



9 Manila says first Filipino 'suicide bomber' behind last month's attack



11 Gulf Bank records KD 24m in net profit for first half of 2019



24 Paris says its missiles found on pro-Haftar base in Libya



28 New Zealand stun India by 18 runs to reach World Cup final



US wants military coalition to guard waters off Iran, Yemen

Trump accuses Iran of secret enrichment, says sanctions to be cranked up 'substantially'

Bedoon who killed himself was 'drug addict, criminal'

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The public relations and security information department of the ministry of the interior yesterday issued a statement on the recent suicide of a young stateless man, in response to various reports on social networking sites. The ministry said investigations conducted by security authorities showed the illegal resident (the government's term for bedoons) was a drug addict and had 12 criminal cases of drugs-related and theft offenses filed against him.

The ministry indicated that the deceased was arrested on May 11, 2019 on charges of possession of drugs and was placed by a judicial ruling in a social

welfare institution of the ministry of social affairs and labor for one year. The statement said the man had tried to commit suicide in Andalus on June 7, 2019, but was unsuccessful. He then repeated the attempt on July 7, 2019 in Saad Al-Abdullah.

The ministry added the deceased had tried multiple times to commit suicide. The statement highlighted that the forensic report revealed the man died as a result of asphyxiation by hanging. The autopsy report also showed the deceased had abused shabu before killing himself. Notably, MPs have been blaming the government for the bedoon's suicide, after the central agency for illegal residents refused to renew his security ID.

WASHINGTON: The United States hopes to enlist allies over the next two weeks or so in a military coalition to safeguard strategic waters off Iran and Yemen, where Washington blames Iran and Iran-aligned fighters for attacks, the top US general said on Tuesday. Under the plan, which has only been finalized in recent days, the United States would provide command ships and lead surveillance efforts for the military coalition. Allies would patrol waters near those US command ships and escort commercial vessels with their nation's flags.

Marine General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, articulated those details to reporters following meetings on Tuesday about it with acting US Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. "We're engaging now with a number of countries to see if we can put together a coalition that would ensure freedom of navigation both in the Straits of Hormuz and the Bab Al-Mandab," Dunford said. "And so I think probably over the next couple of weeks we'll identify which nations have the political will to support that initiative and then we'll work directly with the militaries to identify the specific capabilities that'll support that."

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This handout picture released by the US Navy on June 25, 2019 shows a visit, board, search and seizure team from the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS McFaul pulling alongside a Bahraini dhow during routine maritime security operations in the Gulf waters. — AFP

News in brief

Anger as Minaj cancels Saudi concert

RIYADH: The cancellation of a concert by rapper Nicki Minaj in Saudi Arabia triggered a fresh social media storm yesterday, with many fans in the kingdom voicing disappointment and demanding ticket refunds. The American star on Tuesday said she pulled out of the July 18 concert in a show of support for women's and gay rights in Saudi Arabia. "So sad, I was preparing to do a Michael Jackson dance at the party," one Twitter user wrote. The singer also faced a torrent of abuse for supporting gay rights in the Islamic kingdom, with one person writing on Twitter: "Cancellation of the party is good news. Praise be to Allah." — AFP

India gets first fully electric car

MUMBAI: Motorists in India, home to some of the world's most polluted cities, can now buy a fully-fledged electric car after Hyundai unveiled a model that can travel 452 km on one charge. The Kona Electric SUV will cost \$36,000 - more than three times the price of the cheapest combustion-engine SUV and more than eight times dearer than a regular saloon car. But its improved range will address one of the major concerns among customers in India, where there is a shortage of charging stations, Hyundai Motors Managing Director SS Kim told the Press Trust of India. — AFP

Press group met Saudi officials

PARIS: French press freedom group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) confidentially met top Saudi officials in Riyadh to press for the release of journalists, it revealed yesterday. The RSF delegation went to Riyadh in late April and urged Saudi authorities to release 30 journalists who it says are imprisoned in the kingdom for their work. The group said it was only confirming the visit now after the prospect of pardons did not materialize and as Saudi Arabia prepares to host next year's G20 summit. RSF said its delegation had met key Saudi figures usually out of reach for a foreign NGO, including Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir and public prosecutor Saud Al-Mojeb. — AFP

Mozilla blocks UAE as Net guardian

WASHINGTON: Firefox browser maker Mozilla is blocking the United Arab Emirates' government from serving as one of its Internet security gatekeepers. Mozilla said in a statement on Tuesday it was rejecting the UAE's bid to become a globally recognized Internet security watchdog, empowered to certify the safety of websites for Firefox users. Selena Deckelmann, Mozilla's senior director of engineering, said reports from Reuters, as well as the New York Times and the Intercept, had made the browser company fear that cybersecurity firm DarkMatter, linked by the reports to a state-run hacking program, would use the role of Internet security gatekeeper to launch surveillance efforts. — Reuters

Thrown under the bus? UK envoy to Washington quits

LONDON: Britain's ambassador to Washington quit yesterday after days of stinging criticism from Donald Trump, leading to accusations that Boris Johnson, the favorite to be the next British prime minister, had "thrown him under the bus". Memos from Kim Darroch describing the Trump administration as inept were leaked to a British newspaper, infuriating the US president, who launched a Twitter attack on both the envoy and outgoing Prime Minister Theresa May, who had given Darroch her full support.

As a spat between the two allies intensified, Trump said he would sever ties with the "very stupid" Darroch and called May "foolish". Darroch said his position had become untenable. The BBC's diplomatic correspondent said the ambassador had made the decision after Johnson declined to back him in a televised debate on Tuesday night. The former London mayor could become prime minister later this month if grassroots Conservatives elect him party leader.

"He has basically thrown this fantastic diplomat under the bus to serve his own personal interests," said junior foreign minister Alan Duncan. "His sort of disre-



Kim Darroch



Donald Trump

gard for Sir Kim Darroch and his refusal to back him was, in my view, pretty contemptible." In confidential memos dating from 2017 to the present, Darroch, 65, had said reports of in-fighting in the White House were "mostly true". Last month, he described confusion within the administration over Trump's decision to call off a military strike on Iran.

"We don't really believe this Administration is going to become substantially more normal; less dysfunctional; less unpredictable; less faction-riven; less diplomatically clumsy and inept," Darroch wrote in one cable. It led to a scathing tirade from the US president. "The wacky Ambassador that the UK foisted upon the

Continued on Page 24

Israelis seize Jerusalem home, evict family

JERUSALEM: A Palestinian family was evicted from a home in east Jerusalem near the Old City yesterday after Israeli settlers won a court battle that stretched more than two decades, activists said. The apartment in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan was home to a 53-year-old woman and her four children, according to Israeli NGO Peace Now, which opposes Israeli settlement expansion. Police arrived and evicted the residents from the apartment and they will

at least temporarily stay with relatives. An Israeli court found that the Elad foundation, which seeks to increase the Jewish presence in mainly Palestinian east Jerusalem, had legally purchased that portion of the property and ruled in its favor. "To take us from the house is like taking my heart from my body," one of the Palestinian residents, Ali Siyam, 20, told AFP. Elad said in a statement "the property was purchased by Jewish people in accordance with the law, in good faith and in a fair and legal transaction". It added that "three separate courts verified that the property was lawfully purchased by Jews."

The foundation, known in English as the City of David foundation, also oversees a nearby archaeological center in

Continued on Page 24



JERUSALEM: A Palestinian woman of the Siyam family reacts as the family is evicted from their home in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan near the Old City yesterday. — AFP

Indians lead in expat suicides, mostly Keralites

KUWAIT: Recent official statistics show the majority of expats committing suicide in Kuwait are members of the Indian community. Statistics indicate that 394 Indian men and women committed suicide in Kuwait in a 10-year period from 2007 to 2017, including 331 males and 63 females. Statistics also showed that a record number of suicides by Indians were recorded in 2016, with 47 males and seven females taking their lives, which was in stark contrast to the rates of death by natural causes for Indians in the same year.

Commenting on the issue, an Indian legal activist attributed the phenomenon to many reasons, including psychological and financial. A study by psychiatrists showed that the highest number of Indians committing suicide hail from the southern state of Kerala - 32 percent of the total number. But psychiatrists also stressed that it is noteworthy to mention that the majority of Indians in Kuwait come from that state. — Al-Rai



BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Finnish Prime Minister Antti Rinne listen to the national anthem before inspecting a military guard of honor at the Chancellery yesterday. — AFP

Merkel has third bout of shaking, says she is fine

BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel insisted she was "very well", despite suffering her third trembling spell in less than a month yesterday that has focused attention on her health. Merkel began shaking involuntarily as national anthems were being played at the reception of Finnish Prime Minister Antti Rinne. But she attended a press

conference as planned just around an hour later, telling journalists that her health was no cause for concern.

"I feel very well, there is no need to worry," she said, adding that she was simply still in a phase of "processing" a previous shaking spell, but that "there has been progress". "I will have to live with it for a while," added Merkel, who turns 65 next week. "Just like how it has come, one day it will go away too," she said. A source close to the government had said the cause of the repeat shaking was now psychological, with memories of the first incident provoking renewed trembling at events with similar settings.

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Amir, Crown Prince receive top state officials



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. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received Speaker of the National Assembly

Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, President of the Constitutional Court and Head of the Cassation Court Justice Yousef Jasem Al-Mutawaa. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah also received

Kazakhstan's Ambassador to the State of Kuwait Almas Abdramanov on the end of tenure. Acting Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Sabah attended the meeting. In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince

received Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah. — KUNA



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 President of the Constitutional Court and Head of the Cassation Court Justice Yousef Jasem Al-Mutawaa.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Kazakhstan's Ambassador to the State of Kuwait Almas Abdramanov.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



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.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



KUWAIT: Parliament Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with Minister Khaled Al-Roudhan, as well as members of CMA, Bursa Kuwait and Kuwait Clearing Company. — KUNA



Parliament Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with Kazakhstan's Ambassador Almas Abdramanov.

Kuwait's parliament speaker receives commerce minister

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem received Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Services Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan yesterday. Roudhan was accompanied by members of the Capital Market Authority's (CMA) board of commission-

ers, Bursa Kuwait and Kuwait Clearing Company. During the meeting, Roudhan and his accompanying delegation presented to Speaker Ghanem thorough details on years of efforts that resulted in promoting Bursa Kuwait to the level of an emerging market by the Morgan Stanley Capital

International (MSCI). Ghanem, meanwhile, hailed the effort of the state bodies to achieve the upgrade which will develop Kuwait's economy, adding that it would be a step forward towards turning the country into an economic and financial center. The meeting was also attended by MPs and

senior officials in CMA, Bursa Kuwait and Kuwait Clearing Company. Meanwhile, Speaker Ghanem met with Kazakhstan's Ambassador to Kuwait Almas Abdramanov on the occasion of his term's ending. The meeting was attended by MP Salah Khorshed. —KUNA

Kuwaiti delegation in Thailand to bolster ties

BANGKOK: A Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation visiting the Kingdom of Thailand yesterday discussed ways to enhance cooperation. A statement by the delegation said that the Thai National Assembly Speaker Chuan Leekpai and the Thai-Kuwaiti parliamentary committee extended an invitation to the Kuwaiti delegation to visit the country. The Gulf state delegation handed during its visit an invitation to Leekpai to visit Kuwait. The Kuwaiti delegation's meetings with Thai legislative officials focused on various issues including further facilitation of procedures for Kuwaitis seeking treatment in Thailand and also touched on increasing Thai exports of agricultural goods to Kuwait amongst other issues. The Kuwaiti parliamen-

tarians brought up the subject of the plight of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, calling on regional states, including Thailand, to support solutions to put an end to the mistreatment of the Rohingya. Head of the Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation MP Ali Al-Deqbasi stressed the importance of the visit especially with it occurring after the new parliamentary election in Thailand, indicating that this opened a new phase in Kuwaiti-Thai legislative ties. He also commended the Kuwaiti diplomatic mission in Thailand, headed by Ambassador Abdullah Al-Sharhan, saying that they were doing a tremendous job in consolidating relations. Meanwhile, head of the Thai-Kuwaiti parliamentary friendship committee Wan Mohammad Nour commended relations with Kuwait, stressing the importance of bolster commercial exchange between the two countries. He also lauded Kuwait's humanitarian efforts, which contributed to world security and peace. The Kuwaiti delegation is headed by MP Al-Deqbasi and includes MPs Khaled Al-Shatti and Ahmad Behbahani, as well as Fatima Al-Qazwini from the National Assembly's Secretariat. —KUNA



BANGKOK: Members of the Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation meet with Thai National Assembly Speaker Chuan Leekpai and other officials. — KUNA

Local

Kuwait urges int'l synergy to cut links between organized crime, terrorism

Terrorists finance operations through transnational organized crimes: Kuwait's envoy

NEW YORK: Kuwait has warned of the growing links between transnational organized crimes and international terrorism and called for collective international action to counter both and cut the links between them. Speaking at a special UN Security Council on threats to the international peace and security on Tuesday, Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi cautioned that the link between organized crime and terrorism is developing, broadening and diversifying. "Terrorist groups finance their operations through transnational organized crimes (drugs, arms and human trafficking, smuggling of migrants, illicit trade in natural resources and kidnapping for ransom)," he pointed out. He noted that the phenomenon of terrorism and its links to organized crime remain a challenge for affected states and a threat to international peace and security. "Though terrorism and transnational organized crime differ in methods and objectives, they share the threat to international peace and security and pose major challenges to the affected countries, as they fuel conflicts there," he warned.

Cementing cooperation

Otaibi underlined the need for cementing international cooperation to tackle the threat. "Today, we cannot deal with the links between international terrorism and organized crime and obstruct the activities of these groups without international and regional cooperation," he said. He called for concerted efforts at the regional and international levels to combat corruption, money-laundering and illegal financial flows. "In this regard, we stress the importance of member states' joining

the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols, the 2003 United Nations Convention against Corruption, the international conventions and protocols against terrorism," he added. The Kuwaiti envoy called for coordinating national, regional and international efforts to strengthen the global response to the links between international terrorism and transnational organized crime.

Otaibi advised member states to cement cooperation and work out joint strategies to prevent terrorists from benefiting from organized crime and build capacity of national security agencies to secure their borders against these terrorists and those who work with them. He urged beefing up national and regional legal systems to collect, analyze and exchange information. He noted that the public and private sectors in all countries had an important role to play in preventing the use of organized crime by terrorists.

Kuwait's efforts

On Kuwait's efforts to the overcome this challenge, Otaibi said that Kuwait understands the serious danger of this link and has recently passed a law to combat money laundering. In recognition of the grave dangers posed by the links between international terrorism and organized crime against international peace and security, Kuwait has issued a law on combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism. He added that Kuwait has also acceded several international conventions for countering organized crimes and terrorism including the United Nations Convention against Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Law No. 25 of 2000), the United Nations Convention against



NEW YORK: Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi speaks during a special UN Security Council on threats to the international peace and security. — KUNA

Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto (Law 5 of 2006) and the United Nations Convention against Corruption (Law No. 47 of 2006).

In 2007, Kuwait chaired Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF) to combat money laundering and terrorism financing, he said. He noted that the FATF aims to adopt and implement the FATF's 40 recommendations, to work together to identify issues related to money laundering and terrorist financing of a regional nature, exchange experiences and develop solutions to deal with them. "In conclusion, we emphasize that organized crime can be eliminated only through a perseverance and inclusiveness approach based on the active participation and cooperation of all states and international and regional organizations," he said. — KUNA

Kuwait Environment Council seeks radical solutions

KUWAIT: The Supreme Environment Council underlined on Tuesday the importance of finding radical solutions for environmental problems in Kuwait for sake of public health. This came in a statement by the Defense Ministry after a meeting of the council, chaired by First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Chairman of the Council Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Council members said the Environment Public Authority (EPA) should remove industrial facilities and ships from area of Usharej, in coordination with Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and Ministry of Communication, because they harm marine environment, the statement said. The meeting also discussed the importance of finding a solution for the plastic wastes, which have harmful effect on the environment and health, the statement added. In other news, Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad sent a cable to his Qatari counterpart Khaled Al-Attiyah, regretting the collision between two military training aircraft that happened earlier yesterday. Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad expressed gratefulness that the planes' pilots were unharmed in the incident. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chairs the Supreme Environment Council's meeting. — KUNA

Kuwait security chief, US envoy discuss ties



KUWAIT: Head of the National Security Bureau Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets with US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence R. Silverman. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Head of the National Security Bureau (NSB) Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah received at his office yesterday US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence R Silverman, discussing with him ways to enhance bilateral ties. A statement by the NSB also indicated that the two touched on issues of mutual interest and latest regional and international developments. — KUNA

Relations with Kuwait expanded at various levels: Jordanian minister



AMMAN: Jordanian Minister of Interior Salamah Hammad Al-Sahaim meets with the Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Daihani. — KUNA

AMMAN: Due to the keenness of both Jordanian and Kuwaiti leaderships, both countries managed to expand ties at various levels, a Jordanian Minister said yesterday. This remark came from Jordanian Minister of Interior Salamah Hammad Al-Sahaim during his reception of Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan Aziz Al-Daihani. According to a ministerial statement, Minister Sahaim commended the strong relations linking Jordanian King Abdullah II and His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, deeming it as

"unique" within the Arab world. He affirmed that the Ministry of Interior of Jordan has always followed up on Kuwaiti nationals in the Kingdom, making sure to facilitate procedures during their stay in the country. Meanwhile, Ambassador Daihani commended relations with Jordan, lauding the efforts carried out by the Jordanian leadership and the Ministry of Interior in favor of Kuwaiti nationals. Minister Sahaim and Ambassador Daihani discussed during their meeting ways to enhance relations between the two countries. — KUNA



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Local



KUWAIT: As summer temperatures keep rising, many flee to cool off at swimming pools. — Photo by Jaber Abdulkhalq (KUNA)

Education Ministry signs contracts with 342 Palestinian teachers to work in Kuwait

Fatah lauds Kuwait's historic support of Palestinian cause



Fatah's Deputy-Chairman Mahmoud Al-Aloul and other Palestinian officials honor members of a visiting delegation from the Kuwaiti education ministry.



RAMALLAH: Members of the Kuwaiti delegation pose for a group picture with the hired Palestinian teachers. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT/RAMALLAH: The Kuwaiti Ministry of Education has worked out contracts with 342 male and female teachers from Palestine to secure a sufficient number of teachers for upcoming academic year. Usama Al-Sultan, the assistant undersecretary at the ministry, said in a press release on Tuesday that the batch of the employed teachers would arrive in the country in the middle of August to begin work with onset of the next scholastic year. He indicated that the Kuwaiti mission for the task had selected the most competent teachers, in line with the approach to enhance education at the national level.

In other news, the Palestinian Fatah movement, which

is chaired by President Mahmoud Abbas, lauded on Tuesday Kuwait's historic stands in favor of the Palestinian cause. Kuwait has significant and key role in the Palestinian cause's history, particularly in hosting the Palestinian people, Fatah's Deputy-Chairman Mahmoud Al-Aloul stated. Aloul made his remarks while meeting with a visiting delegation from the Kuwaiti education ministry at Fatah's Mobilization and Organization Commission headquarters, noting the Kuwaiti-Palestinian relationship is beyond diplomacy.

Dalal Salama, member of Fatah's Central Committee, said Kuwait played an important role in hosting the Palestinian revolution and Fatah movement. "Fatah move-

ment wanted to host you at its own headquarters to tell you that you supported the movement since its establishment," said Salama. "We believe you would leave a notable mark within the next days," she said, affirming Kuwait's continued support of the Palestinian cause as a top priority on all levels. Meanwhile, Fahad Al-Ghais, Assistant Undersecretary for Financial Affairs at the Kuwaiti education ministry, indicated that the number of Palestinian teachers in Kuwait has reached 190 over the past two years. Ghais, also head of the Kuwaiti visiting delegation, added teachers from the Gaza Strip had the lion share of contracts this year, noting the harsh living conditions endured by Gaza's residents in light of the

ongoing Israeli blockage and high unemployment rate.

In the meantime, Basem Al-Tamimi, head of the Palestinian-Kuwaiti friendship and cooperation society, said that the society is honoring the Kuwaiti education ministry's delegation in an appreciation of Kuwait and its people for their firm stand in favor of the Palestinian cause. The society was established in 2014 after the national union of Palestinian public institutions in the city of Tulkarm celebrated Kuwait's national day under the auspices of President Abbas, Tamimi said. He also noted the Palestinian-Kuwaiti friendship and cooperation society aims at deepening fraternal ties between people of the two countries. — KUNA

Kuwait, Senegal discuss boosting aviation cooperation

DAKAR: Director-General of the Kuwaiti Civil Aviation Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah said that Kuwait aims to boost cooperation with Senegal in the aviation field. The remarks came in a statement published by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation on Tuesday, on the sidelines of Sheikh Salman's visit to Senegal. Sheikh Salman noted that the two sides had updated a previously signed memorandum of understanding on aviation cooperation during the meeting. The memorandum will allow Kuwaiti companies to invest in the aviation sector in Senegal, he added. Kuwait is exerting a great effort to develop the aviation field, noting that Kuwait International Airport is executing several projects to boost performance and provide better services.

Meanwhile, Senegal's Minister of Tourism and Air Transport said his country is providing great investment opportunities for Kuwait's private sector in Dakar's new airport. In the meantime, Sheikh Salman, who is also Chairman of the Arab Civil Aviation Organization, also met with Chairman of the African Civil Aviation Commission Gabriel Lisa. The two sides discussed cooperation in aviation training, safety measures and coordination during the elections of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to be held in Montreal, Canada. Moreover, the statement noted that Sheikh Salman met with Director General of the National Civil Aviation Agency of Senegal Magueye Maram, where they discussed updating memorandums of understanding to boost transportation between the two countries. — KUNA



DAKAR: Director-General of the Kuwaiti Civil Aviation Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah and other Kuwaiti officials meet with Senegalese officials. — KUNA

Local

Assembly's finance panel to discuss price rise, inflation

MP Ashour warns of outside solution to bedoons' crisis

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's financial and economic affairs committee will study the issue of price rises and inflation among a host of issues and draft laws the panel aims to complete in the summer, head of the committee said. MP Salah Khorshid said a report will be prepared on inflation rates and the price rises especially in food and consuming goods based on a decision by the assembly to study the causes of such increases.

The committee will also study the controversial issue of interest rates on loans taken by retired people from the Public Institution for Social Security which led to the grilling of the finance minister that resulted in a failed no-confidence vote.

Khorshid said issues raised by MPs Riyadh Al-Adasani and Bader Al-Mulla during their grilling of the finance minister last month. The panel will review proposed amendments to the expropriation law which was enacted more than 50 years ago and did not undergo any changes.

The committee will study a draft law regulating insolvency which stipulates allowing debtors to secure temporary funding through services, commodities or loans before getting approval to restructure a company under the threat of bankruptcy, said Khorshid, adding that the bill regulates the affairs of companies facing financial difficulties.

The lawmaker said that the panel may also discuss a draft law for setting up the Silk City and northern economic zone if the government sends it to the assembly. The bill aims at regulating the establishment of border residential cities and consolidate economic, development and security issues in the northern parts of the country and eventually help diversify sources of income away from oil.

In the meantime, MP Saleh Ashour yesterday warned the government of the risk of a solution from outside the country for the decades-old problem of bedoons or stateless people if the government does not resolve the problem as soon as possible.

The lawmaker held the interior minister responsible for the suicide of a young bedoon man a few days ago reportedly after the central bedoons agency refused to renew his security ID as part of pressure on bedoons to reveal their alleged real nationality. The suicide highlighted the plight in which some 120,000 bedoons are facing, especially with regards to basic human rights including decent jobs.

MP Ashour said the interior minister can decide to grant bedoons their humanitarian and social rights based on international conventions, adding that failure to resolve their problem for over a half century will only tarnish the country's reputation.



The National Assembly.

No delay in smart city project: Kuwaiti official

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti government official strongly refuted recent press and social media reports about plans by the South Korean side to postpone building a smart city in the South Saad Al-Abdullah residential city project. Official spokesperson of the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) Ibrahim Al-Nashi stressed that the Korean news agency (Yonhap) had not released a report about postponing the project, but it rather reported that the South Korean government, represented by the land and infrastructure ministry, plans to invest \$425 million in overseas smart city projects to be built by local companies as it seeks to foster smart cities and have the Korean private sector complete the funding process by the first half of 2020.

Nashi added that the authority had previously announced the schedule of housing units' distribution to citizens, noting that the units in South Sabah Al-Ahmad City are being currently distributed. Meanwhile, the PAHW's deputy director for design and planning Nasser Khoraitbot denied what he described as allegations posted by an NGO on its social media accounts quoting him stating that road planning in the Mutlaa project is full of mistakes, for which he allegedly blamed the traffic department.

In other news, Public Authority for Manpower's Director Ahmad Al-Mousa received the Ambassador of Nepal to Kuwait Durga Prasad Bhandari to discuss bilateral cooperation with Kuwait, which Mousa highly commended. He noted that there are over 56,000 skilled Nepalese workers in Kuwait's private sector.

MPs call for ending 'chaos' in issuing expats' work permits

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: A number of lawmakers have demanded holding a meeting with Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel before the next parliamentary term commences to discuss what they described as 'chaos' in issuing work permits by the Public Authority for Manpower, manipulation of Kuwait's demography and official and public demands to control the increase in expat population at the expense of citizens, well-informed sources said.

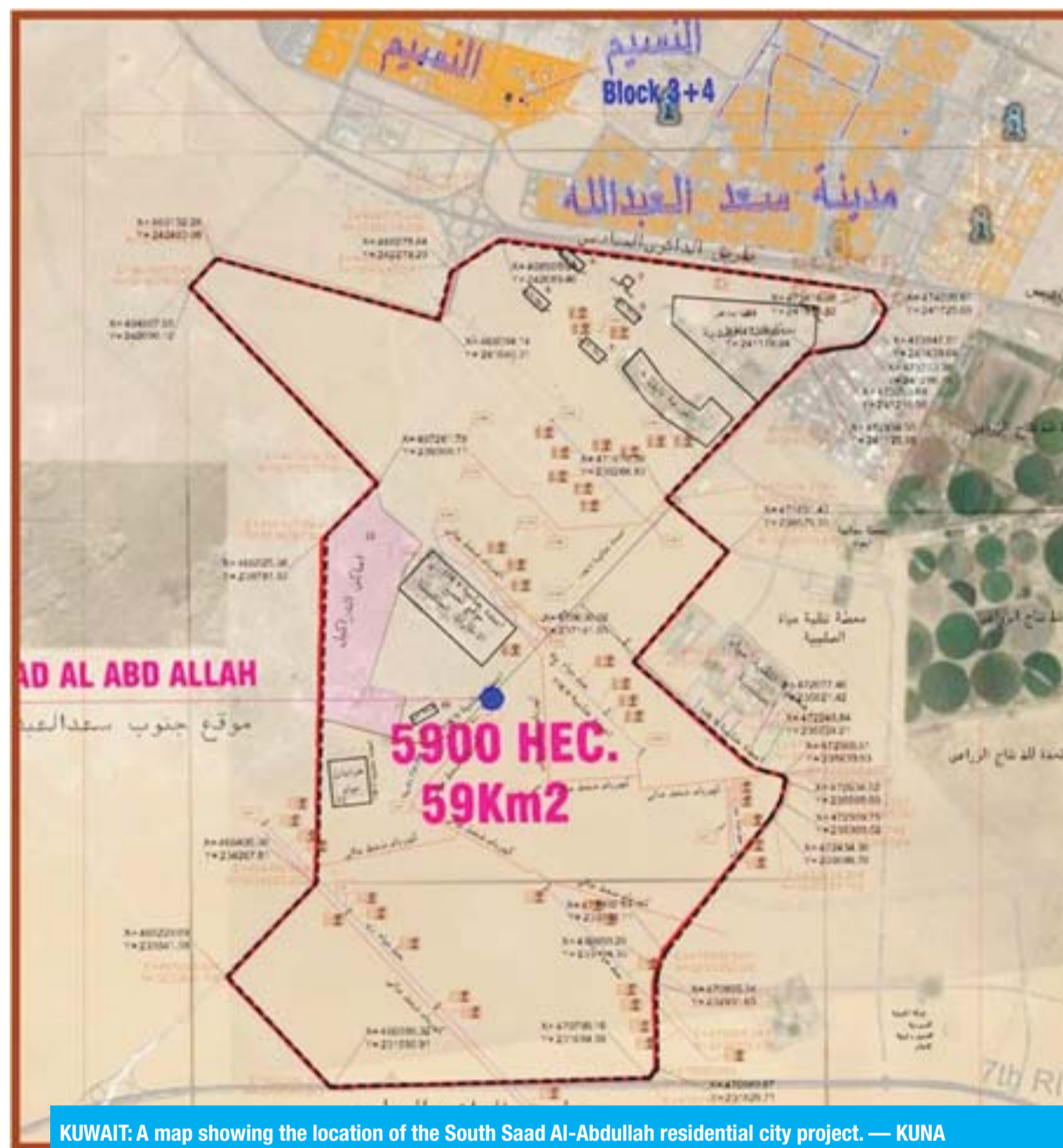
The sources added that the meeting, which will most probably be held in September or the beginning of October, will be open to all lawmakers and not only members of the parliamentary health, social affairs and finance committees. The sources added that unless she fixes the 'mistakes', Aqeel would be grilled.

Further, the sources said lawmakers stressed that practices of the manpower authority in particular and the government in general do not match their demands to resolve the problem of demographic imbalances, adding that the manpower authority has been very generous in issuing work permits to marginal laborers, with the result that over 70 percent of expats in Kuwait do not have university degrees.

In addition, the sources said a government-parliament agreement had been made to limit the number of work permits issued to a certain expat community because their population had grown to become as much as Kuwaitis, which poses a threat, pending the implementation of a limited quota per expat community in Kuwait.

Meanwhile, informed sources at the manpower authority announced launching online transfers of expats through the As'hal (Easier) services for employers, which provides first-time work permit issue, work permit renewals for expats and work permit renewals and adjustments for Kuwaiti workers, in addition to various other services and forms that can be accessed online to save time and effort.

In other news, the Ministry of Education recently received lists of around 330 teachers and 50 schools nominated to be honored for their performance during the school year 2018-2019 on World Teachers Day annually celebrated on Oct 5. Well-informed educational sources are currently reviewing the lists to make sure nominees meet the conditions. Separately, Ministry of Social Affairs' personnel affairs committee held a meeting headed by undersecretary Hana Al-Hajeri to endorse some employees' promotions and the raises they accordingly deserve.



KUWAIT: A map showing the location of the South Saad Al-Abdullah residential city project. — KUNA

Firemen battle Jleeb blaze



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A fire recently broke out in a 400 sq m open yard in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, said security sources, noting that firemen from Jleeb and Ardiya rushed to the scene and found the fire had started in mounds

of garbage in the yard. Firemen immediately formed special teams to evacuate adjacent buildings and control the fire to prevent it from spreading. No casualties were reported but an investigation is in progress to determine the cause of the fire.

Legalese

Non-disclosure agreement



By Attorney Fajer Ahmed

NDA stands for a non-disclosure agreement, and is the most common agreement requested by business owners and creatives. NDAs are super simple and need to be understood by entrepreneurs. An NDA is defined as a contract through which the parties agree not to disclose information covered by the agreement. An NDA protects confidential information between two parties.

Question: When do I need an NDA?

As I mentioned, NDAs are used to protect confidential information, so any time you want to share information and make sure it does not become public, an NDA would be a good way to make sure that your rights are protected. Examples include:

1. If you are pitching a design or an idea to a company and you don't want them to use that design.
2. If you are providing research or data to a company.
3. If you are hiring an employee, you may ask them to sign an NDA.
4. If you are closing a deal, for example if you are purchasing a company or a part of it, you may ask the other party to sign an NDA.

As you can see, NDAs are used for a wide variety of transactions and are simply used to keep information away from the public domain. The agreements are generally less than a page in length.

For questions or queries, please email us at info@fl-legal.com.



Condolences

The Management and Staff of
EQUATE Petrochemical Company

offer their condolences
on the passing of our employee

Krishna Moorthy Ramesh Babu

Reliability & Maintenance Department

May his soul rest in peace and may
God grant comfort and strength
to his bereaved family members
during this time.



Kinshasa governor campaigns against rowdy nights and 'filth'

Indian workers toil at one of world's highest roads

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HELA: This handout photo obtained from the Department Of Health, Hela Province in Papua New Guinea shows dead bodies lined up on a road in Hela province. — AFP

24 killed in PNG tribal massacres

Papua New Guinea prime minister promises justice

PORT MORESBY: At least 24 people, including two pregnant women and their unborn children, were killed in a three-day spasm of tribal violence in Papua New Guinea's lawless highlands, prompting the prime minister yesterday to promise swift justice. Officials said the deaths occurred in Hela province—a rugged region in the west of the country—when rival tribes apparently clashed over control of local gold deposits in the mineral-rich soil.

Highland clans have fought each other in Papua New Guinea for centuries, but an influx of automatic weapons has made clashes more deadly and escalated the cycle of violence. Hela provincial administrator William Bando told AFP yesterday that the death toll could rise. "We are still waiting for today's brief from our officials on the ground," he said, calling for at least 100 police to be deployed to reinforce some 40 local officers.

The incident has shocked both the country and recently appointed Prime Minister James Marape,

whose constituency includes the district where the killings occurred. He vowed more security deployments and warned the perpetrators "your time is up". "Today is one of the saddest day of my life," he said in a statement. "Many children and mothers innocently murdered in Munima and Karida villages of my electorate."

In the Karida attack, six women and eight children—as well as two pregnant women and their unborn children—were hacked and shot to death in a 30-minute rampage. Local health worker Pills Kolo said it was hard to recognize some of the body parts, and posted images of remains bundled together with mosquito nets used as makeshift body bags. Images provided by local

police showed the corpses of two children of school age, one with severe head injuries.

Local media reported the attack appeared to related to the ambush and murder of six people the day before. Marape blamed the violence on three related warlords who have been fighting against the Tagali tribe over local gold deposits. "Gun-toting criminals, your time is up," Marape said. "Learn from what I will do to criminals who killed innocent people, I am not afraid to use strongest measures in law on you." He noted that the death penalty was

by rape or theft, or disputes over tribal boundaries or resources, often prompt violence. But this is the most serious incident in years and the government—which has only 40 police and 16 soldiers in the area according to Bando—is struggling to respond. In nearby Enga province, a similar surge in violence prompted the establishment of a makeshift military garrison and the deployment of a company of around 100 government soldiers under the command of a Sandhurst-trained major.

But even those forces lack the resources to tackle difficult terrain. Bando said 35 officers currently providing security for a nearby ExxonMobil gas project "should be released to assist those on the ground to ensure safety for the families". Marape has not yet provided details of planned security deployments to the area, but appeared exasperated by the current resources available. "How can a province of 400,000 people function with policing law and order with under 60 policemen, and occasional operational military and police that does no more than band-aid maintenance," he said. — AFP



Old rivalries often prompt violence

"already a law".

Tribal clashes are a frequent occurrence in Papua New Guinea's highlands, where old rivalries prompted

Grief-struck families of Sudan's revolution seek justice

AL-RIMELA, Sudan: Amidst mounds of sand capped by hand-written signs naming the dead, Khadom embraces the tomb of her son, one of the more than 200 killed in Sudan's months-long turmoil. It was an April morning when a freshly-shaven Al-Moez drank his tea before heading out to the office from the modest home he shared with his parents in Al-Rimela, southern Khartoum. His office was in the same building as Qatar-based news channel Al-Jazeera and near a longstanding protest camp outside army headquarters in central Khartoum.

"The building was under surveillance by the all-powerful National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS)," Khadom told AFP. Shortly after he arrived at work, a colleague started to take pictures with his mobile phone from a window of their office. Out of nowhere, a bullet pierced the window and lodged itself in the heart of Al-Moez who was standing nearby. The 45-year-old died on the spot.

Like dozens of others who lost a son, uncle or brother, the family has paid a high price for Sudan's revolution that toppled its longtime autocratic ruler Omar al-Bashir in April. And now Al-Moez's family want justice. His parents have called for an official investigation and for his killer to pay the "eye for an eye"

penalty. But Khadom says there is little chance the case will come to trial or that the NISS will be found guilty.

Anti-regime protests which first broke out on December 19 after the tripling of bread prices have cost the lives of more than 200 demonstrators, according to doctors close to the protest movement. Gatherings have been staged in front of the homes of the "martyrs", whose portraits have been painted on walls across the capital. Outside a rundown apartment block in central Khartoum, two little boys, Ahmed and Asir, are often seen waving small Sudanese flags at motorists.

"Blood for blood, we don't want compensation!" they chant if security forces pass by in their pickups. Their uncle, Ali, 25, was felled by a bullet in the back on June 3, the day gunmen in military uniform brutally dispersed the sit-in outside army headquarters that was in place since April 6. More than 100 lives were lost that day alone and over 500 people wounded, according to the doctors. "My brother died a martyr. We're proud and I'm also prepared to die for the revolution," said Yussef, 35, as tears welled up in his eyes.

Blood has not been shed in vain
Eman, 24, also lost a brother in the mas-

sacre at the sit-in, which the protesters had initially launched to demand Bashir's ouster and later to call on the generals to transfer power to a civilian administration. A student in England, Mattar was back to visit the family and had just celebrated his 26th birthday when he decided to spend a night with the demonstrators at the sit-in. "They killed him without mercy," said Eman, whose brother's fate evoked a campaign of solidarity on social media under the hashtag #blueformattar. "Mattar gave his life. Now things in Sudan must change."

Last Friday, crowds of jubilant Sudanese took to the streets to celebrate a landmark deal between protest leaders and ruling generals aimed at turning the page on seven months of political unrest. Protest leaders said they had agreed on a transition period of three years and three months, with the first 21 months presided over by a military nominee, and the last 18 months by a civilian. Demonstrators greeted the breakthrough with chants of "the martyrs' blood has not been shed in vain" and "civilian rule, civilian rule".

But Yussef, at the centre of the protests from the outset, said he would keep demonstrating because nothing significant would come from Sudan's military. "We still have a long way to go for a new Sudan... We must keep up the fight for future generations," he said, glancing over at his sister's boys Ahmed and Asir. — AFP

N Zealand PM's neighbor lets cat out of the bag

WELLINGTON: A guilt-ridden neighbor of New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern revealed yesterday that he was responsible for accidentally killing the nation's "First Cat" Paddles while reversing out of his driveway. Paddles died in November 2017, shortly after Ardern won office, but the full circumstances of the death were never publicly revealed, leading to curiosity about who killed the cat.

The much-loved feline was a popular member of the prime ministerial household, with a Twitter account set up in her name, @FirstCatofNZ, attracting more than 11,000 followers. US magazine Vanity Fair praised the tech-savvy feline for "helping establish Ardern as the latest hip, cool world leader that America wishes it had". Paddles, who was "polydactyl", with extra toes that looked like thumbs, also once interrupted a phone call between Ardern and US President Donald Trump by jumping on a table.

Ardern's neighbor, identified only

as Chris, told the stuff.co.nz news website that he was rushing back to work from a lunch break in his Auckland home when the prime ministerial moggy ran into the path of his reversing car. "It was kind of shocking at first, and I felt fairly bad because I knew a bit of the back story, I knew Paddles had some kind of social media presence and had an extra toe," he said. "I was also aware that to Jacinda and Clarke, Paddles was their fur baby at that point that they loved, so I was pretty gutted."

He could have made a purrfect getaway, but Chris fronted up to the prime ministerial household and told them what he had done, saying Ardern was understanding. He said his children even wrote a condolence card asking Ardern not to send their father to prison. After Chris spoke publicly about the incident for the first time on Wednesday, the @FirstCatofNZ twitter account retweeted his story and made its first post in more than a year. "I forgive you. #prpp." — AFP

International

French envoy holds talks in Tehran in bid to salvage nuclear deal

Bonnes to open discussion space, avoid escalation

TEHRAN: A diplomatic adviser to French President Emmanuel Macron held talks in Tehran yesterday aimed at saving the 2015 nuclear deal and easing tensions between Iran and the United States. Emmanuel Bonne met Rear-Admiral Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, and was set to meet with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif later yesterday.

Bonnes' mission is "to try and open the discussion space to avoid an uncontrolled escalation, or even an accident," according to French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. The accord between Iran and world powers, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), promised sanctions relief, economic benefits and an end to international isolation in return for stringent curbs on the Islamic Republic's nuclear program.

But Tehran says it has lost patience with perceived inaction by European countries more than a year after President Donald Trump unilaterally pulled the United States out of the agreement. The European parties to the deal along with the EU's diplomatic chief on Tuesday called on Tehran to reverse breaches of the agreement. Iran "must act accordingly by... returning to full JCPOA compliance without delay," said a statement from the European Union and foreign ministers of France, Germany and Britain.

Iran until recently consistently lived up to its commitments under the deal, but is now in breach of two aspects, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which is tasked with inspections. Bonne arrived in Tehran after Iran announced on Monday it had surpassed 4.5 percent uranium enrichment—above the 3.67 percent limit under the agreement, though still far below the 90 percent necessary for military purposes.

Attacks against Syrians in Turkey raise fears of escalation

ISTANBUL: Ahmad Yassine was working in his barbershop in Istanbul's working-class district of Kucukcekmece when he saw an angry crowd gather. Then they attacked his business and others owned by Syrians. "They threw stones, the window was completely shattered. There was three of us inside, we were scared," the young man who fled from Aleppo six years ago told AFP. "We were not able to leave before midnight, one in the morning," he added.

The most recent violence against Syrians in Kucukcekmece 10 days ago has raised fears of an escalation in an already volatile climate. Xenophobic language has been unleashed, particularly during the campaigns for local elections. Turkey is home to the largest number of refugees in the world, having welcomed over 3.5 million Syrians—including 500,000 in Istanbul—who were forced to flee their country.

But this welcome, which Ankara hoped would be temporary, has been extended as the economic situation in Turkey has significantly worsened. And so the hosts' hospitality has been put to the test. A study by Istanbul's Kadir Has University last week showed that the share of Turks unhappy with the presence of Syrians rose from 54.5 percent in 2017 to 67.7 percent in 2019.

Turks and Syrians live together in an often precarious situation. The violence began in Kucukcekmece because of a rumor—denied by police—that a young Syrian boy had ver-

Very critical phase
The IAEA said on Monday that Iran has exceeded the purification cap, having earlier this month confirmed it had surpassed 300 kilograms of enriched uranium reserves, another limit that was imposed by the deal. But in an apparent effort to boost France's diplomatic efforts, Le Drian described these breaches as "slight excesses." A source at the French presidency said "we are in a very critical phase. The Iranians are taking measures that are in violation (of the agreement) but (they) are very calibrated."

"Donald Trump is a dealmaker," this source added. "The Iranians exaggerate, but not too much, and Trump is exerting maximum pressure but he is doing this so that he can get a deal." After Washington withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018, it reimposed stinging sanctions on Tehran, hitting the banking and oil sectors hard. As the Iranian economy went into free fall, Iran demanded that the other parties to the deal—especially France, Germany and Britain—deliver promised economic benefits and help it bypass the US sanctions.

However, it became clear that this was no simple task, and Iran—whose economy depends heavily on oil exports—changed tack and indicated it would reshape its policy of "strategic patience". In May, a year after Trump's withdrawal, President Hassan Rouhani said that Iran would roll back its commitments under the deal in stages every 60 days in an effort to force the other parties to deliver on their side of the bargain.

French efforts welcome

As tensions rose, the United States dispatched a naval carrier, bombers and extra troops to the region to counter perceived threats from Iran. Last month Trump said he had called off a retaliatory military strike



TEHRAN: Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, right, meets with Emmanuel Bonne, diplomatic advisor to the French president, in the Iranian capital Tehran. — AFP

against Iran at the last minute after the Islamic republic shot down a US drone that it said had crossed into its airspace, a claim denied by Washington. In reaction to Tehran's latest breach the US president on Tuesday said Iran is "doing a lot of bad things."

"They'd better be very careful," he told reporters at the White House. But despite the heightened rhetoric between the US and Iran, Macron is pursuing his diplomatic track. On Saturday he held an hour-long conversation with Rouhani in which he said he wanted to

"explore the conditions for a resumption of dialogue between all parties". The White House confirmed that Macron and Trump had discussed the standoff.

While pointblank refusing any talks with the Trump administration, Iran has been receptive to French diplomacy. "We welcome their activities because the French are a part of the JCPOA and we consider their efforts as part of their duty" to keep the agreement alive, said foreign ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi, quoted by the official IRNA news agency. — AFP



ISTANBUL: Syrian men work in their bakery shop in Istanbul's working-class district of Kucukcekmece. — AFP

bally harassed a young girl. The aftermath of the violence is still visible: shop windows have been patched up temporarily with tape and signs hang from their wires. Mohammad Amari, a 27-year-old Syrian who fled Damascus seven months ago, discovered the day after that the bakery where he worked had been ransacked. "They broke the shop window using stones and bats," he said.

Scapegoats

While the incident in Kucukcekmece is not isolated, there has never been violence of this magnitude, according to residents. Police had to use tear gas grenades and water cannon to disperse the crowd. Although he is Turkish, Esat Sevim's restaurant was also vandalized. His crime? Employing Syrians. "If one finds a dead cat in the street, there will be someone who says that a Syrian killed it," he said. "We

must stop scapegoating them." With the economy slowing down, double-digit inflation and high unemployment, Syrians are often targeted.

Even if he does not condone the violence, Murat, a worker who lives in Kucukcekmece, wants Syrians to return home because "our youth cannot find work anymore". Politicians have also been accused of heightening tensions during the local election campaigns, before the March 31 vote and the rerun Istanbul mayoral election on June 23. The newly elected Istanbul mayor from the secular opposition party, Ekrem Imamoglu, was criticised for focusing on the number of shop signs in Arabic in some districts. "This is Turkey, this is Istanbul," he said last week. During the campaign, the hostility towards Syrians came to a head—on social media, with the hashtag, #SyriansGetOut. — AFP

S Africa penguins hit by oil spill

ST CROIX ISLAND: Rangers in wet suits have been searching for oil-tarred penguins in shallow water around St Croix Island off the South African coast as a refueling spill highlights conservationists' fears over pollution. Experts said an unknown number of penguins had been affected on the rocky, uninhabited island, which is home to the largest breeding colony of endangered African penguins in the world.

A Liberian-flagged ship spewed between 200 and 400 liters of oil into the sea off Port Elizabeth city during "bunkering" re-fuelling—the process of filling a ship with fuel from another vessel. The small-scale leakage from the bulk carrier MV Chrysanthi vessel at dawn on Saturday was the second oil spill in the environmentally-sensitive area in three years. "This is exactly the concern with offshore 'bunkering' that we have been voicing concerns about," Stacey Webb, of the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB) charity, told AFP.

"The danger is not over yet. Penguins forage up to 100 kilometers away from the islands (St Croix Island and Bird Island) so they could run into the spill out at sea." About 20 penguins covered in black sludge have been rescued by

national parks rangers so far. The weekend spill follows one in August 2016 when about 100 birds were affected by a smaller "bunkering" spill.

"Bunkering" only started in Ngqura port, part of Algoa Bay, in 2016, with the shipping industry promoting it as an economic boost for the area. Plans to develop the bay into a major re-fuelling hub for international vessels have generated widespread controversy, with conservationists and the tourism sector saying the risk of pollution is too high.

Declining population

African penguins, which are only found in South Africa and Namibia, are also known as jackass penguins for their braying call. They re-colonized a beach near Cape Town in the 1980s and have since become a major tourist attraction. But there are only 50,000 mature African penguins alive, according to the UN conservation red list.

"Is the money generated out of 'bunkering' in Algoa Bay worth putting the survival of a species at risk?" asked Jack Peeton, manager of Raggy Charters, a tour operator which organizes whale watching and deep-sea excursions. He said he had taken tourists to St Croix Island on Monday, only to be "greeted by the grim sight of rangers loading penguins covered with thick oil into small boats." Port Elizabeth tourism consultant Peter Myles said the area plays a unique role in the penguins' survival. "'Bunkering' in Algoa Bay has been a point of discussion with concerns raised over regulation," he told AFP. — AFP

Shiites, security forces clash in Nigerian capital

ABUJA: Supporters of an imprisoned Shiite cleric clashed Tuesday with security forces around Nigeria's parliament building in the latest violent confrontation between the group and the authorities. The Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) said two protesters were killed while the police said two officers were shot in the legs as demonstrators tried to "force their way into the National Assembly".

Pro-Iranian cleric Ibrahim Zakzaky has been in custody since fighting between his supporters and the army broke out in December 2015. Zakzaky's supporters have repeatedly protested in Abuja and several northern cities against the continued detention of their leader. Witnesses told AFP that protesters seized a rifle from a police officer manning the main entrance to the assembly, located in the country's institutional capital Abuja.

"They seized the rifle from one of them and shot another policeman standing close by," one witness said. Security forces responded by firing at the protesters, hitting some of them, witnesses said. An AFP journalist saw traces of blood on the road leading to the assembly and cars with their wind-



ABUJA: Fire fighters extinguish a fire coming out from a vehicle following clashes between security operatives and supporters of an imprisoned leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) Ibrahim Zakzaky at the premises of national assembly building in Nigeria's capital Abuja. — AFP

screens smashed by fleeing demonstrators. Police said two officers received gunshot wounds and six others were hit by clubs and stones.

IMN spokesman Abdullahi Musa Mohammed told AFP the security forces fired teargas before shooting at the protests with live ammunition. "They killed two and so many were injured," he said. The police said 40 IMN members were arrested and that they had ordered "24-hour police surveillance" across the capital. The National

Assembly hurriedly suspended its plenary session due to the violence.

In October, the IMN and human rights groups said more than 40 people were killed when the security forces opened fire on crowds on the outskirts of the capital. The army maintained six people died and that soldiers acted in self-defense. Zakzaky has been at loggerheads with Nigeria's secular authorities for years because of his call for an Iranian-style Islamic revolution. Northern Nigeria is majority Sunni Muslim. — AFP

Kurdistan gets new cabinet, without oil minister

ARBIL, Iraq: A new regional government came into power yesterday in Kurdistan, but the key post of oil minister remained unassigned and therefore de facto managed by new prime minister Masrour Barzani. Barzani was appointed premier nearly a month ago by his cousin Nechirvan Barzani, who had served as prime minister for seven years before he was elected president in June.

Masrour Barzani is the son of veteran Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani, who remains a crucial powerbroker in the autonomous region. Yesterday, 88 of the regional government's 111-member body granted a vote of confidence to 21 new ministers. Among them, the Barzani-led Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was awarded nine ministerial posts.

In October 2017, the KDP spearheaded a controversial independence referendum that prompted Baghdad to reoccupy large swathes of Kurdish-held territory and led to Masoud's resignation as president. Nearly a year later, the party emerged victorious in regional parliamentary elections and has since cemented its control of key government posts, including the presidency, premiership and cabinet chief.

Its main rival, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), was awarded six ministers. Qubad Talabani, the son of PUK founder Jalal Talabani, will retain his post as deputy premier. Four of the new ministers hail from the Goran (Change) Movement and one from the Kurdistan Socialist Party. Based on a sectarian quota system, one post was also awarded to the region's Christian minority. But the ministry of natural resources—of which oil is the most important and lucrative—remains without an official head, making PM Barzani its de facto manager.

The regional government in Arbil is currently locked in a dispute over oil revenues with Iraq's federal authorities, which insist that the KRG must hand over revenues from the 250,000 bpd it exports through the north. In exchange, the KRG would receive a portion of the federal budget and Baghdad would pay the salaries of its employees. The parties regularly accuse each other of failing to fulfil their obligations.

Observers have pointed out that Nechirvan Barzani's ascent to the presidency could ease the ties between the two, but Masrour Barzani—who embodies the KDP's more "nationalist" current—would adopt a harder line and be less willing to negotiate. Yesterday, PM Barzani said a delegation from Arbil would travel to Baghdad soon to strengthen ties. Ministers would then tackle the profound financial crisis ravaging the Kurdish region's economy in recent years. "The government currently owes \$14 billion in debts," he said. — AFP

International

Iraqi gets life in jail for teen rape-murder in Germany

Bashar will not be granted parole after 15 years

WIESBADEN, Germany: An Iraqi man was sentenced to life in jail by a German court yesterday for the rape and murder of a teenage girl that fuelled far-right protests against a mass influx of mostly Muslim migrants. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) party and other far-right groups have seized on the brutal killing of 14-year-old Susanna Maria Feldman in their campaign against Chancellor Angela Merkel's asylum policy.

The accused, rejected asylum seeker Ali Bashar, 22, was convicted of the killing and handed the maximum sentence of life in prison by the court in Wiesbaden, the city where the murder took place in May last year. The judge, Juergen Bonk, also found the crime to be of exceptional severity, meaning that Bashar will not be granted parole after 15 years as is usually the case in Germany but kept behind bars. Bashar battered, raped and strangled the schoolgirl to death in a wooded area near railway tracks on May 23.

The court heard he then sent false messages from Susanna's smartphone indicating she had left for an impromptu trip to Paris. Her

body was only found on June 6 in a shallow grave covered with leaves, twigs and soil. By this time, Bashar and his family had left Germany and returned to Arbil in northern Iraq. The accused was however arrested by Kurdish security forces and, even though Berlin and Baghdad have no formal extradition treaty, taken back to Germany.

Incapable of empathy

Federal police chief Dieter Romann personally joined the controversial operation, as newspaper front pages showed pictures of commandos escorting a heavily restrained Bashar off an aircraft. Bashar later confessed the killing but denied the rape, claiming that he and the girl had consensual sex before she fell, got angry and threatened to call the police. In a separate trial, Bashar is accused of twice raping an 11-year-old girl, who was believed to have also been sexually assaulted by an Afghan youth.

The Bashar case put renewed pressure on Merkel's government over the decision to keep open German borders at the height of

Europe's refugee crisis. The far-right has voiced fury about cases of sexual violence committed by recent migrants and other foreign nationals—including mass assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015-16, and, in April this year, the alleged gang rape by eight Bulgarian teens of a 13-year-old girl.

Bashar, his parents and siblings arrived in Germany in 2015, at the peak of the influx that would bring more than a million asylum seekers, mostly from the Middle East and Africa. His asylum request was rejected in late 2016, but he obtained a temporary residence permit pending his appeal. During this time, he came to police attention for fights, alleged robbery and possession of an illegal switchblade. Susanna's mother, Diana Feldmann, dressed in black during the almost four-month-long trial, broke down in tears as the court heard the harrowing details of the crime. "I have already been given a lifetime sentence," she told a court last week. Bashar by contrast appeared composed during the trial, in which a psychiatrist testified the accused has a personality disorder and is incapable of empathy. —AFP



WIESBADEN: Ali Bashar, right, covers his face in front of the cameras upon entering the courtroom, as his lawyer Martin Reineke looks on, in Wiesbaden, western Germany. — AFP

'Alexa, my head hurts:' UK health service signs up Amazon

LONDON: "Alexa, what are the symptoms of flu?" The UK government said yesterday that Britons will be able to get an answer to this and other simple medical queries from the National Health Service (NHS) using their Amazon smart speakers. The state-run health system's tie-up with the US-based technology giant drew praise from overworked doctors and professionals weary of bad medical advice proliferating online.

But privacy campaigners expressed alarm over the possibility of Amazon storing medical data and then using it to sell targeted ads. "Technology like this is a great example of how people can access reliable, world-leading NHS advice from the comfort of their home, reducing the pressure on our hardworking GPs and pharmacists," Health Secretary Matt Hancock said in a statement.

Amazon said it began updating its Echo smart speakers to search NHS websites for medical answers at the start of the week. The UK health department said it expected half of all symptom checks and other medical queries to be made through voice-assisted technology by next year. It added that the new and more reliable service would be especially helpful to the elderly and the blind.

Health professionals also welcomed the government's embrace of shifting consumer habits and the growing dominance of voice services. "However, it is vital that independent research is done to ensure that the advice given is safe," Royal College of GPs chairwoman Helen Stokes-Lampard said. "Otherwise it could prevent people seeking proper medical help and create even more pressure on our overstretched GP service."

Some privacy campaigners have also expressed concern about entrusting the tech giant with sensitive enquiries. "Encouraging the public to give their private health details to one of the most aggressive corporate data guzzlers is astonishingly misguided," said Big Brother Watch privacy group director Silkie Carlo. "It's a data protection disaster waiting to happen."

Big Brother Watch also claimed that Amazon stores users' voice recordings in its data centers. But Amazon said in a letter to US Senator Chris Coons last month that its services "allow customers to see, hear, and delete the audio that was streamed to the cloud". Coons has been investigating Amazon's data practices since last year.

No patient data shared

The Health department insists that Amazon will not be able to access Britons' medical records. "No patient data is being shared with Amazon as part of this agreement," the health department said in a statement released to AFP. "Amazon is not sharing any of this information with third parties, nor is it selling products or making product recommendations based on this health information, nor is it building a health profile on customers." The health department added that Amazon was accessing the information for free and that similar services such as Google Assistant were also encouraged to sign up.

"This agreement with Amazon is not exclusive—we want to work with other technology providers on similar agreements," the health department said. It added that all third parties needed to win approval from the NHS before accessing its websites and linking them up to their voice-assistant devices. The NHS website offers basic advice on thousands of medical conditions and is one of the most popular symptom checkers in the world. The new service is being billed by the UK government as a world-first. — AFP

Australia to hold Aboriginal recognition referendum

SYDNEY: Australia will hold a landmark referendum on recognizing Aboriginal people in the constitution within three years, the minister for indigenous affairs said yesterday. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders lived on the land for tens of thousands of years prior to British colonization, and make up roughly three percent of the population today, but remain by far the country's most disadvantaged community. The cam-

paigned to include them in the constitution has stirred heated debate in Canberra.

But last week right-leaning Prime Minister Scott Morrison agreed to work with the opposition Labor party, clearing a path for indigenous affairs minister Ken Wyatt to promise a constitutional referendum on the issue within the three-year term of the current parliament. Wyatt acknowledged, during a speech in Canberra, that "there are diverse views" in the country on granting constitutional recognition to Australia's first people.

"I am prepared to walk with people on all sides of politics, all sides of our community to hear their views and reach a point in which they can agree," he said. Wyatt, who in May became the first Aboriginal Australian to hold the indigenous affairs portfolio, said the question put forward to Australians for a vote must be carefully crafted. "Sometimes we can aspire to an optimum outcome but we also have to accept that there is a pragmatic element to (a) constitutional referendum

and I would rather us in the psyche of this nation have a win on a referendum than to have a loss."

Voting in a constitutional referendum is compulsory in Australia, and since 1901 just eight of 44 proposals for constitutional change have succeeded. "We all know how difficult it is to achieve referendum change in Australia on any subject," opposition shadow minister for indigenous Australians Linda Burney, who is also Aboriginal, told national broadcaster ABC.

Burney, whose Labor party supports the referendum, said she expected a "pretty ugly" no campaign run against the proposed change, but believes the "Australian public, in the main, is ready for constitutional reform". Advocates of the reform say it will help remove discrimination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders while creating a more inclusive national identity. Government efforts to improve outcomes in the areas of health and education for Aboriginal Australians have consistently fallen short. — AFP



DRODORO: Thousands of displaced Congolese people take refuge in the grounds of a Catholic Church in Drodoro, eastern DR Congo. — AFP

Kinshasa governor campaigns against rowdy nights and 'filth'

KINSHASA: The long, loud nights of Kinshasa's street life are set to be shortened by the new governor of DR Congo's unruly capital, as part of a city-wide crusade against "dirtiness". In less than a month, the bars spilling out on to the city's highways and byways will no longer be allowed to serve customers with beer and meat skewers before 6:00 pm. Five hours later, the premises must close. Governor Genty Nyabenda ordered last Thursday.

Customers on the packed terraces of working-class districts such as the Huillierie, Matonge and Bandal will benefit from an extension until midnight at weekends and on public holidays after the rules take effect on August 1. Popular rumba music can still boom out, but sales of drinks must always cease an hour before closing time, according to authorities who believe that a "live and let live" attitude has gone too far in Africa's third-largest metropolis.

The bid to cut down on noise and disorderly conduct is just one aspect of Nyabenda's "Kin Bopeto"—"Clean Kinshasa"—operation, which also targets alleged prostitutes and delinquents. "Sometimes you find somebody having a beer at 10 o'clock in the morning. What state will they be in by midday?" protested the provincial minister of the environment, Didier Tenge Litho. He has exhorted "the ordinance-law of May 31, 1975, which regulates the opening and closing hours of places serving (alcoholic) drinks".

Speaking on several radio stations to spread the word, Tenge Litho said that the Kin Bopeto campaign is intended to provoke a general "change in outlook and behaviour" to "reject filth". Nobody knows for sure how many people live in the sprawling capital of the Democratic

Republic of Congo. There has been no census since 1984, but a broad consensus estimate puts the population at 10 million.

Cleansing brigades

The city inherited from Belgian colonial rule was often called "Kin-la-belle" ("Kin-the-beautiful"), but for many nowadays it's become "Kin-la-poubelle" ("Kin-the-trash-bin") — where countless plastic bags are strewn the length of "avenues" of beaten earth and clog up the waterways. The new governor has announced resources to obtain visible results from the Kin Bopeto initiative within six months. Each of Kinshasa's 24 administrative departments will get financial help, while "cleansing brigades" of at least 40 agents will serve each district.

The campaign also targets behaviour seen as immoral and socially unacceptable, but the authorities have set their sights on traditional scapegoats. The "shogue" and "kuluna" street kids and juvenile delinquents get the blame for insecurity, while "ujana" alleged teen prostitutes are rounded up. Innocent girls are sometimes indeed often-accused of being loose women simply because they don't wear bras.

City officials even plan to enforce distance among the informal traders who gather along congested main roads. These people must stand back at least a meter from the highway to avoid anyone falling sick because of filth.

What will become of Kinshasa six months into the governor's plan remains to be seen, but one thing is already certain. It will affect the majority of the workforce that ekes out a precarious living in informal jobs, including petty roadside trade and serving beer. — AFP

US Marines arrested for migrant trafficking

LOS ANGELES: Two US Marines have been arrested for smuggling undocumented Mexican migrants into the United States in exchange for money, according to a court document. Byron Darnell Law II and David Javier Salazar-Quintero were arrested on July 3 along the Mexican border in Jacumba, California, the document said. They were charged with having transported three undocumented migrants about six miles over the border.

The three Mexican nationals seated in the back of the Marines' vehicle were prepared to pay \$8,000 "to be smuggled into the United States," although it is unclear to whom they would have paid the money. The two Marines, who were stationed at Camp Pendleton near San

Diego, have been accused of "knowingly" transporting the migrants into the US "for the purpose of... private financial gain," according to the court document.

During their hearings, both men accused each other of responsibility in the matter: Law said that Salazar received directions to the pickup location via a cell phone, while Salazar said that Law originally got him involved with smuggling. Salazar also said he had made four other smuggling trips to Jacumba. Law and Salazar were formally charged Monday, according to The Washington Post. The office of the attorney general did not respond to AFP's request for comment.

"We continue to cooperate fully with the investigative efforts into this matter," Marine spokesman First Lieutenant Cameron Edinburg told Marine Corps Times. This is not the first case of US military members helping migrants enter the US. There were similar instances in 2014, 2017 and last year. The US Border Patrol apprehended nearly 700,000 people illegally crossing into the United States from October to June, 140 percent higher than during the same period a year earlier. — AFP

Nigeria sharia police arrest four over 'Facebook' wedding

KANO, Nigeria: Four men have been arrested in the northern Nigerian city of Kano for allegedly carrying out a false marriage on Facebook, which the Islamic enforcement agency said had mocked Islam. Kano is among 12 northern Nigeria states where Sharia law operates and the Hisbah enforcement agency said yesterday the wedding was perceived to have made a mockery of the institute of marriage.

"We arrested four men for organizing a mock wedding on Facebook which has caused public outrage," Hisbah's chief Abba Sufi said. "We arrested them for making a mockery of the sanctity of the institution of marriage," he said. The four suspects, aged between 30 and 32, were picked up on Tuesday, days after news circulated that one of them married a young woman on Facebook in a ceremony witnessed by the others, Sufi said.

The groom, Sanusi Abdullahi, confessed to have "jokingly" offered a female Facebook friend who lives in the north-eastern city of Maiduguri a bride price of 20,000 naira (\$56) during the "online marriage" on the condition that the money would be paid after she moved into his house. His three accomplices stood as witnesses in the ceremony which was more of a "banter" between friends. Sufi said the suspects had never met the 'bride' in person and was only a "social media friend" to the four men.

The incident sparked an uproar from radical Muslim clerics, who called for the arrest and prosecution of the suspects. Sufi said Abdullahi even received



NANTES: This picture taken in Nantes, shows logos of the online social media and social networking service Facebook. — AFP

death threats on his mobile phone and was assaulted by an attacker while leaving the mosque after evening prayers on Monday before his arrest. "We have to intervene to ensure the issue doesn't spiral out of control, now that the main suspect is under threat."

"We have asked the police to investigate such threats and the physical attack on him which has left him with an injury to his arm," he said. Sufi said the suspects had shown remorse and the Hisbah was considering "closing the case" but wanted to gauge the mood of the people. Last December, the Hisbah arrested 11 young women for allegedly planning a lesbian wedding. The suspects were arrested while making last-minute preparations for the wedding in a hotel, but insisted on belonging to a dance club. In northern states, where Sharia runs parallel to the state and federal justice system, homosexuality is punishable by death, although the sentence is rarely, if ever, enforced. — AFP

International

Court battles underline complexity of India's myriad land laws

Land laws spark conflicts, make justice harder for farmers

BANGKOK: Recent court rulings have underlined the complexity of India's numerous land laws, which have sparked conflicts and made it harder for poor farmers and indigenous people to access justice, analysts and lawyers said. Last week, the Supreme Court ruled that indigenous people in Meghalaya state owned their land and its resources, and that only they could permit mining, after years of illegal mining devastated the environment and their livelihoods.

Also last week, the Madras High Court ruled that all land acquisitions by Tamil Nadu state after September 2013 under state laws were illegal and the land must be returned - unless already in use - as the laws bypassed the federal land acquisition law. "Finding a solution to land conflict is one of the foremost policy challenges for India," said Namita Wahi, who heads the Land Rights Initiative at New Delhi-based think tank Centre for Policy Research.

"Competing historical and policy narratives of property rights have resulted in numerous, conflicting laws, leading to legal disputes," she said. "The problem is compounded by administrative failure to comply with the rule of law." A study of eight of India's 29 states by CPR showed there

are more than 1,200 laws related to land. Some dated back to the colonial era more than a century ago, said Wahi. "No government has ever attempted to rationalize existing land laws. But this is the need of the hour," she said.

Long wait

With a population of about 1.3 billion people on a land mass less than half the size of Australia, rising pressure on land in India for homes, highways, airports and industry is triggering conflicts. Across India, more than 700 land disputes affect nearly 8 million people, according to research firm Land Conflict Watch. Many of these cases end up in court. Matters related to land and property made up about two-thirds of all civil cases in the country, according to a 2016 study by Bengaluru-based legal advocacy group Daksh.

About a fourth of all cases decided in the top court in the past 70 years were related to land, CPR's research showed. But anyone approaching the court must be prepared for a long wait, as a land acquisition dispute in the Supreme Court can take up to 20 years to resolve, according to CPR's research. One of the biggest tests of India's

land laws and states' compliance with the rule of law is the ongoing case against the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in the Supreme Court.

Millions of forest dwellers and indigenous people whose land claims were rejected under the 2006 law may be evicted because of a failure to implement the law that recognized their right to inhabit and live off forests where their ancestors had settled. Conservation groups say the law hurts wildlife and causes deforestation. Meanwhile, the Narendra Modi-led government has drafted a new forest policy that would make the FRA ineffective, according to land rights groups.

The top court is set to resume hearings on the FRA on July 24. "The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is committed to defending the constitutional validity of FRA and safeguarding the interests of tribals," said a senior ministry official who asked not to be named as the matter is in court. "We have seen the draft of the new forest policy, and we have offered feedback, so that it does not negate the FRA," the official told the Thomson Reuters Foundation on the phone.

Only option

India's Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act (2013), passed by a previous government led by the Congress party, replaced a colonial-era law with an aim to safeguard farmers. But land is a state issue, and several states have amended provisions of the law that require consent from farmers, a social impact assessment, adequate compensation and rehabilitation. State officials say the law delays land acquisitions for industrial projects that are key to generating jobs and improving livelihoods of tens of millions of people.

Last year, the top court issued notices to five states, on the basis of a plea filed by land rights activists who said the amendments went against the federal law. "Given how brazen various state governments have been in diluting the provisions, a challenge in the courts is the only realistic option," said Suhrit Parthasarathy, a lawyer who argued against Tamil Nadu state's land laws. "There cannot be differing standards employed by the state to acquire land. Ultimately, at some point the Supreme Court will need to settle these questions," he said. — Reuters

Indian workers toil at one of world's highest roads

TANGTSE, India: Hundreds of miles from their homes, a group of laborers are toiling in a cold Indian Himalayan desert to repair some of the world's highest roads. Stationed near Chang La pass which is perched at a height of 5,360 meters, the 13 men, whose home is the low-lying eastern state of Jharkhand, have little experience of cold climes. They have been hired for four months in the Tangtse district of Ladakh, where blizzards can rage throughout the year, to ensure that the key tourist route to the picturesque Nubra Valley and Pangong lake is in good condition.

Their back-breaking stint will fetch them 40,000 rupees each—a considerable sum in a country where more than 21 percent of the 1.3 billion population lived on less than two dollars a day in 2011. "There is not much work there (back home). I don't find any work difficult," said Sunil Tutu, 30. They toil six days a week, using only their bare hands, shovels and old sacks to move rocks and sand, with the help of local Ladakhi workers, some of them women.

Sundays are the only days they can do their laundry as well as bathe and shave. Each morning the group hops on a truck to reach the work site after a breakfast of tea and bread. They return to their basic housing tents after sunset and have a meal of rice and lentils. The tents do not have electricity and workers rely on kerosene stoves to cook and heat up the icy water. But they are undaunted.



TANGTSE, India: In this picture Chota Montu, 25, a road maintenance worker from India's low-lying eastern Jharkhand state, takes a bath on his day off at his campsite near Tangtse village in northern India's Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir state. — AFP

"If given a chance I will come back here again," said Sushil Tutu, 35. "I like the road work... I like it anywhere." Another worker Rajshekhhar, 33, said the inhospitable conditions helped him save more for the future. "Back home we are unable to save money, we eat and drink and the money gets over. The work is good (here), I like the snow and the mountains. I don't like the cold though."

Migration for work is common in rural India. According to the non-government Aajeevika Bureau agency, millions work in hazardous conditions with little legal or social protection. India's unemployment rate has been worsening. In 2017-2018 it was 6.1 percent, the worst since the 1970s, posing a major challenge for newly re-elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi. — AFP



MANILA: Philippine Armed Forces spokesperson Brigadier General Edgard Arevalo, left, speaks beside Philippine National Police (PNP) spokesperson Bernard Banac during a joint press conference at the military headquarters in Manila. — AFP

Filipino 'suicide bomber' behind last month's attack

MANILA: Philippine security forces confirmed yesterday the first Filipino "suicide bomber" attack in the Asian country, warning Islamic militants were grooming other local prospects for more such actions in the future. Norman Lasuca and one other yet to be identified suspect blew themselves up outside a military camp on the remote southern island of Jolo on June 28 in explosions that also killed three soldiers and two civilians, authorities said.

"We can now confirm... the incidence of the first suicide bombing in the Philippines, perpetrated by a Filipino in the person of Norman Lasuca," military spokesman Brigadier-General Edgard Arevalo told a news conference. The Islamic State group claimed the attack that marked a serious escalation of militancy driven by the influence of IS in Southeast Asia. A decades-old Islamist insurgency in the southern Philippines has killed tens of thousands, but suicide attacks have been used extremely rarely, with foreign fighters blamed for the few that have been carried out.

The region's military commander gave a somber outlook. "Based on our monitoring, they (IS militants) are training others," Lieutenant-General Cirilito Sobejana told reporters. "The probability is high," Sobejana said when asked about

the likelihood of future suicide attacks by local militants. He said suicide bomber recruits were training in the south of the mainly Catholic country where IS-linked outfits operate.

Police spokesman Bernard Banac said the Jolo bombing was "organised by the Abu Sanyaf group"-Filipino militants engaged in kidnappings and bombings and who look to IS as a "model". A local woman and member of Jolo's dominant Tausug ethnic group claimed one of the attackers was her son, allowing the authorities to match their DNA samples. "The security environment in our country has changed," Arevalo said, requiring military and police "adjustments in techniques, tactics and procedures".

"Before, we only heard of IED (improvised explosive device) attacks, remote-controlled attacks but this time an individual blew himself up as a full-fledged suicide bomber." The June 28 attack came months after explosions described by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte as a "suicide bombing" killed 21 people in Jolo's Catholic cathedral in January. Banac, the police spokesman, said authorities had no way of knowing whether the feet of a man and a woman recovered after that attack belonged to Filipinos or foreigners.

In July last year an explosives-laden van driven by a Moroccan man killed 11, including the driver, when it blew up at a security checkpoint on the southern island of Basilan. "The Moroccan... was the first suicide bomber but a lot has happened since then. In a way, they have leveled up and are now using our locals for suicide bombings," Sobejana said yesterday. — AFP

Media watchdog slams Pakistan curbs on TV broadcasters

ISLAMABAD: A global media watchdog has slammed Pakistani authorities over the removal of three television channels from the country's airwaves, saying the move was "indicative of disturbing dictatorial tendencies" as pressure mounts on journalists in the South Asian nation. The statement from Reporters Without Borders (RSF) comes days after AbTakk TV, 24 News, and CapitalTV all had their broadcasts cut, after screening a press conference with opposition leader Maryam Nawaz.

Pakistani authorities say the channels were unavailable due to "technical issues", but RSF described the outage as an act of "brazen censorship". "Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is appalled to learn that three Pakistani TV news channels have been suspended from cable networks at the behest of the authorities in reprisal for broadcasting an opposition leader's news conference," the watchdog said late Tuesday.

It went on to pin the removal of the channels on the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority, saying "the all-powerful broadcast media regulator" takes its lead from the country's "military establishment". A senior official with knowledge of the case confirmed the move against the

channels, saying the broadcasters had violated Pakistan's "code of conduct" and been warned against airing the press conference with Maryam Nawaz.

Nawaz is the daughter of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif—who is currently behind bars for corruption—and her press conference featured a judge claiming he had been blackmailed into convicting the former premier. The move came as Prime Minister Imran Khan's administration vowed to block any media coverage and interviews of politicians "who are convicts and under trial", according to leading English-language daily Dawn.

Just last week, Pakistan's largest private broadcaster Geo News TV abruptly took an interview with former president Asif Ali Zardari off air shortly after it began. There have been accusations in recent years of the country's powerful military putting pressure on the media to stop coverage critical of its policies—allegations it denies. Pakistan routinely ranks among the world's most dangerous countries for media workers and reporters have frequently been detained, beaten and even killed for being critical of the government or powerful military. — AFP

New Thai leader keeps junta powers of arbitrary detention

BANGKOK: Thailand's new civilian government will retain the power to arbitrarily detain critics despite the imminent easing of junta-era security controls, prompting warnings from rights groups of enduring "martial law". Nearly 2,000 people have been tried in military courts since now-prime minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha seized power in a 2014 coup.

The junta eased a ban on political activities last year in the run-up to national elections and the former army chief phased out dozens of additional junta-enacted orders Tuesday, transferring military cases to civilian courts. But the government retained over 100 orders, including the right for the military to detain suspects for seven days on national security grounds.

"This is martial law used during an emergency crisis, but we've had elections and a new government so why is it still imposed?" said Anon Chalawan of legal monitoring group iLaw. Prayut on Tuesday defended his original invoking of junta-era

powers as a way of "solving problems". But political analyst Titipol Phakdeewanich said the continuing restrictions showed that full democracy remained a distant prospect for Thais. "I think they know people will be more critical of this government," he said.

Thailand held elections in March and Prayut holds a slim majority in the lower house through a coalition of almost 20 parties, which—together with a military-appointed Senate—installed him as civilian prime minister. Prayut's political opponents slammed the process, which included the temporary suspension from parliament of his biggest rival. But despite questions over his legitimacy the ex-army chief is pressing ahead and is expected to form a cabinet in the coming days. Tuesday's announcement came after a rash of attacks on pro-democracy activists that remain unsolved. In late June, activist Sirawith Seritawat-known for staging anti-junta protests—was set upon with sticks by men on motorcycles and put in hospital. — AFP

China activist arrested for 'promoting terrorism'

BEIJING: A Chinese anti-corruption activist who had urged officials to disclose their wealth was arrested for allegedly "promoting terrorism", as Beijing clamps down on Communist Party critics. Zhang Baocheng, 60, was a member of the now-defunct New Citizens Movement, which campaigned for democracy and government transparency. It is unusual in China for members of civil society or human rights activists to be accused of terrorism, and his wife told AFP that she fears it suggests Zhang might receive a heavy prison sentence.

Zhang was given a two-year prison term in 2014 for "disrupting public order" after holding a banner in a crowded shopping area in Beijing urging officials to disclose their assets as a check against corruption. He has continued to be a vocal critic of the Communist Party even after the movement was suppressed and at least 20 of its members were detained in a year-long crackdown starting in 2013. But what led to his latest arrest is unclear.

Zhang was arrested by Beijing police on July 4, suspected of "picking quarrels, promoting terrorism, extremism, and inciting terrorism," according to an arrest warrant shared by his wife, Liu Juefan. "After his release from prison... he never stopped fighting, so they are now using this charge of terrorism and extremism to condemn him to a heavy sentence," Liu said on the phone from New York. "Since his arrest, I have not been able to reach him, but his lawyer has met him twice," she said, adding that her husband "has been framed".

Living in fear

Zhang's arrest comes over a month after he was detained on May 28 — days before the politically sensitive anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown that falls on June 4. Authorities crack down on activists and further tighten internet censorship to prevent any mention of the killing of hundreds, possibly more than 1,000, of pro-democracy protesters by soldiers and tanks in 1989.

Zhang was also detained for over a month in 2016 for participating in a private commemoration of the taboo incident, but it is unclear whether he had planned for something similar this year. "On May 28, Zhang Baocheng called his daughter and told her that police had detained him and were searching his apartment," Liu said. "The police had told him they were looking for a gun."

Beijing police did not answer AFP calls to clarify whether Zhang was in possession of an illegal firearm. China's leadership under President Xi Jinping has cracked down on student groups, labor movements and rights activists in recent years in a bid to silence dissent.

"Everyone in China is living in fear and with lies," Zhang told AFP in December, when he went outside a courthouse to show support for a prominent lawyer critical of the party who was on trial. "When there's more people willing to stand up (against bad government)," he said, "it will allow more people to get rid of their fears." — AFP

Aircraft technician crushed by landing gear

KOLKATA: A trainee technician in India was crushed to death yesterday by the landing gear flaps on an aircraft while conducting maintenance work, airline SpiceJet said. "Inadvertently, the main landing gear hydraulic door closed and he got stuck in between the hydraulic door flaps," SpiceJet said after the incident at Kolkata airport in eastern India. "The hydraulic doors were broken to rescue (Rohit) Pandey but he was declared dead," the airline said. "The entire SpiceJet family stands together in grief in this unfortunate incident." Airport director Kaushik Bhattacharya said that Pandey, 26, was "sucked into the lower end of the aircraft due to hydraulic pressure. His body had to be cut out of it". The aircraft was a Canadian Bombardier Q400. — AFP

Analysis

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Assad hits a wall in Syrian war as frontlines harden

President Bashar Al-Assad's assault in the northwest has been met with a painful rebel counter-punch that underlines Turkish resolve to keep the area out of his hands and shows why he will struggle to take back more of Syria by force. More than two months of Russian-backed operations in and around Idlib province have yielded little or nothing for Assad's side. It marks a rare case of a military campaign that has not gone his way since Russia intervened in 2015.

While resisting government attacks, the insurgents have managed to carve out small advances of their own, drawing on ample stocks of guided anti-tank missiles that opposition and diplomatic sources say have been supplied by Turkey. "They're even targeting personnel with these missiles ... it means they are comfortably supplied," a rebel source said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was discussing rebel military capabilities. Turkey's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on reports that Ankara has stepped supplies of arms to rebels.

With Turkey committed to the rebels, the battle for the northwest stands in stark contrast to a campaign in the southwest a year ago, when Western and Arab states stood by as Assad and his Russian- and Iranian-backed allies took the area. Despite Russian backing in the latest fighting, questions have arisen over whether Assad and his allies are entirely on the same page when it comes to the northwest, where Turkey has deployed forces in agreement with Russia and Iran.

Moscow has appeared keen to preserve its ties with Ankara even as its air force bombs in support of Assad. Turkey says Russia has intervened to stop attacks on Turkish forces from Syrian government-held territory. And this time there has been no sign of a major role for Iranian-backed Shi'ite forces that have helped Assad to victories in parts of Syria that are of greater interest to Iran, including territory near Iraq, Lebanon and Israel.

The capture of the southwest a year ago remains Assad's last big gain. The prospects of further advances have been obstructed not only by Turkish interests in the northwest but also the presence of US forces in the east and northeast. American troops are still supporting Kurdish-led fighters following a reversal of President Donald Trump's decision last December to pull them all out. After more than eight years of war, this leaves Syria carved up into areas of US, Russian, Turkish and Iranian influence that seem unlikely to be stitched back together any time soon. "We could see the front lines harden and remain like that for some time, where either the appetite or capability to fight through them is not there on the part of the regime or its allies," said a Western diplomat speaking anonymously in order to offer a candid assessment.

'Bone-breaking battle'

The Idlib area is dominated by Tahrir al-Sham, the jihadists formerly known as the Nusra Front. Proscribed as a terrorist group by the UN Security Council, the group has set aside past conflict with Turkish-backed rebels to defend the northwest. Colonel Mustafa Bakour, a commander in the Jaish al-Zaluma rebel group, said coordination among rebels was a major factor in foiling government attacks. "I expect the battles to continue for a time because it has become a bone-breaking battle," he said in written answers to questions from Reuters.

The government campaign of air strikes and barrel bombing that began in late April was followed by the capture of around 20 villages. This led to a rebel counter-attack in early June that seized ground the government has been unable to recover. The Syrian government has described its operations as a response to militant violations of ceasefire agreements. Russia says action was needed to stop attacks from being launched from Idlib, including drone strikes on its nearby air base. President Vladimir Putin said in April a full-scale operation in Idlib was impractical for now.

Though the government has not declared the goals of the campaign, rebel sources believe it was to capture two highways that pass through rebel-held territory. Some 300,000 people fleeing bombardment have moved towards the Turkish border since April, prompting the United Nations to warn that Idlib was on the brink of a "humanitarian nightmare". For Ankara, the Syrian opposition's last major state sponsor, preventing another major influx of Syrian refugees is of paramount importance: Turkey already hosts 3.6 million of them. While accusing the Syrian government of targeting civilians and its military observation posts in the Idlib area, Turkey has stopped short of blaming Russia, instead saying it would continue to cooperate with Moscow over the northwest. The Turkish foreign ministry, in a written response to questions from Reuters, also said "necessary messages have been sent to Russian officials to end the attacks on our observation points and civilians" in the Idlib area. — Reuters

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(Clockwise from top left) In this photo taken on April 8, 2019, a man walks past a billboard bearing the image of Ahmad Shah Massoud, the late military and political Afghan leader also known as the "Lion of Panjshir" in Malaspa village near Bazarak in Panjshir Province, north of the capital Kabul; In this photo taken on April 7, 2019, schoolgirls walk past a barrier wall painted with an image of Massoud in Kabul; In this photo taken on May 4, 2019, a bodybuilder wears a T-shirt with a portrait Massoud at a gym in Kabul; In this photo taken on April 8, 2019, a shopkeeper holds a cup bearing the image of Ahmad Shah Massoud as he waits for customers at his shop in Saricha in Panjshir Province. — AFP

Massoud's image becomes national icon

In Kabul, it is hard to miss the late Ahmad Shah Massoud. His bearded visage is painted onto blast walls across the city, his photo adorns the windscreens of pro-government forces. And a central roundabout bears his name. More than 17 years since his assassination, the legendary fighter who battled the Soviets and the Taliban has become something of an Afghan icon. The feats of the "Lion of Panjshir", named for his home valley north of Kabul, has earned him a devoted following in war-weary Afghanistan.

The most famous images of Massoud, with a beige pakol - the traditional Afghan woolen hat - perched on his head, can now be found on T-shirts, key rings and even coffee cups in Kabul's markets. Massoud gained fame for his military prowess, through which he kept Panjshir free even during the bloody Soviet occupation (1979-89) and under the Taliban regime (1996-2001). "Every country has a national hero, and Massoud is known worldwide as our national hero, that is why you see his pictures all over the country," said Shamsullah Jawid, a former mujahideen fighter who now is a Panjshir prosecutor.

Massoud's only son, Ahmad, said his father's vision for Afghanistan was a "peaceful country with good relations between all ethnicities and neighboring countries". Massoud was the first to approach the Taliban to seek peace, noted Ahmad, 29, who now runs a foundation bearing his father's name. The United States is currently leading a push to find a peace deal with the insurgents. "Peace has not come and the struggles Afghanistan still face keep piling up," explained Ahmad. "In this current situation they

need a Massoud figure to be again their savior," he said of the nation's love of his father.

National hero

Massoud was killed aged 47 in 2001 by a team of Al-Qaeda bombers posing as journalists. His death came two days before the September 11 attacks that would precipitate the US-led invasion to oust the Taliban, who had granted Al-Qaeda safe haven. Massoud has subsequently been elevated to the rank of Afghan "national hero" by presidential decree. American historian Michael Barry, an Afghanistan specialist who lived with Massoud and wrote a biography about him, said his subject's legacy comes from his struggle against two of the 20th century's most totalitarian regimes.

"He missed Nazism but he fought against the Soviet Union and he fought against what Al-Qaeda came to represent," Barry said. "With the passage of time, the various shifting political strategies that the real Massoud engaged in have become blurred and forgotten behind the iconic image of someone who gave his life for the defense of his country."

Viewed by the West as someone who represented moderate Islam, Massoud was in April 2001 invited to Paris and then the European Parliament in Strasbourg. But his story is not without controversy. In his youth, he studied with the Muslim Brotherhood along with other mujahideen leaders, before cutting ties in 1978. His troops were accused of massacres and looting during the 1992-1996 civil war, which killed tens of thousands of people and reduced much of Kabul to rubble.

'Photogenic'

Massoud's legend owes a good amount to a few photographic portraits that capture the aura of the Afghan "lion" and are instantly recognizable, rather like those of Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara. Yousef Jannesar, an Afghan photographer, says he has "never met anyone so photogenic". The most famous images of Massoud were taken by French-Iranian photographer Reza Deghati, known simply as Reza, or by Hiromi Nagakura of Japan.

"He's the man who best embodies the most important word for Afghans: Pride. He is the only person in modern history who represents the Afghan soul," said Reza, who like his subject shares a passion for chess and Persian poetry. But Massoud left nothing to chance with his image. "Whenever he would receive guests, his troops would come to pick me up so I could perfect his look, and when I would cut his hair he always insisted on being well presented," said Malekdad, Massoud's former hairdresser.

Every Sept 9, the anniversary of his death, crowds of pakol-wearing admirers, as well as politicians and a few diplomats, go to Panjshir to pay homage. In Kabul, followers shoot weapons in the air to honor his memory, an event that invariably results in locals getting wounded. His likeness is emblazoned on goods in a small gift shop beside his burial ground and memorial in Panjshir - something that Massoud may not have approved of. "If he were alive, he would never like his pictures to be misused and hung on walls by people," said Faizullah Saifi, Massoud's former driver. His son is also dubious about the growing Massoud iconography. We should celebrate "the values that we fought for ... not the photos," he said. — AFP

Waves of change: Lagos battles Atlantic erosion

Can Lagos hold back the waves? Sprawled around a lagoon, Nigeria's frenetic economic capital faces a threat from the Atlantic on its doorstep. The ocean has pounded the soft, sandy shoreline on a timescale far surpassing human history - but now its waves spell a major threat to the city and its booming population. The coastline is eroding, driven partly by higher water levels caused by global warming but also from the impact of dredging to provide sand for construction.

Global warming, according to a World Bank study in March, is causing the Atlantic to invade Africa's western coast by up to four metres a year, badly hitting some economically vital areas. Attempts have been made to defy the ocean - but critics say they have sometimes just led to new problems. In particular, a high-end construction project called Eko Atlantic has divided opinion.

Launched in 2007 by billionaire investors with strong political backing, the scheme has been billed as a Dubai for Africa - a hyper-luxury enclave of skyscrapers built on land reclaimed from the seas. An economic downturn in recent years has stalled the mammoth undertaking, but already millions of tonnes of sand have been hauled from the ocean floor to create a manmade peninsula jutting out into the Atlantic from the affluent Victoria Island.

Surrounding it is what the developers call the "Great Wall of Lagos", a barrier of rocks and five-ton concrete blocks intended to run for 8.5 km, designed to withstand the worst storms the Atlantic can throw at it. While the barrier has still not reached full length, those responsible say it has "saved" the business hub of Victoria Island standing behind it from the ravages of the ocean. "Today, Lagos is already seeing the benefits of the Great Wall, once flooded roads are now passable and abandoned properties have been reinvested," Eko Atlantic's website says.

'Washed away'

But while it is seen as a solution for some, the mammoth project is described as a major problem for others. Around 12 km to the east, landowner Wasiu Elegushi says the Eko Atlantic has caused devastating changes to coastal currents, destroying his small middle-class neighborhood, Alpha Beach. Since construction began in 2007, locals and researchers say dis-



A man walks past an abandoned house destroyed by tidal erosion at Alpha Beach, a strip of the Lagos coastline, on April 29, 2019. — AFP

placed currents have washed away more than 25 m of land from the shoreline. "Before Eko, we had nature, palm trees and coconut trees," Elegushi told AFP. "The water started to rise. Everything has been washed away."

The shore-hugging Alpha Beach road has disappeared under the waves and apartment blocks built with prized ocean views just 10 years ago are now occupied only by squatters. A barrier has now gone up to try to protect the area, but for many residents it appears too late. "The way the tides would react to the wall was clear to anyone who understands this," said Tunji Adejumo, an ecologist at the University of Lagos. "It shows that the promoters had no consideration" for the rest of the coast, he said. Eko Atlantic did not respond to questions from AFP about the impact of its construction.

Megacity, mega-problems

Experts say Eko Atlantic is simply the most prominent example of the impact of large-scale land reclamation in Africa's largest metropolis. With more than 20 million residents - no one knows its exact size - Lagos is also one of the world's fastest growing cities. The city has long been vulnerable to flood surges, but environmental safeguards are weak. One unanticipated consequence of the city's headlong rush for growth has been that parts of the seabed have become a moonscape as dredgers have pillaged its sand to make concrete.

An extensive impact study for the state government seen by AFP shows that the once smooth ocean floor now has gigantic holes up to eight metres deep, some of them perilously close to the shore. Experts say such craters can compromise the safety of coastline properties, and some structures in poorer waterfront communities are already collapsing.

Elsewhere, what were once shallow swamplands in Lekki, a peninsula dividing the Lagos lagoon from open sea, were reclaimed in the 1990s to become a middle-class residential area. — AFP

Diplomacy: Genteel world combusts in online era

President Donald Trump's fury over leaked cables written by the British ambassador demonstrates the growing predicament faced by diplomats whose profession - once nearly synonymous with a stiff-upper-lip decorum - has become explosive in the era of Internet leaks. Trump - never one to be described as diplomatic - on Tuesday branded Ambassador Kim Darroch "a very stupid guy" and a "pompous fool" after a confidential missive described the White House as "uniquely dysfunctional."

Darroch, representing a government that has assiduously courted Trump to preserve the "special relationship" between Washington and London, was burned after The Mail on Sunday obtained and published his cables. While diplomats are trained to put on a polite smile and show an air of stability as they represent their countries overseas, they also serve a more discreet role - providing unvarnished, on-the-ground insight to their governments.

In the most sensational look at diplomats' inner communications, the website WikiLeaks in 2010 published more than 250,000 internal cables from US diplomats, revealing their unfiltered takes on foreign leaders. Brett Bruen, a former US diplomat who was director of global engagement in Barack Obama's White House, said that the latest episode will change how ambassadors operate. "We will see more ambassadors and diplomats reserve critical comments for calls and video conferences. Those, at least on secured lines, for the time being have not been hacked," he said.

Bruen, who runs the Global Situation Room communications firm, said that Trump was learning some hard truths about diplomacy after apparently believing that the

British sincerely liked him after rolling out the red carpet for his state visit last month. "Countries and ambassadors do things mostly out of their own self-interest and they will tell you whatever is necessary to secure your trust and support," he said.

Time-honored communications

Cables are a legacy of European diplomacy, when envoys traveling among royal courts sealed their messages in diplomatic pouches. Such pouches remain protected under international law, with the United States still employing around 100 couriers to deliver classified and sensitive materials. The advent of underwater lines led to the creation of "cables". Inside the US State Department, like many other foreign ministries, cable-writing has virtually grown into an art form taught to rookie diplomats, who know that a crisp, insightful memo can be seen at the top and provide a career boost.

Some of the authors of the cables published by WikiLeaks won praise - unsought - for their literary skills, as when the deputy US ambassador in Moscow wrote that some saw then president Dmitry Medvedev as playing Robin to the Batman of Vladimir Putin, Russia's paramount leader since 2000. In one significant reprisal, Ecuador - which later gave refuge to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange - expelled the US ambassador over cables that suggested illegal activity by the national police chief.

Embarrassment over the cables made some diplomats' positions untenable. The US ambassador to Mexico quit after the release of his cables questioning the military's commitment to fighting drug cartels, and the US envoy left Libya after remarking on then dictator Muammar Gaddafi's fondness for a "voluptuous blonde" nurse from Ukraine. Then secretary of state Hillary Clinton tried to make light of the WikiLeaks cables' impact in comments that have a whole new meaning a decade later for Trump. "You should see what we say about you," she quoted a foreign leader as telling her. — AFP

THURSDAY, JULY 11, 2019

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Gulf Bank records KD 24 million in net profit for first half of 2019

Boursa Kuwait's MSCI upgrade will lead to more FDI inflows, improve liquidity: Alghanim

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank K.S.C.P. announced its financial results for the first half of 2019. The Bank recorded a net profit of KD 24 million for the first half of 2019. These first half results consisted of KD 12.2 million net profit recorded in the second quarter of 2019 plus KD 11.8 million recorded in the first quarter of 2019.

This net profit increase occurred as operating profit grew by 17 percent, from KD 26 million in the first quarter of 2019 to KD 30 million in the second quarter of 2019, more than offsetting higher Provisions / Impairments. In addition, over the three-month period ending 30 June 2019, gross loans and advances to customers grew by 8 percent on an annualized basis.

Commenting on the results, Omar Kutayba Alghanim, Gulf Bank's Chairman said: "We are pleased with our Bank's performance in the first half, particularly the second quarter momentum we saw in both business segments. In addition, we are extremely proud that our Consumer Business achieved its 12th straight quarter of loan growth and that has helped Gulf Bank reach an all-time high on gross customer loans and advances. These results highlight the Bank's progress and our ability to deliver long-term sustainable results for our shareholders."

Boursa Kuwait MSCI upgrade

On the recent news of upgrading Boursa Kuwait to an emerging market status by Morgan Stanley Capital International ("MSCI"), one of the most respectable global research firms and index providers, Alghanim commented: "We value the

tremendous efforts of the Capital Markets Authority, Boursa Kuwait and the Kuwait Clearing Company for their vital role in enhancing the investment environment, accessibility and transparency of our domestic capital market. The reclassification of Boursa Kuwait to an emerging market under MSCI will lead to more inflows of foreign investment funds, diversify the shareholder base, and improve liquidity." It is worth mentioning that Gulf Bank is one of the Kuwaiti companies on the initial watch-list of the May 2020 reclassified MSCI Kuwait Index. In addition, Gulf Bank has been part of the FTSE-Russel Kuwait secondary emerging market index since March 2019. "This is great news for Gulf Bank investors. Being part of these indices creates an investment opportunity with enhanced liquidity, fair valuation and diversification of the investor base," said Alghanim.

"A" Credit Ratings

Gulf Bank continues to be well recognized in terms of its credit worthiness and financial strength internationally as it is rated "A" by all four leading credit rating agencies.

Fitch: Long Term IDR "A+" rating with a "Stable" outlook

S&P Global Ratings: Issuer Credit Rating "A-" rating with a "Stable" Outlook

Moody's Investor Services: Long Term Deposits "A3" rating with a "Positive" Outlook

Capital Intelligence: Long Term Foreign Currency "A+" rating with a "Stable" outlook.



Gulf Bank Chairman
Omar Kutayba Alghanim

Sustainability

Sustainability continues to play an integral role in the Bank's Corporate Social Responsibility ("CSR") initiatives. Gulf Bank's social responsibility programs include events focusing on youth and education; women empowerment; health and fitness; and Kuwait's heritage. "We see increasing demand from investors, customers, regulators and our own employees around social responsibility and sustainability. We aim to invest in our communities and engage with our partners to promote social and economic development that will ultimately drive sustainable growth in our beloved country, Kuwait," said Alghanim.

In an ongoing effort to support and empower the development of Kuwait's youth and entrepreneurial spirit, Gulf Bank renewed their title sponsorship of the "Company Program Competition" for INJAZ Kuwait 2019. During the competition, Gulf Bank hosted students for a workshop

Rating Agency	Rating	Outlook
MOODY'S	A3	Positive
S&P Global Ratings	A-	Stable
Fitch Ratings	A+	Stable
CI CAPITAL Intelligence	A+	Stable

session under the theme of public speaking and presented the "Best Student Company Award." During the summer, Gulf Bank also launched its 2019 Summer Internship Program for university students. The program blends both practical and theoretical skills, encouraging students to explore a career path in Kuwait's banking sector.

Gulf Bank also demonstrated its commitment to raising awareness for Kuwait's heritage and traditions as part of its ongoing CSR program. During the second quarter of the year, Gulf Bank was a proud gold sponsor of "Memoirs of a Sailor," an epic musi-

cal production which took place at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Centre.

Appreciation

Alghanim concluded his remarks by stating: "I would like to thank everyone that contributed to these results. I would also like to thank our shareholders and the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Capital Market Authority for their continued support. I especially want to thank our customers for their loyalty and reiterate our commitment to place them at the center of everything we do."

British inventor Dyson pays \$54m for Singapore's priciest penthouse

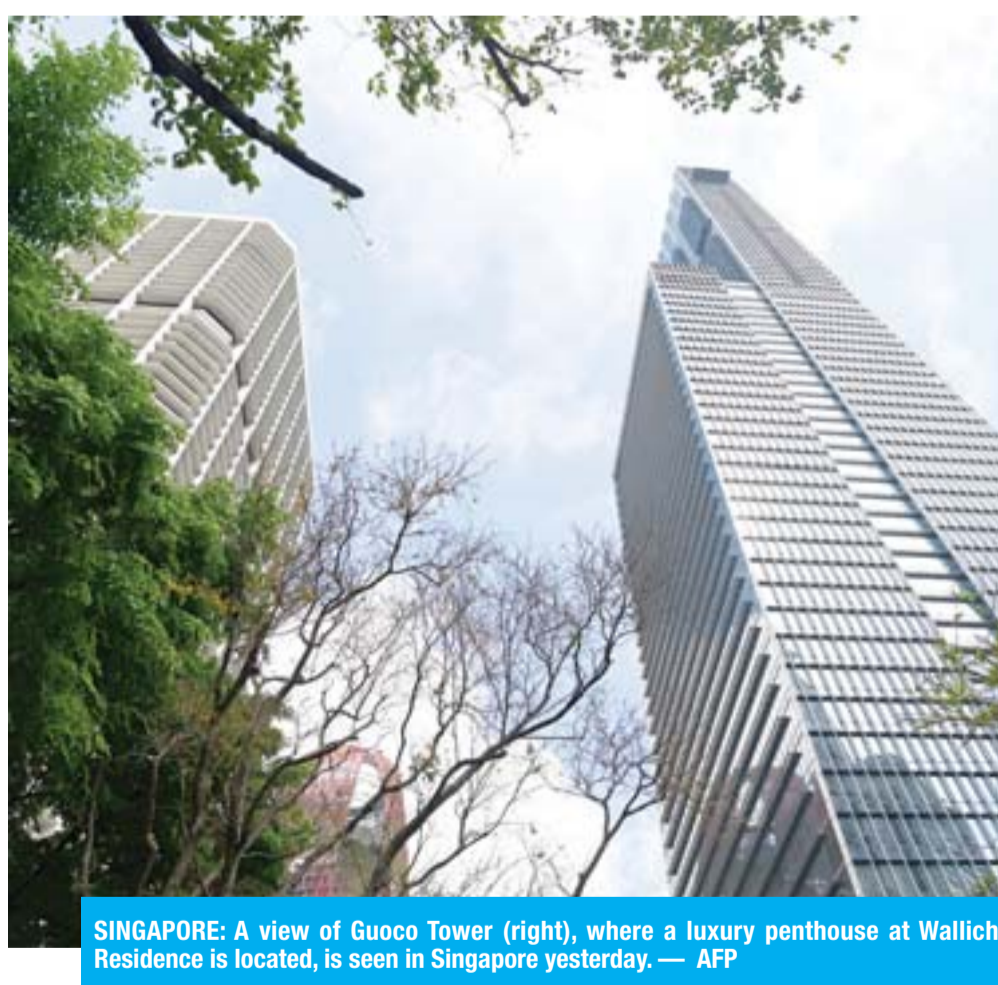
SINGAPORE: British billionaire inventor James Dyson has paid a reported \$54 million for Singapore's biggest, most expensive penthouse: a three-floor residence with a rooftop terrace, private pool, and jacuzzi. His electric appliance company, known for its bagless vacuum cleaners, hand dryers and fans, announced this year it was shifting its global headquarters from England to the city-state to be closer to Asian markets.

The company also plans to produce electric cars there, as part of its expansion east after Britain's decision in 2016 to leave the EU. The Brexit-backing tycoon purchased the 21,000 square foot (1,960 square meter) "super penthouse" for almost Sg\$74 million (\$54 million). Singapore's Business Times newspaper reported, without citing a source. A land title document seen by AFP lists Dyson and his wife Deirdre as joint tenants of the 99-year leasehold property, with the sale registered on June 20.

The company confirmed Dyson, 72, had bought a property in the city. The luxury home at Wallich Residence sits on the top three floors of a 64-storey, 290-metre high tower-the tallest in Singapore-which is in the business district and has panoramic views over Singapore, including popular waterfront area Marina Bay.

It has five bedrooms, each with their own en-suite bathroom, a private garden and a viewing deck on the 62nd floor, according to a sales brochure for the property. It also has a private lift, storage for 600 bottles of wine, and a round-the-clock dedicated butler service.

The cost is below a price tag of over Sg\$100 million originally sought for the property. A Dyson spokesman declined to give details of the purchase but told AFP:



SINGAPORE: A view of Guoco Tower (right), where a luxury penthouse at Wallich Residence is located, is seen in Singapore yesterday. — AFP

"Given the decision to locate the headquarters in Singapore and the growing focus of the company's business in the region, of course James Dyson has bought a property there."

Booming property market

It is the highest price paid for a condo in the city-state-where property is among the world's costliest-beating the nearly Sg\$60 million paid by Facebook co-founder Eduardo Saverin for a penthouse in 2017, according to local media. Last month, an 11,000 square foot luxury penthouse reportedly sold for Sg\$52 million. Affluent and developed, Singapore has long attracted wealthy residents from around Asia and

the world-a trend that has helped fuel a rise in property prices over the years.

The government has taken steps to cool the property market-in July last year, they raised buyers' fees and tightened loan requirements. In October, Dyson announced it had picked Singapore for its first electric car plant, sparking criticism from some quarters that the Brexit-supporting tycoon was not investing more at home. A prototype Dyson electric vehicle is in the works for 2020, followed by a product launch in 2021.

The company insists its decision to move headquarters from western England is not due to Brexit but an effort to be closer to a growing majority of its customers. — AFP

Uncertainties continue to weigh on US economy: Powell

WASHINGTON: Uncertainty about trade frictions and global growth continues to weigh on the US economic outlook, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said yesterday, keeping the door open to an interest rate cut this month. In his highly-anticipated testimony to Congress, Powell said many central bankers believed the case for lower rates "had strengthened" last month given the rising "crosscurrents" in the economy.

President Donald Trump has been putting intense and constant pressure on the Fed to cut the benchmark interest rate to boost the economy, repeatedly criticizing Powell on Twitter and in public comments. Financial markets too were looking for a clear signal about whether the central bank will cut lending rates later this month, and after a blowout US jobs report on Friday investors became concerned the Fed might make them wait.

Powell was not explicit, but in his prepared statement to the House Financial Services Committee he noted that the Fed in June announced it "would act as appropriate to sustain the expansion." After raising the key borrowing rate nine times since 2015 as the economy expanded, most recently in December, the Fed last month opened the door to a rate cut amid signs of slowing. And Powell said that in the weeks since the June policy meeting "it appears that uncertainties around trade tensions and concerns about the strength of the global economy continue to weigh on the US economic outlook." At the same time, price measures watched closely by the Fed continue to run well below its two percent target.

'Objective analysis'

"Inflation pressures remain muted," he said. "And there is a risk that weak inflation will be even more persistent than we currently anticipate." Powell has brushed off Trump's attacks, but in his testimony he noted that Congress has granted the



Federal Reserve Board Chairman
Jerome Powell

central bank "an important degree of independence" to conduct policy "based on objective analysis and data."

In the wake of Trump's aggressive trade policies, especially with China, Powell said businesses and farmers "report heightened concerns" about the US economy. Meanwhile, disappointing growth in China and Europe raised fears a weak global economy could impact US growth, which contributed to slowing business investment and waning confidence, he said.

Although the US economy expanded by a solid 3.1 percent in the first three months of the year, the Fed chief said that growth was based on factors, like exports, "that are not generally reliable indicators of ongoing momentum." The Fed still believes the US economy will post solid growth, as labor markets remain healthy, but Powell pointed to other domestic concerns that need to be addressed, including "high and rising federal debt."

In addition, he said, "The relative stagnation of middle and lower incomes and low levels of upward mobility for lower-income families are also ongoing concerns." The Fed chief is required to testify before Congress twice a year, and Powell will respond to questions from legislators, before appearing today before the Senate Banking Committee. — AFP

Business

NBK economic report

Qatar non-oil activity buoyed by government investment

Volatile energy prices and LNG competition remain risks

KUWAIT: Growth is expected to accelerate to 2.6 percent in 2019 from 1.6 percent in 2018, driven by a recovery in hydrocarbon sector output (0.4 percent) and ongoing gains in non-hydrocarbon activity (4.4 percent) as the government's expansive public investments bear fruit.

Over the medium term, as infrastructure projects related to the FIFA World Cup 2022 and work on the broader Qatar National Vision 2030 advances, non-oil growth is expected to moderate to around 4 percent by 2021. By this time, the private sector should have assumed a greater role in driving diversification through greater-value add-in sectors such as manufacturing, services, transportation and real estate-as per 2018's Qatar National Development Strategy 2018-2022 (NDS-2). NDS-2 also prioritizes raising the average productivity of its local and foreign workers, which partly explains last year's decision to offer long-term, skilled expats permanent residency and permit 100 percent foreign ownership across all business sectors.

The hydrocarbon sector, meanwhile, should get a



welcome boost in 2020 from the commissioning of the delayed \$10bn Barzan gas production facility. This should raise gas output by 12 percent (2 bnfc/d) and drive higher condensates and NGLs volumes. The most significant contribution, however, will come over the medium-to-long term when LNG capacity expands by over 40 percent to 110 mtpa, with the addition of 4 new LNG trains by 2024.

Inflation subdued on housing, food price weakness

Inflation has been in negative territory for six consecutive months (-1.2 percent y/y), weighed down by continued weakness in the housing/utilities (-1.6 percent y/y), transport (-2.3 percent y/y) and food (-0.6 percent y/y) categories (March data) in the context of slowing population growth (+0.3 percent y/y to 2.74m in May). (Chart 2.) Inflation will probably settle at an annual avg. of -0.2 percent this year before rising next year to 3.0 percent with the probable introduction of the VAT and faster economic growth.

Public finances benefit from spending restraint and reform

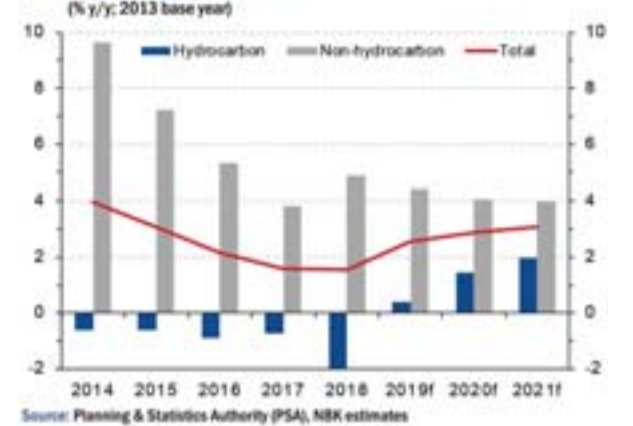
Qatar's fiscal position has strengthened since the authorities began the process of fiscal reform and consolidation (merging ministries, liberalizing fuel prices etc.) after the oil price downturn and as energy prices began to recover from their 2016 nadir. Qatar recorded a surplus in 2018 (2.2 percent of GDP); that should improve further to 3.2 percent by 2021 amid continued spending restraint and stable energy prices.

Table 1: Key economic indicators

	2017	2018	2019F	2020F	2021F	
Nominal GDP	\$ bn	167	182	192	200	210
Real GDP	% y/y	1.6	1.6	2.6	2.9	3.1
- Oil	% y/y	-0.7	-2.0	0.4	1.4	2.0
- Non-oil	% y/y	3.8	4.9	4.4	4.0	4.0
Inflation	% y/y	0.4	0.3	-0.2	3.0	2.3
Fiscal balance	% of GDP	-6.5	2.2	1.7	2.2	3.2
Public debt	% of GDP	49.8	48.5	53.0	48.7	40.9
Current account bal.	% of GDP	3.8	8.3	6.4	4.0	4.4

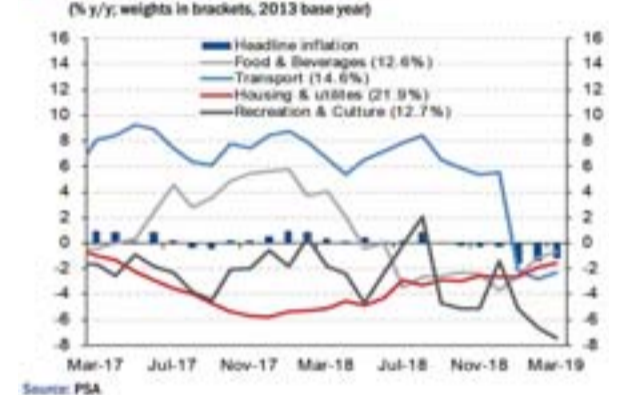
Source: Official sources, NBK estimates

Chart 1: Real GDP growth



Source: Planning & Statistics Authority (PSA), NBK estimates

Chart 2: Consumer price inflation



Source: PSA

The improvement in government finances will also have a positive bearing on public debt. While the authorities accessed the debt markets in 2018 and early in 2019-securing favorable rates amid considerable investor demand-to the tune of \$24bn, debt levels are expected to fall from 53 percent of GDP in 2018 to 41 percent of GDP by 2021.

External account to remain in surplus

The external current account (CA) balance, which moved back into surplus in 2017 and reached an estimated 8.3 percent of GDP in 2018 should remain in surplus over the forecast period. Notwithstanding a slight deterioration in 2019 to 6.4 percent of GDP on softer oil and gas prices, the CA will benefit in the medium-to-long term from higher gas exports and returns from QIA's overseas assets. QIA's assets are estimated to be around \$320bn (167 percent of GDP), which is a sizeable buffer with which to absorb economic shocks such as the 2017 conflict. Moreover, as the CA has improved, official QCB foreign reserves have recovered, touching pre-conflict levels in March of \$33.5bn (6.1 months of imports).

Robust credit growth

The banking sector has overcome the shock of non-resident capital flight and tighter liquidity associated

with the 2017 blockade. Foreign deposits have returned (+29 percent y/y), private sector credit growth is at a near-three year high (+12.6 percent y/y) and overall liquidity has improved. Qatar faces several challenges including continued sensitivity to volatile global energy prices and capital flows as well as increasing LNG competition (especially from Australia and the US), which could put downward pressure on prices.

S Korea warns of 'prolonged' export row with Japan

SEOUL: South Korean President Moon Jae-in told top business leaders yesterday that Japan's restrictions on exports of chemicals crucial to the country's tech sector had caused an "unprecedented emergency" and warned of a drawn-out trade dispute.

Tokyo last week said it would stop the expedited shipment of compounds used by major firms including Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix in the manufacture of microchips and smartphones, increasing long-simmering tensions over the use of forced labor during World War Two.

With the two firms accounting for almost two-thirds of global chip production, the issue is raising concerns about the impact on supply chains across the planet. Moon yesterday met executives from Samsung Electronics and SK Group as well as Hyundai Motor Co. and Lotte Group to discuss the crisis, telling them last week's decision by Tokyo was intended to damage South Korea's economy.

Our "government is doing its best to solve the matter diplomatically. I hope

the Japanese government will reciprocate", he said at the presidential office in Seoul, adding: "We cannot rule out the situation will be prolonged." A "joint government-private sector response system is required as we are in an unprecedented emergency".

South Korea's prime minister said the government would also ask parliament to release more than 120 billion won (\$101 million) in extra budgetary funds to help cope with the impact of the restrictions, according to Yonhap news agency.

South Korea has said the measures violate international law and has threatened to raise the issue at the World Trade Organization. It is the latest development in a spat over South Korean court rulings requiring Japanese firms to compensate victims of a wartime forced labor policy.

The row comes with global tech companies already under pressure from a weakening global outlook, while the chip sector is particularly under pressure from weak demand. Moon said dependence on overseas markets for the crucial materials Tokyo has cut off must be reduced in the long term.

Despite Seoul's appeals for negotiations, Japan has refused to budge. Tokyo's deputy chief cabinet secretary Yasutoshi Nishimura told a regular news conference yesterday that the new restrictions were "necessary to manage the export control system appropriately for security purposes". — Reuters

Turkey cenbank seen making deeper rate cut on July 25

ISTANBUL: Turkey's central bank is expected to make a deeper than previously expected cut in its key interest rate this month after President Tayyip Erdogan dismissed its governor, a Reuters poll showed yesterday.

Erdogan sacked Governor Murat Cetinkaya over the weekend, reigniting concerns over political interference in monetary policy and boosting rate cut expectations to revive the recession-hit economy. The median of forecasts compiled from 18 institutions showed the economists expected 200 basis point rate cut in the policy rate on July 25 after the dismissal of Governor Murat Cetinkaya, compared to 100 basis points beforehand.

Erdogan told reporters that Cetinkaya, who was due to serve until 2020, had made decisions for which a high price was paid and he had not inspired market confidence, Haberturk reported yesterday.

Cetinkaya's deputy, Murat Uysal, took over as governor. The Turkish economy shrank sharply for the second straight quarter in early 2019 as a punishing currency crisis, persistent double-digit infla-

tion and high interest rates took a toll on overall output.

"The replacement of the central bank governor to us suggests that there is likely to be a larger rate cut at the end of this month," said Lee Hardmand, currency analyst at MUFG in London. "I would expect interest rate cuts to be more frontloaded than previously," he added. Six of 18 economists who took part in the poll increased their rate cut forecasts after Cetinkaya's dismissal. Three who previously predicted no change in the policy rate now expect a reductions in rates.

The remaining nine economists did not change their rate cut forecasts despite the change at the bank's helm. "The change in governor should not be directly linked to a change in the central bank's monetary policy," said Nilufer Sezgin, chief economist at Is Portfoy, which maintained its forecast for a 100 basis points cut.

However, Sezgin said Is Portfoy may review its forecast after Uysal makes his first public statements. He is expected to give a news conference in coming days. The central bank hiked its policy rate by 11.25 percentage points to 24 percent last year to put a floor under the lira and rein in soaring double digit inflation. It has remained steady since September. The lira weakened 30 percent against U.S. dollar in 2018.

Investors have long been concerned over Erdogan's influence over monetary policy, given his opposition to high interest rates. They also accuse the central bank of acting slowly to defend the lira at the time of the currency crisis. — Reuters

Think-tank trims Greek 2019 growth forecast to 1.8%

ATHENS: Greece's economy will continue to recover at a moderate clip of around 1.8 percent this year, the influential Greek think-tank IOBE predicted yesterday, trimming a previous forecast. The new forecast by the Foundation of Economic and Industrial Research in its quarterly review is close to the central bank's 1.9 percent projected rate. It previously saw an expansion rate of 2.0 percent.

Greece's economy is recovering from a 10-year recession. It has to a large extent corrected the imbalances of its twin deficits - its fiscal derailment and the current account gap.

The 180 billion euro economy grew at an annual 1.9 percent last year as the country emerged from its third and last bailout program in August 2018. The economy's annual expansion pace decelerated to 1.3 percent in this year's first quarter from a downwardly revised 1.5 percent in the previous quarter.

IOBE predicted that Greece's unemployment rate, the highest in the euro zone at 18.1 percent in March, will decline at a slower pace this year to settle slightly below 18 percent. It predicted stronger job growth in export sectors. — Reuters

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	304.550
Euro	345.990
Sterling Pound	383.580
Canadian dollar	234.000
Turkish lira	53.430
Swiss Franc	309.500
US Dollar Buying	297.200

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.812
Indian Rupees	4.435
Pakistani Rupees	1.967
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.724
Nepali Rupees	2.772
Singapore Dollar	224.760
Hongkong Dollar	39.117
Bangladesh Taka	3.590
Philippine Peso	5.935
Thai Baht	9.980
Malaysian Ringgit	77.890

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.268
Qatari Riyal	83.702
Omani Riyal	791.553
Bahraini Dinar	809.220
UAE Dirham	82.972

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	21.750
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Egyptian Pound - Transfer	18.340
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.223
Tunisian Dinar	109.160
Jordanian Dinar	430.310
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.203
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.399

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate for Transfer

US Dollar	303.640
Canadian Dollar	231.025
Sterling Pound	386.455
Euro	346.375
Swiss Frank	298.070
Bahraini Dinar	807.490
UAE Dirhams	83.070
Qatari Riyals	84.310
Saudi Riyals	81.865
Jordanian Dinar	429.550
Egyptian Pound	18.210
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.719
Indian Rupees	4.379
Pakistani Rupees	1.933
Bangladesh Taka	3.596
Philippines Peso	5.904
Cyprus pound	18.065
Japanese Yen	3.825
Syrian Pound	1.590
Nepalese Rupees	2.739
Malaysian Ringgit	74.225
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.515

Thai Bhat	10.825
Turkish Lira	52.785
Singapore dollars	222.971

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY BUY SELL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
British Pound	0.372223	0.386123
Czech Korune	0.005332	0.014632
Danish Krone	0.041665	0.046655
Euro	0.333754	0.347454
Georgian Lari	0.104110	0.104110
Hungarian	0.000956	0.001146
Norwegian Krone	0.031156	0.036356
Romanian Leu	0.055209	0.072059
Russian ruble	0.004761	0.004761
Slovakia	0.009113	0.019113
Swedish Krona	0.028095	0.033095
Swiss Franc	0.300128	0.311128
Australian Dollar	0.202490	0.214490
New Zealand Dollar	0.194762	0.204262
Canada Dollar	0.226487	0.235487
US Dollars	0.300600	0.305900
US Dollars Mint	0.301100	0.305900
Bangladesh Taka	0.003011	0.003812

Chinese Yuan	0.042815	0.046315
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036907	0.039657
Indian Rupee	0.003846	0.004618
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002712	0.002892
Korean Won	0.000247	0.000262
Malaysian Ringgit	0.069966	0.075966
Nepalese Rupee	0.002681	0.003021
Pakistani Rupee	0.001372	0.001242
Philippine Peso	0.005805	0.006195
Singapore Dollar	0.218218	0.228218
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001354	0.001934
Taiwan	0.009656	0.009836
Thai Baht	0.009556	0.010106
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.00013

Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.802072	0.810130
Egyptian Pound	0.018856	0.022016
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000210	0.000270
Jordanian Dinar	0.424856	0.433856
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000151	0.000251
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021407	0.045407
Omani Riyal	0.786298	0.794197
Qatar Riyal	0.083037	0.083871
Saudi Riyal	0.080167	0.081467
Syrian Pound	0.001292	0.001512
Tunisian Dinar	0.010198	0.010998
Turkish Lira	0.046901	0.056746
UAE Dirhams	0.082326	0.083152
Yemeni Riyal	0.000991	0.001071

Business

China's 2019 growth slowing to 6.2% as trade war weighs

Inflation expected to edge up to 2.3% in 2019

BEIJING: China's economic growth is expected to slow to a near 30-year low of 6.2 percent this year, a Reuters poll showed yesterday, despite a flurry of support measures to spur domestic demand amid a bruising trade war with the United States. The median forecast was unchanged from the last poll in April.

But a stream of downbeat data in recent months and higher US tariffs have fanned expectations that Beijing will need to roll out more stimulus soon to ward off a sharper slowdown that could stoke job losses.

Second-quarter growth was seen cooling to 6.2 percent from a year earlier, the same as in the previous poll, from 6.4 percent in the first quarter. China will post its second-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) on July 15. Most of the 72 institutions covered in the survey expect growth will remain at 6.2 percent for the rest of this year, compared with expectations for a tick-up to 6.3 percent in the previous poll.

Zhang Yiping, senior economist at Merchants Securities in Shenzhen, said he expected the US tariff hike in May on \$200 billion of Chinese goods to weigh on growth in the second half. But Zhang said authorities are likely to stick to more moderate policy easing, rather than resorting to more aggressive measures.

"We expect policy this year would focus more on building a floor to underpin the economy, rather than to boost growth," he said. So far, China's stimulus measures have been more

restrained than in past downturns, which analysts attribute to fears of adding to a mountain of debt left over from past credit binges.

But the central bank governor reportedly said last month that there is "tremendous" room to adjust policy if the trade war worsens. The full-year forecast would be nearing the lower end of the government's 2019 target range of 6-6.5 percent, and would mark the weakest pace of growth China has seen in 29 years. It would also spell a further deceleration from 6.6 percent in 2018 and 6.8 percent in 2017. Growth next year will likely cool further to 6.0 percent, the poll showed.

Trade uncertainty

Beijing has been relying on a combination of fiscal stimulus and monetary easing to weather the current slowdown, including hundreds of billions of dollars in infrastructure spending and tax cuts for companies. But the economy has been slow to respond, and investors fear a longer and costlier trade war between the world's two largest economies could trigger a global recession.

US President Donald Trump told counterpart Xi Jinping late last month that he is putting threatened additional levies on hold as they agreed to get trade negotiations back on track.

But Washington sharply raised tariffs on \$200 billion of goods from China in May, which remain in force, and no timeframe was set for the talks. "Trade frictions would remain

in the long run despite the truce reached last month. We expect the standoff to morph into more forms such as a tech war, to put further strain on China's economy," Zhang added.

Capital Economics believes China's fiscal policy will become even more supportive, which would be most likely achieved by relaxing constraints on off-budget borrowing. "We now expect our estimates of the augmented fiscal deficit, which includes off-budget borrowing, to widen in the coming quarters and average 8 percent of GDP this year, up from 6.4 percent in 2018."

The government has announced a rise in its budget deficit to 2.8 percent of GDP this year from 2.6 percent in 2018.

More measures expected

Analysts in the latest Reuters poll expect the People's Bank of China (PBOC) will ease policy further this year. But they do not expect it to cut its benchmark lending rate, as it repeatedly did in past downturns. Separately, some other China watchers have recently raised the possibility of cut in the PBOC's benchmark or one of its short-term rates if the US central bank starts easing policy as soon as this month. The PBOC has slashed banks' reserve requirement ratio (RRR) six times since early 2018 to turn around soft credit growth. It has also injected large amounts of liquidity into the financial system and guided short-term interest rates lower. Analysts forecast two more RRR cuts of



BEIJING: A vegetable vendor talks to a customer at a market in Beijing yesterday. Factory prices in China were unchanged in June from a year ago, data showed yesterday, reviving the prospect of deflation as the US trade war hits the crucial manufacturing sector. — AFP

50 basis points each in this quarter and the last quarter.

Economists expect the central bank to keep its benchmark rate unchanged at 4.35 percent through at least the end of 2020. The poll also predicted annual consumer inflation will pick up to 2.3 percent in 2019, quickening from 2.1 percent estimate in the

April survey, but below the government target of around 3 percent. Data this week showed China's producer prices stalled in June while consumer price growth reached a 15-month high as supply shortages triggered by the African swine fever outbreak and extreme weather continued to push up pork and fruit prices. — Reuters



CBK receives Najma winner of KD 500,000

KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) received the lucky winner of Al-Najma account biannual award of KD 500,000. Mohammed Abdul Aziz Mohammed Abdul Aziz whose name was announced in the draw conducted on air through the 88.8

Nabdh Al-Kuwait radio station. Speaking on the occasion, Abdul Aziz expressed his absolute joy noting that he had been a CBK client for years and that he was over the moon on hearing his name as the winner.

On his part, CBK's individual banking services general manager, Hameed Salman congratulated the winner and expressed best wishes for all other clients. He noted that more awards are still to be announced in 2019 through the weekly KD 5,000 award, monthly KD 20,000 award and the grand prize of KD 1.5 million by the beginning of 2020.

S&P 500 hits 3,000 for 1st time as Fed signals possible rate cut

NEW YORK: The S&P 500 surged past 3,000 points for the first time yesterday in early trading following congressional testimony from Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell that pointed to a possible interest rate cut. In prepared testimony ahead of a House hearing, Powell highlighted continued uncertainty about trade as a drag on US growth, amplifying his message from recent appearances that have been widely seen by investors as opening the door to an interest rate cut.

Powell was not explicit but in his remarks to the House Financial Services Committee he noted the Fed in June announced it "would act as appropriate to sustain the expansion."

About 40 minutes into trading, the broad-based S&P 500 stood at 2,997.10, up 0.6 percent after earlier topping 3,000. The tech-rich Nasdaq Composite Index rose 0.9 percent to 8,211.82, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 0.6 percent to 26,930.36.

Both the S&P 500 and Nasdaq were above their all-time closing highs, while the Dow is about 35 points short of its record. Powell's comments "gave the market what it was looking for," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

Futures markets are betting that the Fed at its July 31 meeting will cut interest rates by 25 basis points although some have seen the possibility of a larger cut. "The Q&A portion of today's testimony will likely be Mr. Powell's moment to talk down the prospect of a 50 basis points rate cut at the July meeting," O'Hare said. "The market should be able to live with that since we suspect the Fed Chair will also stick to the line that the (Fed) will do what it thinks is appropriate to sustain the economic expansion."

Other stock markets turned mostly higher yesterday after Powell kept the door open to an interest rate cut this month.

In mid-afternoon trading, both the blue-chip CAC 40 index in Paris and the FTSE in London were higher, while the

DAX 30 in Frankfurt was steady. "Powell's prepared testimony release highlighted uncertainties since the June FOMC continue to dim the outlook," said Edward Moya, analyst at the Oanda brokerage in reference to a meeting of the central bank's rate-setting Open Markets Committee.

"The economic outlook has not improved in recent weeks and that pretty signals a rate cut at the July 30-31 FOMC meeting," he said. On the foreign exchange markets, the pound rebounded from more than two-year lows versus the dollar meanwhile, as official data showed Britain's economy returned to growth in May, with gross domestic product expanding by 0.3 percent following a contraction of 0.4 percent in April.

In Britain, "the pound caught some bid as the UK economy bounced back in May following the decline in April," noted Neil Wilson, analyst at Markets.com.

"But traders need to be careful as Brexit uncertainty remains the major drag on sterling."

Fed officials have helped spur a rally in world equities in recent weeks by taking an increasingly dovish or subdued tone regarding monetary policy, fueling expectations they would cut borrowing costs sharply to support a stuttering economy. Hopes for a deep reduction seemed to have been set back on Friday by data showing the US created far more jobs than expected in June.

But Powell told US lawmakers the case for lower rates "had strengthened" last month given the rising "crosscurrents" in the economy. While the Fed chief was not explicit, in a prepared statement to the House Financial Services Committee he noted that the central bank in June announced it "would act as appropriate to sustain the expansion."

Elsewhere, oil prices jumped more than two percent after a closely watched industry report showed a massive drop in US stockpiles last week, while traders also cheered reports that Russian output fell in July to its lowest in nearly three years. The developments provided a boost to the commodity, which took a hit earlier in the week as a stronger dollar added to ongoing worries about the trade war and soft global outlook.

Still, analysts said prices will remain volatile as investors weigh the trade war against geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. — AFP

Eurozone growth, inflation outlook cut as risks from US trade grow

BRUSSELS: The European Commission lowered its estimates yesterday for euro zone growth and inflation, saying uncertainty over US trade policy posed a major risk to the bloc.

In its quarterly economic forecasts, the European Union's executive arm said prices would grow less than previously predicted, pushing the inflation rate further off the European Central Bank's target of close to but less than 2 percent.

The commission confirmed its prediction that economic growth in the euro zone would slow this year to 1.2 percent from 1.9 percent in 2018. It also revised down its estimate for next year's growth, which is now seen at 1.4 percent instead of the 1.5 percent forecast in May.

Risks for the bloc have increased, the commission said, and mostly come from "the elevated uncertainty" around United States' trade policy, as Washington keeps threatening punitive tariffs on a broad range of EU products. Fears of increased trade tensions "could also trigger a shift in global risk sentiment at times when valuations appear stretched across many asset classes", the EU economics commissioner Pierre Moscovici told a news conference.

"This could lead to rapid tightening of global financial conditions," he added.

The weaker economic outlook contributed to a downward revision of inflation expectations, the commission said, cutting its estimate to 1.3 percent for this year and next from the 1.4 percent it previously estimated for both years. This year's forecast matches the ECB's projection, but for 2020 the commission's estimate is lower than the 1.4 percent rate forecast by the central bank in its latest projections, released in June. That could give the ECB a reason to push ahead with fresh stimulus.

The commission confirmed the economic slowdown in the euro zone was mostly caused by weaker growth in Germany, the eurozone's largest economy, and Italy, its third largest. German growth will slow to 0.5 percent this year, in line with earlier predictions, after reaching 1.4 percent in 2018. Growth is expected to return to 1.4 percent next year, less than the 1.5 percent the commission predicted earlier.

Forecasts for Italy remained unchanged, reiterating its economy will barely grow this year, seeing the worst growth rate in the whole EU. Next year's growth is expected to accelerate to 0.7 percent but remain the slowest in the bloc. France's economy will expand 1.3 percent this year and 1.4 percent in 2020, the commission estimated, leaving unchanged its forecast for this year but lowering the estimate for the next, earlier seen at 1.5 percent.

The commission maintained unchanged its forecasts for Britain, whose economy is foreseen growing 1.3 percent this year and next. However, the projection does not take into account possible trade disruptions caused by a no-deal Brexit. — Reuters



NEW YORK: A trader works on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange in New York. — AFP

QNB reports \$2.0bn net profit for H1 2019

DOHA: QNB, one of the leading banks in the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia (MEA/SEA) region, announced its results for the six months ended 30 June 2019. For the six months ended 30 June 2019, Net Profit reached QAR7.4 billion (\$2.0 billion), up by 4 percent compared to previous year. Total Assets reached QAR887 billion (\$244 billion), up by 5 percent from 30 June 2018, the highest ever achieved by the Group.

Loans and advances grew by 5 percent to reach QAR634 billion (\$174 billion), which contributed to the growth in Total Assets. Growth in the loan book was mainly funded by customer deposits which also grew by 5 percent to reach QAR646 billion (\$177 billion) as at 30 June 2019. Strong funding sources helped QNB Group to maintain the loans to deposits ratio at 98.3 percent as at 30 June 2019, well within the regulatory limit.

The ratio of non-performing loans to gross loans amounted to 1.9 percent as at 30 June 2019, a level considered one of the lowest amongst financial institutions in the MEA region, reflecting the strong quality of the Group's loan book and effective management of credit risk. The Group's conservative policy with respect to provisioning resulted in the coverage ratio maintained at 106 percent as at 30 June 2019.

QNB Group Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) as at 30 June 2019 amounted to 18.4 percent, higher than the regulatory minimum requirements of the Qatar Central Bank and Basel Committee.

During the first half of 2019, QNB successfully closed the syndication of its EUR2.0 billion three-year senior unsecured term loan facility, successful completion of a \$1.0 billion bond issuance and a \$850 million Formosa bond issuances under its Euro Medium Term Note (EMTN) Program in the international capital markets. All of the above-mentioned deals attracted strong interest around the world from key global investors, reflecting investors' confidence in QNB Group's financial strength and its position as the largest financial institution in the Middle East and Africa region. It also reflects their trust and confidence in QNB Group's strategy over the coming years.

QNB continued its outstanding achievements by topping the Middle East and Africa (MEA) region, on the Banker magazine's Top 1000 World Banks list. QNB Group serves a customer base of 24 million supported by 30,000 staff resources operating from more than 1,100 locations and 4,400 ATMs.

ArcelorMittal to cut 2,000 jobs in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG: Global steel giant ArcelorMittal said yesterday it could slash nearly a quarter of its workforce in South Africa in a bid to curb costs as it expects to fall into the red in the first six months of this year. "A large-scale restructuring is contemplated, and it is anticipated that in excess of 2,000 positions may be affected," ArcelorMittal said in a statement.

The group, the world's largest steelmaker, employs a total workforce of 8,800 in South Africa.

The proposed job cuts are certain to pile more pressure on the government of Cyril Ramaphosa which is battling a weak economy and near record unemployment of more than 27 percent. South Africa's banks, mining and construction sectors have signalled mass layoffs as gross domestic product contracted by 3.2 percent in the first three months of 2019. ArcelorMittal said that "due to the difficult domestic economic environment, the South African steel industry continues to face significant challenges." Certain costs "that are not within the company's control such as high electricity, rail, port, and primary raw material costs have contributed to these challenges," it said. — AFP

Business

US, China negotiators resume trade war talks after the truce

Two economies seek to resolve their trade dispute

WASHINGTON: Top US and Chinese negotiators held phone talks on Tuesday as the world's top two economies seek to resolve their trade war, more than a week after they declared a truce. Talks had broken down in May over US accusations that Beijing had reneged on its commitments, and the dispute escalated with the two sides exchanging steep increases in punitive tariffs.

But US President Donald Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping agreed to revive negotiations when they met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Japan on June 29.

US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer spoke with Chinese Vice Premier Liu He and Commerce Minister Zhong Shan on Tuesday. White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow told reporters the talks "went constructively" but it was "too soon for details."

In an interview with the Fox Business Network, Kudlow described the discussions as "preliminary" and said meetings will "probably" be arranged, but did not give more details.

Kudlow noted that Trump has agreed to hold off on imposing new tariffs and will allow certain US products to be sold to Chinese telecom giant Huawei. "Having said that, we have a very strong-I want to underscore this-a very strong expectation that China will really shortly, maybe immediately, begin to purchase US agricultural products," he told the US broadcaster.

The Chinese commerce ministry said in a brief state-

ment that the two sides exchanged "opinions on implementing the consensus reached between the two countries' heads of state in Osaka."

Washington and Beijing have hit each other with punitive tariffs covering more than \$360 billion in two-way trade and those duties remain in place. After his meeting with Xi in Osaka, Trump said he would refrain from imposing tariffs on more Chinese products. He had previously threatened to put punitive duties on an additional \$300 billion in Chinese exports.

He also triggered a backlash in the US Congress by agreeing to soften some US export restrictions on components to Huawei, though Trump stipulated that officials would take care to avoid creating new risks to US national security. The United States had imposed tough sanctions on the company, whose equipment US officials fear could be used as Trojan horses for China's intelligence services.

The ceasefire comes as the US presidential campaign has started ahead of the November 2020 election. Asked about speculation that Beijing may be waiting to see how the race plays out, Kudlow said it "would be a very big mistake on their part." "I think that kind of thinking would probably do great damage to these trade talks," he said. But he suggested that the US was in no hurry to finalize a deal. "Speed is not an issue, quality is the issue," Kudlow said. "And so I make no forecast on that and reiterate this view. There's no timetable, none of that stuff." — AFP



HOTAN: Women preparing lamb skewers at a Uighur restaurant in Hotan in China's northwest Xinjiang region. —AFP

How has war affected Syria's oil and gas sector?

BEIRUT: Syria's eight-year war has seen the Damascus regime lose control of key oil fields and caused state hydrocarbon revenues to plummet by billions of dollars. Weak production has forced President Bashar al-Assad's regime to import oil, but Western sanctions on Damascus and Tehran are hampering incoming tankers.

Here's an overview: Who controls what?

In 2013, Syria's oil reserves were estimated at 2.5 billion barrels, and gas supplies at 241 billion cubic meters (8.5 trillion cubic feet). Control of these is split between the regime and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces who have been fighting the Islamic State group.

The US-backed SDF control Syria's largest oil field in Al-Omar in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor, as well as the nearby Tanak and Jafra fields. They also hold the Rmeilan field in the northeastern province of Hassakeh, as well as other smaller ones there and in the northern province of Raqa.

The Russia-backed regime, meanwhile, holds the country's largest gas field in Shaer, as well as those of Sadad and Arak. It also controls some oil fields in Deir Ezzor, Raqa, and the central province of Homs.

What's the damage?

Before the war, oil and gas were key to the country's economy. In 2010, they contributed about 35 percent of export earnings and 20 percent of state revenue, the Syria Report economic publication says. After war broke out in 2011, production plummeted as fighting and bombardment destroyed infrastructure, and the government lost control of its largest fields.

International oil companies suspended activities, including to comply with Western sanctions on the regime. Up to \$74.2 billion in revenue has been lost in the war, Oil and Mineral Resources Minister Ali Ghanem has said. Crude oil production plunged more than 99 percent between 2010 and 2016, from 385,000 barrels per day to just 2,000, according to figures provided by Ghanem in April.

Natural gas production fell 69 percent from 21 million cubic meters per day to just 6.5 million over the same period. But since the regime took back Homs oil and gas fields from IS jihadists in 2017, production has increased to 24,000 bpd for oil and 17 million cubic meters for gas, according to the minister. But this is just 20 percent of Syria's oil needs, and between 60 and 70 percent of its gas requirements.

Are sanctions biting?

After production plummeted Damascus had to resort to importing hydrocarbons to fulfill its needs. The Syrian government turned to ally Iran, who opened up a credit line to supply it with oil. But Western sanctions on oil shipping, as well as US punitive measures against Iran, have complicated imports. In November,



Washington slapped fresh sanctions on Tehran, accusing it of creating a complex web of Russian cut-out companies and Syrian intermediaries to ship oil to Damascus.

From October 2018 to the start of May this year, no oil tanker reached Syria, pro-regime Al-Watan newspaper has reported.

A fuel and gas crisis hit regime-held areas this winter and spring, causing the government to take austerity measures. Damascus also accuses Egypt of having closed the key Suez Canal shipping lane to vessels heading to Syria. Last week, Britain detained a tanker carrying Iranian oil on suspicions it was heading to Syria, but Tehran on Sunday denied that was its final destination.

Last month, Damascus accused an unnamed foreign entity of "sabotage" of underwater pipelines to its Baniyas oil refinery on the Mediterranean.

What options for Damascus?

With the country's most important

oil fields in the far east still out of reach, Damascus faces two options: strike a deal with the SDF, or military reconquest.

The Kurdish-led forces have in the past insisted that any deal with the regime would have to ensure an equal sharing out of oil and gas. Before the war, crude extracted in the east was transferred to either Homs or Baniyas to be refined, whereas Syria's Kurds only have small refineries designed to meet just local needs.

Yet the regime taking back military control of the eastern oil fields would allow Syria to be self-sufficient in all petroleum products, according to the oil minister. During the conflict the regime has bought oil from Kurdish and IS-held areas to secure part of its needs, several sources have said. Analysts say revenues from the oil and gas sectors are likely to be key in rebuilding Syria should a peace deal be struck and sanctions lifted so exports can resume. — AFP

AUB wins 'the Best Business IT Innovation - Banking - Kuwait 2019'

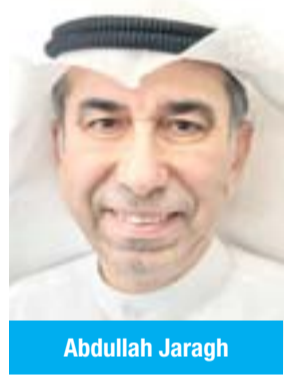
KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) won the Award "the Best Business IT Innovation - Banking - Kuwait 2019" granted by "the International Finance Magazine (IFM)", a world-class recognized magazine specialized in Banking and Finance based in London, UK.

Winning this award can be attributed to the several achievements and success made by the Information Technology Department of AUB, the Bank is continually striving to discover new, more efficient ways to deliver services that go beyond contemporary banking systems and business models. Ahli United Bank continues to reinforce the Bank's long-established vision of delivering digital transformation and exceptional customer experiences. AUB also seeks advanced technology to create a new digital banking model relying on its highly efficient IT team and project management team and support staff.

For the judgment panel, the first level of evaluations is done by Internal Evaluation Team, after which, the details are forwarded to an External Evaluation Agency to conclude with the final level of evaluations. Upon receiving the judgment report, IFM announces the award winners on their website. Announcement is done through a points system that includes the findings of the initial evaluation report, rating from external research partners along with inputs from the Industry Experts.

Commenting on winning this award, Abdullah Jaragh, General Manager Information Technology at AUB said: AUB is proud to win this prestigious Award by IFM, which confirms the continuous success of the digitization agenda pursued by the Bank and its enduring commitment to further improve its applications and technical system to reinforce the speed and flexibility of information technologies and operational efficiency, as well as providing the best digital innovations to our customers."

Jaragh added: winning this Award highlights AUB leading role in digital innovation. Our winning of this Award is not only a confirmation that we follow the right approach in terms of our ability to create more robust, secure and efficient digital financial solutions, but also emphasizes the appreciation we have, and we still aspire achieving the highest standards of quality and innovation to deliver our customers exceptional services and innovative user-friendly products.



Abdullah Jaragh

Mexico's new finance minister takes charge of choppy economy

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's new finance minister Arturo Herrera is a pragmatic and respected policy maker who says he was inspired to study economics by the Latin American debt crisis that wrought financial chaos and wrecked livelihoods in his country. Now, he must boost investor confidence in a shrinking economy buffeted by what his predecessor and former boss Carlos Urzua called "extremism" that led him to resign on Tuesday with a strongly worded letter.

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Tuesday named former World Bank executive and long-time ally Herrera to succeed Urzua, who blamed meddling in the finance ministry and ill-thought-out economic policies for his abrupt resignation. Straight-talking Herrera is well-regarded among investors who have become accustomed to seeing him at high profile events representing Latin America's second-largest economy. He had already been put in charge of policies close to the president's heart, such as bringing banking to more people.

Mexico was rich in resources "but is a country with a lot of poverty," he told Reuters in an interview shortly after he was named deputy finance minister last year.

He spoke of the importance of focusing on growth without spurring the runaway inflation and currency crises that stunted Mexico in the



Mexico's new finance minister Arturo Herrera

what the finance ministry says.

"The one calling the shots is Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador," said Ricardo Adroque, head of Barings' global sovereign debt and currencies group. Urzua did not elaborate on what policy steps led him to resign, but decisions by Lopez Obrador to cancel a partially built \$13 billion airport, designate scarce funds to a new oil refinery and forcefully renegotiate gas pipeline contracts with Canadian and US companies have all led to market volatility.

Herrera now faces a balancing act of meeting a 1 percent primary budget surplus target that has helped offset market worries about government policies and kept the peso broadly stable, while reviving the growth that Lopez Obrador on Tuesday said was his priority.

To achieve that Herrera must spur private investment and fend off downgrades from ratings agencies worried about indebted state-owned company Pemex. He must also handle the frictions with others in the government alluded to by Urzua in his letter. "Herrera has been the face of Mexico's finance ministry in meetings with inter-

national investors in recent months and is a credible choice," said Abbas Ameli-Renani, an emerging markets portfolio manager at Amundi.

"But the outgoing finance minister's resignation letter confirms the waning influence of the office of the finance minister over key decisions."

Crisis management

Herrera told Reuters in the interview last year that he was inspired to study economics by the Latin American debt crisis in the 1980s that saw the region's largest economies crippled by heavy international debt repayments. He said that he and his longtime friend Gerardo Esquivel, both of whom studied at the Colegio de Mexico social sciences institute, were motivated to understand what happened and figure out how to prevent a repetition. Esquivel became deputy central bank governor last year. "We started studying economics in the middle of one of the most profound crises in the history of Mexico," Herrera said. "Inflation, devaluation, the lack of employment were the topics that dominated life in Mexico."

"Those are topics that pain me personally, but as an economist I have an interest in applying this knowledge to try and solve it," Herrera said. An avid rock climber, Herrera started his career in the Mexican finance ministry. Later, he became general director for financial management and finance secretary in Mexico City's government when Lopez Obrador was mayor, a job earlier held by Urzua.

In 2010, he joined the World Bank. When Lopez Obrador started his third campaign for president ahead of the July 2018 election, his promises to end corruption, fight poverty and inequality resonated with Herrera. "The possibility to join an administration that is trying to resolve those topics was very tempting," Herrera said. — Reuters

HSBC launches issuer services in UAE and Egypt

KUWAIT: HSBC has launched its onshore Issuer Services business in the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. The team, which is part of HSBC Securities Services, helps corporates and institutions execute complex transactions by providing services such as operational and administrative support for bond and loan programs, escrow services for M&A transactions, as well as agency and account bank services for structured debt issuance.

Pankaj Kaul has been appointed as Regional Head of Issuer Services for the Middle East, North Africa and Turkey (MENAT), reporting to the MENAT Head of HSBC Securities Services. Pankaj was previously part of HSBC's Issuer Services team in London.

Pankaj Kaul, HSBC's Regional Head of Issuer Services, MENAT, said, "In today's market, there is a strong desire to minimize counterparty risk and to obtain assurance that assets are secured, which is why we have responded by launching onshore Issuer Services in the region. With our deep roots in the region and global network, we are ideally placed to act as a trusted third-party custodian, enabling clients to complete their transactions as quickly and efficiently as possible."

The newly-formed MENAT Issuer Services team can now provide capital markets clients with key services including escrows, account bank and security agent services. The recent addition of UAE and Egypt to the HSBC network brings the number of countries the business operates in to 15. Issuer Services plans to offer its services in other countries in the region, such as Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and Qatar, as it expands its footprint.



Pankaj Kaul

Technology & Science

Japan's asteroid probe Hayabusa2 set for final touchdown

Probe hopes to collect materials from asteroid

TOKYO: Japan's Hayabusa2 probe began descending yesterday for its final touchdown on a distant asteroid, hoping to collect samples that could shed light on the evolution of the solar system. "At 9:58, we made a 'Go' decision for the Hayabusa2 probe's second touchdown," the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) said in a statement.

By early afternoon, JAXA said the probe had descended around five kilometers and was on track to touchdown Thursday on the Ryugu asteroid, some 300 million kilometers from Earth. If successful, it will be the second time it has landed on the desolate asteroid as part of a complex mission that has also involved sending rovers and robots. The mission hopes to collect pristine materials from beneath the surface of the asteroid that could provide insights into what the solar system was like at its birth, some 4.6 billion years ago.

To get at those crucial materials, in April an "impactor" was fired from Hayabusa2 towards Ryugu in a risky process that created a crater on the asteroid's surface and stirred up material that had not previously been exposed to the atmosphere.

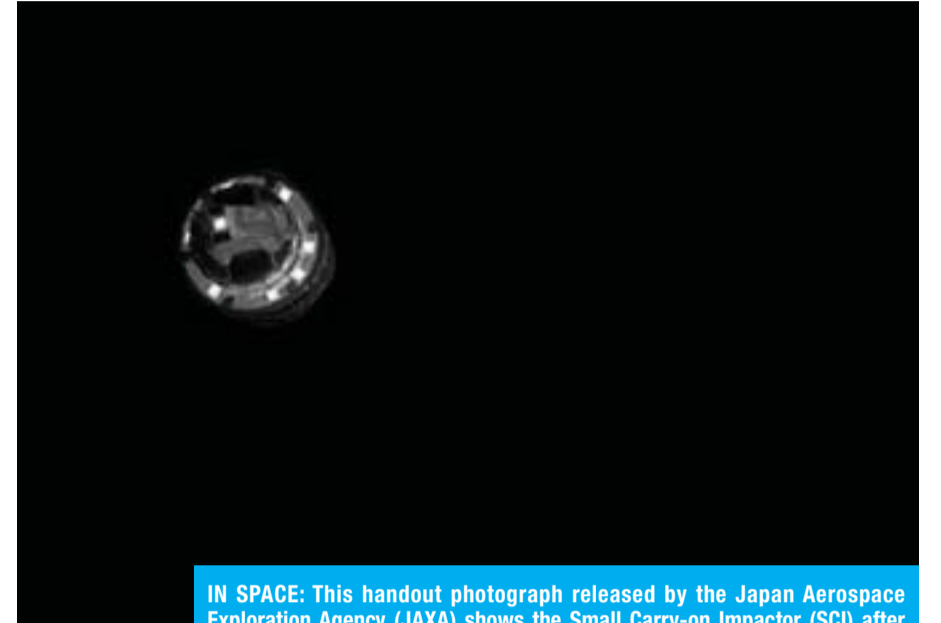
"This is the second touchdown, but doing a touchdown is a challenge whether it's the first or the second," Yuichi Tsuda, Hayabusa2 project manager, told reporters ahead of the mission. "The whole team will do our best so that we'll be able to complete the operation," he said.

Extremely attractive materials

Hayabusa2's first touchdown was in February, when it landed briefly on Ryugu and fired a bullet into the surface to puff up dust for collection, before blasting back to its holding position. The second touchdown requires special preparations because any problems could mean the probe loses the precious materials already gathered during its first landing. A photo of the crater taken by Hayabusa2's camera shows that parts of the asteroid's surface are covered with mate-



IN SPACE: This handout photograph received from the Hayabusa2 spacecraft shows stone and sand after bullets were fired into the surface to collect data by the Hayabusa2 spacecraft after landing on the asteroid Ryugu.



IN SPACE: This handout photograph released by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) shows the Small Carry-on Impactor (SCI) after the separation from Hayabusa2 probe. — AFP photos

rials that are "obviously different" from the rest of the surface, mission manager Makoto Yoshikawa told reporters.

The probe is expected to make a brief touchdown on an area some 20 meters away from the centre of the crater to collect the unidentified materials believed to be "ejecta" from the blast. "It would be safe to say that extremely attractive materials are near the crater," Tsuda said. The touchdown will be the last major part of Hayabusa2's mission, and when the probe returns to Earth next year scientists hope to learn more about the history of the solar system and even the origin of life

from its samples. "I'm really looking forward to analyzing these materials," Yoshikawa said.

At about the size of a large refrigerator and equipped with solar panels to keep it powered, Hayabusa2 is the successor to JAXA's first asteroid explorer, Hayabusa-Japanese for falcon. That probe returned with dust samples from a smaller, potato-shaped asteroid in 2010, despite various setbacks during its epic seven-year odyssey and was hailed as a scientific triumph. Hayabusa2 observes the surface of Ryugu with its camera and sensing equipment but has also dispatched two tiny MINERVA-II rover robots as well as the French-

German robot MASCOT to help surface observation.

Its photos of Ryugu, which means "Dragon Palace" in Japanese and refers to a castle at the bottom of the ocean in an ancient Japanese tale, show the asteroid has a rough surface full of boulders. Launched in December 2014, the Hayabusa2 mission has a price tag of around 30 billion yen and is scheduled to return to Earth with its samples in 2020. But its mission has already made history, including with the creation of the crater on Ryugu's surface. In 2005, NASA's Deep Impact project succeeded in creating an artificial crater on a comet but only for observation purposes.—AFP

Nine deer dead in Japan after eating plastic

TOKYO: Nine deer have died after swallowing plastic bags in Japan's Nara Park, a wildlife group said yesterday, warning that a surge in tourism may be to blame. The Nara Deer Preservation Foundation said that masses of plastic bags and snack packets were found in the stomachs of the deer which died between March and June this year. "The biggest litter found in one of the nine amounted to 4.3 kilograms," foundation official Yoshitaka Ashimura told AFP. "We were surprised. It was so big," he said.

The picturesque park in Japan's ancient capital is home to more than 1,000 deer, which can even be found roaming the streets in search of special tasty crackers offered by tourists. Tourists are forbidden from feeding the deer any food besides the crackers but Ashimura said some visitors offer the animals other types of snacks. "The deer probably think that the snacks and the plastic packs covering them are both food," he said, adding the animals normally eat grass and acorns.

"They might also eat plastic bags dropped on the ground," he said, adding that he believed such cases had increased recently "due to the growing number of visitors". "The only way to prevent this is to remove all the garbage." The sprawling park that also includes wooden temples and shrines built centuries ago is a major tourist attraction. The number of tourists visiting Nara city where the park is located has increased in recent years, with 16 million visitors in 2017. The deer at the park—numbering on average about 1,200 — are protected as a national treasure.—AFP

Goats bleat to reveal emotions to friends

WASHINGTON: Goat bleats not only sound remarkably human, they are also key to revealing feelings to their companions, according to new research that deepens our understanding of the animals' emotional complexity. As part of a study published in *Frontiers of Zoology* on Tuesday, scientists played the ruminants a series of calls from a hidden speaker that were either happy or sad. To obtain the positive calls, they approached goats with buckets of food.

For the negative calls, they recorded goats that were frustrated at not being fed while others were. When they switched from playing one type of bleat to the other, the goats were more likely to look toward the source of the sound and walk about, suggesting they were able to distinguish its emotional content. What's more, readings of heart-rate variation taken from the goats corresponded to a positive, more relaxed state when they were played the happy calls, and a distressed state when the sad calls were played.

"It is quite crucial for us because often we talk about animal welfare and how we can improve the animal life in a farm setting," Luigi Baciadonna, lead author of the study from Queen Mary University of London, told AFP. It means that if some goats in a group are distressed, or content, that can cause a ripple effect among others. Baciadonna would next like to investigate whether goats are able to respond to different emotions displayed by humans.—AFP

Ankabut selected as Dell Technologies' Cloud Service Provider in UAE

ABU DHABI: Taking a step forward in strengthening the collaboration between UAE government, industry, and academia, the Emirates Advanced National Research and Education Network (Ankabut) yesterday announced that it has achieved the status of Dell Technologies' Cloud Service Provider (CSP). As the education sector increases its investment towards enabling digital transformation, with this new partner status, Ankabut can provide Dell Technologies' comprehensive hybrid and multi-cloud solutions across the UAE.

An initiative of Khalifa University, Ankabut provides leading edge network infrastructure to educational institutions within the UAE to help facilitate an advanced e-learning environment and develop a collective collaborative approach to research and learning. Presently, Ankabut provides infrastructure and managed services to more than 80 institutions, in line with UAE's Vision 2021 which highlights the provision of a first-rate education system as a pillar of the National Agenda. As part of the Vision, the UAE also sanctioned 17 percent of its national budget towards education and development of advanced skills.

In order to cater to the demands of the industry, educational institutions in the country are adopting cloud solutions to optimize their operations, democratize education, and foster new talent. The openness of the cloud allows students to create, collaborate and capitalize on global opportunities - which are central to building a knowledge-based economy.

As the student population grows and evolves, Ankabut will now be able to provide education institutions with Dell Technologies' foundational cloud service offerings to accelerate innovation, develop new market competencies and manage on and off premises cloud. Furthermore, with over 300 CSP partners worldwide, Ankabut will have easy access to Dell Technologies specialized training, product and service incentives, greater profit potential and the flexibility to grow its business with a comprehensive set of benefits and financial incentives.

Fahem Al Nuaimi, CEO, Ankabut said:

Global warming changes wild plant mix in France

PARIS: In less than a decade, climate change has altered the mix of plants in the French countryside, with some species thriving at the expense of others less tolerant of heat, researchers reported yesterday. A study of almost 2,500 plant species from 2009 to 2017, published in *Biology Letters*, is the first to document the impact of global warming on flora in France over such a short period. "There has been a rearrangement of plant communities in France since 2009," Gabrielle Martin from France's Natural History Museum, co-author of the study, said. "Species that prefer warmer temperatures grow more abundantly

and even settle in new areas." Slender wild oat (*Avena barbata*), for example, has flourished across a wide range. At the same time, however, other plants that prefer cooler climes, such as wild buckwheat (*Fallopia convolvulus*), have declined over the last decade. Climate change is clearly the driver in each case, the study found. The data underlying the findings was gathered through a citizen science project called Vigie-Flore. More than 300 skilled amateur botanists collected data over the nine-year period, noting the presence or absence of France's most common plant species.

Each participant regularly surveyed one or more plots of one square kilometer each. About a quarter of the area monitored was artificial land cover, 29 percent was farmland, 16 percent were meadows, and 22 percent was forest. More than 3,000 sites were catalogued, and the evolution of 550 species tracked. The biggest transformation occurred where the rate of temperature increase was highest, the study showed.

Tenable research discovers vulnerability in Siemens software

DUBAI: Tenable Inc, the Cyber Exposure company, yesterday announced its research team discovered a critical vulnerability in Siemens STEP 7 TIA Portal, design and automation software for industrial control systems (ICS). The vulnerability, which impacts the same family of devices compromised in the STUXNET attack, could be used as a stepping stone in a tailored attack against critical infrastructure, with the potential for catastrophic damage.

The flaw would allow an unauthenticated, remote attacker to perform any administrative actions on the system, enabling them to add malicious code to adjacent ICS. A bad actor could also exploit the vulnerability to harvest data in order to plan a future, targeted attack. The delicate nature and function of critical infrastructure means a successful cyberattack could result in damage to operational technology equipment, disrupt operations, destruction of hardware or cyber espionage.

"Attacks on critical infrastructure go well-beyond cyberspace - they have the potential to cause physical damage and harm. And the threats to these often deli-

Just like humans, gorillas form 'complex societies'

PARIS: Gorillas form social bonds in a strikingly similar way to humans, including tiers of old friends and family members, according to a study released yesterday that may provide insight into how mankind evolved its social behavior. Gorillas, which in the wild spend most of their time in dense forests making behavioral studies tricky for researchers, are known to form small family units comprised of a dominant male and several females with offspring.

But a new analysis of data collected from years of social exchanges of hundreds of western lowland gorillas suggests the creatures are far more socially complex



Renaud Deraison

cate systems cannot be overstated," said Renaud Deraison, chief technology officer and co-founder, Tenable. "Cooperation and collaboration between researchers and vendors are of utmost importance when it comes to vulnerability disclosures. Tenable Research is committed to working with willing vendors, like Siemens, to protect organizations everywhere from new and emerging threats." Siemens has released patches to address this vulnerability. Users are urged to confirm their systems have been updated to the latest version.

than previously thought. A team of specialists looked at the frequency and length of each observed interaction between the animals when they gathered in clearing to feed on water plants. They found that in addition to close family, the gorillas formed an "extended family" social tier comprised of 13 individuals on average.

There were also wider groups, averaging 39 gorillas, where the animals consistently interacted with one another despite not being related. "An analogy to early human populations might be a tribe or small settlement, like a village," said Robin Morrison, a biological anthropologist at the University of Cambridge, who led the study. In addition, the team uncovered hints of an even wider social tier, similar to an annual gathering or festivals in human societies, where dozens of gorillas would come together to eat fruit. Morrison said that the gorillas may have evolved these gathering skills to help maintain a "collective memory" for tracking down hard-to-find foodstuffs.—AFP

"It's the first time that a change in flora on a national scale is detected over such a short period of time," Martin said. The impact on individual species varied: some blossomed more, others less; some migrated northward, while others grew taller. Plant species with shorter, one-year life cycles adapted more quickly to climate change than perennials, trees or bushes. The similar relationship between size and the ability to adapt has been noted in animals too.

As to whether the change observed is good or bad news is "difficult to say," according to Martin. "Plant diversity has been modified," she said. "These changes certainly have an impact on other organisms in the environment: insects, birds..." Even if biodiversity does not decline, she added, there would certainly be a knock-on effect on the relationship between species. When species gravitating toward more favorable conditions "settle in an established community, they modify the interactions—and more specifically competitive interactions—between species," Martin said.—AFP

Health

Light pollution puts Nemo's offspring at risk

PARIS: Popularized by Disney's 'Finding Nemo', the common clownfish may not see its eggs hatch if they are exposed to artificial light at night, researchers reported yesterday. "Clownfish, and likely other coral reef fish species living in areas exposed to light pollution, might not be able to produce viable offspring," Emily Fobert of Flinders University in Australia told AFP. A wide range of animals and plants across the globe are exposed to light pollution, but scientists have only begun to study its impact on their development and behavior.

An estimated 23 percent of land surface-excluding the poles-is today exposed to so-called "artificial light at night" (ALAN). "The correct functioning of most natural systems fundamentally relies on light days and dark nights," Fobert said. "But the presence of ALAN can mask these natural light rhythms, and interfere with the behaviour and physiology of individual organisms. "It can impact ecological systems as a whole," she added.

Most research on light pollution has focused on terrestrial wildlife. But marine species are exposed too: 22 percent of the world's coastal regions experience some degree of artificial illumination, Fobert said. Because it typically travels great distances in its larval phase just after hatching, the clownfish was a good subject for experiments testing the impact of light pollution. "Baby clownfish don't stay in the anemone where they were born-they can disperse and find a new home, ten to hundreds of kilometers away from their parents," Fobert explained.

Visible to predators

Once they choose a habitat, they remain for life. "If they settle to an area that is exposed to light pollution, they most likely won't be able to move away," she said. Clownfish eggs are often attached to the side of shallow-water rocks, which means-in an area, say, near a harbor with LED lights that penetrate seawater-embryos will be constantly exposed as they develop. To mimic such conditions in the laboratory, researchers monitored 10 breeding pairs of clownfish in separate tanks during a breeding cycle.

Five pairs-the "control" fish-were exposed to light days and dark nights, much as they would in their natural habitat. The other five pairs were exposed to dim, overhead LED lighting at night, duplicating conditions found near coral reefs adjacent to human habitation. Both groups spawned as they would in nature, and had normal rates of fertilization. But the eggs in the ALAN tanks had a zero percent hatch rate.

"The results of our study suggest that 'darkness' is used as an environmental cue to trigger hatching at the right time," the scientists said in a statement. Under the constant glare of artificial light at night, "hatching is not initiated". Even if they are not directly exposed to light when hatching, moving from their tiny eggs into the ocean environment under a spotlight is dangerous for another reason. "Baby fish are extremely small and vulnerable, so it's believed hatching after dark-when they are less visible to predators-improves their chance of survival," Fobert said. — AFP



CALIFORNIA: This file photo shows a clown fish at the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, California. — AFP

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Stars

CROSSWORD 2254



ACROSS

1. A licensed medical practitioner.
4. A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
11. According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
15. The month following March and preceding May.
16. A state in the southeastern United States on the Gulf of Mexico.
17. A Hindu prince or king in India.
18. A flat-bottomed volcanic crater that was formed by an explosion.
20. American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).
21. All the weapons and equipment that a country has.
23. Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
24. The act of going to see some person or place or thing for a short time.
26. A small unit serving as the nucleus of a larger political movement.
27. The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Dali region of Yunnan.
29. The capital and chief port of Qatar.
31. Relating to or characteristic of a tribe.
35. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
36. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
39. Type genus of the Canidae.
42. Ancient Hebrew unit of liquid measure = 1.5 gallons.
43. A stick that people can lean on to help them walk.
44. A federation of North American labor unions that merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1955.
45. A person who announces and plays popular recorded music.
46. An association of nations dedicated to economic and political cooperation in southeastern Asia.
49. Designer drug designed to have the effects of amphetamines (it floods the brain with serotonin) but to avoid the drug laws.
51. (Greek mythology) Goddess of the earth and mother of Cronus and the Titans in ancient mythology.
53. The deep vascular inner layer of the skin.
54. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
55. Being one more than three.
57. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
58. A United Nations agency to promote trade by increasing the exchange stability of the major currencies.
60. A siren of German legend who lured boatmen in the Rhine to destruction.
63. A football game in which two teams of 11 players try to kick or head a ball into the opponents' goal.
66. A Russian river.
67. Narrow wood or metal or plastic runners used for gliding over snow.
70. A wall hanging of heavy handwoven fabric with pictorial designs.
74. Divulge information or secrets.
76. Fleshy spore-bearing inner mass of e.g. a puffball or stinkhorn.
77. A unit of weight used in some Moslem countries near the Mediterranean.
78. Disorderly fighting.
80. (Islam) The man who leads prayers in a mosque.

81. A fencing sword similar to a foil but with a heavier blade.
82. Any tropical African shrub of the genus Protea having alternate rigid leaves and dense colorful flower heads resembling cones.
83. A small cake leavened with yeast.

DOWN

1. Fallow deer.
2. A translucent mineral consisting of hydrated silica of variable color.
3. A steep rugged rock or cliff.
4. An informal term for a father.
5. A tricyclic antidepressant drug (trade name Elavil) with serious side effects.
6. Surrealist Spanish painter (1904-1989).
7. Wading birds of warm regions having long slender down-curved bills.
8. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
9. Italian violin maker in Cremona.
10. A room or establishment where alcoholic drinks are served over a counter.
11. A particular geographical region of indefinite boundary (usually serving some special purpose or distinguished by its people or culture or geography).
12. A bag used for carrying money and small personal items or accessories (especially by women).
13. Slightly open.
14. A large bundle bound for storage or transport.
19. Spiritual leader of a Jewish congregation.
22. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
25. In the same place (used when citing a reference).
28. An associate degree in applied science.
30. (Irish) Mother of the Tuatha De Danann.
32. The amount a salary is increased.
33. Located inward.
34. A shoe consisting of a sole fastened by straps to the foot.
37. Type genus of the Ardeidae.
38. The seventh month of the Moslem calendar.
40. Young sheep.
41. Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
47. Characterized by friendship and good will.
48. Verbal abuse.
50. Breed of large wiry-coated terrier bred in Yorkshire.
52. Tuberous or rhizomatous herbaceous perennials.
56. A blood vessel that carries blood from the capillaries toward the heart.
59. A radioactive element of the alkali-metal group discovered as a disintegration product of actinium.
61. First in time.
62. A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
64. The fourth or lowest deck.
65. A rugged box (usually made of wood).
68. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
69. Tropical American tree grown in southern United States having a whitish pink-tinted fruit.
71. Cause to run.
72. In addition.
73. Marked by lack of intellectual depth.
75. Standard temperature and pressure.
79. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Don't be surprised if someone younger turns to you for guidance today. Their admiration of you may be revealed. You may find you have had an impact on their life you didn't even realize. You never know who is watching and living by the example you set. You are an inspiration to others. You have overcome obstacles in your life and others truly admire you for this.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today may find you in a very serious mood dismissing all that you find trivial in this world. You have a no-nonsense attitude and a strong desire to succeed. You may find yourself in an extremely strict and disciplined mode and very ambitious. You are driven and passionate about your career and this is being noticed in the workplace to the point you may be approached to take on a special project. You are an excellent manager of yourself and your time and this may lead to an opportunity to excel as a manager of others. You are on a prosperous and successful path. This is a great time for you to surround yourself with friends and family. This may lead to a more relaxed environment for you.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

A friend will seek your advice today. What she really wants is your approval for what she has decided to do. If you tell her what to do, it may lead to a rift in your friendship. You can give your opinion, but make it clear that she has to make the decision for herself. You might offer some options and point out the possible consequences of each. That mean she takes responsibility for her action. Regardless of how her decision turns out, your friendship will be strengthened. Being the friend to others that you desire a friend be to you is the key to happiness in your world.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You have a special place in your heart for those close to you. You seem to be the one the younger generation in your life look up to and admire. Your advice and guidance maybe sought from someone who looks to you as a mentor. You may feel as if your greatest growth comes when you are helping others. Today may be one of those days you are spinning your wheels getting physical tasks accomplished. Before frustration takes hold, stop and realize your shoulder to lean on and your listening ear and wonderful advice may be a much greater accomplishment than a completing a simple chore. Be proud of who you are and what you mean to others.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You crave all that is new and different. What has been great motivation to you in the past may seem meaningless. You have been a creature of habit as long as your friends can remember. This new you and the new path you have chosen may catch others off guard. Follow your heart. This is your journey and your journey alone. Do what makes you happy and put yourself first for a change. You can not change the way others see you. Chase your dreams and do what sets your soul on fire.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You have become a more emotional person. Being more in touch with your emotions has led you to nurture and care for those surrounding you. You may find yourself especially drawn to those younger and children. This is mostly driven by and if I knew then, what I know now? type of attitude. You feel as if you could help so many others and wish someone would have been around to mentor and guide you. You may find yourself signing up to volunteer to work with children or find some other role to step in where your knowledge may be beneficial to others. You will benefit in many ways from helping those close to you.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

If you have been debating on a new business approach, today is the day to make it happen. Much success will come your way. Make the pitch, present the proposal. Today is a day you will get the results you have been dreaming of. You are convincing and have a way with your words today. You will be able to make others see things your way. By the time you are through, those involved will see things your way and have the exact desires you do. Stay on top of news about money matters. This is a very profitable time for you.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You may be faced with a career opportunity that goes against what you value. You have always prided yourself for clearly seeing things in life in black and white. There is no room for a grey area. If an opportunity that presents itself to you seems to good to be true, it probably is. Be sure you are able to lay your head down at night and sleep peacefully. You know right from wrong and this is a time for you to make the right choice. Actions have consequences and these consequences will have a lasting effect on your world. Do what satisfies your soul.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You may be feeling a need for change. A deep desire for emotional security takes hold now and you feel your most content when surrounded by family and those closest to you. Relationships are a priority in your world now. You feel as if things in your life are monotonous and you are ready to spice things up. This may mean a shiny new car purchase, a vacation, or simply surrounding yourself with a new group of friends. Any direction you choose, this will be a time of excitement and give you a fresh start and a more focused outlook. We all need a bit of change from time to time. Keep life interesting and exciting.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You may find this a great time to reflect and gain understanding of your own situation. How did you get to this point in your life? You know that everything happens for a reason and you have learned to have a positive outlook on adversity. You have learned lessons from obstacles that have been place in your path in the past. This a great time for you to gain a sense of understanding for those around you. A deeper connection is possible for your relationships. This is a good time for you to spend with a loved one. You may find yourself at peace today.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Far from reality is where you may find your thoughts today. Dreaming of what the future holds can lead to peace and clarity in your life. Set a goal. Picture yourself accomplishing this goal. Imagine how you will feel once your dream becomes a reality. Make a list of everything you need to do to accomplish this. Today is the first day of the rest of your life. Make it happen. Dedication and determination can lead you to the position in life you wish to be. Love to learn and learn to love. The world has much more to offer you. Know this and own it!



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

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

Wordsearch Puzzle

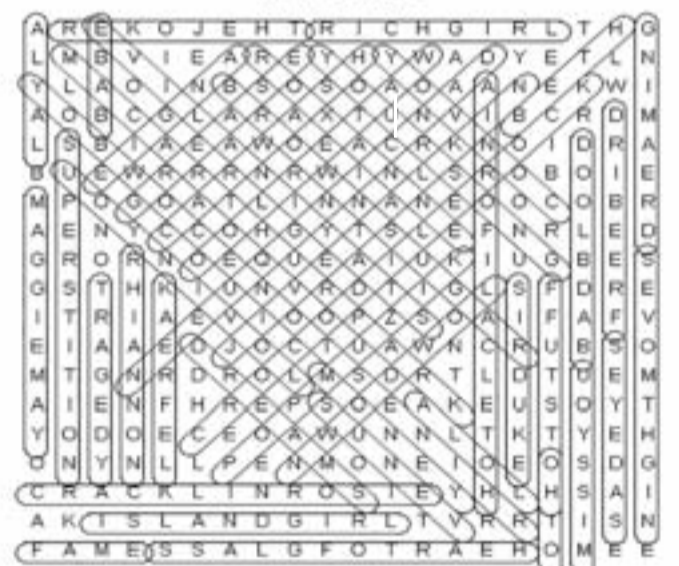
80's Radio Hitmakers

Find and circle all of the 1980's music artists that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the name of a hit song by the Bangles.



- | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-----------------|------------|
| ASIA | ERASURE | NENA | THE FIXX |
| BANGLES | EURHYTHMICS | NEW ORDER | THE MOTELS |
| BERLIN | FALCO | PRINCE | THE POLICE |
| BILLY JOEL | FOREIGNER | QUEEN | TIFFANY |
| BILLY OCEAN | GENESIS | QUIET RIOT | TOM PETTY |
| BLONDIE | HEART | ROXETTE | TONI BASIL |
| SON JOVI | INKS | SCANDAL | TOTO |
| CHICAGO | JOURNEY | SOFT CELL | VAN HALEN |
| DAVID BOWIE | KAJAGOOGOO | TALK TALK | WANG CHUNG |
| DEBARGE | MADNESS | TEARS FOR FEARS | WHAMI |
| DURAN DURAN | MADONNA | THE CARS | |

70's Songs



- | | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| ANGIE | FAME | LOVIN' YOU | RICH GIRL |
| BABE | FREE BIRD | LOWDOWN | ROXANNE |
| BAD BLOOD | GREASE | MACARTHUR PARK | SAD EYES |
| BETH | HEART OF GLASS | MAGGIE MAY | SIR DUKE |
| BROWN SUGAR | HOT STUFF | MISS YOU | STAYIN' ALIVE |
| CAR WASH | HOTEL CALIFORNIA | MONEY | SUPERSTITION |
| CONVOY | ISLAND GIRL | NIGHT MOVES | THE JOKER |
| CRACKLIN' ROSIE | JIVE TALKIN' | OHIO | TRAGEDY |
| CROCODILE ROCK | LAYLA | POP MUZZIK | VENUS |
| DANCING QUEEN | LE FREAK | RHIANNON | WATERLOO |
| DREAMING | LOLA | RHINESTONE COWBOY | YOUR SONG |
| DREAMS | | | |

The hidden song is: TIE A YELLOW RIBBON 'ROUND THE OLE OAK TREE

Yesterday's Solution



Daily Sudoku



Yesterday's Solution



Lifestyle

THURSDAY, JULY 11, 2019



Irish urban artist Fin Dac (second right) and his assistant work on his mural "Magdalena", in honor of Mexican painter Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo in the month of her birth, in Guadalajara, Jalisco state, Mexico. — AFP

APPLYING MASCARA, MALE BLOGGERS CHALLENGE RUSSIA GENDER NORMS

Gevorg brushes mascara onto his already long, dark lashes before dabbing highlighter above his cheekbones and checking the results in a mirror of a central Moscow salon. The 26-year-old is one of a growing number of young men in Russia who are offering makeup tutorials and beauty advice online—a practice that is not only boosting their profiles and bank balances but also challenging the conservative country's strict gender norms. "I feel that my work is a 'fun' education that helps people develop in a different way," says Gevorg, who goes by just his first name online.

He began offering tips on the internet several years ago while working in a beauty store and finding many of his female customers had a limited idea about what they could do with the products. The silver-haired blogger keeps his audience updated with regular Instagram posts and a couple of YouTube videos a week, in which he answers questions from viewers and discusses his latest purchases.

Across the two platforms Gevorg has more than 250,000 followers and subscribers, many of them young women, and earns a living not just from sponsored posts but also in-person makeup workshops in cities across Russia. "My work is to show a wide audience that makeup isn't about looking like a brightly painted escort—it's about looking the way you want and showing that you have a choice, whatever you do in life," he says. Male beauty blogging is a global phenomenon that has exploded in popularity in recent years—spawning US stars such as James Charles and Jeffree Star, with some 15 million YouTube subscribers each—and is tied in with major brands like MAC and Maybelline hiring men to front campaigns. But in Russia, where LGBT activism is all but illegal under a controversial "gay propaganda" law, and politicians are more likely to praise women's beauty than champion gender equality, the trend has a particular significance.

'It's not moral'

Gevorg admits he found it hard to deal with aggressive



Beauty blogger Gevorg, 26, puts makes on his face as he attends an interview with AFP at a Moscow salon.

online comments when he first started posting about beauty products, which often targeted his Armenian background. "They said that in Armenian culture you can't look like that, it's not moral," says the blogger. "I used to try to engage with people... now I just hit the block button and it doesn't bother me anymore." Despite his bright online presence, the stylist says he avoids problems in the street by wearing neutral makeup or none at all. Other top Russian beauty bloggers have reported harassment online and off.

Igor Sinyak, who has more than 400,000 Instagram followers, was this year threatened by a group of young people as he was leading a masterclass in a store in the industrial city of Chelyabinsk, some 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) east of Moscow. Videos released on YouTube showed security ushering him out of the building. Russia's most prominent male beauty blogger by numbers, Andrei Petrov, has posted screen grabs of the abuse he receives via Instagram and YouTube.

Sergey Naumov, a 27-year-old whose popular Instagram show sees him copy the makeup of an invited

guest, agrees his clips could come as a "shock" to many in the country. A native of Chelyabinsk, Naumov moved to Moscow as a teenager and found work as a makeup artist, later launching an eponymous line of beauty products which he promotes through his account.

Soviet legacy

While his videos are intended mainly as entertainment, the entrepreneur hopes they are also expanding Russians' ideas about what men are allowed and able to do. "I don't think the problem's so much that Russia is a naturally conservative country, more that for such a long time there was the Soviet Union," Naumov says, an era when conformity was encouraged or enforced. "You have to wait for people to become more open, more receptive to new ideas and that is quite a difficult thing," he adds during an interview in GUM, the Soviet-era department store on Red Square that has since turned into a high-end shopping destination.

"But it's exactly shows like mine, like Andrei Petrov's, like Gevorg's, that do make people a bit more tolerant, not towards gays per se, but towards guys who wear makeup—it shows that it's normal." Sergey Ostrikov, who makes a claim to being the first male beauty blogger in Russia 12 years ago, says Russians are already much more open than they were to content like his. "There was a lot of aggression towards me at the very start," recalls the 31-year-old from the Siberian city of Abakan, who now manages two of his own cosmetics brands.

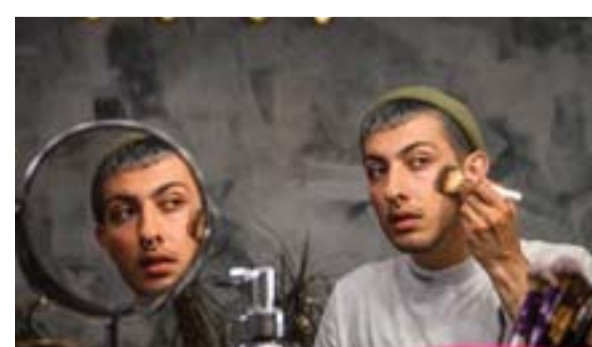
"Most of it came from women—they were saying, 'How dare a man get involved in this area that was purely feminine.'" The phenomenon of male beauty blogging has "undoubtedly" helped the LGBT community in Russia, he added. "Now there's a new 'digital native' generation who have seen stuff like this from their childhoods—they take it all very calmly. Everything's changed in the last decade and it's all got easier." — AFP



Beauty blogger Gevorg, 26, gestures as he speaks during an interview with AFP at a Moscow salon.— AFP photos



Beauty blogger Gevorg, 26, puts makes on his face as he attends an interview with AFP at a Moscow salon.



UK spy agency decrypts some secrets with new exhibition

Historic gadgets used by British spies will be revealed for the first time later this week, as one of the country's intelligence agencies steps out the shadows to mark its centenary—and to educate people about the risks of cyber-attacks. The Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) will hold an unprecedented exhibition at London's Science Museum, taking visitors through 100 years of secret conversations and eavesdropping.

It was the codebreakers of GCHQ at Bletchley Park who helped break the Germans' Enigma code during World War II—as portrayed in the Oscar-winning 2014 film *The Imitation Game*, starring Benedict Cumberbatch. A prototype of the Enigma cipher machine used by the Germans will be on display. But the standout exhibit at this new exhibition is the 5-UCO machine developed in 1943 to send decrypted German messages to officers in the field.

"It was one of the first electronic and fully unbreakable cipher machines and was considered so secret that it was long thought to have been destroyed to conceal the very fact of its existence," GCHQ chief Jeremy Fleming told journalists on Tuesday. "It turns out we kept one and it's here for everyone to see." The spy chief said his agency had given unique access to the famous museum in an attempt to tackle the rising threat of cyber crime. "It is no longer enough for us to serve in secret... openness is our strength," he said. "We are aiming to put tailored advice in the hands of every citizen," he added.

A laptop infected with the infamous "WannaCry" virus highlights how ordinary citizens can unwittingly act as a gateway for cyber-attacks against major institutions. This was the virus that brought the computer system of Britain's National Health Service to its knees in 2017.

Cold War intrigue

The exhibition begins with a probe of the radio technology used by the nascent GCHQ to calculate the position of German airships attacking Britain in World War I. It features clothes from crewmen who perished when one was shot down in southern England. It then showcases infamous encoding devices, such as the Enigma machine, and the ingenious methods that the team at Bletchley Park—the wartime home of Britain's top code-breakers—used to crack the code. A recreation of a humble suburban home near London tells the extraordinary Cold War tale of a Canadian couple who were sending top-secret military information to Moscow on a radio transmitter hidden under their kitchen floor.

And it tackles more recent issues from the digital age, including the revelations by US whistleblower Edward Snowden about the controversial techniques used by GCHQ to intercept communications. On display is a laptop used by Guardian journalists working on the story—which intelligence chiefs ordered them to smash up. "They were happy for us to tell that story," curator Liz Bruton told AFP. "It would be a very odd exhibition not to include that." They had consulted with academics and civil libertarians about how to approach the issue of security and privacy, she added.—AFP

Chloe Flower, the scene-stealing pianist turning up classical music

Seen by many as the music of grandparents and elevators, classical is getting a facelift thanks to its fiercest star Chloe Flower, a pianist making the genre pop. The 33-year-old artist won the internet earlier this year after a showstopping performance at the Grammys alongside rap queen Cardi B, who twerked on Liberace's crystal piano as Flower, wearing couture, theatrically struck thunderous chords. "I was so scared. I got a fortune cookie the night before, and it was like, 'if you don't take big risk, you won't get any reward,'" the musician told AFP from her Manhattan apartment that boasts sweeping views, a lush sheepskin rug and another of the iconic Liberace's pianos his foundation lent her, this one encrusted in mirrored glass.

Flower betrayed none of those nerves at music's biggest night, wowing with a sparkling solo before serving up drama by staring straight at the camera-and 22 million people-before breaking into the bassline of Cardi B's "Money." The Juilliard-trained artist, who has been playing since age two, became an overnight sensation, gaining tens of thousands of social media followers within hours and landing a deal with Sony Music. It wasn't her first collaboration with the pop or hip hop worlds: in 2010 Flower signed with legendary R&B producer Babyface, composing instrumental sequences and gaining producing experience.

Babyface "taught me so much about the back end of music," Flower said, describing learning to use computer software to compose string arrangements and drum beats that could layer under her keys. She has since worked with Celine Dion, Nas and 2 Chainz. "It's kind of a road that isn't normal," she said. "It's not like there's so many classical pianists playing like a glass piano with hip hop beats, right? Or producing hip hop tracks to Bach."

But the marriage of classical and rap was natural, Flower said: "I love drums. I love beats. And I love dance." "I always felt like there was no reason I couldn't combine

the two, and as I did, I noticed that a lot of people who don't necessarily listen to classical music would text me: 'Oh my god, I was listening to the classical station because of you!'"

'Despacito' with a twist

Flower describes classical music's reputation as dusty—a friend of hers likened New York's famed Carnegie Hall as "God's waiting room," due to its elderly clientele—as a "packaging" problem. "What we have to do as instrumentalists and artists—that's not exclusive to the piano, it includes the violin, the flute, and the cello—is for all of us to really think about our music in a different way: in a modern way," she said.

She uses Instagram—where Cardi B discovered her—to promote her work and the genre more broadly, posting clips of herself busting out classical remixes of megahits like Ariana Grande's "Thank U, Next" and Luis Fonsi's "Despacito," as well as more traditional pieces like Frederic Chopin's Nocturnes.

As she plays, Flower whips her waist-length hair over her bold, designer outfits complete with vertiginous heels—looks she says are a strategy to brighten classical music's appeal. "Fashion has a huge, huge, huge role in my performance," she said, motioning to her bright blue Balenciaga wrap skirt set and shimmering Gucci chandelier earrings. "My music is purely instrumental," she said. "So there are no lyrics—I have to find different ways to express myself." "My style represents my personality but also who I am as an artist."

Elements of accessibility

Flower has an album forthcoming and recently released her first-ever music video, for her latest single "Get What U Get," which showcases her energetic performance style and features a cast of female dancers. But no matter how poppy her image leans, Flower makes sure to include elements of classical music in every work she composes.



Pianist Chloe Flower poses for a portrait in New York City.— AFP photos

"Part of the reason why kids and adults don't understand or care about classical music is because they don't recognize it," she said. "I think that people think that without lyrics, you can't really understand the music or connect." But "you can do it in a way that captures them and

then add the element of accessibility, which for me was the drums, and it makes it almost like you can work out to it," she said. "We just need more of me! More instrumentalists," said Flower, flashing a wide smile. — AFP



In this file photo taken on September 8, 1996 actor Rip Torn gives the thumbs up as he holds his Emmy Award for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series for his role as Arthur on the "The Larry Sanders Show" at the 48th Annual Primetime Emmy Awards in Pasadena, California.

Rip Torn dead at 88

Oscar-nominated actor Rip Torn, best known for his roles in the cult TV series "The Larry Sanders Show" and the Hollywood blockbuster "Men in Black", died at the age of 88 on Tuesday, his publicist said. Torn built a reputation as a formidable actor in film, TV and theater, and was also known for his volatility—he once admitted he "got angry easily", according to The New York Times. "Torn passed away peacefully this afternoon... at his home in Lakeville, Connecticut, at the age of 88 with his wife Amy Wright, and daughters Katie Torn and Angelica Page by his side," publicist Rick Miramontez said in a statement.

Born Elmore Rual Torn on February 6, 1931 — the nickname "Rip" came from his father—he won praise for his early theater performances, including a Tony nomination in 1960 for his performance in the Tennessee Williams play "Sweet Bird of Youth". He was nominated for an Oscar for his role in the film "Cross Creek", losing out to Jack Nicholson in the supporting actor category at the 1984 Academy Awards. In the 1990s, Torn was cast in "The Larry Sanders Show", a cult comedy series that is widely considered one of the most influential in the modern era of television. He played Artie, the producer of a fictional late-night TV show.—AFP

HARD SOIL, BIG JUMPS AND EPIPHANIES: WHAT IT'S LIKE ON THE MOON

Twelve American men walked on the Moon between 1969 and 1972, with most describing in great detail their experiences on the dusty, low-gravity world lit by the blinding light of the Sun. Here are their impressions, collected from a series of oral history interviews by NASA during the 1990s and 2000s, unless otherwise stated.

Right after landing

"That's where you experience the most quiet moment a human being can experience in his lifetime. There's no vibration. There's no noise. The ground quit talking. Your partner is mesmerized. He can't say anything. The dust is gone. It's a realization, a reality, all of a sudden you have just landed in another world on another body out there (somewhere in the) universe, and what you are seeing is being seen by human beings, human eyes, for the first time." Gene Cernan, Apollo 17

Totally black sky

"We had a few moments to look around, to look up in the black sky—a totally black sky, even though the Sun is shining on the surface, it's not reflected; there's no diffusion, no reflection—a totally black sky and seeing another planet: planet Earth ... You think to yourself, just imagine that millions of people are living on that planet and don't realize how fragile it is." Alan Shepard, Apollo 14

The horizon

"I was surprised by the apparent closeness of the horizon. I was surprised by the trajectory of dust that you kicked up with your boot, and I was surprised that even though logic would have told me that there shouldn't be any, there was no dust when you kicked. You never had a cloud of dust there. That's a product of having an atmosphere, and when you don't have an atmosphere, you don't have any clouds of dust. I was absolutely dumbfounded when I shut the rocket engine off and the particles that were going out radially from the bottom of the engine fell all the way out over the horizon, and when I shut the engine off, they just raced out over the horizon and instantaneously disappeared, you know, just like it had been shut off for a week. That was remarkable." Neil Armstrong, Apollo 11

"There's a problem on the Moon. Your-with depth perception, because you're looking at objects you've never seen before, so a big object far away looks very similar to a smaller object close in. You don't have any pole-telephone poles or houses or trees or cars to sit and judge scale like we did... down here on Earth." Charlie Duke, Apollo 16

A lazy lope

"There seems to be no difficulty in moving around—as we suspected. It's even perhaps easier than the simulations of one-sixth g that we performed in the various simulations on the ground. It's absolutely no trouble to walk around." Armstrong to Mission Control shortly after descending from Apollo 11's lunar module.

"I started jogging around a bit, and it felt like I was moving in slow motion in a lazy lope, often with both of my feet floating in the air. One of the pure joys of being on the Moon was our somewhat lightfooted mobility." Apollo 11's Buzz Aldrin in his book "Magnificent Desolation: The Long Journey Home from the Moon"



This undated NASA image obtained February 5, 2016 shows Astronaut Edgar D Mitchell, Apollo 14 lunar module pilot standing by the deployed US flag on the lunar surface during the early moments of the mission's first spacewalk.— AFP

"I would say that balance (while walking) was not difficult; however, I did some fairly high jumps and found that there was a tendency to tip over backwards on a high jump. One time I came close to falling and decided that was enough of that." Armstrong during his 1969 technical debrief.

The gloves

"The biggest problem is that the gloves are balloons... to pick something up, you have to squeeze against that pressure, 3.7 psi... That squeezing against that pressure causes these forearm muscles to fatigue very rapidly. Just imagine squeezing a tennis ball continuously for eight hours or ten hours, and that's what you're talking about." Harrison Schmitt, Apollo 17

Hardened soil

"Getting the flagpole to stand in the lunar surface was more difficult than we anticipated... For the first time a shot of panic seared through me. Since childhood I had seen pictures of great explorers planting their flags in their new worlds. Would I be the first to plant the flag and have it fall over?" Aldrin in "Magnificent Desolation"

Nasty dust

"I noticed some of the moon dust on the floor (of the lunar module). It had a gritty charcoal-like texture to it, and a pungent metallic smell, something like gunpowder or the smell in the air after a firecracker has gone off. Neil described it as having a 'wet ashes' smell." Aldrin in "Magnificent Desolation"

An epiphany

"All of a sudden I realized that the molecules of my body and the spacecraft and my companion were prototyped in an ancient generation of stars. And somehow it suddenly became very personal instead of an objective: 'Oh, yes. Molecules and atoms were made in those stars.' No. My molecules were made in those stars, and this was a 'wow!'" Edgar Mitchell, Apollo 14. — AFP

UNESCO inscribes Azerbaijan's historic Centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace to the World Heritage Site list

The historic city of Sheki, located at a short 5-hour drive from the capital of Azerbaijan - Baku, was added to UNESCO's World Heritage List of cultural sites during the 43rd session of the committee's meeting. The opening ceremony of this year's session was held on the 30th June in Baku marking the start of the committee's work this year. Sheki Khan's Palace was granted "enhanced protection" status and inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List in Need of Urgent Safeguarding on October 24, 2001 and has now been recognized by UNESCO heritage site.

Commenting on the addition, Florian Sengstschild, CEO of Azerbaijan Tourism Board, said, "We are honored that the historic center of Sheki and the palace have made it to UNESCO's World Heritage List. Receiving this recognition will help us showcase Azerbaijan's rich heritage, distinctive culture and unique history to the world along with the story of the country's legacy. The city of Sheki is one of Azerbaijan's most picturesque towns, filled with cobbled streets and medieval architecture - a fresh, idyllic retreat from the vibrant capital. As for the palace, travellers from all over the world are fascinated by the craftsmanship and is one of Azerbaijan's most prized pieces of historical architecture."

Set at the foot of the greater Caucasus mountains and divided in two by the Gurjana River, Sheki is home to the palace and summer home of the Sheki Khans. A unique architectural monument of the empire of Khanate, the Sheki Khans' Palace was built in 1762 by Huseyin Khan surrounded by scores of charming chinar trees within the



the Sheki Palace. A mosaic of coloured glass set in wooden latticework and assembled without nails or glue are these stunning examples of artwork. What makes the Sheki Khan Palace unique is the 5,000 wooden and glass details of 'Shebeke' making it a real visual feast. UNESCO seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. This is embodied in other UNESCO sites in Azerbaijan including the Gobustan Rock Art Cultural



Landscape (2007) and the Walled City of Baku with the Shirvanshah's Palace and Maiden Tower (2000). Additionally, the Azerbaijani carpet was proclaimed a masterpiece of Intangible Heritage by UNESCO. The National Museum of Carpets in Baku has one of the largest collections of carpets in the world.

Lifestyle | Music & Movies

Jay-Z goes into the marijuana business

Billionaire rapper Jay-Z is entering the fast-growing cannabis industry, taking a role with California company Caliva as a strategist. Privately owned Caliva, formed in San Jose in 2015, said on Tuesday that Jay-Z had entered a long-term partnership in which he will focus on outreach and the creative direction of the company. The rapper, whose formal title with Caliva will be chief brand strategist, will also further his social justice efforts by increasing job training for former prisoners as well as fostering quality and fairness in the develop-

ment of the legal marijuana industry, the company said in a statement.

"We want to create something amazing, have fun in the process, do good and bring people along the way," the rapper said in a statement. Jay-Z earlier this year helped to launch a criminal justice group called the Reform Alliance with a goal of helping to get 1 million Americans out of jail and on probation or parole in the next five years. Jay-Z, 49, who is married to R&B artist Beyonce, was named by Forbes magazine in June as the

first hip-hop artist to become a billionaire thanks to investments in clothing, champagne, ride-hailing service Uber and his Roc Nation entertainment company.

He is the latest celebrity to get into the marijuana business as its legalization for recreational use has spread to 11 US states, including California. Rapper Snoop Dogg has his own brand, Leafs by Snoop, and actress Whoopi Goldberg in 2016 launched a line of medical marijuana products aimed at providing relief from menstrual cramps. — Reuters



'Stranger Things' breaks Netflix viewing records

Retro sci-fi series "Stranger Things" has broken Netflix viewing records with the global launch of its third season, the streaming giant said in a rare tweet publishing viewing data. The nostalgic 1980s show about a gang of suburban adolescents battling supernatural monsters had been watched by 40.7 million accounts since Thursday, it said. That figure for season three was "more than any other film or series in its first four days," the company said late Monday.

"And 18.2 million have already finished the entire season," it added. Netflix is the market leader in global television and film streaming, with over 140 million paying accounts worldwide. It occasionally publishes viewing figures for certain shows, but closely guards the vast majority of its data. The platform is under increasing pressure from a cluster of deep-pocketed rivals including Amazon, Disney and Apple. Comcast's NBCUniversal and WarnerMedia's HBO Max are also set to launch, depriving Netflix of popular shows "The Office" and "Friends" respectively.

By comparison, Netflix in December said over 45 million accounts had streamed the Sandra Bullock film "Bird Box" a week after its launch. With no independent verification or details on the criteria for measuring a full "viewing" available, some analysts expressed skepticism over the statistic. — AFP



Swift shakes off Kardashian clan as highest-paid celebrity

Singer Taylor Swift was named the world's highest-paid entertainer yesterday but was closely followed by two members of the wider Kardashian clan - reality star turned cosmetics queen Kylie Jenner and rapper Kanye West. The annual Forbes Celebrity 100 list also saw soccer stars Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Neymar among the top 10, along with British singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran and 1970s soft rock band The Eagles, who embarked on a new tour in 2018.

West, the husband of Kim Kardashian, returned to the list after a four-year absence. Forbes estimated his pre-tax earnings at \$150 million, driven mostly by his popular Yeezy sneaker line, putting him in third place. Kim Kardashian ranked No.26 on the list. Swift, hot off her 2018 "Reputation" tour and album, earned an estimated \$185 million to take the No. 1 spot. The 29-year-old pop star also topped the list in 2016 after her best-selling "1989" tour and album.

Jenner, 21, the half-sister of Kim, Khloe and Kourtney Kardashian, came in second place after bringing in an estimated \$170 million thanks to her booming online lip kits and cosmetics company. Earlier this year Forbes declared Jenner to be the world's youngest billionaire.

Forbes compiled its 2019 list by estimating pre-tax earnings from June 2018-June 2019, before deducting fees for managers, based on data from Nielsen, touring trade publication Pollstar, movie database IMDb and interviews with industry experts and many of the celebrities themselves. The magazine said the world's 100 highest-paid celebrities pulled in \$6.3 billion pre-tax over the past 12 months. American boxer Floyd Mayweather and actor George Clooney took the top two spots on last year's list but landed outside the top 10 this time. — Reuters

SPAIN COURT RULES 43-YEAR-OLD MAN IS SON OF JULIO IGLESIAS

A Spanish court ruled yesterday that Grammy award-winning singer Julio Iglesias is the biological father of a 43-year-old man who has waged a protracted paternity battle with the star. The judge in the case refused to admit DNA evidence obtained surreptitiously by a private detective working for the claimant and his lawyer. But he ruled that the man's mother had provided credible details of her affair with the singer and also cited the physical resemblance between the two men.



This combination of pictures created yesterday shows a file photo of Spanish singer Julio Iglesias in Mexico city and a file photo of Javier Sanchez Santos in Valencia. — AFP photos

Iglesias himself has always refused to give DNA evidence to settle the dispute. His other children include the Latin pop superstar Enrique Iglesias. The case was brought by Javier Sanchez Santos, the son of Portuguese former ballerina Maria Edite, who says she had a brief affair with Iglesias in 1975. After examining the paternity suit, a judge at a court in the eastern city of Valencia "declares that Julio Iglesias is his biological father", the court said in a statement. Edite told the court that she had a one-week affair with Iglesias in Catalonia in Spain's northeast in July 1975 and that nine months later Javier was born, said Sanchez's lawyer, Fernando Osuna.

The singer's defense team had argued that the trial should not take place since the case had already gone to court before and was dismissed in 1992. The 75-year-old singer did not attend the trial. But Osuna had argued a new trial was justified as they had "DNA evidence" brought from the United States by a detective.

DNA evidence rejected

The detective managed to get close to the singer's son Julio Iglesias Junior while he was surfing in Miami and picked up a bottle of water that was used in a DNA test,



Javier Sanchez Santos, who claims to be the son of Spanish crooner Julio Iglesias, arrives with his mother Maria Edite Santos (left) and his Italian partner Chiara Allegrini (right) to appear to the court of Valencia before a hearing to examine his paternity claim.

the lawyer said. That test showed that Julio Iglesias Jr and Sanchez were brothers, Osuna claimed. When Sanchez filed the paternity suit in 2017 he told reporters gathered outside the Valencia courthouse that the DNA evidence "indicates with an accuracy of 99.9 percent that I am his son and that my mother has always told the truth."

The judge refused to admit the DNA evidence obtained by the detective. But he ruled that Edite had provided "very concrete" information about the location and description of the chalet where Iglesias was staying when she says she had an affair with the singer. The judge also said there was evidence that Iglesias and Edite had contact at around the time that Sanchez was conceived, which means that "the possibility that sexual relations took place between them is not unlikely nor preposterous."

He also cited the "obvious physical resemblance" between Iglesias and Sanchez and the singer's steadfast refusal to carry out a DNA test despite evidence of the affair. Iglesias's lawyer, Fernando Falomir, told AFP his client will appeal the ruling on the grounds that the issue had already been "resolved" by the courts.

'Obsession for sex'

Sanchez, who is married and lives in Italy, has said in previous media interviews that he suffered bullying as a youth because of his claim that he was the singer's son. He has enjoyed modest success as a singer and DJ. In 1999 he released an album called "Lucha y Veras", or "Fight and You Will See", which was seen as a reference to his paternity battle. Iglesias is known for his romantic ballads and a prolific love life that has long been fodder for tabloid headlines. He has sold over 300 million albums in his decades-long career.

He has been married twice. His first marriage was to Spanish socialite Isabel Preysler with whom he had three children-including pop star Enrique. He has five other children with his current wife, Miranda Rijnsburger. Iglesias has often presented himself as an unapologetic flirt with "an obsession for sex". "Don't ask me how many brothers I have," his son Julio Jr said in 2018 on television. "I don't even know myself." — AFP

Sting in string of cancellations across Europe over illness

British singer Sting cancelled a slew of concerts in Europe yesterday, blaming an unspecified illness for keeping him off the stage since the beginning of the week. Hours after calling off an appearance in Munich, Germany slated for last night, the former Police frontman's website said shows in another German city Stuttgart as well as Slavkov u Brna in the Czech Republic scheduled for Thursday and Friday would also not go ahead. "It is with great regret that Sting's concerts... will be cancelled," the statement read.

"Sting is under the weather and under doctor's orders," it continued, saying he was "forced" not to take to the stage. "Sting sincerely regrets disappointing or causing any inconvenience to the fans" and will be offering refunds to the disappointed concert-goers. The string of cancellations for 67-year-old Sting, who has more than 100 million album sales to his name, began when he called off a Monday appearance at a jazz festival in Ghent, Belgium. So far he has not revealed what illness prompted him to send out an SOS. The former teacher was the face of the massively successful Police before launching a solo career in 1985. He has also thrown his star power behind activist causes like freeing Nelson Mandela or protecting the Amazon rainforest. Sting is also well-known as a keen yoga practitioner. — AFP



In this file photo British singer Sting performs during KAABOO Texas Music Festival at the AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. — AFP



In this file photo taken on September 21, 2002, cast members from "Friends," which won Outstanding Comedy, series pose at the 54th Annual Emmy Awards in the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. — AFP

HBO Max set for 2020 streaming launch, nabs 'Friends' from Netflix

WarnerMedia will launch its new Netflix rival "HBO Max" in early 2020 after reclaiming the rights to stream its hugely popular television comedy "Friends," the company said Tuesday. The new service will enter an increasingly crowded TV streaming marketplace, vying for customers with Netflix, Hulu and Amazon as well as the soon-to-be-launched Disney+, Comcast's NBCUniversal and Apple's upcoming product. "Friends"-which ended back in 2004—is believed to be one of Netflix's most-watched shows, capturing a new generation of viewers since it was licensed by WarnerMedia to the streaming market leader in 2014.

Although Netflix rarely publishes viewership figures, it reportedly paid \$100 million to extend streaming rights by just one year for the New York-based sitcom starring Jennifer Aniston in 2018. "We're sorry to see Friends go to Warner's streaming service at the beginning of 2020 (in the US). Thanks for the memories, gang," Netflix said Tuesday in a Twitter post labeled "The One Where We Have To Say Goodbye."

As well as all 236 episodes of "Friends," the HBO Max platform will group together WarnerMedia's vast library of shows and films, along with premium HBO content including "Game of Thrones," and new original programming.

Pricing for the new service has not been announced, with more details to follow later this year, a WarnerMedia spokesman told AFP. The launch of HBO Max will see WarnerMedia become the latest media-entertainment conglomerate to move into on-demand streaming, as consumers shift away from traditional "linear" television and hefty cable TV bundles.

The announcement indicates parent company AT&T will offer a single streaming product, expanding on its existing HBO service, rather than a separate service with content from its newly acquired Time Warner and Turner television operations. As a result, the new service will also include exclusive streaming rights to shows like "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air" and "Pretty Little Liars."

HBO Max will debut with some 10,000 hours of "premium content," according to the WarnerMedia statement. "HBO Max will bring together the diverse riches of WarnerMedia to create programming and user experiences not seen before in a streaming platform," said Robert Greenblatt, chairman of WarnerMedia Entertainment. — AFP



Iraqi artist Haidar Al-Zaeem concentrates on the human element

By Abdellatif Sharaa

Bushehri gallery was the venue of an art exhibition of the works of Iraqi formative artist Haidar Al-Zaeem, who brought attention to the suffering of refugees in many countries around the world, who are seeking a decent living while escaping oppression.

The opening of the exhibition on Thursday was attended by Iraqi minister Mohammad Al-

Husseini, Sheikha Suhaila Al-Sabah, Sheikha Um Rakan Al-Sabah, Sheikh Malik Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Dr Hussein Al-Harbi, Abdelaziz Al-Enezi and artist Sami Mohammad, as well as members of the European-Arab Organization for Belgian Cultural Exchange.

The atmosphere at the gallery was one of cooperation, forgiveness and appreciation of the humanitarian mission that calls for a world free of wars and suffering. Zaeem struggled

from within on how to project this tragic dilemma of endless masses of migrants entering a dark tunnel with the faintest light at the end of it, yet hope remains evident. He concentrated on the human element while explaining the extent of suffering the migrant endures along a perilous journey to freedom and prosperity. The gathering appreciated the work of Zaeem and valued his approach, which is a living expression of a human dilemma.



A woman poses for a photograph with an installation titled "Cold Wind Sphere" by Icelandic/Danish artist Olafur Eliasson.

Eliasson recreates Icelandic nature in London's Tate Modern

With light, mist and rain, Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson brings nature into the Tate Modern for a new London exhibition that appeals to visitors' senses while, at points, disorientating them. About 40 works of art dating back over three decades are on display inside and outside the Thames-side gallery of contemporary art, including an extraordinary 11-metre high waterfall. Eliasson won acclaim here in 2003 when he filled the Tate's vast Turbine Hall with a giant blazing sun for "The Weather Project", an installation that drew more than two million visitors.

In December, the 52-year-old left 24 blocks of glacier ice to melt outside to raise awareness of the impact of global warming. This latest exhibition, "In Real Life", explores the Berlin-based artist's favorite themes, including nature, geometry and the nature of perception. Before even entering the exhibition, visitors are dazzled by three rows of yellow neon lights.

The installation uses mono-frequency lights—which suppress all colors—to transform your perception of space", said curator Mark Godfrey. "The color in your clothes seems to drain away and the color in your face seems to drain away when you're under those lights."

Rainbow and waterfall

A giant kaleidoscopic sculpture "Your Spiral View", through which visitors can walk as if in a tunnel, is aimed at encouraging them to perceive things from a different viewpoint. But the experience that is most disconcerting, even frightening, is a long corridor filled with thick mist in which the visitor loses their bearings, unable to see further than a couple of meters. Other works illustrate the impact humans have on nature, including a series of photographs taken by the artist of Iceland's glaciers in 1999. They will be replaced in the autumn with a new collection incorporating pictures taken 20 years on, revealing how much they have changed.

Nature is omnipresent in the exhibition, from a huge wall covered in moss to a rainbow formed as if by magic in a dark room where a soft rain falls. "Olafur spent a lot of



A family stand next to an art installation titled "Beauty" by Icelandic/Danish artist Olafur Eliasson.

time as (a) child in Iceland and the environment, the landscape, have affected him greatly," said Godfrey. "He was always interested in the idea of bringing the landscape into the gallery." Walking through the exhibits, "you become more aware of yourself, become more aware of your sense of sight, your sense of smell, your sense of touch". Some installations give the sense that the visitor is "co-producing the work", he added.

In one room, visitors walk in front of projectors, watching their different coloured shadows dance on the wall in front of them. The final part, dubbed "The Expanded Studio", addresses Eliasson's social and environmental concerns, including an artistic workshop he conducted with asylum-seekers and refugees. The exhibition opens today and runs until January 5, 2020. — AFP



A woman poses for a photograph next to an installation titled "Stardust Particle" by Icelandic/Danish artist Olafur Eliasson.



A woman poses for a photograph next to an art installation titled "Your uncertain shadow" by Icelandic/Danish artist Olafur Eliasson.



Icelandic/Danish artist Olafur Eliasson poses for a photograph beside his art installation titled "Your Spiral View" during a press-preview at Tate Modern in London. — AFP photos



Visitors are seen through a screen in art installation titled "Room for one color" by Icelandic/Danish artist Olafur Eliasson.

Paris says its missiles found on pro-Haftar base in Libya

PARIS: France said yesterday its missiles had been found at a Libyan base used by forces loyal to strongman Khalifa Haftar, in an embarrassing admission that raises fresh questions about its role in the conflict. Confirming a report in the New York Times, a defense ministry statement said the US-made Javelin missiles discovered in June at a camp south of Tripoli had been purchased by France. But it denied supplying them to Haftar in breach of a UN arms embargo, saying French forces operating in the war-torn country had lost track of them after they were judged to be defective.

"Damaged and out-of-use, these weapons were being temporarily stocked in a warehouse ahead of their destruction," it said. "They were not transferred to local forces." The anti-tank missiles, worth \$170,000 each, were seized when forces loyal to the UN-recognized government in Tripoli overran the pro-Haftar base in Gharyan, 100 km south of Tripoli.

Three of them were shown to journalists, including AFP reporters, on June 29 alongside Chinese-made shells bearing the markings of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The French ministry statement did not explain how the missiles were lost and the find is likely to boost

suspicious that Paris is backing Haftar on the ground. "These weapons were for the protection of forces undertaking intelligence and counter-terror missions," the French statement said.

Claudia Gazzini, senior Libya analyst at the International Crisis Group, an NGO, said the town of Gharyan had in the past housed facilities for obsolete weapons. But there were unanswered questions about whether French troops were present when the base was overrun, she said. "The French need to clarify in greater detail," she told AFP. "The open question is whether or not they are actively supporting Haftar's forces in their offensive on Tripoli."

Haftar's opponents have branded him a warlord and dictator-in-the-making, but the military strongman is backed by some Western and many regional countries as a bulwark against Islamist groups. On April 4, he launched an offensive on the Libyan capital seeking to overthrow the government of Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj. The fighting has claimed at least 1,000 lives and displaced tens of thousands of people.

Jalel Harchaoui, an expert on Libya at the Clingendael Institute, a Netherlands-based think-

tank, recalled the deaths of three French forces who were working alongside Haftar's troops in 2016. The French defense ministry statement "has no credibility", he told AFP.

French presence

France under President Emmanuel Macron has publicly denied taking sides in the conflict and has called for a UN arms embargo to be enforced. The Libyan conflict has drawn in a range of regional and international actors and the country is awash with foreign weaponry despite the UN embargo. "Before, the violations were happening but people were still cautious," Gazzini told AFP. "But now it is quite the contrary. There is no shame in boasting about the arrival of new equipment."

Analysts say Haftar has been backed by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Russia, the US and France during offensives against Islamist militias that have brought most of the country under his control. The UN-recognized government in Tripoli headed by Sarraj controls a much smaller section of territory around Tripoli in the west and draws support from Turkey, Qatar and Italy,

analysts say. In May, the government posted pictures showing the arrival of Turkish BMC Kirpi armored vehicles at Tripoli port.

France's role has caused tensions. Macron threw himself into diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict after his election in May 2017, seeing the instability as a major security worry and a source of migration to Europe. He invited Haftar and Sarraj to a peace conference in Paris in 2017 which was seen as giving the commander international legitimacy for the first time.

The UAE has also denied shipping weapons to Haftar's forces in Libya. Before the latest discoveries, UN experts were investigating so-called Chinese Blue Arrow missiles fired from a Chinese drone in a suburb of Tripoli in April which experts suspect were supplied by the UAE. In a video distributed by pro-Sarraj forces after the Haftar base in Gharyan was over-run in June, a captured commander alleges six French military advisors and UAE soldiers were at the base. This was dismissed as "fake news" by the French embassy in Tripoli. Libya descended into chaos after a 2011 uprising and NATO-backed military campaign against late dictator Muammar Gaddafi. — AFP

'Plan Bee' gets elephants to buzz off Indian railways

NEW DELHI: Indian Railways have come up with a novel way of getting elephants to buzz off from train tracks: Speakers that play the sound of bees to scare the jumbos away. Almost 70 elephants were killed by trains between 2013 and June this year, mostly in the north-eastern state of Assam and northern West Bengal. But nearly 50 buzzing amplifiers have been deployed as part of "Plan Bee" at a dozen "elephant corridors" in the vast forests of Assam state, home to nearly 6,000 elephants, 20 percent of the country's total.

"We were looking for means to stop the elephants from coming on to the tracks and our officers came up with this device," Pranav Jyoti Sharma, an Indian Railways spokesperson, told AFP. The buzzing is played as trains approach vulnerable points and can be heard up to half a mile away, the spokesman said. The devices were tested for efficiency in 2017 on domesticated elephants, and then wild ones, before they were

deployed for real last year.

The novel approach has won the team accolades from animal conservationists and on Tuesday an award for "best innovative idea" from Indian Railways for regional operator Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR). Elephants have long been known to be frightened by the buzzing of bees and stings. Villagers in the southern Indian state of Kerala have been using "bee-hive fences" to scare away marauding elephants. When elephants touch the fences, bees inside boxes attached to the fences storm out angrily to defend their colonies.

Besides the dangers posed to elephants and trains alike on railways, India has also witnessed an increase in man-animal conflict that conservationists blame on the shrinking of habitat for the wild animals. Nearly 2,300 people have been killed by elephants in the last five years, according to official figures released in June. — AFP



Iranian boats carrying commercial goods, mainly food ingredients, are pictured at Ras Al-Khor in Dubai yesterday. — AFP

Israelis seize Jerusalem home...

Continued from Page 1

Silwan that seeks to demonstrate Jews' historical connection to Jerusalem. It was in the news recently when US officials attended an inauguration of an archaeological project it organised in Silwan, another break with traditional diplomatic practice by President Donald Trump's White House that drew Palestinian outrage. Their attendance was seen as further US recognition of Israeli sovereignty over east Jerusalem.

Palestinians say Israel and groups such as Elad are on a systematic campaign to force them out of

Jerusalem. Israel occupied east Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed it in a move never recognized by the international community. It sees the entire city as its capital, while the Palestinians view the eastern sector as the capital of their future state. East Jerusalem includes highly sensitive holy sites for Christians, Muslims and Jews that are located in the Old City near Silwan. Some 600,000 Israeli settlers now live in the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem among around 2.9 million Palestinians.

Peace Now said in a statement "the settlement in Silwan not only harms the prospects for a conflict-ending agreement and stability in Jerusalem, it is also cruel and evil". It accused the settlers of "using their power and money to exhaust and impoverish the Palestinian families in legal proceedings so that they will have to agree to sell them homes." — AFP

Meanwhile, Trump warned yesterday that sanctions against Iran would soon be "increased substantially" after Tehran said it had exceeded a limit on enriched uranium reserves under a 2015 nuclear deal abandoned by Washington. "Iran has long been secretly 'enriching,' in total violation of the terrible 150 Billion Dollar deal made by John Kerry and the Obama Administration," Trump said on Twitter. "Remember, that deal was to expire in a short number of years. Sanctions will soon be increased, substantially!"

Former secretary of state Kerry spearheaded the diplomacy that led to the 2015 accord between Iran and world powers, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The deal promised sanctions relief, economic benefits and an end to international isolation in return for stringent curbs on the Islamic republic's nuclear program. But Tehran says it has lost patience with perceived inaction by European countries more than a year after Trump pulled the United States out of the agreement, reimposing stinging sanctions.

Tehran announced on Monday it had surpassed 4.5 percent uranium enrichment - above the 3.67 percent limit under the accord - though still far below the 90 percent necessary for military purposes. President Hassan Rouhani said in May that Iran would roll back its commitments under the deal in stages every 60 days in an effort to force the other parties to deliver on their side of the bargain.

Washington used a session yesterday of the International Atomic Energy Agency's 35-nation Board of Governors to accuse Iran of extortion after it inched past the deal's limit on enrichment levels, while still offering to hold talks with Tehran. But Iran's IAEA ambassador said in a German newspaper interview published yesterday that Tehran intended to preserve the nuclear deal with major powers if all other signatories honored their commitments under it. "Everything can be reversed within a single hour - if all of our partners in the treaty would just fulfill their obligations in the same way," Gharib Abadi was quoted by the weekly Die Zeit as saying.

Rouhani said yesterday the Islamic Republic's moves were permissible under the deal, rebuffing a warning by European powers to continue compliance. The Trump administration says it is open to negotiations with Iran on a more far-reaching agreement on nuclear and security issues. But Iran says it must first be able to export as much oil as it did before the US withdrawal. "There is no credible reason for Iran to expand its nuclear program, and there is no way to read this as anything other than a crude and transparent attempt to extort payments from the international community," said a Trump administration statement issued at the closed-door session of the IAEA board in Vienna. — Agencies

Merkel has third bout of shaking...

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The shaking yesterday was visible although less severe than during the first episode in June. On that occasion she appeared unsteady and shook as she stood in the midday sun next to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, whom she was welcoming with military honors. That first bout of shaking was blamed on dehydration. But a second episode struck a week later at the end of June, just hours before she was due to board a plane for a G20 summit in Japan. Officials had sought to play down fears over her health then, saying that she was fine and that she would not be cancelling any planned engagements.

Merkel has been leader of Europe's biggest economy for almost 14 years. Frequently called the European Union's most influential leader and the most powerful woman in the world, Merkel has said she will leave politics at the end of her term, in 2021. But she has struggled to stamp out repeated speculation that she may leave the political stage earlier than planned. The coalition that she had forged with the center-left Social

Democratic Party was fragile from the start, and has lurched from crisis to crisis.

The latest health scare has prompted additional questions over the length of her reign. There were brief concerns about her well-being in 2014 when she was taken ill during a television interview. The broadcast was interrupted when she experienced a drop in blood pressure. Merkel's spokesman explained at the time that the leader did not feel well for a moment, then ate and drank something and continued the interview.

Earlier that same year, she fractured her pelvis while cross-country skiing in Switzerland and was ordered to cut back her schedule dramatically and stay in bed as much as possible for three weeks. A keen hiker too, Merkel herself once asserted she had a "camel-like" ability to store energy for sleepless all-night summits. German media, which had largely refrained from speculating about Merkel's health during her second spell of shaking, said they could not look away a third time.

"Angela Merkel's health is now a political issue," said Germany's largest selling daily Bild. "If signs of physical or psychological weaknesses appear often, the government would have to rethink its stonewalling tactic. Otherwise, rumors will take on a life of their own," warned the daily. In case of emergency, Merkel would be replaced by Vice Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who would carry out her duties until parliament elected a new leader. — AFP

US wants military coalition to...

Continued from Page 1

Pompeo said last month that he hopes more than 20 countries, including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, would work together on building maritime security. "We'll need you all to participate, your military folks," Pompeo said. "The president is keen on sharing that the United States doesn't bear the cost of this."

Iran has long threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz, through which almost a fifth of the world's oil passes, if it was unable to export its oil, something US President Donald Trump's administration has sought as a way to pressure Tehran to renegotiate a deal on its nuclear program. But the US proposal for an international coalition to safeguard shipping in the Strait, at the mouth of the Gulf, has been gaining momentum since attacks in May and June against oil tankers in Gulf waters. Last month, Iran shot down a US drone near the Strait, prompting President Donald Trump to order retaliatory air strikes, only to call them off.

Although US officials had publicly discussed plans to safeguard the Strait, Dunford's disclosure that the coalition would also seek to bolster security in the Bab Al-Mandab off Yemen appeared to be a new element. The United States, as well as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have long fretted over attacks by Iran-aligned Houthi fighters in the narrow Bab Al-Mandab waterway, which connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea.

Nearly 4 million barrels of oil are shipped daily through the Bab Al-Mandab to Europe, the United States and Asia plus commercial goods. Dunford said the United States would provide "command and control" ships but said the goal would be for other countries to provide vessels to patrol waters between those command ships. The third part of the mission would involve coalition members escorting their countries' commercial vessels. "The expectation is that the actual patrolling and escorts would be done by others," he said.

Dunford said the size of the campaign could be adjusted based on the number of countries that commit to it. "This will be scalable, right? So with a small number of contributors, we can have a small mission. And we'll expand that as the number of nations that are willing to participate identify themselves," he said.

Thrown under the bus? UK envoy to...

Continued from Page 1

United States is not someone we are thrilled with, a very stupid guy," he tweeted, describing Darroch as a "pompous fool".

Darroch had been due to step down at the end of the year. "Since the leak of official documents from this Embassy there has been a great deal of speculation surrounding my position," he said. "The current situation is making it impossible for me to carry out my role as I would like." An inquiry is under way into who leaked the memos, and why. "Somebody has, for whatever malicious reasons, sought to either damage the UK-US relationship or indeed Sir Kim personally," British trade minister Liam Fox told reporters. "I don't know what the motivations would be at this stage but it is very important that we find out who actually carried out this particularly damaging act."

Britain prides itself on its "special relationship" with its closest ally and Trump himself described it as "the greatest alliance the world has ever known" during a lavish state visit to Britain last month. That relationship is of particular importance to London now, as it hopes to strike a major trade deal with Washington when it leaves the European Union. Darroch, a career diplomat who was previously Britain's envoy to the EU, had been accused by some Brexit supporters of being biased towards the bloc.

Trump himself had previously suggested that Nigel

Farage, now leader of Britain's Brexit Party, would be a good choice as ambassador, irritating British officials. Farage said this week he was not the right man for the job, but yesterday, after Darroch's resignation, tweeted: "The right decision, time (to) put in a non-Remainer who wants a trade deal with America." May said the government did not share Darroch's views of the Trump administration, but that British ambassadors should have the freedom to give frank assessments, and that it was a matter of great regret that he had felt he had to quit.

During a campaign visit yesterday, Johnson, who was himself foreign minister until a year ago, called Darroch "a superb diplomat", adding that whoever leaked the documents had "done a grave disservice to our civil servants". The main opposition Labour Party said Darroch had been bullied out by Trump and because of Johnson's "pathetic licks-pittle response". "It makes a laughing stock out of our government," said Emily Thornberry, Labour's foreign affairs spokeswoman. "(Johnson) claims to regard Winston Churchill as his hero. But just imagine Churchill allowing this humiliating, servile, sycophantic indulgence of the American president's ego to go unchallenged."

The head of Britain's diplomatic service, Simon McDonald, said it was unprecedented for a head of state, friendly or hostile, to refuse to work with British ambassadors, who are generally professional diplomats, not political appointees. The last time there was a problem with an envoy to Washington was in 1856, he said. Johnson says he should be the one to replace May because his insistence on leaving the EU as scheduled on Oct 31, with or without a transition agreement, will spur the EU to give Britain a better deal than the one she secured in two years of talks but failed to get through parliament. — Reuters

Sports

Court in a trap? Wobbly Serena faces test against wily Strycova

Serena 'saw therapist' after US Open meltdown, apologizes to Osaka

LONDON: American superstar Serena Williams is tantalizingly close to equaling Margaret Court's record haul of 24 Grand Slam titles but it's far from a certainty given her shaky displays so far at Wimbledon. The 37-year-old seven-time champion had to draw on all her strength—physical and mental—to get past unseeded compatriot Alison Riske in the last eight and faces another grass court loving opponent in Barbora Strycova in today's semi-finals.

The 33-year-old Czech veteran—the oldest player to play in a woman's semi-final for the first time—has found the thought of retirement a spur for playing some of her finest tennis and says she will step onto Centre Court "without any fear". The other semi-final pits two seeds against each other, seventh seed and former world number one Simona Halep against eighth seeded Ukrainian Elina Svitolina.

It says a lot about the turbulence of women's tennis that Williams is making her 12th semi-final appearance while of the other three only Halep has gone this far before, and that was back in 2014. Williams is the colossus that still bestrides women's tennis, but there are chinks in her armour as have been exposed both at Wimbledon and in her last two Grand Slam finals.

Outplayed by Angelique Kerber in last year's Wimbledon final and then a spectacular meltdown in the US Open defeat by Naomi Osaka gives Strycova genuine hope of an upset. Not that the diminutive Czech will require any as her bubbly character oozes optimism and her form guide is as good as any of the semi-finalists having ousted four seeds on her way to the semi-final. Williams's clay court campaign was affected by a knee injury but has accrued invaluable extra game time by playing the mixed doubles with another former world number one, Andy Murray.

'Fighting spirit'

"This is the first time since Australia (she reached the quarter-finals of the Australian Open) that I actually felt, like, good," said Williams. "It's been a really, really long year for me already, and hard year, because I'm usually not typically injured. "I don't know where I am. I do know I feel good." However, she has still looked vulnerable and Strycova's speed round the court and array of shots will pay dividends if she reproduces the lead-

en-footed performance she put up against Riske.

"She's good on the grass," Williams said of an opponent she has defeated three times without dropping a set, including the first round at Wimbledon seven years ago. "She knows what to do. She has a good all-around game. She's incredibly tricky. It's definitely not easy. "But it's something I'm definitely geared up for." Strycova for her part described Williams as a great champion and amazing athlete but if that indicated she was intimidated think again. "I don't have fear," "I don't have such a power like Serena, but I have other weapons. "I will try to use them as much as I can. I will enjoy. "I have really at this point nothing to lose."

Halep should prevail in the other clash, not only because of her greater experience and having won a Slam in last year's French Open, but she says she has at last taken to grass after not being best suited to it when she lost to Eugenie Bouchard in the 2014 semi-final. Halep showed this in impressing in her previous two matches dealing with the partisan crowd in beating Coco Gauff and then coming back from 4-1 down and break points in the first set against Zhang Shuai in her quarter-final.

"I'm a different person," said the 27-year-old Romanian. "Everything changed. I have a lot of experience now. I'm more confident. "I love grass. It's first time when I say that." Svitolina has at last broken the psychological barrier of reaching the semi-finals—four losing quarter-final appearances at other Slams testify to her inability to go further. "I am not going to give up the match easy," she said.

Meanwhile, Serena has revealed that she consulted a therapist after her infamous 2018 US Open final meltdown in which her bitter war of words with the umpire overshadowed Naomi Osaka's maiden Grand Slam victory. The American superstar was widely vilified for her New York outburst in which she branded the chair umpire a "liar" and "thief". She was handed a code violation for coaching, docked a point for smashing her racquet and penalized a game for verbal abuse.

"I couldn't find peace. I started seeing a therapist," Williams wrote in a first-person account published in US glossy magazine Harper's Bazaar. "I was searching for answers, and although I felt like I was making progress, I still wasn't ready to pick up a racquet." Williams's essay



A combination of photos shows US player Serena Williams (right) and Czech Republic's Barbora Strycova. Strycova and Williams will face each other in the women's singles semi-finals at the 2019 Wimbledon Championships today. — AFP

appeared online and on her own Instagram account in the middle of her Wimbledon quarter-final defeat of Alison Riske on Tuesday. In it, she says she has apologized to Osaka, the breakout Japanese star who won the US Open final in straight sets.

"I am so proud of you and I am truly sorry. I thought I was doing the right thing in sticking up for myself. But I had no idea the media would pit us against each other," said the 37-year-old Williams. "I would love the chance to live that moment over again. I am, was, and will always be happy for you and supportive of you. "I would never, ever want the light to shine away from another female, specifically another black female athlete." Williams said that Osaka, who went on to take the Australian Open title and the world number one spot, had accepted her apology.

Osaka's reply, she insisted, had even moved her to

tears. Despite her apology, Williams still insists she was a victim of sexism at Flushing Meadows. "Why is it that when women get passionate, they're labeled emotional, crazy, and irrational, but when men do they're seen as passionate and strong?" "So often, in situations similar to mine, when men fight back against the referees, they're met with a smile or even a laugh from the umpire, as if they're sharing an inside joke."

"I'm not asking to avoid being penalized. I am asking to be treated the same way as everyone else. Sadly, that's simply not the world we currently live in." After partnering Andy Murray in the mixed doubles on Tuesday, the American said it had been a tough decision to seek counseling. "It wasn't very easy. I've had a lot of things happen to me at that particular tournament in general," she explained. "It was just important to always try to better yourself in any way that you can." — Agencies

Burbayea claims gold at the International Jet Ski World Series



KUWAIT: Red Bull athlete and water sports extraordinaire, Mohammad Burbayea, has managed to continue his streak of success at the Jet Ski World Series 2019 in Belgium, clinching 1st place in the Pro Grand Prix category. Burbayea was able to surpass 18 other participants and global champions, Pons Teddy from France and Jorgensen Marcus from Denmark, who secured the silver and bronze medals, respectively. After a grueling 4 rounds, Mohammed had accumulated

ed a total of 214 points, 43 points ahead of the distant second place.

Right by his side, was the Kuwaiti Jet Ski team, also achieving inspiring success. A 17-member Kuwaiti team participated in Belgium from July 3rd to 7th. World champion, Mohammed Al Baz claimed 4th place in the same category while Abdul Rahman Al Omar claimed 5th. Similarly, Salem Al Mutawa managed to achieve podium level success as he completed in 3rd place in the Expert

Ski Limited category.

Belgium was the first stop of the Jet Ski World Series 2019, with the participation of 33 countries and 300 participants from across the world including representatives from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Round 2 will be hosted by Arizona in October and round 3, the final, will occur in Thailand in December. The World Series consists of several categories ranging from the Pro Ski Grand Prix to the Junior Ski 13-15 Stock.

Burbayea's journey began at the young age of five years old, where he was introduced to a jet ski through weekend get-aways with his family at their chalet. Professionally, he started entering local competitions when he was 16 years old and has since then grown into a global competitor and household name. His advice to all young hopefuls is to develop a hobby and passion into a profession.

Burbayea is the first Jet Ski racer in Kuwait and he aims to elevate the level of

competition in the country. Part of his motivation is to raise Kuwait's flag at global championships, as well as gain interest within Kuwait in the sport. Whether it is championships on a regional or global level, bringing worldwide recognition to his home country is what he makes him the proudest of his achievements. To Stay up to date with the latest from Mohammed Burbayea you can follow him on Instagram @m.burbayea or follow Red Bull @redbullkuwait.



Sports

NHL notebook: Blackhawks and Sabres swap recent 1st-rounders

Bednar signs two-year extension as NHL Avalanche coach

CHICAGO: The Chicago Blackhawks and Buffalo Sabres exchanged former first-round picks Tuesday. The Blackhawks will receive 21-year-old forward Alexander Nylander while sending 20-year-old defenseman Henri Jokiharju to Buffalo. Nylander, the No 8 overall pick in the 2016 draft, appeared in 19 career games for Buffalo, including 12 last season, when he had two goals and two assists. Jokiharju, selected 29th in the first round in 2017, posted 12 assists in 38 games for Chicago as a rookie last season. Nylander, a native of Calgary, had 31 points (12 goals, 19 assists) in 49 games for the AHL's Rochester Americans last season. Jokiharju, from Finland, posted 17 points (two goals, 15 assists) in 30 games for the Rockford IceHogs of the AHL.

Greg Johnson

Former Nashville captain Greg Johnson, who took the first faceoff in Predators history, died Tuesday in Detroit. He was 48. No cause of death was immediately reported. A second-round draft pick by the Philadelphia Flyers in 1989, Johnson scored 369 points (145 goals, 224 assists) in 785 career NHL games from 1993-2006. He served as the Predators' captain from 2002 to 2006 and still holds the franchise records for short-handed goals (11) and short-handed points (17). Johnson is survived by his wife and two children. His younger brother, Ryan Johnson, played 13 seasons in the NHL (1997-2011) with five teams.

Golden Knights

The Vegas Golden Knights avoided arbitration with Malcolm Subban, signing the goaltender to a one-year, \$850,000 contract. Subban appeared in 21 games (20 starts) for Vegas last season, with an 8-10-2 record, a

2.93 goals-against average and a .902 save percentage. Subban, 25, again will be an arbitration-eligible restricted free agent after next season. Subban, claimed off waivers from the Boston Bruins in October 2017, was 13-4-2 in the 2017-18 season with a 2.68 GAA and a .910 save percentage, helping the Golden Knights reach the Stanley Cup Final.

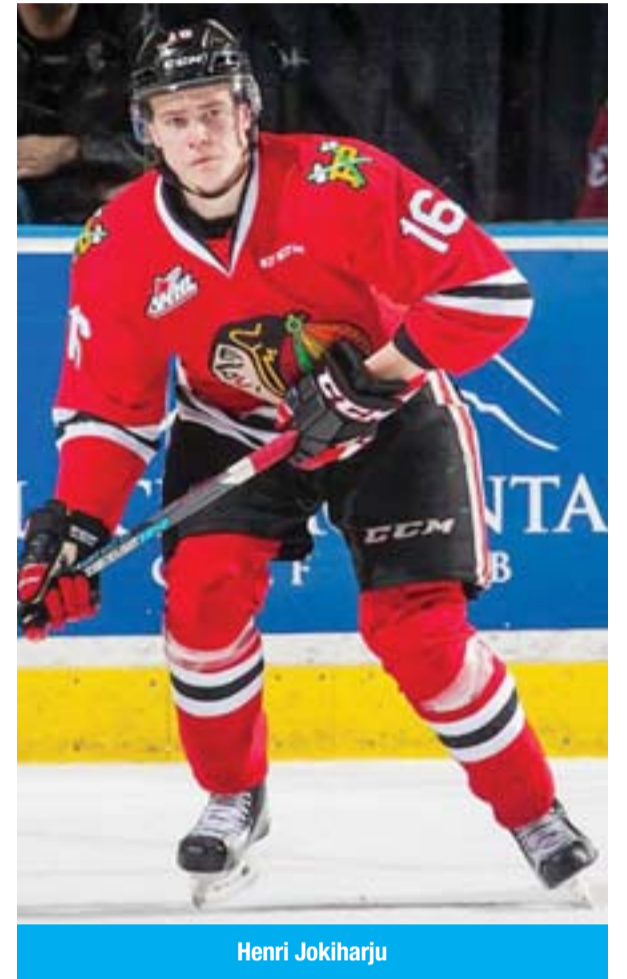
Bednar's extension

Jared Bednar, who coached the Colorado Avalanche to the club's deepest Stanley Cup playoff run since 2008, signed a two-year contract extension on Tuesday, the National Hockey League club announced. The deal takes the 47-year-old Canadian through the 2021-22 campaign. The Avalanche went 38-30 with 14 overtime losses last season and reached the playoffs for the second time in three seasons under Bednar, beating Calgary in the first round of the NHL playoffs before falling to San Jose in the second round. "Jared has done a tremendous job behind the bench and has earned the opportunity to continue leading this team," Avalanche general manager Joe Sakic said. "We are excited with what this group can do moving forward."

Bednar is 103-116-27 in three seasons with the Avalanche and 9-9 in 18 playoff contests since replacing Patrick Roy as coach in August 2016. "I'd like to thank (owners) Stan and Josh Kroenke, Joe Sakic and the entire Avalanche organization for continuing to show their faith in me to lead this team," Bednar said. "We're moving in the right direction with the group that we have here. This team has an exciting future and I'm ecstatic to be part of it." The Avalanche last won the Stanley Cup in 2001. They also took the title in 1996 in the first season after they moved to Denver from Quebec City.—Agencies



Alexander Nylander



Henri Jokiharju

Kuwait national boxing team in Baku



By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait national boxing team will participate in friendly matches for the third day with its Azerbaijan counterpart, as part of its training camp that is being held since July 1st in Baku. The team is preparing for the Asian championships to be hosted by Kuwait Aug 1st - 9th under the patronage of



Kuwait Olympic Committee Chairman Sheikh Fahad Nasser Al-Sabah.

Head of Kuwait delegation Jaber Hizam lauded the discipline of the team members, adding that moral is at its best, as all are looking forward to win and hoist Kuwait's flag high during one of the most important international tournaments. Hizam said the camp activities are going according to the program put by the

technical department to get the best preparation possible, adding that there will be another local.

Meanwhile, national trainer Hamid Zayed said training is done mornings and evenings, and it includes six friendly matches. He said despite time constraints and boxers lack of international experience due to the suspension, "we felt high efficiency by boxers during the first friendly matches with Azerbaijan team."

NBA allows coach's challenge, replay center reviews

NEW YORK: NBA team owners unanimously approved two changes to instant replay rules on Tuesday that will allow a coach's challenge and other video reviews triggered by the NBA Replay Center. The measures, recommended by the NBA competition committee, are being used in NBA Summer League games and will be adopted on a one-season trial basis for the 2019-20 campaign.

In all cases, "clear and conclusive visual evidence" will be required to declare a call incorrect and overturn a referee's decision. The coach's challenge is available in a limited set of situations, provided a team has at least one timeout remaining. The replay center reviews were first tested at last year's summer league.

"These initiatives further strengthen our officiating program and help referees make the right call," NBA President of League Operations Byron Spruell said. "Giving head coaches a voice will enhance the confidence in our replay process among teams and fans and add a new, exciting strategic element to our game. "Enabling the NBA Replay Center to trigger instant replay will improve game flow and provide real-time awareness of any adjustments to the score."

Each team is allowed one challenge a game, successful or not, on a personal foul charged to a player on that team, an out of bounds call or whistles for goaltending or basket interference. A personal foul challenge can come at any point in a game but in the final two minutes of the fourth quarter or overtimes, only the on-court referees can instigate challenges for basket interference, goaltending or out of bounds calls. To challenge, a team must call a timeout and the coach must signal the challenge by twirling a finger toward the referees. The penalty for attempting to challenge without a timeout is a technical foul and no challenge to the call will be given. Calling a timeout to challenge an event that cannot be reviewed will cost the team the timeout but it will keep the right to make a challenge. The NBA Replay Center can instigate replays in the first 46 minutes of regulation time and the first three minutes of overtime periods for certain issues.—AFP

India FA backs Super League as domestic turmoil continues

MUMBAI: India's FA has thrown its weight behind a popular franchise-based league by calling on the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) to award its champions a slot in the continent's elite club competition. Currently, the winners of the traditional I-League are awarded the AFC Champions League slot, while the champions of the upstart Indian Super League (ISL) gain entry to the secondary AFC Cup competition.

The ISL, promoted by billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries and Rupert Murdoch's Star India TV, has grown in popularity since its 2014 launch, whereas interest in the I-League has stagnated. The I-League was formed in 2007 as a rebrand of the National Football League, India's first professional league launched in 1996. Openly backing the ISL as the

NSW clinch Origin series

SYDNEY: A try thirty seconds from time clinched New South Wales back-to-back State of Origin rugby league series triumphs yesterday over Queensland in Sydney. The titanic decider was locked at 20-20 in the final moments before fullback James Tedesco scored his second try of the night to clinch a 26-20 victory over the Maroons. It was the defending champion Blues first back-to-back series win since 2005, while Queensland were gunning for their 12th title in 14 years.

NSW looked to have opened a match-winning 20-8 lead after tries from Tedesco and hooker Damien Cook midway through the second half, before Queensland roared back. Forwards Josh McGuire and Josh Papalii scored tries and Ethan Lowe levelled the match with a pressure conversion with three minutes left. But the Blues had the final word

country's elite competition for the first time, the Indian FA (AIFF) said its recommendation was based on the Master Rights Agreement it signed in 2010 with its commercial partners Football Sports Development Limited.

It said in a statement "... in the last five years the entire Indian National squad are mostly being signed/playing for the ... Indian Super League clubs. "TV viewership and in-stadia audience having grown far more substantially vis a vis the ... I-League," it added. The AIFF has been toying with the idea of merging the leagues before deciding to let both continue for the time being. Earlier this week, six I-League clubs wrote to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi requesting intervention and an enquiry into the running of the AIFF.

The AIFF said it has sought help from the AFC to sort out the issues plaguing soccer in the country. "The AIFF Executive Committee requests the Asian Football Confederation to send a high-level delegation ... at the earliest to discuss this issue with all stakeholders of Indian football ... to arrive at a fair solution," it said. Cricket-mad India, home to 1.3 billion people, is a massive underachiever as far as football is concerned and the country has yet to make a single appearance at the World Cup finals. — Reuters

before their fans in the 82,500 crowd, and recalled scrum-half Mitchell Pearce moved the ball wide for centre Tom Trbojevic to link with winger Blake Ferguson.

Ferguson skipped clear of a tackle and kept his balance centimetres from the touch line before passing to Tedesco for the winning try. Tedesco was awarded the player of the series after a starring role for the Blues, who fought back from losing the series opener in Brisbane. "It's unbelievable. I thought it was going to golden point (sudden death extra time)... it's an unbelievable feeling," Tedesco said.

The Maroons won a pulsating opening clash in Brisbane 18-14 but NSW bounced back to crush their arch-rivals 38-6 in neutral venue Perth to set up the blockbuster final in Sydney. "I'm just so happy for the boys, for coach Brad Fittler... the hurt they went through throughout the years, and see how happy they are now," skipper Boyd Cordner said. Queensland, smarting from their heavy defeat in the second game, had the better of the opening half and led 8-2 after a try by Felise Kaufusi off a Corey Norman grubber kick after 15 minutes.—AFP

NFL notebook: On audio, Chiefs' Hill heard denying assault

KANSAS: In a full version of an audio recording aired by a Kansas City radio station on Tuesday, Chiefs star wide receiver Tyreek Hill is heard denying assaulting his fiancée, although Hill pleaded guilty to an assault and battery charge in 2015. Dan Graziano of ESPN reported that NFL investigators have already heard the full recording and are including that in deciding any potential discipline to be levied on Hill.

The Chiefs announced in late April that Hill has been barred from team activities. In three seasons with the Chiefs after he was a fifth-round draft choice out of West Alabama in 2016, Hill has 223 catches for 3,255 yards and 25 touchdowns. In the just released section of the recording, played by 610 KCSP radio, Hill is heard telling Crystal Espinal that he "didn't touch you in 2014. You f---ing ruined my life and you lied on me in 2014. I'm still not over that. I didn't touch you in 2014."

Kendrick Norton

The NFL has offered to pay the medical bills for Miami Dolphins defensive tackle Kendrick Norton, the player's agent told ESPN. The 22-year-old suffered career-ending injuries in a car accident last week, including the amputation of his left arm. A GoFundMe page set up to raise additional financial support for Norton had raised more than \$10,000. Agent Malki Kawa said Norton's "spirits are up considering the traumatic accident that he suffered and he's thankful for the support."

Glover Quin

Former Detroit Lions safety Glover Quin will retire from the NFL after 10 seasons. Quin, a fourth-round pick of the Texans in 2009, spent his first four seasons in Houston before joining the Lions. Detroit released the 33-year-old in February and he chose not to sign with another team. Quin, who started the final 148 games of his career and had 24 interceptions, announced his decision to ESPN via text message. Quin led the league with seven interceptions and earned a Pro Bowl selection in 2014.

Scouting Combine

The NFL will hold its second International Scouting Combine in Cologne, Germany, on Oct 19. As many as 50 players will be invited to participate in the event, which took place last year in Australia. The athletes will participate in drills similar to those at the Combine for college prospects that is held in Indianapolis each February. Participants who successfully move into the International Player Pathway program will get the opportunity to work with NFL teams during the offseason and remain on the practice squad throughout the season.

Eagles

Philadelphia Eagles offensive tackle Jordan Mailata (Australia) and Carolina Panthers defensive end Efe Obada (Nigeria) reached the NFL through the program. Mailata was the Eagles' seventh-round pick in the 2018 NFL Draft. Obada tallied 2.0 sacks and an interception last season. — Reuters

Sports

Madagascar tongue-twisters tackle Tunisia for semis place

Indian Ocean islanders stunned three-time champions Nigeria

CAIRO: Before the Africa Cup of Nations kicked off in Egypt last month, Madagascar were best known for the tongue-twisting surnames of players such as Anicet Andrianantenaina and Charles Andriamahitsinoro. Now, 20 days into the biennial tournament, the Indian Ocean islanders have stunned three-time champions Nigeria and are preparing to face Tunisia today in the last quarter-final. While France-born coach Nicolas Dupuis insists "the team is the star", midfielder Andrianantenaina and forward Andriamahitsinoro have caught the eye.

Bulgaria-based Andrianantenaina was among the 11 footballers chosen by a Confederation of African Football (CAF) panel as the best in the 36-match group phase. Andriamahitsinoro, who plays for a Saudi Arabian club, made the substitutes' list in the group 'dream team', and his two goals have put him in contention for the Golden Boot award. "The coach is correct to say the team is the star and, sometimes, an individual will stand out when we need him to. That is our strength," explained Andriamahitsinoro.

He stands out on the field because he has blond dyed hair and is tall in a squad of mostly medium-height footballers. Tunisia coach Alain Giresse says his first target of a last-eight place has been achieved, adding: "We are capable of lifting the trophy 15 years after doing so for the first time." Here, AFP Sport looks at Thursday's last-eight matches as Algeria face the Ivory Coast in a clash of former champions before Madagascar meet 2004 winners Tunisia.

Madagascar v Tunisia

The countries have met competitively only twice

with Tunisia winning 1-0 at home and 2-0 away in 2002 World Cup qualifying. Since then, Tunisia hosted and won a Cup of Nations while Madagascar became so weak that the Democratic Republic of Congo went to Antananarivo three years ago and won a qualifier 6-1.

But while unimpressive Tunisia reached the quarter-finals with four straight draws—a penalty shootout win over Ghana was officially classified as a draw—Madagascar blossomed. Apart from the 2-0 triumph over African powerhouses Nigeria, they defeated fellow debutants Burundi and held Guinea and DR Congo playing eye-pleasing football. Should Madagascar eliminate vastly more experienced Tunisia, they will become the first Cup of Nations debutants since South Africa in 1996 to reach the semi-finals.

Algeria v Ivory Coast

This clash extends one of the great rivalries in the tournament with the Ivorian Elephants winning three and the Algerian Desert Foxes two of seven previous meetings. When they last met, in a 2015 quarter-final, Ivory Coast triumphed 3-1 with Serey Die part of the winning team while the losing line-up included Riyad Mahrez. The midfielders, who have contrasting roles with Die primarily a destroyer and Mahrez a creator, captain the teams in Suez four years later. Algeria coach Djamel Belmadi believes his team, the only survivors with a 100 percent record in Egypt, can go all the way, saying: "It does not cost anything to be ambitious." Rival coach Ibrahim Kamara is saying little during this Cup of Nations while a side boasting star attackers like Nicolas Pepe, Jonathan Kodjia and Wilfried Zaha has yet to sparkle.—AFP



ALEXANDRIA: Madagascar's players try to block a free-kick during the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) Round of 16 football match at the Alexandria Stadium. — AFP

Confetti flies on Broadway as NY fetes US women soccer team

NEW YORK: Amid confetti and chants of "equal pay," New York honored the US women's soccer team yesterday with a ticker-tape parade down the "Canyon of Heroes," celebrating its World Cup triumph and paying tribute to the players' emergence as icons of women's rights. The squad's 2-0 win over Netherlands in the final match on Sunday capped a World Cup campaign that attracted vast television audiences and unprecedented public interest.

The parade down Broadway in New York's financial district also cast a light on the team's fight for equal pay with their counterparts on the US men's national team, and by extension, the issue of equal pay for equal work for women in general. As the parade kicked off, families pressed up against the metal police barriers, eager to catch a glimpse of players like Alex Morgan, Carli Lloyd and Megan Rapinoe, the tournament's top scorer and an outspoken team leader, as they rode on open floats along the parade route.

"They shouldn't have to win a title to get paid the right amount," said Jessica Hicks, a New Jersey teacher who was watching the parade with her 14-year-old daughter Aria. Olivia Ciampi, 15, of Rockaway, Queens, who joined the throng with her mother, agreed equal pay for the team was long overdue. "They work so hard and they win so many titles and they really do so much and they deserve it," she said.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo took it a step further, telling a press conference that if pay is based on performance, the women's team should be better compensated than the men's. "They play the same game that men soccer players play. By the way, they play it better, with better results," Cuomo said. "If there's any economic rationale, the men should get paid less than the women. Let's be honest!" In March, all 28 players on the women's team filed a gender discrimination law-



NEW YORK: Members of the World Cup-winning US women's team take part in a ticker tape parade for the women's World Cup champions yesterday in New York. — AFP

suit against the US Soccer Federation, demanding their compensation equal that of their male counterparts.

"The level of interest and excitement is much higher from four years ago," said Jessica Lappin, president of the parade's organizers, Alliance of Downtown New York, referring to the 2015 parade for the team after its last World Cup victory. "That's partly because they're women's rights icons now." The parade route is up Broadway through the heart of Manhattan's financial district, from Battery Park to City Hall, a path dubbed "the Canyon of Heroes."

At the end of the route, Mayor Bill de Blasio and other politicians will pay tribute to the team, while some of the players are likely to address the crowd. Past honorees have included John F. Kennedy after his nomination as Democratic presidential candidate; Neil

Armstrong and other Apollo 11 astronauts after their mission to the moon; and Queen Elizabeth II. In recent decades, the city has hosted a much smaller number of parades and most of them have honored championship sports teams, including the New York Yankees and New York Giants.

Despite the name, today's "ticker tape" parades are missing the real stuff — the ubiquitous strips of paper that ran through stock tickers that once provided price quotes for Wall Street traders. Instead of ticker tape, about a ton of confetti made from shredded paper, tossed from about 20 buildings, rained down on the team as they ride in open vehicles up Broadway, according to the Alliance of Downtown New York. Unlike in years past, most of the office towers along the route lack windows that can open. — Reuters

AL defeats NL again in 90th All-Star Game

OHIO: The American League held on to defeat the National League 4-3 in the 90th All-Star Game at Progressive Field in Cleveland on Tuesday for its seventh straight win. With the AL holding a 4-1 lead in the top of the eighth, rookie Pete Alonso of the NL's New York Mets, who won the Home Run Derby on Monday, singled with the bases loaded and two out to make it 4-3, but Brad Hand of the Cleveland Indians got Mike Moustakas of the Milwaukee Brewers to pop out to Chicago White Sox catcher James McCann in foul territory.

The New York Yankees' Aroldis Chapman struck out the side in the ninth for the save. MVP honors went to Indians second-year pitcher Shane Bieber, who pitched a scoreless fifth inning and struck out all three batters he faced. The AL holds a 45-43-2 advantage and has outscored the NL 373-370. The AL also has a 25-6-1 record over the last 32 All-Star Games.

A familiar face in Cleveland gave the AL a 1-0 lead in the second inning when former Indian Michael Brantley doubled to drive in Houston teammate Alex Bregman, who had an infield single. Added with George Springer's single in the first, it was the first time in All-Star Game history that the first three hits by a league came from players on the same team. Brantley played 10 seasons for the Indians and was an All-Star in 2014, '17 and '18. He told Fox during the game that he was moved by the ovation he received during the introductions. "I always want to make sure the fans know how appreciative I am that they supported me for 10 years of being here and in this outfield," he said. After Bieber struck out the NL's Willson Contreras, Ketel Marte and Ronald Acuna Jr in the top of the fifth, the AL responded in the bottom of the inning to go up 2-0. New York Yankees catcher Gary Sanchez, who began the inning with a double, scored on an infield single by Jorge Polanco of the Minnesota Twins. — Reuters

Solskjaer: Media have an 'agenda' against Pogba

MELBOURNE: Manchester United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has moved to hose down speculation that Paul Pogba is unhappy and set to leave the club, declaring the media have an "agenda" against the French World Cup winner. Pogba's agent recently told The Times that the troubled 26-year-old intends to leave United, while the player, himself, said in Tokyo last month that he thought it might be time for a "new challenge somewhere else".

Serie A club Juventus and La Liga giants Real Madrid have been linked with Pogba, and the speculation has followed United to Australia on their pre-season tour ahead of a match against A-League side Perth Glory on Saturday. Pogba has two years left on his contract, with the option for a third, however, and Solskjaer hit out at media for indulging in the transfer talk. "Agents talk all the time. As I said, we've not had any bids from any clubs," he told reporters in Perth on Wednesday.

"That's all I can say about this matter. There is an agenda against Paul, he's a top, top bloke. A great professional, there's never been any problems and he's got a heart of gold." Pogba, who moved to Old Trafford from Juventus for a then-world record transfer fee of 89.3 million pounds (\$112.43 million) in August 2016, was named in last season's PFA Premier League Team of the Year and has scored 31 goals in 142 appearances in all competitions.

But he has frustrated fans with his inconsistency, and a series of low-key performances last season culminated in clashes with angry supporters in the final-day home defeat by relegated Cardiff. Manchester United posted a video of the



Paul Pogba

team taking a stroll through Perth on its social media accounts earlier in the week but the upbeat soundtrack of electronic music could not disguise what appeared to be a heated exchange between Pogba and team mate Jesse Lingard.

Grimming defender Victor Lindelof came between the pair and threw an arm around Pogba as they continued walking but the moment sparked speculation of a rift in the camp. Solskjaer said there was nothing in it. "For example, Jesse and Paul walking around and it's been portrayed as a fight between the two boys," he said. "I know you're here to sell papers and sell stories but that's nothing, no problems between the boys at all. They're all professional. Pre-season has been very, very good so far." — Reuters

AC Milan and Inter Milan launch bid to build new stadium

ROME: AC Milan and Inter Milan have launched their bid to knock down the iconic San Siro and build a new 60,000-capacity home on the same site, the Serie A giants announced yesterday. "Today, AC Milan SpA (AC Milan) and FC Internazionale Milano SpA (FC Internazionale) filed with the Municipality of Milan the 'Technical and Economic Feasibility Study' for the new Milan stadium and its multifunctional district," the clubs said in a joint statement.

The proposal is the first step towards construction of a new ground adjacent to the current San Siro, while the old stadium will make way for an area "dedicated to sports, entertainment, and shopping". The two clubs say that the project will require investment of 1.2 billion euros (\$1.34 billion) and lead to jobs for 3,500 people.

Eventual approval from the city for the proposal filed yesterday would give a preliminary green light and mean Milan and Inter would then have to provide a "definitive plan" which would also have to be approved before any building

could begin. The proposal also said it was not possible to renovate the existing San Siro. Milan president Paolo Scaroni and Inter CEO Alessandro Antonello had already announced last month the clubs' intention to knock the San Siro down, but have met resistance from the city's mayor Giuseppe Sala.

Sala said the current ground, which is owned by the city, would still be standing in 2026 as it was included in the victorious Milan-Cortina d'Ampezzo bid for that year's Winter Olympics as site of the opening ceremony. Most clubs in Italy play in stadiums owned by local authorities, although that has been slowly changing in recent years. Atalanta, who are in next season's Champions League after finishing ahead of the Milan clubs in May, are building a new ground on the site of the formerly city-owned Stadio Atleti Azzurri d'Italia.

Serie A rivals Roma are also trying to get a similar project in the south-west of the Italian capital built, but it has been stuck in a bureaucratic quagmire since being given initial 'public interest' approval in 2014. Their project is complicated by the need to build infrastructure to serve the 52,500-capacity arena and disputes over the proposed adjacent business park. Juventus, meanwhile, have won the Serie A title every season since their Allianz Stadium was opened in 2011. Their rebirth since relegation in the aftermath of the 'Calciopoli' match-fixing scandal has been helped by a marked increase in revenues from the redeveloped ground.—AFP

25 Court in a trap? Wobbly Serena faces test against wily Strycova

27 Confetti flies on Broadway; NY fetes US women's soccer team

27 American League overpower National 4-3 in All-Star Game



NZ stun India in WCup thriller

New Zealand reach final despite Jadeja heroics



MANCHESTER: New Zealand's Matt Henry celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of India's Rohit Sharma for one during the 2019 Cricket World Cup first semi-final between New Zealand and India at Old Trafford in Manchester yesterday. — AFP

MANCHESTER: New Zealand (NZ) stunned India to reach their second successive World Cup final as they survived Ravindra Jadeja's late heroics to clinch a thrilling 18-run win at Old Trafford yesterday. It was a superb display by the underdog Black Caps, who came into the match on the back of three straight defeats by Pakistan, Australia and England and only qualified for the semi-finals on net run-rate, while India topped the 10-team group stage.

New Zealand will face the winners of today's second semi-final between Australia - the team that beat them in the 2015 final - and hosts England in Sunday's title match at Lord's. "We had to ask a lot of questions. We pride ourselves on always giving ourselves a chance. They have world-class finishers and we knew we'd have to bowl them out to win. It's special to be going to Lord's on Sunday."

Two-time world champions India lost key batsmen Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and KL Rahul for just one run each. They slumped to five for three in pursuit of a target of 240 and were 24 for four when Dinesh Karthik was out. New Zealand pacemen Henry (three for 37) and Trent Boult (two for 42) did the damage with the

new ball. Shell-shocked India captain Kohli admitted his team had paid the price for the dismal start to their innings.

"It's tough, 45 minutes of bad cricket put you out of the tournament. It's hard to come to terms with but New Zealand deserve it. They put us under pressure and came through in the key moments," Kohli said. "Our shot selection could've been better but otherwise we played a good brand of cricket and I'm proud of the way we played." India, one of the pre-tournament favorites, were all but beaten at 92 for six when Jadeja came in to bat alongside MS Dhoni.

The pair gave India hope during a World Cup record seventh-wicket stand of 116, all-rounder Jadeja boldly leading the way with 77. Jadeja hit well-struck sixes off both Jimmy Neesham and left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner during a 39-ball fifty. With 10 overs left, India were 150 for six and needing a further 90 runs off the final 60 balls of the innings. Jadeja got them closer with a superb straight six off fast bowler Lockie Ferguson and, with five overs left, the target was down to 52.

But left-hander Jadeja's 59-ball innings, featuring four fours and four sixes, ended when he skied Boult to New Zealand captain Kane Williamson. With India needing 31 off two overs, Dhoni uppercut Ferguson for six to the delight of the massed ranks of India fans in

the crowd. But going for a second run to keep the strike, the 38-year-old Dhoni, India's 2011 World Cup-winning captain, was just run out by Martin Guptill's direct hit for 50 off 72 balls.

Shock victory

With 23 required off the last six balls, tailender Yuzvendra Chahal glanced Neesham for four. But the match finished with three balls to spare when Chahal edged to wicketkeeper Tom Latham, a review confirming his dismissal and New Zealand's shock victory. Sharma, who had already made a five hundreds at this tournament - a record for a single World Cup, began the procession of top-order dismissals when he was caught behind off Henry.

Kohli fell next, lbw to a superb inswinger from left-armier Boult. India were then five for three when Rahul was brilliantly caught by a diving Latham after edging Henry. Neesham then held a brilliant superb one-handed catch at backward point to dismiss Karthik off Henry.

Rishabh Pant holed out for 32 when he was caught at deep midwicket by Colin de Grandhomme following a lofted sweep off Santner, leaving India slipping towards an unexpected exit. Earlier, New Zealand added 28 runs in the remaining 23 balls of their innings to finish



MANCHESTER: India's Rohit Sharma reacts at the end of play during the 2019 Cricket World Cup first semi-final between New Zealand and India yesterday. New Zealand beat India by 18 runs. — AFP

on 239-8 after rain had stopped play on Tuesday. Ross Taylor, who resumed on 67 not out, top-scored with 74 after Williamson had made a masterly 67 in awkward conditions.—AFP

England face an acid test in WCup semis

MANCHESTER: Four years of planning will be put on the line for England when they face holders Australia in a blockbuster Cricket World Cup semi-final at Edgbaston today. England's woeful first-round exit at the 2015 edition prompted a complete rethink of their approach to one-day internationals for a side that had long placed Test success above all other considerations. Australian coach Trevor Bayliss was drafted in with the aim of guiding their bid for a first World Cup title.

The transformation has been impressive,

with England climbing to number one in the ODI rankings under the astute captaincy of Eoin Morgan. Their rise to the summit has been based on dynamic run-scoring, with in-form openers Jason Roy and Jonny Bairstow leading the way. But the stakes for hosts England are higher than simply the winning of a match that would see them into a final against either India or New Zealand at Lord's on Sunday.

Satellite subscription host broadcaster Sky has said it will allow the final to be shown on free-to-air television in Britain-but only if England are involved in the showpiece match. It would be the first time since 2005 that a major England men's home match had emerged from behind a UK television paywall, with cricket having a chance to reconnect with a 'lost' audience in its birthplace.

Australia, however, have never lost any of their seven previous World Cup semi-

finals-although they did tie with South Africa at Edgbaston 20 years ago before advancing into the final on superior net run-rate. They landed a psychological blow in the group stage when they beat Ashes rivals England by 64 runs at Lord's last month.

Australia left-arm quicks Jason Behrendorff and Mitchell Starc shared nine wickets between them in a match where Australia captain Aaron Finch made 100 after surviving a testing opening from England's fast bowlers. Roy, however, was missing with a torn hamstring and since his return, England have scored crucial wins over India and New Zealand that took them into the semi-finals.

'Different animal'

By contrast Australia, who have not won in any format at Edgbaston since the 2001 Ashes Test, suffered a surprise 10-run

defeat by South Africa at Old Trafford in their final group game. England, as well as finding a way to cope with Starc, will have to contain the run-scoring threat of a powerful Australian top order.

David Warner has scored 638 runs this tournament following the left-handed opener's return to international cricket after a 12-month ban for his role in a ball-tampering scandal in South Africa. But paceman Liam Plunkett insisted England could rise to the occasion. "We're a different sort of animal compared to our last teams," he said. "We've played well for the past four years, we're ranked number one. "We feel on our day we can beat anyone in the world."

The five-time world champions, will pitch late call-up Peter Handscomb straight into today's match after fellow batsman Usman Khawaja suffered a tournament-ending hamstring injury against South

Africa. Australia coach Justin Langer led his squad on a barefoot walkabout around Edgbaston on Monday before they shared stories on the outfield in a so-called "bonding circle". "Haydos (Matthew Hayden) and I used to do it as a bit of a ritual before every Test match," former Australia opener Langer explained.

"If you go back 12 months there wasn't much to be relaxed and chilled about in Australian cricket, was there? We went through a major crisis in our cricket. It didn't just affect our cricket, it affected our country. "We've got to work hard on being more humble in what we do and being focused on playing good cricket." But despite the coach's new-age talk, Australia's Nathan Lyon tried to put pressure on England in typically acerbic style. "It's all on them," the off-spinner said. "It's their World Cup to lose if you ask me." — AFP