulf Bank is one of the leading conventional banks in Kuwait with total assets of KD 5,683 million for year ended 31 December 2017. The Bank provides a broad offering of consumer banking, wholesale banking, treasury, and financial services through its large network of 58 branches and more than 200 ATMs in Kuwait.

The Bank was founded in 1960 and is listed on the Kuwait Stock Exchange (Boursa Kuwait) since 1984.

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Gulf Bank is strongly committed to giving back to

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Steen Jakobsen, Chief Economist and Chief Investment Officer, Saxo Bank



Ahmad Shams El Din, Head of Research and Managing Director, EFG Hermes



Dalya Al-Qassem Executive Manager, Consumer Investments



Event attendees

## Novartis sees 2018 profit soar 64% after exiting GSK venture

**ZURICH:** Swiss pharmaceuticals giant Novartis said yesterday that the sale of its stake in a joint venture with Britain's GlaxoSmithKlein helped boost net profit last year by 64 percent. Novartis said in a statement that it had raked in a net profit of \$12.6 billion for 2018, including a \$5.7 net gain on its exit from the consumer healthcare joint venture it created with GSK in 2015. Sales came in at \$51.9 billion-up six percent from a year earlier but just missing forecasts of analysts polled by Swiss financial news wire AWP, who had anticipated \$52.1 billion. Following the news, Novartis saw its share price slip 1.38 percent in mid-morning trading to 84.48 Swiss francs as the Swiss stock exchange's main SMI index was basically flat. Novartis chief Vas Narasimhan hailed the results as evidence that the company's strategic shift since he took the reins early last year was paying off.

"In 2018 we re-imagined Novartis," he said in the statement. "We took major steps towards becoming a medicines company that focuses its capital on developing, launching, and creating global access to breakthrough medicines," he said. "Together with delivering strong accretive growth, we also advanced our strategic priorities including building new advanced therapy platforms, ramping up productivity and digital efforts, and creating a new culture," he added.

In addition to cutting loose Novartis's stake in the GSK joint venture, the company has since Narasimhan's arrival made a large acquisition in the genetic therapy realm, opened discussions on selling off its Alcon eye care unit and announced thousands of upcoming job cuts in Switzerland and Britain. In 2018, the group's two blockbuster drugs, Cosentyx for psoriasis and its Entresto heart treatment, along with its cancer medications, helped push its pharmaceutical division sales eight percent higher to \$34.5 billion, the company said. Alcon, which Novartis said it aimed to part with during the first quarter of 2019, meanwhile saw sales rise six percent last year to \$7.1 billion, while Sandoz, its generic drug arm, saw sales dwindle two percent, to \$9.9 billion, amid heavy pricing pressure in the United States. For 2019, Novartis said it expected to see overall sales continue to rise by around five percent, while its operating profit should grow between one and five percent. —AFP

## Ponemon-Tenable releases study on cyber risks to organizations

**DUBAI:** Tenable, Inc., the Cyber Exposure company, released the Measuring and Managing the Cyber Risks to Business Operations Report, an independent study conducted by Ponemon Institute. It found that 60 percent of organizations globally had suffered two or more business-disrupting cyber events - defined as cyberattacks causing data breaches or significant disruption and downtime to business operations, plant and operational equipment - in the last 24 months. Further, the vast majority of respondents (91 percent) had suffered at least one such cyber event in the same time period.

Despite this documented history of damaging attacks, the study found that the majority of organizations (54 percent) are not measuring, and therefore don't understand, the business costs of cyber risk. The report concludes that organizations are unable to make risk-based business decisions backed by accurate and quantifiable metrics, resulting in a lack of actionable insight for the C-suite and board of directors.

Digital transformation has created a complex computing environment of Cloud, DevOps, mobility and IoT, where everything is connected as part of the new, modern attack surface. This has created a massive gap in an organization's ability to truly understand its Cyber Exposure at any given time. The research-which surveyed 2,410 IT and infosec decision-makers in six countries-found less than one third (29 percent) of respondents reported having sufficient visibility into their attack surface (i.e. traditional IT, cloud, containers, IoT and operational technology) to effectively reduce their exposure to risk. To further complicate



Robert Huber

senior management.

Huawei invites all innovation and smartphone lovers in Kuwait to join its biggest event, which will kick-off at 5:00 PM and will include various entertainment activities, as well as special gifts and exclusive offers. The store is designed to be a comfortable futuristic space inspired by nature, where customers can enjoy a better choice and a more comprehensive experience.

Reflecting a positive business outlook, the store opening follows closely on the heels of the incredible success of the HUAWEI Mate 20 series launch in Kuwait, cementing Huawei's position as one of the leading consumer brands in the country. Visitors will be able to purchase the latest HUAWEI Mate 20 series and discover first-hand the latest technology innovations from Huawei, including smartphones, wearables, tablets, laptops and other products.



this lack of visibility, more than half of respondents (58 percent) said their security function lacks adequate staffing to scan for vulnerabilities in a timely manner, with only 35 percent scanning when it's deemed necessary by an assessment of risks to sensitive data.

Together, these data points reveal that the tools and approaches organizations are using fail to provide the visibility and focus required to manage, measure and reduce cyber risk in the digital era.

Of those organizations that measure the business costs of cyber risk, 62 percent are not confident their metrics are actually accurate. Thus, decisions about the allocation of resources, investments in technologies and the prioritization of threats are being made without critical information - such as the costs of IP theft, loss of revenue or loss of productivity. Organizations admit to not using the key performance indicators (KPIs) they consider important to assessing and understanding cyber risks:

- 64 percent rated "time to assess" an essential KPI but only 49 percent actually measure it

- 70 percent rated "time to remediate" an essential KPI but only 46 percent measure it

- Only 30 percent of respondents believe their organizations can translate cyber risk KPIs into actionable steps

This lack of rigor leaves boards of directors in the dark about the true cost of cyber risks to their organizations. Without confidence in the accuracy of their measures, CISOs and other security executives are reluctant to share critical information about the business costs of cyber risks with their boards.

"In today's digital economy, cyber risk equates to business risk. It's shocking to learn that organizations are suffering business-impacting cyber events yet are struggling to accurately measure the resulting financial cost," said Bob Huber, CSO, Tenable. "This study powerfully highlights that most organizations have not implemented security metrics that reflect cybersecurity's role as a core business function. CISOs need reliable metrics to help them make educated decisions on the allocation of resources, investments in technology and the prioritization of threats."

## Huawei brings 'Intelligent Life' retail concept to Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** Huawei Consumer Business Group (CBG) announced the expansion of its Intelligent Life footprint and agenda in Kuwait with the launch of its first flagship Huawei Experience Store (HES) in The Avenues Mall - Phase 4 on February 2nd 2019, in the presence of delegations, VIPs and Huawei CBG MEA headquarters





## Health &amp; Technology

# For some whales, sonar may provoke suicidal tendencies

‘The stress response, in other words, overrides the diving response’

**PARIS:** Scientists have long known that some beaked whales beach themselves and die in agony after exposure to naval sonar, and now they know why: the giant sea mammals suffer decompression sickness, just like scuba divers. At first blush, the explanation laid out yesterday by 21 experts in the Royal Society journal *Proceedings B* seems implausible. Millions of years of evolution have turned whales into perfectly calibrated diving machines that plunge kilometers below the surface for hours at a stretch, foraging for food in the inky depths.

The heart rate slows, blood flow is restricted, oxygen is conserved. So how could the ocean's most accomplished deep-sea diver wind up with nitrogen bubbles poisoning its veins, like a scuba novice rising too quickly to the surface? Short answer: beaked whales — especially one species known as Cuvier's — get really, really scared.

“In the presence of sonar they are stressed and swim vigorously away from the sound

source, changing their diving pattern,” lead author Yara Bernaldo de Quiros, a researcher at the Institute of Animal Health at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, told AFP. “The stress response, in other words, overrides the diving response, which makes the animals accumulate nitrogen,” she added. “It's like an adrenalin shot.” One type of sonar in particular throws these whales off balance.

#### ‘Atypical’ mass strandings

Developed in the 1950s to detect submarines, mid-frequency active sonar (MFAS) is used today in naval patrols and exercises, especially by the United States and its NATO allies. Starting around 1960, ships began emitting underwater signals in a range of about 5 kilohertz (kHz). That is when the mass beaching of beaked whales, especially in the Mediterranean, began.

Between 1960 and 2004, 121 of these so-called “atypical” mass strandings took place,

with at least 40 closely linked in time and place with naval activities. These were not individual strandings of old or sick animals, nor en masse strandings such as the one last November in New Zealand, when more than 200 pilot whales beached themselves together. Rather, a handful or more beaked whales would wash ashore within a day or two, and no more than few dozen kilometers apart. The most deadly episode, in 2002, saw 14 stranded over a 36-hour period in the Canary Islands during a NATO naval exercise.

“Within a few hours of the sonar being deployed, the animals started showing up on the beach,” Bernaldo de Quiros said. Outwardly, the whales showed no signs of disease or damage: they had normal body weight, and no skin lesions or infections. Internally, it was another story. Nitrogen gas bubbles filled the veins, and their brains were ravaged by hemorrhaging. Autopsies also revealed damage to other organs, as well as to the spinal cord and central nervous system. — AFP



Humpback whales are seen, on January 15, 2019, north of Tromsø, Northern Norway. During winter, air temperature is between -5C and -10C, water temperature is +3C. — AFP

## Lowering blood pressure cuts risk of cognitive impairment: Study

**TAMPA:** Aggressive treatment to lower blood pressure in older people has been shown to cut the risk of developing mild cognitive impairment, a risk factor for dementia, US researchers said Monday. While the findings in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* did not find any significant impact on the likelihood of developing dementia, experts said the trial offers a glimmer of hope as the world's population ages and dementia becomes a growing concern.

Dementia, including its most common form, Alzheimer's disease, is expected to affect 115 million people worldwide by 2050. So far, the world's best scientific minds have not found a way to reliably prevent, cure or treat dementia. But some research has suggested that high blood pressure — which affects three-quarters of people over 75 — might be a modifiable risk factor. For the Systolic Blood Pressure Intervention Trial (SPRINT), more than 9,300 people aged 50

and older with high blood pressure (systolic blood pressure of between 130 and 180 mm Hg) were randomized to receive different interventions.

Some received intensive blood pressure control, with medications that targeted 120 mm Hg. Others aimed for a more standard treatment goal of less than 140 mm Hg. Patients were followed for about five years and given a battery of cognitive tests. In the intensive treatment group, 149 participants were deemed to have probable dementia, compared with 176 participants in the standard treatment group. In other words, the intensive blood pressure control “did not significantly reduce the incidence of probable dementia,” said the study.

However, researchers were cautiously optimistic about a secondary finding, that mild cognitive impairment occurred in far fewer participants in the intensive treatment group — 287 compared to 353 participants

in the standard treatment group. “This is the first trial, to our knowledge, to demonstrate an intervention that significantly reduces the occurrence of MCI, a well-established risk factor for dementia,” said the study.

An accompanying editorial in *JAMA* by Kristine Yaffe of the University of California, San Francisco, also emphasized the possibility that more research could confirm the technique as an effective prevention strategy. “For older adults, almost all of whom have concern about being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, SPRINT MIND offers great hope,” she wrote. “The study demonstrates that among those with hypertension, intensive SBP control can reduce the development of cognitive impairment.”

She called for studying the approach along with other vascular health efforts, such as physical activity, and prevention. Maria Carrillo, chief science officer of the Alzheimer's Association, which is funding a two-year extension of the study to further probe any effects on dementia, called the findings “the strongest evidence to date about reducing risk of mild cognitive impairment through the treatment of high blood pressure. — AFP

## Swine flu outbreak kills 76 in India's Rajasthan

**NEW DELHI:** A swine flu outbreak in one of India's biggest tourist hubs, Rajasthan state in the west of the country, has killed 76 people this year, government officials said yesterday. Colder weather has worsened the seasonal outbreak of the H1N1 virus, with Rajasthan recording more than a third of all swine flu deaths in India, officials said.

Rajasthan's cities, with their imposing fortresses and palaces, attract many overseas visitors,

although officials said there no reports of any of them catching the virus. More than 8,700 people in Rajasthan have been screened for H1N1 this year, and 1,976 had tested positive by Tuesday, a state health department spokesman told Reuters. The worst affected area was Jodhpur district, which recorded 23 of the 76 deaths in the state so far this month.

Rajasthan reported 705 cases of swine flu and 53 deaths in the month of January last year. A team from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) arrived in Jodhpur on Tuesday and will spend two days to investigate the outbreak, the spokesman said. Nationwide, 4,571 cases of H1N1 virus and 169 deaths were reported by Jan. 27, according to NCDC data. Doctors said that the severity of the current outbreak in Rajasthan was partly due to colder than normal weather. — Reuters

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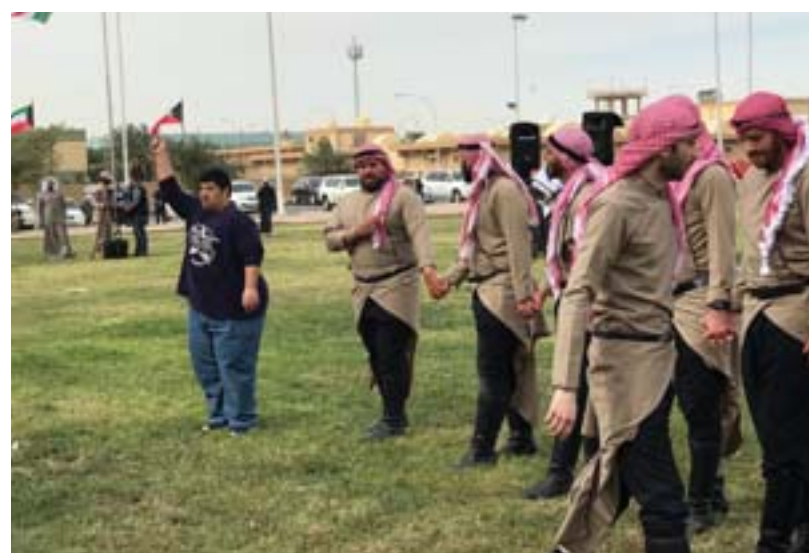
## What's On



## Jordanian community shares Kuwait's national celebrations



**KUWAIT:** The Jordanian Community Council in Kuwait participated in a flag hoisting ceremony organized recently by the Social Care Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Its participation came to highlight its active role and contributions in service of Kuwait and the Kuwaiti society, the council said in a statement.



### Chinese New Year Concert at Abdulhussein Abdul Redha Theatre

Visiting Chinese Nan Jing Art Troupe from Jiang Su province enthralled the audience in the packed hall of Abdulhussein Abdul Redha Theatre with their extraordinary skill during an hour-long performance. Diplomats, Kuwaitis, expats and cross section of the Chinese community enjoyed the

evening with applause. The show is organized by the embassy of the people's Republic of China with the partnership of National Council of Art, Culture and Letters at eve of Chinese New Year.

Na Jing art troupe, the concert presenter consists of Nanjing Chinese orchestra song and dance the-

atre. Founded in 1986, Nanjing Chinese orchestra has evolved into one of China's most influential professional orchestras and has earned great recognition for artistic excellence by foreign audiences by touring to more than 40 countries and region around the world. — Photos by Joseph Shagra









# Lifestyle

THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 2019

## Axes, armor, torches: Vikings feast on Scottish island



Guizer Jarl, John Nicholson (in white) leads the chants as participants dressed as vikings pose on the viking longboat that will be set alight in Lerwick, Shetland Islands before the Up Helly Aa festival later in the day. — AFP photos



A participant poses in his viking costume in Lerwick, Shetland Islands.

Vikings partied in Scotland's Shetland Islands on Tuesday in the annual "Up Helly Aa" festival, featuring a parade of men in suits of armour torching a wooden ship. The event—which means "long winter's end" in Old Norse—has taken place in the port of Lerwick, around 125 miles (200 kilometers) northwest of mainland Scotland, on the last Tuesday in January every year since the early 1890s to celebrate the region's Viking heritage. "It means a lot to Shetlanders and people in Lerwick that we can do this festival," John Nicolson, one of the organizers, told AFP. "It's really steeped in Viking history here."

The 48-year-old is the figurehead for this year's festival—known as the "Guizer Jarl"—leading a "Jarl Squad" of dozens of Vikings for the day and hundreds of other dressed up "guizers." "I've been looking forward to it for 13 years," said Nicolson, a self-employed decorator who has been on the 17-strong organizing committee all that time. "There's only been a few guys that have been

(Guizer Jarl), so it's a great privilege." The Jarl dons the same suit of armor—comprising helmet, breastplate, shield, axe, dagger and belt—each year.

But in a closely guarded secret, he chooses the design for his and his squad's other garments, representing a different character from the Norse Sagas stories each time. The formidable looking crew spent Tuesday parading through the town, before a torchlit procession of hundreds led the burning down of the replica longship—and celebratory parties were expected to last until dawn. The festivities take place regardless of conditions on the far-flung islands—which sit in the North Atlantic Ocean on the same latitude as southern Greenland. "There's no postponement for weather," said Nicolson. "It'll be what it'll be, and we'll just carry on." — AFP

A Guizer from the Viking Jarl Squad takes part in the Up Helly Aa festival in Lerwick. >>



Guizers dressed as Vikings from the Jarl Squad set fire to the long ship with burning brands as they take part in the Up Helly Aa festival.



Guizers dressed as Vikings from the Jarl Squad surround the long ship with burning brands as the Guizer Jarl (center) stands aboard.



Guizer Jarl, John Nicholson (in white) leads the chants as participants dressed as vikings pose on the viking longboat that will be set alight in Lerwick, Shetland Islands before the Up Helly Aa festival.



Guizers dressed as Vikings from the Jarl Squad set fire to the long ship with burning brands.



Guizer Jarl, John Nicholson (in white) leads his squad through the streets of Lerwick, Shetland Islands.





## BRIAN JOHNSON TO FEATURE IN NEW AC/DC ALBUM

**B**rian Johnson has confirmed a new AC/DC is on the way - and he will be singing on it. The 71-year-old singer previously forced to quit the band in 2016 on doctor's orders due to progressive hearing loss, and he was replaced for the band's remaining live dates by Guns N' Roses frontman Axl Rose. Johnson has now seemingly confirmed that a brand new album is set to be released, and his unique rock pipes are back. American band Terrorizer shared the news after meeting Johnson - who joined AC/DC in 1980 following the death of previous singer Bon Scott - in an airport. Writing on their Facebook page, the band said: "We ran into Brian Johnson from AC/DC at the airport today after the flight home. We asked him about the rumors of him being on the new AC/DC album and he said 'yes' and that he is 'sick of denying it.' So that was a cool surprise ending to the tour." The

band's rhythm guitarist Malcolm Young - the older brother of lead guitarist Angus Young - died in November 2017 after retiring due to early onset dementia, and it has previously reported that the 'Highway To Hell' rockers would release "hundreds" of unreleased songs that featured Young and Johnson on "vocals". A source told Dallas's JAM magazine: "Turns out, five years prior to the 'Black Ice' LP, AC/DC's 15th studio release, Angus and Malcolm Young lived together where they literally wrote hundreds of songs, many were recorded and have been stashed away until now. "Angus has decided to selected [sic] the best tracks from those recordings that Malcolm played on and is now back in the studio recording and mixing them with fellow band mates Phil Rudd, Cliff Williams and yes, Brian Johnson on vocals."



## Lewis Capaldi crowned winner of MTV PUSH: Ones to Watch 2019

**L**ewis Capaldi has been named the winner of MTV PUSH: Ones to Watch 2019. The 'Grace' hitmaker saw off the likes of Sam Fender - who he lost out to for this year's BRITs Critics' Choice Award - Grace Carter, Mahalia and Jade Bird in the fierce competition, which sees the artists do everything they can to be crowned the winner. However, after the 22-year-old Scottish singer and finalist Loski promised to drop new music and announced meet and greets with their fans, Lewis pulled out the big guns, by doing an Instagram Live with his close pal Niall Horan for the final PUSH. Lewis said: "Absolutely honored to be the MTV PUSH: Ones to Watch winner this year! To be nominated alongside so many other amazing people is a privilege and I can't wait to see what the year has in store for everyone. Cheers, to everyone who voted and it's nice to be MTV's One to Watch and not the FBI's." The 'Someone You Loved' singer follows in the footsteps of the likes of previous MTV Brand New recipients Mabel, AJ Tracey, Anne-Marie and Krept & Konan, all of whom have gone on to be things. Grime star Loski - whose real name is Drilloski Loose - previously commented on being chosen for the shortlist by MTV officials and music industry folk: "Love to MTV for including me in their Top 10 MTV Push: Ones to Watch for 2019, thanks for all the support." Dermot Kennedy, Col3trane, Glowie and Young T & Bussy were also selected.



## Ozzy Osbourne postpones No More Tours 2 European dates

**O**zzy Osbourne has had to cancel his 2019 UK and European tour on doctor's orders after being struck down with a bad case of flu. The 70-year-old heavy metal legend has had to pull out of 15 dates on his 'No More Tours 2' - due to kick off yesterday at the 3Arena in Dublin, Ireland - as he is too ill to step on stage. A statement posted on his official Instagram account read: "OZZY has been forced to postpone the entire UK and European leg of his NO MORE TOURS 2 tour on doctors' orders. "This follows yesterday's announcement that OSBOURNE was postponing the first four dates of the tour because of the flu. "After seeing his physician again, OSBOURNE has been diagnosed with a severe upper-respiratory infection which the doctor feels could develop into pneumonia given the physicality of the live performances and an extensive travel schedule throughout Europe in harsh winter conditions." Ozzy - who is married to Sharon Osbourne - is "completely devastated" to have to let his fans down but has vowed to make it up to them when he heads out on the road for the rescheduled dates. In the statement, the 'Bark at the Moon' singer said: "I'm completely devastated for having to postpone the European leg of my tour. It just seems that since October everything I touch has turned to s\*\*t. First the staph infection in my thumb and now coming down with the flu and bronchitis. I want to apologize to all of my fans who have been so loyal over the years, my band, my crew and to Judas Priest for letting you all down. However, I promise the tour with Judas Priest will be completed. It's being rescheduled right now to start in September. Again, I apologize to everyone. God Bless. Love you all, Ozzy." Once he has recuperated Ozzy will resume touring on March 9 at Download Festival in Sydney, Australia.

## Madonna records with female orchestra for new album

**M**adonna's new album is set to feature an all-female orchestra from Portugal. The 60-year-old Queen of Pop took to Instagram to share a video of Orquestra Batukadeiras PT singing in the studio for an unknown track on her forthcoming 14th studio album. Alongside the clip, she wrote: "A prayer at



the end of a magical recording session with the @orquestra.batukadeiras.pt So Lucky to have these Amazing Powerful Women on my record. #caboverde #lisbon #music #magic #mirwais @dinodantiago (sic)" The 'Like a Prayer' hitmaker is planning to drop her new record later this year, and fans who snap up a ticket for her first world tour in three years, plotted for late 2019, will also be treated to some of her greatest hits, as well as a collection of her new songs. A source said recently: "Of course she'll treat revelers to a few of her classic hits too. She adores performing and loves to see her fans. "She's hugely professional and always puts on a mind-blowing show. It's going to be the hottest ticket in town." Last October, Madonna confirmed she was working on her follow-up to 2015's 'Rebel Heart'. She said: "I'm finishing my record, which I'm going to release next year." And the superstar singer admitted she just cannot stop making music. Speaking about her fashion products, which include skincare lines and perfumes, she said: "Yep, in between rose mist spray and serums, I'm actually making music. Can't quit my day job." Madonna last hit the road on her 'Rebel Heart Tour', which consisted of 82 dates from September 2015 to March 2016. The music legend's tour is said to be a "no expenses spared" run of shows, which will feature pyrotechnics and her usual army of performers, and she will stun supporters in some "amazing outfits". The industry source said: "Madonna is really excited about performing her new music and has spared no expense with the production. "There will be the usual army of dancers, slick lighting and even some pyrotechnics. "She might be 60 but she works incredibly hard to keep her body in the best shape possible and plans to show it off in some amazing outfits, so fans can expect an array of dramatic costume changes."



## Peter Jackson making new Beatles documentary

**'L**ord of the Rings' filmmaker Sir Peter Jackson is making a new documentary on The Beatles using 55 hours of never-before-seen studio footage that was shot in early 1969 for the 1970 feature film 'Let It Be'. The exciting project - from Apple Corps Ltd and Jackson's production company WingNut Films Ltd - has been announced on Wednesday January 30 on what is the 50th anniversary of The Fab Four's rooftop concert on top of the Apple Records offices in London. Although no release date has been set it is believed that the as-yet untitled film will come out in 2020 to mark the 50th anniversary of the 'Let It Be' movie and album - which was the final studio release from the band before they split at the end of 1970. In a statement confirming the doc, Jackson said: "The 55 hours of never-before-seen footage and 140 hours of audio made available to us ensure this movie will be the ultimate 'fly on the wall' experience that Beatles fans have long dreamt about. It's like a time machine transports us back to 1969, and we get to sit in the studio watching these four friends make great music together." The

footage for the original 'Let It Be' documentary film was shot as the band - John Lennon, George Harrison, Sir Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr - rehearsed the songs for the album at Twickenham Film Studios and then recorded them at Apple headquarters and the dissension and fractured relationships that led to the group's demise 18 months later was seen on screen. That film has been out of circulation since the 1980s when it was available as VHS and laserdisc after a restored cut was pulled from DVD release in the early 2000s reportedly on the instructions of surviving members Paul, 76, and Ringo, 78. However, the restored version of director Michael Lindsay-Hogg's film will come out "following the release of this new film," according to Apple Corps. Jackson, 57, has been through much of the unseen footage and says that what he has viewed shows just how much fun the four bandmates had during those sessions, despite the impending break-up. The New Zealand-born filmmaker said: "I was relieved to discover the reality is very different to the myth. After reviewing all the footage and audio that Michael Lindsay-Hogg shot 18 months before they broke up, it's simply an amazing historical treasure trove. Sure, there's moments of drama, but none of the discord this project has long been associated with. Watching John, Paul, George and Ringo work together, creating now-classic songs from scratch, is not only fascinating, it's funny, uplifting and surprisingly intimate ... I'm thrilled and honored to have been entrusted with this remarkable footage. Making the movie will be a sheer joy."

## Danny DeVito thinks CGI is 'kind of cool'

**D**anny DeVito thinks the CGI elements of the live-action 'Dumbo' movie are "kind of cool". The veteran actor stars as Max Medici in the Tim Burton-directed film, and he's admitted to being wowed by the experience of interacting with the CGI elements in the movie. He shared: "I've never done that before. It's really kind of cool. "The first time I saw it, we have a couple people in green suits. We have these big aluminum outlines of how big an elephant would be, with eyes that are like little tennis balls. "They're carried by a person in green so that when you're in the relationship, you know where it's gonna be." DeVito, 74 - whose co-stars include Colin Farrell, Michael Keaton, Eva Green, and Alan Arkin - also admitted to being charmed by the film's "never-give-up" tone. He told Collider: "It's very, very positive. Hopeful. Almost a never-give-up kind of thing. "In life, you see all the different things that infiltrate the good things in life. Things that surprise you come out of nowhere. Like when you think you're making a move with someone who maybe is duplicitous. "In terms of a younger person, or an older person, by now you guys must have learned this already, I hope, but the idea is that you can't always believe what somebody tells you. "Sometimes it messes up all your hopes and dreams. But if you all stick together, possibly you could get out of it and there'll be a happy ending. And dreams do come true."



## Mads Mikkelsen says passion for graphic novels drew him to Polar



**M**ads Mikkelsen's passion for graphic novels drew him to star in 'Polar'. The 53-year-old actor stars in the new action film - which is based on the comics series of the same name by Victor Santos - and Mads admitted that his fondness of graphic novels attracted him to the project. He explained: "I am actually a huge graphic novel collector. But I kind of stopped 20 years ago when it was just becoming too much. There was too much to read." Mads plays the role of Duncan Vizla - a working-class assassin who is close to retirement - in the Jonas Akerlund-directed movie. And the Hollywood star - who appears alongside the likes of Vanessa Hudgens and Matt Lucas - admitted to relishing playing the "super cool" character. Asked why he wanted to star in the movie, Mads told Screen Rant: "Well, basically he's just cool. He's super cool." Meanwhile, Jonas has revealed he's keen to turn 'Polar' into a franchise. He said: "It's supposed to be based on the first book, but we kind of borrowed a little bit from the second and the third book as well. And we also added some stuff that aren't even in the book. "So, we had the freedom of working with these characters as we wanted - and, yeah, the 'Polar' story has way more to give. "[Victor Santos] actually wrote five books, and there's a lot more stories in there; and the characters are great, so why not?" — BangShowbiz



# KUWAITI FASHION DESIGNERS PARTICIPATE IN ALTAROMA SHOW



Kuwaiti fashion designer Dhafer Baqer.

Kuwaiti fashion designers Tahani Al-Otaibi and Dhafer Baqer displayed their products at the AltaRoma 2019 Fashion week, marking the first participation of designers from the Gulf region in the Italian haute couture. Al-Otaibi showed a collection of 15 Sunset Abayas - long black robes worn by women in the Arabian Gulf region - while Baqer showed 15 Special dresses for women. Al-Otaibi said she was proud to be the first female from Kuwait and the Gulf to participate in AltaRoma's International Couture Fashion Show, and expressed her gratitude to the audience who showed love for designs. "This success is an evidence that Kuwaiti fashion designers are creative and their readiness to face challenges, as well as to change from being mere importers of Western fashion to exporters of quality clothes associated with heritage," she told KUNA.

Al-Otaibi said she was eager to take the traditional Abaya - which has many uses including soirees, weddings, feasts and Ramadhan gatherings - to international markets. "Abaya is an elegant dress which

can fits all tastes and ages. It can be used in the traditional way, modern, sport, home gatherings and work places," she said. Baqer meanwhile said she was proud to have participated in AltaRoma, which would definitely be an added value to the way he approached designing. Speaking to KUNA, Baqer said Gulf and Arab people have "unique styles which reflected the beauty of their selection of clothes."

Maria Christina Rigano, supervisor of the International Couture Fashion Show, praised the Kuwaiti designers for the success of their designs, attracting marketing specialists. She said the International Couture Fashion Show was an opportunity for designers to show their products for more than 120 marketing specialists. Kuwait Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Ali Khaled Al-Sabah, speaking to KUNA, received Al-Otaibi and Baqer at the Embassy and expressed his pride for their contribution. He said fashion has high economic revenues which could be part of the diversification of the economy. — KUNA



Kuwaiti fashion designer Tahani Al-Otaibi. — KUNA

## Yemeni pet shop survives despite the odds

In Yemen, where almost four years of war have brought millions to the brink of famine and ravaged the economy, Mourad Jamal struggles to keep his small pet shop in the capital Sanaa afloat. Fluffy white cats and birds are on show in cages along the wall. A lone gold fish swims in a tank, and a grey parrot stands on a perch. Animal collars and leads hang from the back wall and packets of dog biscuits are stacked at the counter. "The situation in the country has deteriorated, the financial state is dismal. A Yemeni national barely keeps himself going," said Jamal, owner of the Aalam Aleef pet shop.

Having a pet in the current situation is considered a luxury, he added. He has been in the pet business for seven years and had his shop for two years. Yemen's war has been in stalemate for years, with a Saudi-led coalition of Sunni Muslim Arab states and Yemeni allies unable to dislodge the Iranian-aligned Houthis movement that controls Sanaa, and most urban centers. Sanaa has been subject to air strikes from the coalition, which intervened in Yemen in 2015 to restore the government of ousted President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi. When embassies closed with the outbreak of war, and foreigners fled Sanaa, taking their animals with them, the number of customers spending on treats for their animals fell, Jamal said.

In a country where people once bought many pets, the price of an animal companion has as much as halved, despite significant inflation. Jamal, a vet by training, said he stays in business by treating animals, but faces huge problems trying to carry out even routine procedures. Vaccinations which should be kept cool in transport can arrive unfit for use, he said. Dog owner Amro Al-Awadi said he can no longer afford to buy special food for his dog and now feeds it restaurant scraps. "I kept my pets because of my love for animals, other people abandoned them," he said. — Reuters



Veterinarian Murad Jamal (left) and dog's owner Amr Al-Awadhi check dogs at Al-Awadhi's house in Sanaa, Yemen.



Boys ride a motorbike with a dog outside a veterinary clinic in Sanaa, Yemen. — Reuters photos

## LAKME FASHION WEEK (LFW) SUMMER RESORT 2019



Indian models parade on stage as they wear clothes created by designer Varun Bahl at the Lakme Fashion Week (LFW) Summer Resort 2019 in Mumbai yesterday. — AFP photos





# Stinkin’ sky-high: Indonesian durians fetch \$1,000 apiece



This undated handout photograph shows a man holding a pair of durians that sold for 14 million rupiah (990 USD) per fruit, in Tasikmalaya. — AFP photos

Two durian fruits have sold for nearly \$1,000 each in Indonesia, an eye-watering price that lit up social media and prompted awestruck fans to take selfies with the pungent pair. Fetching 14 million rupiah (\$990) each, the spiky fruits were displayed in a clear case on red satin and surrounded by fake flowers at a supermarket in Tasikmalaya, a city in West Java province. The price tag was about eight times the local monthly minimum wage. Known as the “king of fruits”, durians are popular across Southeast Asia. Fans rave about their creamy texture but many detractors liken their intense aroma to sewage or sweaty socks. Unlike the usual oblong variety, which sell for just a few dollars, the round “J-Queen” brand durians are reported to be extremely rare and possess the punch-

est of aromas. “The buyer did not want to be named, but he was a durian lover,” supermarket manager Heriawan Teten told AFP yesterday. Not all internet users were impressed by the extravagant cost. “The price is crazy-I’d rather use the money to buy a motor-bike,” one Instagram user said. — AFP



A pair of durians on sale for 14 million rupiah (990 USD) per fruit at a supermarket in Tasikmalaya.

## London's India Club, saved from developers, celebrates its history

An exhibition celebrating the storied history of an Indian members' club in London opened yesterday, less than a year after the restaurant dodged being turned into a boutique hotel. “A Home Away from Home”, organized by British conservation charity the National Trust, tapped into a “treasure trove” of history on the India Club which emerged in part thanks to recent efforts to save it from eviction. The month-long exhibition tells the story of the restaurant and bar venue on the Strand in London's West End, through the voices of those connected to it over its six decades. “The history has always been there but the campaign unearthed it and brought it to the surface,” Phiroza Marker, the club's manager, told AFP during a preview tour. “People want to tell their stories,” she added, noting that old customers and even relatives of those who helped establish the club came forward when it was threatened with closure. In late July, the club was saved from developers who wanted to overhaul the building, which already has a budget hotel on its higher floors.

### Heart of the diaspora

Now primarily just a restaurant, the India Club became the heart of the Indian diaspora in Britain after it was set up in 1951 by Krishna Menon, India's first High Commissioner to Britain. It moved to its current location sometime in the late '50s or early '60s and was an umbrella organization for groups serving the growing south Asian community in Britain. Westminster Council rejected redevelopment plans last year following a high-profile campaign against them. The campaign garnered the support of intellectuals, Anglo-Indian businessmen and lawmakers from both countries-as well as more than 26,000 petition signatories. “We followed the campaign with a lot of interest,” said Laura Carderera, a creative program leader at the National Trust. The charity is more associated with running historic buildings in rural Britain, but has ventured into new conservation projects like this over the past six years. “We felt that this place told a really important chapter in British history, about migration,” Carderera added. “It also tells a really important story about London's changing landscape-places like the India Club are becoming a rarity.”



In this file photo a blackboard stands at the entrance to the India Club restaurant in London. — AFP

### 'I made a connection'

The oral history created by the trust, with the help of a bursary from the British Library, saw more than a dozen people interviewed, from the club founders' children to former staff and longtime clientele. In keeping with the nostalgic atmosphere of the venue-which has changed remarkably little over the decades-Carderera's team bought old vinyl and cassette players on eBay to play the recordings. Others are heard on vintage telephone handsets mounted on the walls. “I was missing my home, my mum,” recounts Krishna Ghosh, a trained Indian classical dancer who arrived in London in 1966 and began rehearsing at the club, in one of the oral histories. “I made a connection culturally with the India Club,” he said. With a mandate to promote Indo-British friendship, the club built up a roster of regulars not from the Indian subcontinent-particularly journalists working on nearby Fleet Street and at a BBC building opposite. “It was one of those places where you felt: this is home, this is part of things,” said Kieran Cooke, a BBC World Service journalist in the 1980s, in another oral exhibit. In some of the non-audio elements featured, early 1970s clippings from the “India Weekly” newspaper serving the diaspora, adorn the walls. Together with framed pictures, they show some of the dignitaries who have held meetings in the first floor lounge or dined at the restaurant above, including founding member Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister. In his recollections, Cooke said: “The cliché is if only the walls could talk, but it's very much like that there”. — AFP

# Hong Kong gifts Pakistan a culinary star

A pair of his father's old tandoor ovens helped Hong Kong restaurateur Asim Hussain achieve a dream-the world's first Michelin star for a Pakistani restaurant, an accolade he hopes will fire interest in the country's often overlooked cuisine. Like many of Hong Kong's 85,000 strong South Asian population, Hussain's family trace their lineage in the bustling financial hub back generations, when the city was a British colonial outpost. His great-grandfather arrived during World War One, overseeing mess halls for British soldiers while his Cantonese speaking father owned restaurants in the eighties and nineties. Hussain, 33, already had some twenty eateries in his group when he decided to embark on his what he described as his most personal and risky project yet, a restaurant serving dishes from Pakistan's Punjab region, the family's ancestral homeland and where he was packed off to boarding school aged six. His father, a serial entrepreneur and even once Pakistan's ambassador to South Korea, suggested he restore two old tandoors from his now shuttered restaurant collecting dust in storage. “He comes from a generation that doesn't throw things away,” laughs Hussain, dressed in a traditional knee-length tunic and sitting in a restaurant decked with paintings by Pakistani artists. “Actually the results are better than if we had new ovens because these things improve with age.” Those tandoors, frequent trips to Lahore to perfect recipes and a kitchen overseen by head chef Palash Mitra, earned the New Punjab Club a Michelin star just 18 months after it opened its doors.



Shish being cooked in the tandoor oven of the New Punjab Club restaurant in Hong Kong.

### 'A benchmark'

The success made headlines in Pakistan, a country that is unlikely to see a Michelin guide any time soon and whose chefs have long felt overshadowed by the wider global recognition gained from neighboring India's regional cuisines. “It makes us proud, it makes us very happy,” Waqar Chatha, who runs one of Islamabad's best-known restaurants, told AFP. “In the restaurant fraternity it's a



Hong Kong restaurateur Asim Hussain sitting at a table in his restaurant, the New Punjab Club, in Hong Kong.

great achievement. It sort of sets a benchmark for others to achieve as well.” Hussain is keen to note that his restaurant only represents one of Pakistan's many cuisines, the often meat-heavy, piquant food of the Punjab. At it doesn't come cheap-as much as \$100 per head. “I'm not arrogant or ignorant to say this is the best Pakistani restaurant in the world. There are better Pakistani restaurants than this in Pakistan.” But he says the accolade has still been a “great source of pride” for Hong Kong's 18,000-strong Pakistani community. “It's bringing a very niche personal story back to life, this culture, this cuisine is sort of unknown outside of Pakistan, outside of Punjab, so in a very small way I think we've shed a positive light on the work, on who we are and where we come from,” he explains. It was the second star achieved by Black Sheep, the restaurant group which was founded six years ago by Hussain and his business partner, veteran Canadian chef Christopher Mark, and has seen rapid success. But the expansion of Michelin and other western food guides into Asia has not been without controversy. Critics have often said reviewers tended to over-emphasize western culinary standards, service and tastes.

Daisann McLane is one of those detractors. She describes the Michelin guide's arrival in Bangkok last year as “completely changing the culinary scene there-and not in a good way.” She runs culinary tours to some of the Hong Kong's less glitzy eateries-to hole in the wall “dai pai dong” food stalls, African and South Asian canteens hidden inside the famously labyrinthine Chungking Mansions and

to “cha chan teng” tea shops famous for their sweet brews and thick slabs of toast. While she's “delighted” New Punjab Club has been recognized, she has her reservations: “There is a lot of world cuisine operating way under the radar in Hong Kong and it doesn't get noticed by Michelin or the big award groups.”

### 'Taking ownership'

For some, any recognition of Pakistan's overlooked cuisine is a success story. Sumayya Usmani said she spent years trying to showcase the distinct flavors of Pakistani cuisine, so heavily influenced by the tumultuous and violent migration sparked by the 1947 partition of India. When the British-Pakistani chef first pitched her cookbook to publishers on her country's cuisine, many initially balked. But in recent years, she says, attitudes have changed. Pakistani-run restaurants in the west that once might have described themselves as Indian are more proudly proclaiming their real culinary heritage, she says. “I think it's really good that people are coming out of that fear of calling themselves specifically Pakistani,” she told AFP. “It's nice that Pakistanis have started to take ownership of what belongs to them.” Back in Hong Kong, Hussain remarks the hard work has only just begun. “I joke with the boys and I say that ‘It's the first Pakistani Punjabi restaurant in the world to win a star, let's not be the first one to lose a star’”. — AFP



A selection of dishes cooked by the New Punjab Club restaurant in Hong Kong.



A dish of spiced chicken on display at the New Punjab Club restaurant in Hong Kong.



Spiced fish (center), naan bread (bottom left) and other dishes on display at the New Punjab Club restaurant in Hong Kong.



Hong Kong restaurateur Asim Hussain posing for a photo in his restaurant, the New Punjab Club, in Hong Kong. — AFP photos



A staff member (right) from the New Punjab Club in traditional clothing greeting customers arriving to dine at the restaurant in Hong Kong.



# Classifieds

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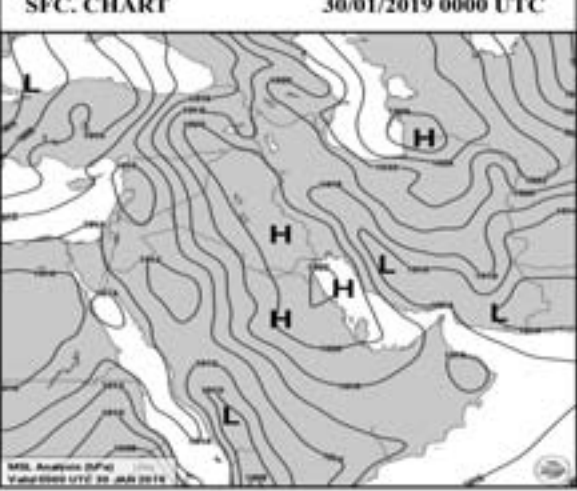
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## Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

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

**BY DAY:** Partly cloudy to cloudy with light to moderate north westerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h with a chance for light rain.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX. REC.	MIN. EXP.	<div>SFC. CHART30/01/2019 0000 UTC</div>	
KUWAIT CITY	19 °C	13 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	20 °C	09 °C		
ABDALY	19 °C	07 °C		
BUBYAN	--- °C	--- °C		
JAHRA	20 °C	10 °C		
FAILAKA ISLAND	18 °C	12 °C		
SALMIYAH	19 °C	14 °C		
AHMADI	19 °C	13 °C		
NUWAISIB	21 °C	10 °C		
WAFRA	21 °C	08 °C		
SALMY	17 °C	06 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST					
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.	
Thursday	01/31	Fair	23 °C	10 °C	VRB-SE 06 - 26 km/h
Friday	02/01	Warm and some scattered clouds will appear with a chance for scattered light rain	24 °C	11 °C	VRB-NW 08 - 30 km/h
Saturday	02/02	Fair and and some scattered clouds will appear	22 °C	11 °C	VRB-NW 10 - 30 km/h
Sunday	02/03	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	21 °C	10 °C	NW 12 - 32 km/h

TOMORROW PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	05:17
Sunrise	06:39
Zuhr	12:01
Asr	15:03
Sunset	17:24
Isha	18:44

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	20 °C
MIN. Temp.	10 °C
MAX. RH	92 %
MIN. RH	39 %
MAX. Wind	NW 53 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

## SKS GROUP CO. W.L.L

### NOTICE TO OLD EMPLOYEES

SKS GROUP CO. W.L.L under new management hereby inform to all employees to collect their pending benefits with effect from 02 February 2019 on following selected days and timings:

- 1- Saturday - 4:00 PM – 8:00 PM
- 2- Monday - 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
- 3- Wednesday - 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

Employees willing to settle the issues shall call following

Tel: +965 90986011

## Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171
Jazeera Airways	177
Wataniya Airways	22 066 536
Turkish Airlines	1884918
American Airlines	22087425
	22087426
	22924455
Jet Airways	22414400
FlyDubai	22432888
Qatar Airways	22425747
KLM	22418064/5/6
Royal Jordanian	22425635
British Airways	22430224
Air France	22921555
Emirates	22438184
Air India	22424444
Sri Lanka Airlines	22421578
Egypt Air	22421516
Swiss Air	22426306
Saudia	22423073
Middle East Airlines	22422493
Lufthansa	



Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page ([www.kuwait-airport.com.kw](http://www.kuwait-airport.com.kw))

## DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Thursday 31/1/2019						Departure Flights on Thursday 31/1/2019						MSR					
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	KAC	792	Madinah	14:05	Airlines	Fit	Route	Time	MSR	611	Cairo	14:10		
JZR	254	Amman	00:05	KNE	231	Riyadh	14:10	AIC	976	Goa/Chennai	00:05	UAE	872	Dubai	14:15		
JAI	572	Mumbai	00:15	SVA	602	Baku	14:10	FDB	072	Dubai	00:40	AXB	394	Kozhikode	14:15		
THY	766	ISL	00:30	FDB	500	Jeddah	14:15	JZR	409	Delhi	00:50	KNE	532	Jeddah	14:20		
BAW	157A	London	00:30	KAC	672	Dubai	14:20	JZR	707	Luxor	01:00	IAW	158A	Bahrain	14:40		
KAC	504	Beirut	00:45	FDB	8065	Dubai	14:25	JAI	571	Mumbai	01:15	IAW	158B	Al Najaf	14:55		
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40	JZR	111	Doha	01:45	KAC	661	Abu Dhabi	15:00		
SAI	441	Lahore	00:50	KAC	618	Doha	14:40	SAI	442	Dubai	01:50	QTR	1079	Doha	15:00		
KA	C102	Heathrow	00:50	KAC	412	Bangkok	15:00	KAC	677	Lahore	01:50	KNE	382	Taif	15:00		
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	KNE	529	Jeddah	15:05	KAC	417	Manila	02:20	FDB	060	Dubai	15:10		
PGT	858	Istanbul	01:00	KAC	788	Jeddah	15:10	DLH	625	Frankfurt	02:25	JZR	125	Dubai	15:15		
DLH	625	Dammam	01:25	ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15	THY	773	Istanbul	02:30	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25		
RJA	642	Amman	01:35	IRA	667	Esfahan	15:30	BAW	156A	London	02:55	KAC	673	Dubai	15:40		
UAE	853	Dubai	01:45	JZR	222	Riyadh	15:30	PGT	859	Istanbul	02:55	FDB	8066	Dubai	15:40		
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	OMA	645	Muscat	15:35	IGO	1758	Kochi	02:55	SVA	501	Jeddah	15:45		
IGO	1757	Kochi	01:55	KAC	562	Amman	15:35	THY	767	Addis Ababa	03:05	KAC	775	Riyadh	15:50		
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	KAC	304	Mumbai	15:40	ETH	621	Dubai	03:40	KNE	530	Jeddah	16:00		
JZR	722	Alexandria	02:15	UAE	857	Dubai	15:45	UAE	854	Amsterdam	03:40	KAC	615	Bahrain	16:05		
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	SAW	705	Damascus	16:00	KLM	446	Muscat	03:55	KAC	619	Doha	16:10		
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	KAC	118	New York	16:05	OMA	644	Istanbul	04:00	ETD	304	Amman	16:10		
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	ABY	127	Sharjah	16:05	THY	765	Doha	04:00	KAC	283	Abu Dhabi	16:20		
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	JZR	212	Jeddah	16:25	KKK	1269	Istanbul	04:00	IRA	666	Dhaka	16:30		
KKK	1268	Istanbul	03:05	KAC	542	Cairo	16:30	ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:05	OMA	646	Esfahan	16:30		
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:05	KAC	502	Beirut	16:30	MSR	613	Cairo	04:15	KAC	728	Muscat	16:35		
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	KAC	1072	Doha	16:35	LMU	511	Cairo	05:00	ABY	128	Jeddah	16:40		
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	FDB	051	Dubai	16:40	KAC	203	Lahore	05:10	SAW	706	Sharjah	16:45		
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	FEF	341	Sohag	16:55	IGO	1752	Chennai	05:10	KAC	675	Damascus	17:00		
JZR	724	Alexandria	04:00	JZR	114	Doha	17:10	QTR	1077	Doha	05:30	KAC	691	Dubai	17:05		
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	SVA	510	Riyadh	17:15	FDB	070	Dubai	05:50	FDB	052	Muscat	17:15		
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30	JZR	205	Jeddah	06:00	JZR	405	Dubai	17:40		
KAC	784	Jeddah	04:30	JZR	104	Bahrain	17:45	KAC	313	Mumbai	06:10	KAC	503	Kochi	17:45		
JZR	406	Kochi	04:45	JZR	214	Jeddah	17:45	JZR	713	Sohag	06:15	UAE	858	Beirut	17:45		
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	FDB	8191	Dubai	17:50	JZR	121	Dubai	06:35	QTR	1073	Doha	17:50		
KAC	382	Delhi	05:05	UAE	875	Dubai	18:00	THY	771	Istanbul	06:40	FEF	242	Alexandria	17:55		
THY	770	Istanbul	05:10	FDB	063	Dubai	18:15	JZR	251	Amman	07:05	KAC	343	Chennai	18:00		
KAC	1544	Cairo	05:10	FDB	124	Dubai	18:20	KAC	167	Paris	07:10	KAC	331	Trivandrum	18:00		
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	QTR	1080	Doha	18:30	RJA	643	Amman	07:15	JZR	733	Cairo	18:10		
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:15	MSR	620	Cairo	18:30	GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15	SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15		
JZR	112	Doha	05:25	RJA	640	Amman	19:00	KAC	413	Bangkok	07:20	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20		
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:40	ABY	123	Sharjah	19:00	KAC	173	Munich	08:20	KAC	621	Doha	18:25		
KAC	344	Chennai	05:50	RBG	555	Alexandria	19:25	JZR	601	Baku	08:30	JZR	127	Dubai	18:35		
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30	KAC	163	MXP	08:40	JZR	253	Amman	18:40		
KAC	302	Mumbai	06:25	NIA	161	Cairo	19:30	FDB	054	Dubai	08:50	JZR	403	Hyderabad	18:40		
KAC	678	Dubai	06:55	KAC	616	Bahrain	19:30	KAC	501	Beirut	09:00	FDB	8192	Dubai	18:50		
BAW	157	London	07:05	KAC	156	Istanbul	19:30	KAC	787	Jeddah	09:05	JZR	721	Alexandria	19:20		
JZR	708	Luxor	07:15	KAC	662	Abu Dhabi	19:35	KAC	613	Bahrain	09:05	FDB	064	Dubai	19:20		
KAC	354	Bengaluru	07:35	FDB	057	Dubai	19:50	KAC	791	Madinah	09:10	UAE	876	Dubai	19:30		
KAC	206	Islamabad	07:35	KAC	776	Riyadh	19:50	JZR	731	Cairo	09:10	MSR	621	Cairo	19:30		
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	JZR	126	Dubai	19:55	BAW	156	London	09:10	QTR	1081	Doha	19:55		
QTR	8511	Doha	08:00	KNE	381	Taif	20:00	KAC	541	Cairo	09:30	RJA	641	Amman	20:00		
KAC	384	Delhi	08:00	KAC	620	Doha	20:15	KAC	561	Amman	09:40	RBG	556	Alexandria	20:05		
KAC	358	Kochi	08:05	OMA	647	Muscat	20:20	KAC	671	Dubai	09:45	ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05		
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	DLH	624	Frankfurt	20:45	KAC	101	London	09:45	GFA	218	Bahrain	20:10		
MSC	411	Asyut	09:00	ETD	307	Munich	21:15	KAC	741	Dammam	09:45	NIA	162	Cairo	20:30		
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05	ALK	229	Colombo	21:20	ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45	KAC	381	Delhi	20:30		
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	MEA	402	Beirut	21:20	QTR	8512	Doha	10:00	KAC	301	Mumbai	20:35		
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30	KAC	164	MXP	21:25	UAE	856	Dubai	10:00	FDB	058	Dubai	20:35		
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	KAC	168	Paris	21:30	MSC	412	Asyut	10:00	KNE	232	Riyadh	20:50		



# Cyber weapon used to spy on iPhones of foes

WASHINGTON: A team of former US government intelligence operatives working for the United Arab Emirates hacked into the iPhones of activists, diplomats and rival foreign leaders with the help of a sophisticated spying tool called Karma, in a campaign that shows how potent cyber-weapons are proliferating beyond the world's superpowers and into the hands of smaller nations.

The cyber tool allowed the small Gulf country to monitor hundreds of targets beginning in 2016, from the Amir of Qatar and a senior Turkish official to a Nobel Peace laureate human-rights activist in Yemen, according to five former operatives and program documents reviewed by Reuters. The sources interviewed by Reuters were not Emirati citizens.

Karma was used by an offensive cyber operations unit in Abu Dhabi comprised of Emirati security officials and former American intelligence operatives working as contractors for the UAE's intelligence services. The existence of Karma and of the hacking unit, code named Project Raven, haven't been previously reported.

The ex-Raven operatives described Karma as a tool that could remotely grant access to iPhones simply by uploading phone numbers or email accounts into an automated targeting system. The tool has limits - it doesn't work on Android devices and doesn't intercept phone calls. But it was unusually potent because, unlike many exploits, Karma did not require a target to click on a link sent to an iPhone, they said.

In 2016 and 2017, Karma was used to obtain photos, emails, text messages and location information from targets' iPhones. The technique also helped the hackers harvest saved passwords, which could be used for other intrusions. It isn't clear whether the Karma hack remains in use. The former operatives said that by the end of 2017, security updates to Apple Inc's iPhone software had made Karma far less effective.

Lori Stroud, a former Raven operative who also previously worked at the US National Security Agency, told Reuters of the excitement when Karma was introduced in 2016. "It was like, 'We have this great new exploit that we just bought. Get us a huge list of targets that have iPhones now,'" she said. "It was like Christmas."

The disclosure of Karma and the Raven unit comes amid an escalating cyber arms race, with rivals such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE competing for the most sophisticated hacking tools and personnel. Tools like Karma, which can exploit hundreds of iPhones simultaneously, capturing their location data, photos and messages, are particularly sought-after, veterans of cyberwarfare say. Only about 10 nations, such as Russia, China and the United States and its closest allies, are thought to be capable of developing such weapons, said Michael Daniel, a former White House cybersecurity czar under

President Obama.

Karma and similar tools make personal devices like iPhones the "juiciest of targets," said Patrick Wardle, a former National Security Agency researcher and Apple security expert. A spokeswoman for UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declined to comment. Apple Inc declined to comment.

## A flaw in Apple's iMessage system

The former Raven insiders said Karma allowed the operatives to gather evidence on scores of targets - from activists critical of the government to regional rivals, including Qatar, and the UAE's ideological opponent, the Islamic political Muslim Brotherhood movement. It also granted them access to compromising and at times sexually explicit photos of targets. The material was described to Reuters in detail but reporters didn't inspect it. Reuters saw no evidence that the UAE leaked damaging materials discovered through Karma.

Raven was largely staffed by US intelligence community veterans, who were paid through an Emirati cybersecurity firm named DarkMatter, according to documents reviewed by Reuters. The company did not respond to numerous emails and phone calls requesting comment. The NSA declined to comment on Project Raven. The UAE government purchased Karma from a vendor outside the country, the operatives said. Reuters could not determine the tool's creator.

The operatives knew how to use Karma, feeding it new targets daily, in a system requiring almost no input after an operative set its target. But the users did not fully understand the technical details of how the tool managed to exploit Apple vulnerabilities. People familiar with the art of cyber espionage said this isn't unusual in a major signals intelligence agency, where operators are kept in the dark about most of what the engineers know of a weapon's inner workings.

Three former operatives said they understood Karma to rely, at least in part, on a flaw in Apple's messaging system, iMessage. They said the flaw allowed for the implantation of malware on the phone through iMessage, even if the phone's owner didn't use the iMessage program, enabling the hackers to establish a connection with the device. To initiate the compromise, Karma needed only to send the target a text message - the hack then required no action on the part of the recipient. The operatives could not determine how the vulnerability worked.

A person with direct knowledge of the deal confirmed Karma's sale to the Emiratis from an outside vendor, details of its capabilities and its reliance on an iMessage vulnerability. The Raven team successfully hacked into the accounts of hundreds of prominent Middle East political figures and activists across the region and, in some cases, Europe, according to former Raven operatives and program documents.

In 2017, for instance, the operatives used Karma to hack an iPhone used by Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, as well as the devices of Turkey's former Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Simsek, and Oman's head of foreign affairs, Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah. It isn't clear what material was taken from their devices. — Reuters

# AFC to probe shoe-throwing...

Continued from Page 1

Abu Dhabi authorities bought thousands of spare tickets and handed out them out to fans with Emirati

# Brutal deep freeze grips...

Continued from Page 1

The cause of the sub-zero chill was a swirl of arctic air that broke away from the polar vortex that usually encircles the North Pole. "A record arctic air mass will remain over the central and eastern US over the next several days," the National Weather Service said. "Wind chill values of 30 to 60 degrees below zero will be common across the northern Plains, Great Lakes, and upper Midwest."

Residents in Grand Forks, North Dakota awoke to a bone-chilling -35 degrees Fahrenheit, and it was -27 degrees in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Authorities warned that the extreme temperatures were life-threatening, as Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin implemented emergency procedures. Warming centers were opened for vulnerable residents such as the elderly and shelter capacities increased for the homeless. "We need everyone to do your part and make sure you and your families are prepared," said Illinois Governor JB Pritzker. US media attributed at least four deaths to the extreme

# MPs walk out as Assembly expels...

Continued from Page 1

issue, which is not correct. He said the walkout was to express opposition and non-acceptance of the decision. MP Osama Al-Shaheen said the action constituted a clear violation of the constitution and the will of the voters as well. He warned that the action could lead to what he called legal chaos, because the constitutional court exceeded its powers. The government must now call for by-elections within 60 days to elect two members to replace Harbash and Tabtabaei.

The entire issue started when the court of cassation, the highest court in the country, issued in July a final verdict convicting Harbash and Tabtabaei, in addition to a dozen other ex-MPs and opposition activists for storming the National Assembly building during a protest against corruption in Nov 2011. The court jailed Tabtabaei and Harbash to 42 months in jail. They however did not go to jail because they were outside the country when the verdict was issued.

Following the jail verdict, the Assembly voted to retain their membership in the house. A motion against

identification, meaning the 42,000-capacity Mohammed bin Zayed Stadium was nearly unanimously behind the home team.

Loud booing and whistling also drowned out the Qatari anthem before the game, which Qatar - who will host the World Cup in 2022 - dominated to reach their first Asian Cup final. "Everybody knows about the problems but we don't care - we just play football," Qatar defender Pedro Correia told AFP. "Let the people talk, winning 4-0 is more important." — AFP

cold and the major snowstorm that preceded it.

Andrew Orrison, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service, said the some of the coldest wind chills were recorded in International Falls, Minnesota, at -48C. "Really today is going to be the absolute coldest across the Northern Plains and across the Midwest... stretching down into the Ohio Valley as well," Orrison said in a phone interview yesterday. "Moving forward here, we are going to see a decent amount of this cold air move through the East Coast."

An Illinois police department found a fictitious cause for the icy blast, posting on Facebook that its officers had arrested Elsa, the frosty character from the Disney movie "Frozen," for bringing the arctic air to the Midwest. The McLean Police Department shared a staged photo of officers putting a woman dressed in a blue princess gown in pink handcuffs and escorting her into a police car.

With officials in Midwest and the Northern states advising residents to stay indoors, dashcam footage from one trucker taken outside Grand Rapids, Michigan gave a snapshot of hair-raising driving conditions. "I about just got caught in a giant wreck; cars are into other pickups, there's people hurt. I gotta let you go," Jason Coffelt is heard saying in an Instagram post on Tuesday, as his truck is forced off the highway and pulls up just before a multi-vehicle accident. — Agencies

this vote was then filed at the constitutional court, which ruled last month that an article in the Assembly's internal charter was unconstitutional. It was the article the Assembly vote was based on.

In another Assembly business, MPs comfortably passed the second and final reading of the early retirement law under which male and female civil servants can seek retirement before the legal age against a two percent deduction from their pension until women reach 60 and men 65 years of age. With the new law, workers can apply for voluntarily retirement before the legal age, provided they bear the costs, in addition to creating the opportunity allowing retirement at the age of 30 for men and 25 for women from Jan 1, 2020. There is no discrimination, within framework of the new law, between married and unmarried women who seek retirement.

The law has a string of cases and conditions, saying in part that the retiree can seek disbursement of a quarter of the retirement payment for 28 months in advance - only once during their lifetime. Finance Minister Nayef Al-Hajraf affirmed that the new law grants prerogatives based on social solidarity. It is voluntary and the civil servant in this case bears relevant costs, he explained. Ghanem dismissed the belief that that this law will enable the government to force civil servants to retire. "Such rhetoric is baseless because the retirement is voluntary," he assured.



LONDON: Rights group Amnesty stage a demonstration outside the UK headquarters of US travel company TripAdvisor yesterday. — AFP

# Digital giants ‘profiting’ from...

Continued from Page 1

is also strategic affairs minister, charged with opposing the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement.

He said that he had started to act well before the publication of Amnesty's study. "A few weeks ago I asked the finance minister to end the tax benefits granted to the organization," he said without giving details. Israel sees the BDS movement as a strategic threat and accuses it of anti-Semitism - a claim activists deny, saying they want only to see an end to Israel's occupation.

Amnesty International accused the online firms of "normalizing" settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem. "To boost bookings, many listings in settlements boast of their proximity to areas of natural beauty in the occupied territories, such as the Dead Sea, nature reserves and the desert," it said. "By listing and promoting these natural features and nature-based activities and attractions the digital companies are increasing the attractiveness of the listings, securing greater numbers of tourists and ultimately benefiting financially from the illegal exploitation of Palestinian natural resources."

Amnesty launched a campaign in 2017 calling on governments to prevent businesses based in their countries from operating in settlements. "Governments worldwide must take action to regulate companies or activities over which they have control," said the report. In November, Airbnb announced it was removing from its rental listings settlement homes in the occupied West Bank. But it never said when the decision would go into force.

Israel passed legislation in March 2017 banning entry to foreigners who support boycotting the country or its settlements. In November of that year Erdan's office denied entry to a US employee of Amnesty, with an interior ministry spokeswoman giving the grounds as "BDS", without elaborating. About 450,000 Israelis live in West Bank settlements often in confrontation with the territory's 2.5 million Palestinians, in addition to

200,000 living in settlements in occupied east Jerusalem. Israeli settlements are considered illegal under international law and major roadblocks to peace, as they are built on land Palestinians see as part of their future state.

Meanwhile, Fashion designer Vivienne Westwood and Pink Floyd singer Roger Waters were among dozens of figures from Britain's creative industries urging the BBC yesterday to oppose Israel hosting this year's Eurovision Song Contest. The 50-strong coalition, which also includes filmmaker Mike Leigh and author Yann Martel, said the broadcaster should "act on its principles" and call for the annual competition to be moved over Israel's "systematic violation of Palestinian human rights".

"The BBC is bound by its charter to 'champion freedom of expression'," the group stated in a letter published in The Guardian newspaper. "It should act on its principles and press for Eurovision to be relocated to a country where crimes against that freedom are not being committed." The largely European song competition, which dates back to the 1950s, is typically held in May in the winning country from the previous year.

In 2018 that was Israel and its commercial capital Tel Aviv was chosen to host this year's event. The creatives' appeal was timed ahead of the BBC screening a domestic competition on Feb 8 to select the UK's entry. "For any artist of conscience, this would be a dubious honor," said the signatories, who also included musician Peter Gabriel alongside several architects and comedians. "When discrimination and exclusion are so deeply embedded, Eurovision 2019's claim to celebrate diversity and inclusion must ring hollow. Much more in tune with 'inclusivity' is the outpouring of support across Europe for the Palestinian call for artists and broadcasters not to go to Tel Aviv," it said.

A BBC spokeswoman said Eurovision "is not a political event and does not endorse any political message or campaign" and that the broadcaster had no role in choosing the host. "We do not believe it would be appropriate to use the BBC's participation for political reasons," she added, noting it would be taking part. The letter follows more than 60 LGBTQ organizations from nearly 20 countries across Europe and beyond on Tuesday urging its global communities to boycott this year's contest. The signatories alleged Israel was using Eurovision "to distract attention from its war crimes against Palestinians". — AFP

faction of turning ourselves (Muslims & Christians) into enemies."

Authorities are also hunting for those behind the cathedral assault, which security forces initially said was not a suicide bombing. On Tuesday, however, Duterte contradicted them, saying one of the bombers had blown himself up outside the cathedral. If confirmed, it would be only the second known suicide attack in the Philippines after a van bombing in July that killed 11 and was also claimed by Islamic State.

Lorenzana appeared to walk back on the president's comments yesterday, saying: "The final conclusion is not there yet. It's still being investigated." The probe was zeroing in a group tied to the notorious Islamist kidnap-for-ransom group Abu Sayyaf, which has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. Police said they tried to arrest one of the suspects on Tuesday, but he got away and an armed man was shot dead by officers in the process.

The attacks have cast a shadow over hopes that a vote to give Muslims in the south more control over their own affairs would help quell long-running separatist violence. Rebels and the government in Manila have expressed hope the new so-called Bangsamoro area will finally attract the investment needed to pull the region out of the brutal poverty that makes it a hotspot for recruiting radicals.

However, hardline factions aligned with IS were not part of the decades-long peace process with the nation's largest separatist group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, that culminated Jan 21 with the resounding approval of a new Muslim led-region in the south. Jolo, which is home to hardline Islamist factions, is the only area in the southern Philippines that voted against the Bangsamoro.

The grenade attack yesterday drew immediate condemnation from authorities. "There is no redeeming such blasphemous murder. It is the highest form of cowardice and obscenity to attack people who (are) at prayer," said regional leader Mujiv Hataman. "We call on people of all faiths ... to come together to pray for peace." — Agencies

# Philippine mosque attack kills 2...

Continued from Page 1

Just three days earlier, a bombing at a cathedral on the neighboring island of Jolo claimed 21 lives at Sunday mass in an assault claimed by the Islamic State group.

HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable of condolences to Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte over the victims of the grenade attack. In the cable, the Amir voiced sharp condemnation of this terrorist and cowardly act that targeted innocents and disrupted the country's security and stability. He reiterated Kuwait's principled stand that decries all manifestations and forms of terrorism, and stands side by side with the Philippines in all security measures it is taking to fight such criminal acts. HH the Amir also wished mercy to the deceased and swift recovery to the injured. Similar cables were sent by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah to the Philippine president.

Authorities warned against speculating the mosque attack was an act of revenge, adding they had no indication it was retaliation for the cathedral bombing. "We're still looking at it, but we have not found any connection," Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana told reporters. "In the past when churches were bombed ... there were no revenge attacks." Authorities have not publicly identified any suspects and no one has claimed responsibility for the mosque attack.

"Regardless of one's faith (we) must resist becoming a victim of this vicious cycle of violence these terrorists are now attempting to create," Zia Alonto Adiong, a politician in the southern Philippines, wrote on Twitter. "Let us not fall into their trap and give them the satis-



Sports

# All roads lead to Madrid as new Davis Cup era dawns

## Australia Davis Cup captain Lleyton Hewitt slams new format

**LONDON:** The Davis Cup starts a new era this weekend as the revamped team competition kicks off with 12 qualifying-round ties spread across the globe to decide which nations progress to November's finals week in Madrid.

The International Tennis Federation (ITF) believe the new structure, which will culminate with 18 nations battling it out in the Spanish capital as a climax to the season, will breathe new life into an event first held in 1900.

Change is rarely smooth though, and already some of the old problems are resurfacing with several big names notable by their absence while critics of the new format have again been vocal.

With last year's semi-finalists-Croatia, France, Spain and the United States-exempted to the Davis Cup Finals week, and Britain and Argentina handed wildcards, this week's action will decide the 12 remaining spots.

Switzerland and Serbia are both in action, at home to Russia and away to Uzbekistan respectively, but they will have to do without Roger Federer and newly-crowned Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic who are both unavailable. Austria, who host Chile in Salzburg, will be missing world number eight Dominic Thiem who has cited health reasons for his withdrawal from the team. Of the current ATP top 10 only Alexander Zverev is in action this week, spearheading Germany's home clash with Hungary.

While the popular 'home-away' format is retained for the qualifiers, the ties have been shortened to two days with two singles on Friday and a doubles plus two singles on Saturday. Matches will be played over best-of-three sets not best of five-a move designed to lighten the load.

This weekend's matches will be the last chance for teams to play in front of a partisan home crowd, apart from Spain who are hosting the Nov. 18-24 finals.

Australia captain Lleyton Hewitt has already weighed in with his thoughts on the changes-criticising the involvement of Barcelona footballer Gerard Pique's investment company Kosmos in the revamped Davis Cup format.

The ITF signed a 25-year \$3 billion deal with Kosmos with the changes being voted in last August. "He (Pique) knows nothing about tennis," Hewitt told reporters on Tuesday before his side's home tie against Bosnia Herzegovina. "It'd be like me asking to change things for the Champions League. "The two biggest points of difference were, one, the home and away aspect of it and, secondly, (it) was the best of five sets. If you look at the pinnacle of our sport, which are the four majors, they're best of five sets. "Having (the finals) in one place is ridiculous." Kosmos declined to comment on Hewitt's remarks. ITF president David Haggerty says he is excited about the new format and that having a soccer World Cup-style event in one host city will open up the sport to new markets and fan bases and generate more TV revenue streams.

He argues that the few people outside Croatia and France would have watched last year's final, won by Croatia, in Lille. A further fly in the ointment is the ATP Cup-a team event to be launched in Australia next January-although the proof of the pudding will be how the Madrid showpiece is received.

While some nations are weakened this week, Russia can call on world number 11 Karen Khachanov and 16th ranked Daniil Medvedev, who reached the Australian Open last 16, against a Swiss side missing Federer and Stan Wawrinka. Exciting talent Denis Shapovalov plays for Canada in Slovakia, while China and Japan meet in the competition for the first time in 10 years, although Kei Nishikori is missing for the Japanese. — Reuters



Lleyton Hewitt



## Al Sayer partners for BeInspired Series 2019

**KUWAIT:** The BeInspired Series is back in 2019, with the partnership of ALSAYER Holding to run yet another landmark event! The event transcend sport and have successfully reinforced a bond with society to start a health & fitness revolution in the country. This is the 3rd year of BeInspired events and it continues to grow in popularity and success every year. Around 750 runners are expected to participate in the 2019 event.

On Saturday 2nd February 2019 participants will take part in the 7.2 KM 'BeInspired' Road Run at 8:30 AM that will start and finish in the impressive Murouj complex. The lush backdrop of the Sahara Golf and Equestrian club will make this run a scenic yet thrilling event.

Ghada Hussain CEO and Founder of Inspire Sahara Health Club commented "The BeInspired Series is a cornerstone of our values and beliefs in Inspire, for giving back to the public the opportunity

to move, be healthy in a safe and fun environment. The run is part of a series of events which will also involve a mud run and obstacle course in March".

"ALSAYER Holding envision to bring society of all ages and abilities together through the sport of running, and BeInspired events are helpful to drive active lifestyle among community, which is one of the key message of Well Being spread through the Corporate Sustainability - CSR practices. We aim to offer required skills and resources they need to succeed through the partnership" explained Nehad Mohammad AlHaj Ali, DGM Corporate Excellence at ALSAYER Holding.

Supporters are invited on the race day to witness this event, enjoying with family and friends at the facility and cheer runners along the course in Al Murooj and Sahara Golf Resort at Sabhan area.



## Burgan Bank wins prestigious Kuwait Cricket Bank trophy

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank is pleased to announce its historic victory as Champion of the annual 'Kuwait Cricket Bank League' 2019, crediting its talented in-house Cricket team for the outstanding win. In a pulsating finals match, Burgan Bank defeated Al Ahli United Bank by five wickets, claiming the number one position.

Considered one of the top cricket championship leagues in Kuwait with ten leading banks vying for the honor, part of diversified initiatives and activities organized by Kuwait Banks Club for the banks' staff. The league

aimed at encouraging sports as a gateway to maintaining a healthier lifestyle. The Sports Committee of Burgan Bank congratulated the team on the incredible win and wished them further achievements in upcoming championships. Special mentions go to Srinath from Burgan Bank's Phone Banking department, Wonder Bhotheju from Cards Operations and Ramez Parker from Investment Banking, who is also the leading run scorer of 2019's championship, for their inspiring performance.

As a leading contributor to progress in society, Burgan

Bank champions sports and healthy living both externally and internally and supports many dynamic health platforms to guarantee the health and wellbeing of its employees. In the wider society, the Bank is known for its support of local and global competitions through sponsorships and partnerships as it creates a healthy and positive effect on rising talents and athletes. Leading by example, Burgan Bank's personnel strive to inspire the community to integrate sports, team spirit, and physical activities as part of their lifestyle too.



## Australia seek S Lanka relief

**CANBERRA:** Australia finally have the chance to bring some cheers to their fans after an egregious 2018 when Tim Paine's men take on Sri Lanka at the Manuka Oval from Friday with a series victory beckoning the beleaguered hosts.

The 4-0 Ashes victory in 2017-18 seems like a distant past for an Australian side who have since been beaten away by South Africa and Pakistan and lost their first ever home series to India earlier this month.

The tumultuous trip to South Africa not only resulted in a 3-1 drubbing for Australia, but they also lost their two best batsmen in captain Steve Smith and his deputy David Warner due to a ball-tampering scandal.

Australia beat Sri Lanka by an innings and 40 runs in Brisbane for only their second test victory of the summer and the hosts are determined not to take their foot off the pedal in the second and final Test. "We had a great game in Brisbane but I think we can get better," Australia spinner Nathan Lyon told reporters yesterday.

"We know Sri Lanka is going to come back hard, they are a classy outfit, a well-drilled outfit. We are expecting them to come back hard." Sri Lanka have lost all-rounder Angelo Mathews and paceman Nuwan Pradeep through injuries even before the first test and their bid to level the series has been jolted with fast bowlers Lahiru Kumara and Dushmantha Chameera also joining them in the sidelines.

Sri Lanka have call up 22-year-old paceman Chamika Karunaratne but their pace attack has already been robbed of much of its firepower. The tourists also faced off-field issues ahead of the second test after coach Chandika Hathurusingha was dropped from the selection panel while batting coach Jon Lewis has left for home to attend a family matter.

Lyon said the hosts were happy with their preparation as they head into the clash at Manuka Oval, which is making its debut as a test venue. "It's an exciting group, there's lot of intensity at training. Our preparation for every test this summer has been outstanding," said Lyon, who spent four years from 2006-2010 at the venue as a curator.—Reuters

## WI women thankful for Pakistan's cricket revival

**KARACHI:** West Indies skipper Merissa Aguilera yesterday called for cricket nations to return to Pakistan as her squad arrived in the country ahead of a three-match Twenty20 series. The 31-year-old from Trinidad is leading the 13-member side that landed in Karachi early yesterday, amid tight security for the first visit to Pakistan by a non-Asian women's team in 15 years.

Even as security dominated the day's discourse, the team was able to enjoy the finer sides of Pakistan's largest city, including a camel ride along Clifton beach. Bangladesh was the last women's team to tour Pakistan in 2015. The West Indies last visited the country in 2004.

The side, which will miss their captain Stefanie Taylor—who withdrew from the tour over security fears—will play three matches against their Pakistani counterparts today, tomorrow and Sunday in Karachi.

Aguilera said Pakistan—which has only hosted a handful of limited over matches since a militant attack on the Sri Lankan team bus suspended international cricket in the country in 2009 — is back on track.

"I think right now we are heading in the right direction when it comes to bringing back the cricket in Pakistan," said Aguilera at the trophy unveiling ceremony. "I really believe that the other teams should really be thinking about it (touring Pakistan) because it's not just about teams, it's about cricket and when you look at the fans they are so happy that we are here.—AFP



Sports

# Rams running back Anderson ready to rumble in Super Bowl

## ‘Bam-Bam’ plays in his third Super Bowl on Sunday

**ATLANTA:** After a roller coaster year that started in Denver, took a detour in Carolina and included a pit-stop in Oakland before arriving at the Los Angeles Rams, C.J. Anderson is ready to rumble. The running back whose combative rushing style has earned him the nickname “Bam-Bam” plays in his third Super Bowl on Sunday when he suits up for the Rams against the New England Patriots.

But while Anderson is renowned for his direct approach on the field, his journey to Atlanta has been anything but straightforward. After being released by Denver last April, Anderson started the 2018 season with the Carolina Panthers, but was cut in November after the franchise decided that Christian McCaffrey would remain the team’s principal offensive weapon.

He was signed by the Oakland Raiders in December, only to be released a week later without seeing any game time. The Rams, needing cover for running back Todd Gurley, wasted no time in hiring the 27-year-old who packs 225 pounds (102 kg) into a 5ft 8in (1.73) frame. The signing paid immediate dividends, with Anderson amassing nearly 300 rushing yards in two regular-season games before adding another 123 yards in a playoff win over Dallas.

Anderson, one of the stars of Denver’s victory in the 2016 Super Bowl against Carolina, said he had never doubted his talent despite repeatedly being waived.

‘NEVER LOST HOPE’

“I never lost hope because I never got released

because of talent,” Anderson told AFP. “So I never lost hope. That said, I never thought I’d be in a position to play in the Super Bowl. But that’s football.” Anderson’s arrival has given the Rams another dimension in offense, adding a powerful running option against the more fluid rushing style of Gurley, one of the team’s established stars.

Anderson said he had struck an immediate rapport with Gurley. “He knew I had the talent so he respected my game,” Anderson said. “At the end of the day though I tell people ‘This is Todd’s football team. I’m just here trying to get as many first downs as I can.’

“If Todd wants to take all the snaps this Sunday, I’m good. As long as we win.” Anderson also believes his truncated season means he is a fresh pair of legs at a time when most players are weary from the ravages of a bruising season.

“I’m definitely the freshest player on the football team,” he said. “It feels good to be fresh. I highly doubt I’ll be this fresh ever again in my career.”

Away from the NFL, Anderson is devoted to his charitable Dreams Never Die Foundation, which aims to provide opportunities for inner city youth to excell in sports and academia.

“I grew up as an inner city kid, single parent home, no dad, drugs being used and sold in my house,” Anderson said. “I know there were kids living in crazier situations. So we’re just trying to give kids a different opportunity, and different resources that I didn’t have growing up.”—AFP



**NEW ORLEANS:** File photo shows C.J. Anderson #35 of the Los Angeles Rams looks on prior to the NFC Championship game against the New Orleans Saints at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome on January 20, 2019 in New Orleans, Louisiana. —AFP

## Light-heavyweight champ Jones approved for UFC 235 bout

**LOS ANGELES:** Reigning UFC light heavyweight champion Jon Jones was given a one-fight license Tuesday by the Nevada State Athletic Commission to compete against Anthony Smith at UFC 235 in March.

After more than three hours, officials granted the rare license but attached several conditions for Jones if he wants another bout in Nevada. The 31-year-old American will be required to be drug tested at least twice a month until UFC 235, then comply with a similarly rigorous testing schedule for the remainder of 2019 in order to fight in Nevada again.

Jones tested positive for trace amounts of a long-term metabolite of the anabolic steroid Turinabol multiple

times in 2018, then tested negative in four consecutive drug tests from September to November before another positive test last month.

That prompted UFC to move its December 29 show from Nevada, which would not license him after the positive, to California, where Jones was allowed to fight on short notice with extra drug testing, as California officials concluded the new positive tests and others with trace amounts before the fight were from a 2017 violation for which he had served a 15-month suspension.

Jones, a three-time banned fighter, recaptured his title with a third-round stoppage of Alexander Gustafsson. Now his future depends on staying clean outside the Octagon as well as how he performs inside it. “This is on you. It’s on your shoulders,” commissioner Anthony Marnell told Jones. “I like what I hear, I like what I see, but the proof is in the pudding. “I’m happy you are back here. You will always be treated with respect here and I wanted to make sure that you understood that. Welcome back to Nevada and do the right thing from this point going forward. As you know, we’re going to be visiting you frequently.” The US Anti-Doping Agency, in a statement, said it found the samples in Jones’s positive tests to be residual based on amounts and said they provided no chance of performance enhancement.



Jon Jones

“We agree with and support the NSAC decision today to license Jon Jones to fight in Nevada and while USADA does not have jurisdiction over the licensing, we appreciate being able to collaborate with the NSAC to ensure a fair outcome,” USADA said. — AFP

## Wagner makes China move after ‘very attractive offer’

**SHANGHAI:** Bayern Munich’s back-up striker Sandro Wagner yesterday joined Tianjin Teda in the Chinese Super League (CSL) for a reported transfer fee of five million euros (\$5.7m) and a hefty pay packet.

A growing number of players are leaving Europe for China and typically earn much higher wages, although Chinese football authorities have moved to cool the transfer market. “My advisors first told me about it and I discussed everything in peace with my family,” Wagner told German daily Bild. “After weighing up many things, we decided to go to China together, my whole family and some friends will be coming along. “It feels like half of Munich is now coming to China,” he added as a joke. The 31-year-old former Germany international started just once for Bundesliga champions Bayern this season, with Robert Lewandowski as first choice, and failed to make the squad for their past two games.

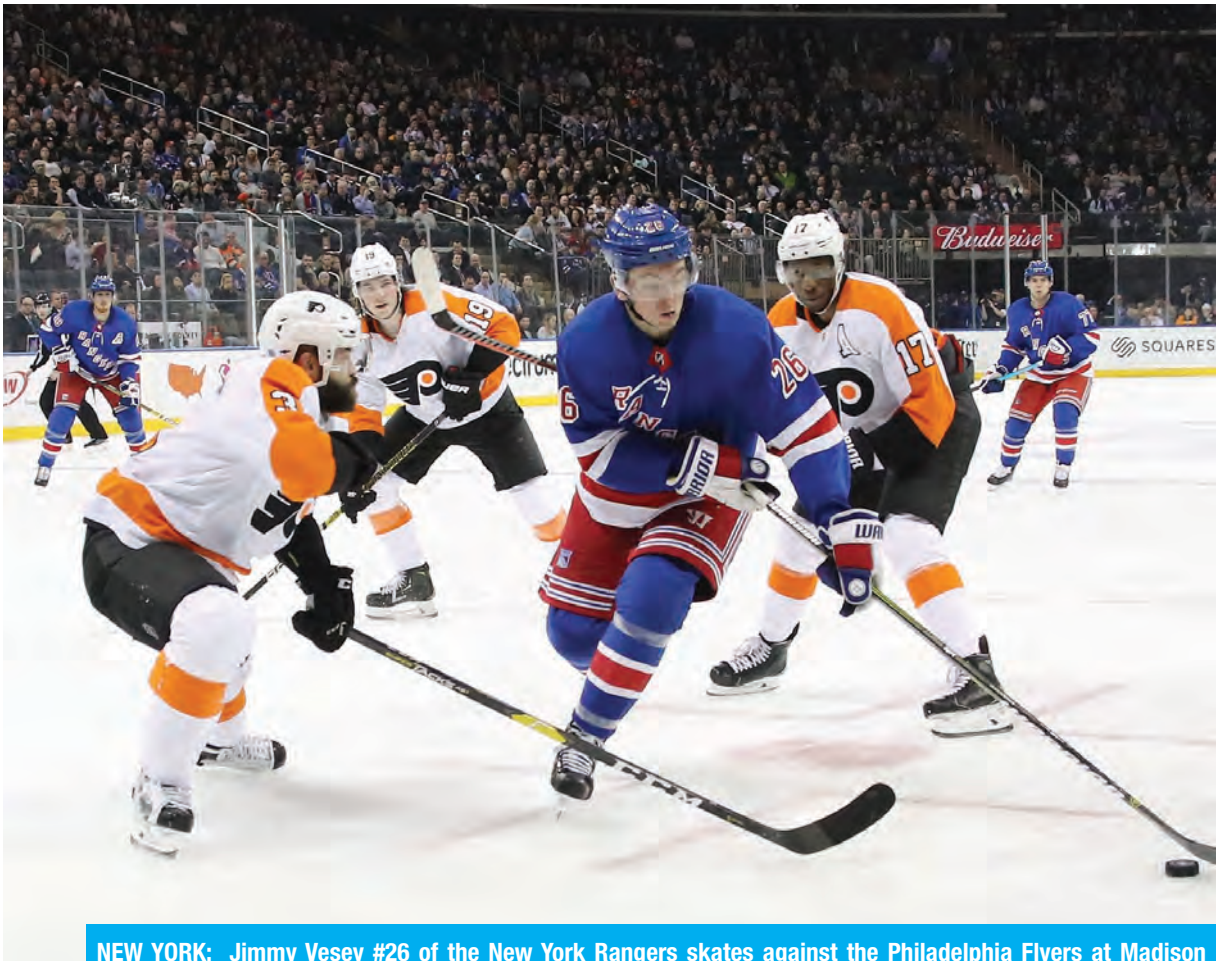
Munich-born Wagner admitted he is leaving with a heavy heart after only a year with the defending Bundesliga champions. “Of course, my plan had been to stay longer in Munich and finish my career here,” added Wagner.

“I love this club, but things developed differently and I had to accept that. “However, I will never say a bad word about this club, but wish FC Bayern and it’s fans all the best.” Chinese and German media said Teda paid about five million euros for the forward, though German daily Bild said previously that Bayern wanted more than that.

Wagner has signed a two-year deal and will pocket about 7.5 million euros a season, Bild said, calling it “a mega salary”. The burly Wagner joined Bayern from Hoffenheim for 13 million euros last January to provide cover for Lewandowski.

But he had become increasingly frustrated by his lack of playing time under Bayern head coach Niko Kovac. Wagner will link up with former Hertha Berlin team-mate Felix Bastians at Teda, who are coached by another German, Uli Stielike.

Teda have struggled in the CSL in recent years, and finished just outside the relegation zone last season. Wagner retired from international duty with Germany in May last year—an angry reaction to being left out of the 2018 World Cup squad by Joachim Loew, despite scoring five goals in eight games for his country. The Chinese season begins on March 1. — AFP



**NEW YORK:** Jimmy Vesey #26 of the New York Rangers skates against the Philadelphia Flyers at Madison Square Garden on Tuesday in New York City. The Flyers shut-out the Rangers 1-0. — AFP

## Stolarz Flyers’ latest hero in net

**NEW YORK:** Anthony Stolarz made his homecoming to the New York area a winning one Tuesday night, becoming the latest Philadelphia goalie to author a surprisingly stout performance as the Flyers beat the Rangers 1-0. Oskar Lindblom scored in the first period for the Flyers, who have won five straight. The Rangers’ three-game winning streak ended with the loss. Stolarz, who grew up about 35 miles away from Madison Square Garden in Edison, N.J., made a career-high 38 saves in his first appearance for the Flyers since he sustained a lower body injury Dec. 15. It was the second NHL shutout for Stolarz, who also blanked the Detroit Red Wings on Dec. 11, 2016. Stolarz is the third Flyers goalie to post a shutout this season: Brian Elliott and Calvin Pickard have one apiece, as well. He is one of seven men to start in net for Philadelphia this season, already tied for the most goaltenders used by an NHL

team in a single season. The Quebec Nordiques (1989-90), St. Louis Blues (2002-03) and Los Angeles Kings (2007-08) also had seven starting goalies.

JETS 4, BRUINS 3 (SO)

Kyle Connor scored twice and netted the lone shootout tally as Winnipeg edged host Boston. Goalie Connor Hellebuyck made 36 saves through regulation and overtime and denied all three Boston shootout attempts as the Central Division-leading Jets snapped a two-game losing skid. Connor executed a perfect backhand after several fakes on the shootout winner, an appropriate analogy for the back-and-forth affair.

SABRES 5, BLUE JACKETS 4

Conor Sheary scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period as visiting Buffalo skated to a narrow win over Columbus. Sheary joined Evan Rodrigues with a goal and an assist for Buffalo, which overcame squandering a two-goal lead late in the second period to snap a five-game losing skid in Columbus. Pierre-Luc Dubois and Cam Atkinson each scored and set up a goal for Columbus, which has dropped three in a row following an 11-3-0 surge. —Reuters

## Rose seeks to consolidate top ranking

**KING ABDULLAH ECONOMIC CITY:** World number one Justin Rose is determined to avoid politics and focus on consolidating his position on top of global golf against a stellar field at the inaugural Saudi International.

The 38-year-old Englishman, who won last week’s Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines on the US Tour, is part of a formidable 132-man field in the \$3.5 million European Tour event at the Royal Greens Golf Course.

He will go up against world No. 2 Brooks Koepka, No. 3 Dustin Johnson and No. 5 Bryson DeChambeau, who won last week’s Dubai Desert Classic. “That’s one of the big reasons that attracted me to the tournament. They had secured Brooks and DJ to come and play and I think I was No 3 in the world at the time when I announced playing here,” Rose said.

“Any time you have the opportunity to play against the best players in the world, it brings added inspiration and for me, that’s a big goal this week.” The win at Torrey Pines widened the gap between Rose and Koepka at the top of the rankings, but the American still has a chance to go back to No. 1 with a win here. “Obviously the world No 1 position has been going back and forth, back and forth,” said Rose, who has held the top position four times for a combined eight weeks since reaching the summit for the first time last September.

“Last year we had four guys vying for it. It was going to take a player a good run and a consistent run of wins to go break clear,” Rose said. “So, last week I managed to just put a little bit of breathing space in there, and that’s motivation for me this week.” “My primary focus this year will be around the major championships, but clearly it’s a nice thing to have,” Rose added. “The bigger lead you can build, the better. The tournament, part of Saudi Arabia’s “Vision 2030” social and economic plan, has come under criticism, but Rose said this could be the start of a new era for the country.

“It’s never straightforward, is it? But we are here to support the European Tour. I’m a European Tour player,” Rose said. “For me, I think I can only commend their vision in terms of growing the game of golf. That’s the industry in which I live. I’m not qualified to speak on any other subjects to be honest.”

“Between now and 2030, there’s a big push here for golf. Many, many courses are going to be developed. Hopefully, golf is a conduit to bridging the gap between this region and how we perceive golf in the western world.

“Who knows? Twenty, 30 years ago, Abu Dhabi and Dubai looked somewhat similar to here, and we’ve all seen the growth and what’s possible in these regions. We can only support the vision.” The tournament starts today. Also in the field are the reigning Masters champion Patrick Reed, the 2017 Masters champion Sergio Garcia and the 2016 Open champion Henrik Stenson. — AFP



Justin Rose



## Sports

# Man City's title bid rocked by Newcastle, United stage late escape

## Cardiff pays an emotional tribute to Emiliano Sala

**LONDON:** Manchester City's Premier League title challenge was rocked by a stunning 2-1 defeat at Newcastle, while Manchester United's late escape preserved Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's unbeaten start in a dramatic 2-2 draw with Burnley on Tuesday.

City needed a win at St James' Park to close the gap on leaders Liverpool to one point ahead of the Reds' clash with Leicester later.

But Pep Guardiola's 100th league game as City manager proved an evening to forget for the champions.

Second-placed City's loss means Liverpool, chasing their first English title since 1990, can move seven points clear with a win over Leicester.

It was a remarkable result given City took just 24 seconds to open the scoring. Raheem Sterling crossed to David Silva and the City midfielder bravely headed it back as he collided with Newcastle goalkeeper Martin Dubravka. Aguero pounced on the loose ball to poke home from close range for his 17th goal of the season.

But City lost their rhythm after that and were punished when Salomon Rondon equalised for Newcastle in the 66th minute from Isaac Hayden's header.

There was worse to come for City in the 80th minute. Fernandinho's foul on Sean Longstaff gave Matt Ritchie the chance to score from the penalty spot and the Newcastle midfielder fired his effort low into the net. "It wasn't our best. We started with a goal but we didn't have the rhythm to impose our game," Guardiola said. It was City's first defeat since a loss at Leicester on December 26, ending a run of eight successive wins in all competitions.

Of City's title chances, Guardiola said: "It is difficult. We have a chance to do it but we need to win our games. The advantage is not there but we need to continue." Solskjaer had overseen eight straight victories in all competitions-including six in the league-since replacing the sacked Jose Mourinho in December.

He lost that perfect streak, but still finished impressed

by United's never-say-die spirit at Old Trafford. Ashley Barnes put Burnley ahead in the 51st minute and Chris Wood struck in the 81st minute to double their lead. But former United star Solskjaer, serving as interim boss until the end of the season after temporarily leaving Norway's Molde, has had the midas touch. And in the 87th minute Jeff Hendrick dragged back Jesse Lingard to concede a penalty that was converted by Paul Pogba. United poured forward and Victor Lindelof snatched the equaliser in the last seconds.

"The comeback was brilliant. The players have been asked how they would react if they went behind, so the way we fought back was fantastic," Solskjaer said.

Cardiff paid an emotional tribute to Emiliano Sala following the striker's disappearance, but Arsenal ran out 2-1 winners at the Emirates Stadium.

Sala signed from Nantes in a club-record deal, but the 28-year-old Argentine was one of two people on board the Piper Malibu plane which vanished in the Channel Islands last week en route to Cardiff.

Yellow daffodils were carried onto the pitch by Cardiff captain Sol Bamba and there was a minute's applause before kick-off for Sala.

A banner shown by Cardiff fans read: "We never saw you play, we never saw you score, but Emiliano, our beautiful Bluebird, we will love you forever more."

The Gunners took the lead in the 66th minute when Bruno Manga fouled Sead Kolasinac and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang stroked home the resulting penalty. Alexandre Lacazette's 83rd-minute strike ensured fifth-placed Arsenal moved level on points with fourth-placed Chelsea. "We talked about Emiliano before the game and I thought it was appropriate we gave a good account of ourselves against a good side," Cardiff manager Neil Warnock said after Nathaniel Mendez-Laing scored in stoppage-time for the visitors.

Ten-man Everton ruined Jan Siewert's first game in charge of Huddersfield with a 1-0 win over the bottom



club at the John Smith's Stadium.

Former Borussia Dortmund reserve team boss Siewert replaced David Wagner, who left by mutual consent earlier in January. But it was a nightmare start for Siewert as Richarlison's third-minute strike put Everton ahead.

eventual winners. But while last year the Brazilian national team's influence proved crucial in persuading Neymar to go under the knife, this time PSG were determined to play the deciding role in the treatment of their record signing.

"The club took control of the matter," a source close to PSG told AFP. So how will they get the former Barcelona superstar back to full fitness in two and a half months without an operation? "A simple consolidation of the affected bone by orthopaedic treatment, which could also be accompanied by the injection of stem cells," an expert in sports rehabilitation, who asked not to be named, told AFP. Neymar's new injury is a major boost to United, who are unbeaten since Ole Gunnar Solskjaer replaced the sacked Jose Mourinho in the dugout. It is also a blow to PSG's ambitions of going all the way in Europe after years of disappointment in the Champions League since the Qatari takeover of the club in 2011.

Neymar has scored 20 goals this season in 23 appearances, including five in the Champions League group stage. His injury comes just as the Ligue 1 leaders are also sweating on the fitness of key midfielder Marco Verratti, who has an ankle problem.

Fellow midfielder Adrien Rabiot has been frozen out over his refusal to sign a new contract, but PSG yesterday completed the signing of Argentine international midfielder Leandro Paredes from Zenit Saint Petersburg. Paredes signed on a four-and-a-half-year deal for a reported fee of 47 million euros (\$54 million), and the club are also keen on the Everton midfielder Idrissa Gueye. — AFP

## Neymar to miss Man Utd tie after being ruled out for 10 weeks

**PARIS:** Neymar will miss both legs of Paris Saint-Germain's upcoming Champions League last-16 tie against Manchester United after the French club confirmed yesterday that the world's most expensive player would be out for 10 weeks with a metatarsal injury.

However, Neymar will not undergo an operation, with PSG saying the 26-year-old Brazilian had instead agreed on "a conservative treatment" that could see him return in time for the Champions League quarter-finals in April should they qualify.

"After detailed analysis by specialists, a consensus was reached of a conservative treatment of Neymar's injury to the fifth right metatarsal," the French champions said. "Informed of this recommendation, Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian international striker agreed with this protocol. As a result, Neymar is expected to return to the field within 10 weeks."

## Soothsayer Xavi has last laugh with Asian Cup predictions

**DOHA:** The 2010 World Cup had Paul the Octopus, the NFL has play-call predictor extraordinaire Tony Romo, and this year's Asian Cup has Barcelona great, and now soothsayer, Xavi Hernandez.

The Spanish World Cup winner has proved remarkably skilled off the pitch as well as on it, with a series of stunning predictions about what would happen in the tournament. He has an almost 100 per cent record, including picking Qatar and Japan as surprise finalists. Before that he correctly predicted seven of the last eight quarter-finalists and three of the four semi-finalists. The only predictions he has got wrong so far is tipping Syria to get to the last eight-Vietnam did instead-and Australia to make the semi-finals, but they lost to the United Arab Emirates.

But apart from that, Xavi has proved remarkably prescient. He was ridiculed online after he went on Doha-based TV station Al Kass in December and publicly announced his predictions for the tournament. Many accused the Doha-based star of home town bias after picking Qatar to reach the final but Xavi is having the last laugh. For Friday's final, the Al Sadd star and 2022 World Cup ambassador has, perhaps unsurprisingly, predicted Qatar to lift the trophy for the first ever time.

But as he is matching Paul the Octopus, who managed 85 per cent in 2010 including correctly selecting Xavi's Spain to lift the World Cup, there is a good chance the Spaniard will be proved correct. — AFP



Xavi Hernandez



## Piatek scores twice as Milan beat Napoli to reach Coppa semis

**MILAN:** Krzysztof Piatek said it was "just the start" to his AC Milan career after scoring twice on his full debut as Gennaro Gattuso's side beat Napoli 2-0 at the San Siro on Tuesday to reach the Coppa Italia semi-finals.

Piatek, signed from Genoa last week as a replacement for Gonzalo Higuaín, put the hosts ahead in the 11th minute before doubling the lead before the half-hour mark with a fine individual strike. It was the second time in four days that Milan had dealt a blow to Napoli's hopes of winning a trophy this season, after a goalless draw on Saturday at the San Siro ultimately left Carlo Ancelotti's men 11 points behind Serie A leaders Juventus.

"I expected a night like this. I said that I was ready and I got a brace, but this is just the start," Piatek told Milan TV. "Both goals were great, even if they were different. I felt good tonight and it was marvellous playing at the San Siro." Five-time winners Milan will face either Inter Milan

or Lazio, who play on Thursday, over two legs in the last four as they look to go one better than their 4-0 final defeat by Juventus last season.

Piatek did not waste much time in endearing himself to the Milan fans, latching onto a hopeful long ball forward from Diego Laxalt, before calmly taking a touch and slotting the ball into the bottom corner. The Polish international continued to torment the visiting defence and made it two in the 27th minute. Piatek appeared to have few options when he collected the ball on the left-hand side of the area, but he cut inside two defenders before unleashing a powerful drive past Napoli goalkeeper Alex Meret.

The 23-year-old has now scored an incredible eight goals in only three Coppa Italia games this season, having scored four for Genoa against Lecce in August and a double against Virtus Entella last month.

Lorenzo Insigne looked to be Napoli's biggest danger, seeing a shot saved by Gianluigi Donnarumma, before firing over the crossbar. Napoli started to put some pressure on the hosts' goal in the second half, with Donnarumma saving from Arkadiusz Milik and Adam Ounas. But Milan held on to reach the semis, with Donnarumma saving his best stop for last as he denied Ounas again. On Wednesday, Juventus continue their bid for a fifth straight Coppa Italia at free-scoring Atalanta, while Fiorentina host Roma. — AFP

Everton had defender Lucas Digne sent off for a professional foul on Adama Diakhaby in the 66th minute. Wolves added to West Ham's woes with an emphatic 3-0 victory at Molineux. Second-bottom Fulham staged a superb fightback to boost their survival bid with a 4-2 win over Brighton. — AFP

## Wife of jailed footballer begs Thai PM for his release

**BANGKOK:** The wife of jailed Bahraini footballer Hakeem Al Araibi pleaded with Thailand's prime minister yesterday to ensure he is not extradited to his native country, saying he faces torture there and should be sent back to asylum in Australia.

"He would go back to face imprisonment, torture and possible death. Please help my husband. I don't want to lose him," Araibi's wife wrote yesterday in an open letter to Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha.

"I am terrified that the final decision to deport him will take place within the next few days," she said in the letter, which was obtained from Araibi's lawyer. Lawyer Nadthasiri Bergman said the wife has asked for her name not to be published out of fear of her safety.

Araibi, who fled Bahrain in 2014 and was later granted asylum in Australia, was arrested in Bangkok in November on an Interpol notice issued at Bahrain's request. He was convicted of vandalising a police station in Bahrain and was sentenced to 10 years in prison in absentia. He denies wrongdoing, saying he was playing in a televised football match at the time of the alleged vandalism.

Human rights groups say Bahraini authorities tortured Araibi because of his brother's political activities during the Arab Spring uprising in 2011. Bahraini authorities deny allegations of torture.

### HONEYMOON HELL

Araibi's wife said in her letter the newly wed couple travelled from Australia to Thailand "because we thought it would be the perfect country to have our honeymoon" but instead found themselves in a nightmare of arrest and detention. She asked Prayuth to show the same concern for those fleeing torture as Thailand did in the case of 18-year-old Saudi woman Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun, who fled what she said was family abuse to Thailand and was quickly resettled to Canada earlier this month.

Thai government officials were not immediately available for comment yesterday but Prayuth told reporters on Tuesday Araibi's case was a matter for Thailand's courts. He acknowledged the concerns of Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who wrote to Prayuth this week urging that Araibi not be extradited, but also said Thailand had good relations with Bahrain.—Reuters



### Matches on TV (Local Timings)

**SPAIN COPA DEL REY**  
Girona v Real Madrid CF 23:30  
beIN SPORTS

**ITALIAN CUP**  
Internazionale Milano v SS Lazio 23:00  
beIN SPORTS



**25** All roads lead to Madrid as new Davis Cup era dawns



**26** Rams running back Anderson ready to rumble in Super Bowl



**27** Man City's title bid rocked by Newcastle, United stage late escape



## Pelicans stun host Houston Rockets

76ers stroll past short-handed Lakers



HOUSTON: Eric Gordon #10 of the Houston Rockets shoots the ball against the New Orleans Pelicans on Tuesday at the Toyota Center in Houston, Texas. —AFP

**HOUSTON:** Jahlil Okafor produced a season-high point total for a second consecutive game while Jrue Holiday undergirded a patchwork rotation with a sensational defensive performance as the depleted New Orleans Pelicans stunned the host Houston Rockets 121-116 on Tuesday. James Harden led the Rockets with 37 points-his 24th straight game with at least 30 — and added 11 rebounds, but he shot just 11 of 32 from the floor. Okafor paired 27 points with 12 rebounds while Holiday posted 19 points, six rebounds, eight assists and six blocked shots for the Pelicans, who were missing five of their top six rotation players and reeling from the trade request of All-NBA center Anthony Davis (who is also sidelined with a finger injury). Harden's streak actually appeared to be in jeopardy, but a late spurt kept it going. He did not hit 30 points until he sank a 3-pointer with less than two minutes left, and then he scored seven more points in the final minute.

### BUCKS 115, PISTONS 105

Giannis Antetokounmpo collected 21 points, 11 assists, eight rebounds and three steals as visiting Milwaukee completed its first four-game season series sweep of Detroit. Eric Bledsoe had 20 points and seven assists and Pat Connaughton added 16 points off the bench for Milwaukee. Khris Middleton contributed 15

points, six rebounds and six assists, Brook Lopez tossed in 14 points and Tony Snell had 11 points in the win. Reggie Jackson paced the Pistons with 25 points while Andre Drummond had 20 points and 13 rebounds. Blake Griffin added 18 points, nine assists and seven rebounds but also committed five turnovers.

### 76ERS 121, LAKERS 105

Visiting Philadelphia welcomed Joel Embiid, Jimmy Butler and Wilson Chandler back into their starting lineup, and the trio helped the Sixers run over short-handed Los Angeles to get back on track after a rough start to a five-game road trip. Embiid finished with 28 points and 11 rebounds. Butler scored 20 points, and Chandler finished with nine. Ben Simmons added 19 points for Philadelphia, Mike Muscala scored 17 off the bench, and JJ Redick had 13. Brandon Ingram scored a career-high 36 points for the Lakers. He has posted at least 20 points in three straight games for the first time in his three-year career. JaVale McGee contributed 17 points and 14 rebounds off the bench, and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 12 points.

### SPURS 126, SUNS 124

Rudy Gay poured in a tiebreaking, 21-foot jump shot as time expired to lift San Antonio to a win over visiting

Phoenix. San Antonio led by four points after Davis Bertans barely beat the shot clock with a 27-foot 3-pointer with 33.3 seconds to play. Phoenix's Devin Booker then cut the lead to two points with a pullup jumper with 24.9 seconds remaining, and Josh Jackson tied the score with a dunk with 19.6 seconds left after a Booker steal. Gay then took the game in his hands, patiently working against Phoenix defender Kelly Oubre Jr. a step inside the arc before letting fly his deciding shot just before the buzzer and granting the third win in a row for the Spurs, who were led by LaMarcus Aldridge (29 points, 14 rebounds).

### THUNDER 126, MAGIC 117

Dennis Schroder's 18 points in the fourth quarter led visiting Oklahoma City to a win over Orlando. Schroder had 21 points in all, and Paul George scored 37 points (31 in the first half). Russell Westbrook had 23 points, 14 assists and 14 rebounds for Oklahoma City, which extended its winning streak to six games. Schroder scored 18 points during a 23-5 Thunder run midway through the fourth quarter. Nikola Vucevic led Orlando with 27 points and 11 rebounds, and Evan Fournier added 17 points. The Magic have lost four straight and seven of their last eight games.

### CAVALIERS 116, WIZARDS 113

Jordan Clarkson scored 28 points and Cleveland squandered most of a 25-point fourth-quarter lead before holding on to defeat Washington for its second straight win. Washington cut the deficit to three points in the final minute and had a chance to tie when it inbounded with 10.8 seconds left but Cedi Osman knocked the ball away from Troy Brown, who was attempting a 3-pointer, and the Cavs held on despite missing nine fourth-quarter free throws. Osman had 26 points for Cleveland and Ante Zizic had 12 points and 12 rebounds.

### NETS 122, BULLS 117

D'Angelo Russell scored 30 points as Brooklyn overcame some sluggish moments to extend its home winning streak to nine games with a victory over Chicago. Russell scored at least 30 points for the eighth time this season as he hit 10 of 22 shots and added seven assists. He scored 22 of his points after halftime as the Nets rebounded from Monday's loss to the Celtics in Boston. Russell's latest productive game also helped the Nets win for the 13th time in their last 14 home games since Dec. 7. The Nets (28-24) also matched their win total from last season and beat the Bulls for the sixth straight time. — Reuters

## Confident Qatar stand in Japan's path to fifth Asian title

**ABU DHABI:** Continental superpower Japan will be out to secure a record-extending fifth Asian Cup title when they take on a young Qatar side building towards the 2022 World Cup in what should be a tight final tomorrow. The Samurai Blue may have the Asian Cup pedigree but they

are a work in progress and stuttered through their early matches in the United Arab Emirates before exploding into life with a ruthless 3-0 humbling of heavyweights Iran in the semi-finals.

Qatar had the easier route through the last four against the hosts but showed huge character in the face of a hostile crowd to run out 4-0 winners and reach a continental title-decider for the first time.

Felix Sanchez's Qatar side have the leading marksman in the tournament in Almoez Ali, who scored his eighth goal against the UAE to match Ali Daei's 1996 record, and go into the final having won all six matches without conceding a single goal.

Japan striker Yuya Osako, who scored two goals in an outstanding performance against Iran, will certainly test the Qatar defensive line at Zayed Sports City but it will be bolstered by the return from suspension of Bassam Al-

Rawri. Coach Hajime Moriyasu took over the Japan squad after last year's run to the last 16 at the World Cup and the control they showed in beating Iran was testimony to his rebuilding work.

As much as Osako and fellow forward Takumi Minamino impressed, it was the work in central defence of experienced captain Maya Yoshida and 20-year-old Takehiro Tomiyasu that laid the foundation for the win. The pair held firm in the face of a barrage of long balls hoofed up to the powerful Iran forward line and will hope to similarly shepherd the more subtly skilled Qatari attackers Akram Afif and Ali today.

Ali, captain Hassan Al-Haydos and Hamid Ismail braved a more literal barrage of missiles from the irate UAE fans as they celebrated semi-final goals on Tuesday and the composure they showed should hold them in good stead against Japan. The Qataris, many of whom have been

coached by Spaniard Sanchez up through the age groups from when they were nine years old, have shown a great sense of tactical cohesion and team unity throughout the tournament.

While their ultimate goal will be to avoid humiliation when Qatar becomes the first Gulf nation to host the World Cup in three years' time, you get the sense that the players are on something of a mission in the UAE. Their fans have been unable to travel across the Gulf to support the team because of the current political rift between Qatar and the UAE and the players appear determined to take a first major international trophy home to them.

With few Japanese fans having made the trip and the locals not being too well-disposed towards the Qataris at the moment, there might not be much of a crowd to see them do it if they can prevent Japan from lifting the cup for a fifth time. — Reuters