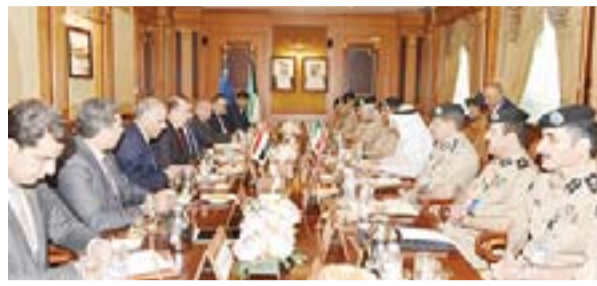




2 Interior minister discusses security cooperation with Iraqi counterpart



9 Outrage mounts over raped teen's suspicious car crash



24 Fears grow for India's missing coffee tycoon



27 Sudan footballers hope for revolution boost



US dollar rises 0.2% against Kuwaiti dinar; GDP up 1.2%

Central Bank bolstering foundations of domestic economy

KUWAIT: Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel announced yesterday the average rate of the US dollar against the Kuwaiti dinar in the fiscal year 2018-2019 stood at 302.743 fils, rising by 0.2 percent compared to 2017. In a press release, the governor said the gross domestic product (GDP), on basis of constant rates, rose 1.2 percent last year against a decline estimated at 3.5 percent in 2017.

Hashel was speaking on the occasion of the CBK's issuance of the 47th annual report for the fiscal year 2018-2019 and the 47th economic report for 2018. Continuous follow-up on local economic, monetary and banking developments as well as monitoring interest rate trends on major global currencies kept the discount rate for the fiscal year 2018-2019 at the same level - 3 percent - since March 2018.

The close follow-up was in line with the CBK's efforts to bolster foundations of the domestic economy, in tandem with preserving attractiveness and competitiveness of the national currency as an incubator for domestic savings, Hashel added. Moreover, the Central Bank in the past year preserved relative stability of the Kuwaiti dinar, keeping it pegged to a balanced basket of currencies of states with substantial commercial bonds with Kuwait, he said.

This was visible in the developments that had taken place in the foreign exchange market, where the average exchange rate of the US dollar against the Kuwaiti dinar for the fiscal year 2018-2019 stood at approximately 302.743 fils for a dollar, in contrast with 302.052 fils per dollar in the previous fiscal year, a rise of the USD exchange rate estimated at 0.692 fils (0.2 percent).

With respect to monetary and banking developments, the CBK governor said money supply in the broad concept (M2) increased five percent at the end of the 2018-2019 fiscal year in comparison to the end of the previous fiscal year. Assets of the cash used from credit facilities offered by local banks to various domestic economic sectors climbed at the end of the fiscal year 2018-2019 by 5.2 percent. Deposits by residents (both citizens and expatriates) in local banks rose 2.4 percent at the end of the fiscal year. Aggregate budget for local banks grew by 5.6 percent.

Regarding the economic report for the year 2018, Hashel indicated that its first section sheds light on main trends of the Kuwaiti economy in terms of data and statistics about national, local accounts, the population and the labor force. Statistics showed growth in added value in the constant prices of the overall non-oil sectors by 1.1 percent in 2018,

in contrast to 1.8 percent in the previous year. Meanwhile, the added value in the fixed prices in oil sectors climbed 1.3 percent against a downturn totaling 7.2 percent in the previous year.

The Kuwaiti dinar relatively steadied against major currencies in 2018. As a result of the changes of interest on main global currencies, the CBK only once increased the discount rate by 0.25 percent in March 2018, reaching three percent. Aggregate accumulated budget of the local banks grew by 4.9 percent at the end of 2018 compared to the 2017 level.

Meanwhile, the identical budget for local exchange dealers registered at the CBK rose 1.2 percent, while that of local investment companies registered at the Central Bank rose 11.1 percent. Achieved surplus in the commodity balance rose 58.6 percent due to the rise of oil exports, following noticeable increase of crude prices in international markets. Current account posted a surplus of KD 6.1 billion (\$30 billion) in 2018, while balance of payments in the same year posted an overall surplus, valued at KD 1.1 billion (\$3.6 billion). In conclusion, he indicated the last sections of the economic report shed light on developments at Bursa Kuwait (the stock market) last year. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel hands HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah a copy of the 47th annual report of the 2018-2019 fiscal year and the 47th economic report for 2018 at Bayan Palace yesterday. — KUNA

Half of public workers 'useless', burden on state

KUWAIT: Half of government employees do not work and do not produce anything, which means around 195,000 employees in all government departments are practically useless. This is what the IMF World Bank, consultation offices and local studies have confirmed. Economist Jassim Al-Saadoun said Kuwait is the number one in the world as far as the number of public employees are concerned compared to the total population.

Financial sources warned against increasing the numbers of those who do not have any designation except being a

part of masked unemployment, with the exception of education, medical, nursing and other sectors that are suffering from a shortage of Kuwaiti employees.

The sources said there is no justification for piling up employees from the economic point of view; rather it will lead to a financial catastrophe, as salaries ate up 63 percent of oil revenues last year. Administrators said this also leads to negative outcomes, such as inequality between productive and non-productive workers, which frustrates those who are doing real jobs and fuels corruption. — Al-Qabas

Interior ministry firm on tackling human trafficking

KUWAIT: The interior ministry yesterday underlined its commitment to combating the crime of human trafficking and has set up various departments solely for this goal. The remarks were made in a speech delivered by the Director of Public Investigations Maj Gen Fahd Al-Dosari at the launch ceremony of an awareness campaign on this issue.

The ceremony was organized jointly by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) under the auspices of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, in the presence of the Representative of the Secretary-General and United Nations Resident Coordinator Dr Tareq Al-Sheikh, and head of the UN migration mission in Kuwait Eman Erekat.

Continued on Page 24

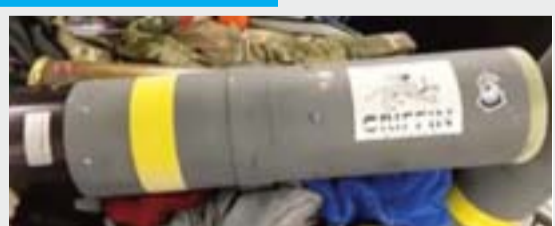


KUWAIT: Senior officials from the interior ministry, IOM and the US ambassador to Kuwait are seen during an anti-human trafficking event at The Avenues mall yesterday. — KUNA

News in brief

Man falls to death

KUWAIT: A 65-year-old Kuwaiti plunged to his death from the 11th floor of a Fintas building. The building's haris called police and told them about a bloodied body in the building's yard. The deceased's wife told police that he was speaking loudly over the phone, then she was surprised to see him jump from the window. The coroner recovered the body and the wife was detained. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun



Missile launcher 'souvenir' from Kuwait

WASHINGTON: US transport security officers confiscated a missile launcher from a checked bag at Baltimore/Washington international airport on Monday, with a Texas man saying it was a souvenir from Kuwait. The "man said he was bringing it back from Kuwait as a souvenir. Perhaps he should have picked up a keychain instead!" Transportation Security Administration (TSA) spokeswoman Lisa Farbstein tweeted. The TSA said "the man, a resident of Jacksonville, Texas, told officials that he was an active military personnel". "Fortunately the item was not a live device. It was confiscated and handed over to the state fire marshal for safe disposal. The man was permitted to catch his flight," TSA said. — AFP

Talks cancelled as Sudan killings trigger outrage

KHARTOUM: Sudanese protest leaders cancelled planned talks with the country's ruling generals yesterday as hundreds of schoolchildren demonstrated in Khartoum against the shooting dead of five pupils at a rally. "Killing a student is killing a nation," chanted crowds of schoolchildren, dressed in their uniforms and waving Sudanese flags, in the capital's eastern district of Burri. Sporadic protests by schoolchildren were also held

in other parts of the capital.

Demonstrators accused feared paramilitaries of the Rapid Support Forces of shooting dead the five teenagers on Monday in the central town of Al-Obeid at a rally against shortages of bread and fuel. The killings came a day before protest leaders were due to hold talks with generals on the remaining aspects of installing civilian rule after the two sides inked a power-sharing deal earlier this month.

But three protest leaders said the dialogue would not take place as planned. "There will be no negotiations today as we are still in Al-Obeid," Taha Osman, a negotiator from the protest movement, told AFP by telephone from the town.

Continued on Page 24



KHARTOUM: Sudanese students protest in the capital yesterday, a day after teenagers were shot at a rally. — AFP

18 killed as Pak jet crashes into residential area

RAWALPINDI: Eighteen people were killed when a small military plane crashed into a residential area in the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi early yesterday, officials told AFP. The plane crashed into a poor village near an upscale neighborhood in the garrison city that is home to the army's headquarters, creating a fireball that lit up the night sky and terrified residents. "We have taken 18 dead bodies to hospital... that included 13 civilians and five crew members," said

local rescue spokesman Farooq Butt, adding that a further 12 people had been injured in the accident near the capital Islamabad. "All the bodies are badly burned, so DNA tests are required for identification," he added.

One resident told AFP that the crash happened around 2 am. "I woke up the sound of a huge explosion. I stepped out of my house and saw huge flames and we rushed to the site," said Mohammad Sadiq. "People were screaming. We tried to help them but the flames were too high and the fire too intense," he said, adding he believed seven members of one family were among the dead. Another resident Ghulam Khan said he heard the plane as it buzzed over his house, adding the aircraft appeared to be on fire before it crashed.

Continued on Page 24



RAWALPINDI: Pakistani soldiers cordon off the site where a Pakistani Army Aviation Corps aircraft crashed yesterday. — AFP

Amir receives senior Kuwaiti officials, Iraqi Interior Minister

Sheikh Sabah hosts Central Bank Governor, receives copy of annual report



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Iraqi Interior Minister Dr Taher Yassin Al-Yaseri. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel.



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



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah along with the visiting Iraqi Interior Minister Dr Taher Yassin Al-Yaseri. Acting Amiri Diwan Affairs Minister Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah attended the meeting. His Highness the Amir also hosted Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel, who handed His Highness a copy of the 47th annual report (2018-2019) and the 47th economic report

(2018). Dr Hashel also presented copies of the reports to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah during receptions held at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Crown Prince also received Ghanem and His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad.

Leading auditors

In the meantime, His Highness the Crown Prince received the honorary chairman of Kuwait Accountants and Auditors Association Yousef Saleh Al-Othman, Board Chairman Faisal Al-Tubaikh, and

association board members on the occasion of composition of the new Board of Directors. His Highness expressed his congratulations and evaluated the role played by the association in developing the working environment of accounting.

His Highness underscored importance of paying attention to the practical and scientific aspects of the accounting profession according to modern methods, which will enhance the performance and efficiency of the members of the association in line with the comprehensive development witnessed in all fields. Upon the occasion, they presented a memorial shield and encyclopedia of old Kuwaiti economy, history and achievements. Sheikh Mubarak Sabah Al-Salem Al-

Humoud Al-Sabah, the head of protocol at the Crown Prince Diwan, attended the meeting.

Amir congratulates Malaysian King

In other news, His Highness the Amir addressed a cable of congratulations to Pahang's Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin on the occasion of his proclamation as the 16th King of Malaysia. His Highness wished the newly crowned Monarch life-long wellbeing, hoping to see bilateral relations between the two friendly countries progressing further. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister addressed cables of identical content to the Malaysian King. —KUNA

Kuwaiti, Iraqi interior ministers discuss security cooperation

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Lieutenant-General Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah yesterday discussed with Iraqi Interior Minister Dr Yassin Al-Yaseri ways of enhancing security cooperation between the two countries. A statement issued by the General Directorate for Relations and Information Security said that during the meeting, Sheikh Khalid stressed on the deep-rooted fraternal relations between the two brotherly countries and keenness of both leaderships to overcome all difficulties hindering developments of such ties as well as unifying visions over all regional and international developments. The statement added that the meeting also touched overall security situation in the region and means of activating coordination and joint cooperation between security agencies in the two brotherly countries, especially in monitoring land and sea borders, combating terrorism and organized crime. Meanwhile, the Iraqi Interior Minister expressed his deep thanks and gratitude for the warm



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Lieutenant-General Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah holds discussions with Iraqi Interior Minister Dr Yassin Al-Yaseri. —Interior Ministry photo

welcome and his deep satisfaction with the issues discussed during the meeting, indicating that there is a complete consensus between the views of both

sides. National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem also received the visiting Iraqi Interior Minister yesterday —KUNA

Sheikh Nasser praises Bahrain's efforts to preserve heritage

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah yesterday praised efforts exerted by Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities to preserve the national heritage and archaeological sites. These efforts reflect the bright side of Bahrain and enhance its historic role and status among world countries, Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad said in a statement received by Directorate of Moral Guidance and Public Relations at the Ministry following his meeting with President of the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities Sheikhha Mai Al Khalifa at Bayan Palace. He also stressed on depth of brotherly and historic relations linking Kuwait and Kingdom of Bahrain. The meeting was attended by Director of the National Theater at Bahrain's Authority Hani Jamal and Director of Media and Public Relations Programs Osama Al-Balhan. —KUNA



KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with President of the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities Sheikhha Mai Al Khalifa. —KUNA

Iraq's top lawmaker departs Kuwait



KUWAIT: Iraq's chief lawmaker Mohammad Al-Halbousi is seen off at the airport. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Iraq's chief lawmaker Mohammad Al-Halbousi and his accompanying delegation departed the country on Monday after a three-day official visit. Upon departure, Halbousi was seen off by Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, National Assembly Secretary General Allam Al-Kanderi, and Iraq's Charge d'Affaires to the State of Kuwait Mohammad Redha Al-Hussaini. On Sunday, the Iraqi lawmakers were received at Bayan Palace by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and Ghanem. —KUNA

Local

Cabinet recalls great sacrifices of Kuwaiti people during Iraqi occupation

Govt to build a memorial for Kuwait's liberation war in Washington

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet recalled the great sacrifices of Kuwaiti people and supportive stances of many countries during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990. On the occasion of the 29th anniversary of the brutal Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which falls on Friday August 2nd, the Cabinet recalls with bitterness this sinful crime and commends the souls of martyrs of Kuwait who sacrificed themselves to defend the dear homeland, said Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh a statement following the weekly meeting which was held at Seif Palace on Monday under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. He stated that the Cabinet recalled with appreciation the sacrifices and sincere efforts of the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the late Amir Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salem Al-Sabah as well as the steadfastness of the Kuwaiti people and their heroic sacrifices in face of the Iraqi aggression.

Saleh reiterated Kuwait's gratitude and appreciation of the contributions of friendly countries to the international efforts to liberate Kuwait and defeat the aggressor. The ministers wished further safety and stability for Kuwait under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Saleh also revealed that the Cabinet agreed on building a memorial for Kuwait liberation war in Washington in recognition of the leading role of the United States in this war.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet discussed a draft agreement for media cooperation with Jordan, a draft memorandum of understanding on strategic dialogue between Kuwait and



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's meeting. — KUNA

the US, and a draft memorandum of understanding for social affairs cooperation with Morocco. The Cabinet approved all agreement and the two memos and referred them to His Highness the Amir, Saleh said.

Several bills discussed

The ministers mulled several bills including one to amend law No. 8 of 2010 on the rights of persons with disabilities to boost their protection and increase their rights and another for amending some provisions of law No. 2 of 2016 on financial disclosure. They also deliberated a draft law on notarization and a draft law on

Coordination to accelerate air base relocation



Kuwait's contribution to the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The Cabinet agreed on the draft laws and referred them to His Highness the

Amir in preparation for their referral to the National Assembly, Saleh said.

The Cabinet reviewed a recommendation by its Public Services Committee on the project of Kuwait International Airport - Terminal 2 (T2), upon which it assigned the Ministry of Defense to collaborate with the Ministry of Public Works, Directorate General of Civil Aviation, and other relevant state bodies to accelerate relocation of the Abdullah Al-Mubarak Air Base. It also took note of a recommendation by the Cabinet's Education, Health and Youth Committee on reports of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development on the follow-up of the construction program for the city of Sabah Al-Salem University in Shadadiya for the months from January to June 2019.

International developments

The Cabinet discussed the latest regional and international developments. In this regard, it offered sincere condolences to the Tunisian people for the death of President Beji Caid Essebsi. It congratulated the newly-elected UK

Prime Minister Boris Johnson on the new post, lauding the historic and distinguished relations between the two friendly countries and stressing the constant aspiration to strengthen bilateral relations and promote mutual cooperation in various fields.

The Cabinet expressed deep concern about Israel's recent demolition of Palestinian homes in occupied East Jerusalem. It strongly condemned the Israeli acts which violate international and humanitarian laws, norms and relevant UN resolutions. It warned that such acts fuel violence, threaten stability in the region and risk undermining peace process. The Kuwaiti Cabinet called upon the international community to take urgent measures to stop these provocative Israeli acts increase suffering of Palestinian people. The Cabinet expressed condemnation of the recent series of attacks in Afghanistan as well as the recent suicide bombing in Mogadishu which resulted in the death and injury of a number of innocent victims. The Cabinet reiterated Kuwait's firm rejection of all acts of violence and terrorism in all forms, regardless of its motives. — KUNA

Kuwait calls for human rights' respect in Libya

NEW YORK: Kuwait called on all parties involved in Libya to practice self-restraint and respect commitment they made to international law on human rights, as well as not to target civilians or civilian facilities. During a Security Council session on Libya,

Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi stressed that the arms embargo must be respected, as the situation is "clearly absurd."

The spread of hate speech through social media is a flourishing danger, he said, noting that monitoring such language online is one of UN Support Mission in Libya's (UNSMIL) roles. He emphasized the need for more action to address root causes of the crisis and to end terrorist aggression against Libyan people. He recalled the Council's condemnation of the Tajoura

attack on July 5, urging all concerned to ensure the safe provision of humanitarian assistance.

Furthermore, Otaibi called upon the Council to condemn the growing number of terrorist activities and to provide support to Libyan efforts in responding to such challenge. He urged all parties to work in a constructive and concrete manner along with the calls and efforts led by UNSMIL to reach a peaceful settlement by conducting a transparent election in the country, rather than pursuing violence. — KUNA



NEW YORK: Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi speaks during a Security Council session on Libya. — KUNA

Zain strategic partner of CODED Fresh Grad Boot Camp



KUWAIT: Zain's officials with CODED's team during the program's orientation session.

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its strategic partnership of the CODED Fresh Grad Boot Camp, an intensive educational program that aims at training 20 fresh university graduates on essential programming skills to make them job-ready as programmers.

Zain's extended Strategic Partnership with CODED comes in line with its corporate sustainability strategy towards the education sector, through which the company is keen on contributing to the development and advancement of the tech innovation ecosystem within all age groups, including university graduates, to boost their coding and technology skills, as such skills are essential for the modern digital world.

The CODED Fresh Grad Boot Camp mainly aims at training fresh university graduates on seven essential programming languages to make them job-ready as programmers and developers. Twenty graduates were selected from over 560 applicants from across various universities, and they will spend 12 intensive weeks of seminars and workshops supervised by CODED's team. Zain's team was present during the orientation session, which gathered the graduates in preparation of the program's launch.

Through supporting this unique program, Zain seeks to offer the best educational environment for university graduates in Kuwait to nurture their tal-

ents, enrich their skills, and promote tech innovation within them. Zain believes in the important role tech innovation plays in building the future and progressing national economy.

Zain is keen on playing a vital role as an integrated digital service provider in light of the rapid digital changes witnessed by the modern world. The company always seeks to reach new levels of excellence with its customers through offering the best innovative services, meeting their needs and aspirations, as well as supporting programs and initiatives that embrace tech innovation and aim at developing it.

Zain further reaffirms its commitment to supporting any entity that offers the proper educational environment for the next generation as per the highest international standards. The company will spare no efforts in offering its support to such initiatives and programs that serve the community and contribute to the further progress of the country.

Last year, Zain supported the CODED Juniors Summer Camp, which aimed at teaching school children (ages 7-12) the basics of coding languages and technology using the latest tools and gadgets like robots, smart toys, computers, and more, as well as traditional learning methods such as art, drawing, and music. The program featured a fun educational environment that lasted for four weeks in the Space Museum at Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Center.

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KUWAITI PEARL DIVERS SAIL OFF KHAIRAN COAST

KUWAIT: Participants in the 31st annual pearl diving trip sailed on traditional dhows off the coast of Khairan, around 100 kilometers (62 miles) south of Kuwait City yesterday. Young Kuwaiti divers searched for shells containing pearls in the seabed in a practice that mimics the profession of their ancestors. The divers and organizers had hosted a ceremony the previous night featuring traditional performances made famous during the heydays of pearl diving, and which have since become synonymous with Kuwait's old folklore. Pearl-diving trips are held annually under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in order to keep alive traditions that accompanied the once important national trade of pearl diving, prior to the discovery of oil. The 31st Pearl Diving Trip kicked off last Thursday and concludes tomorrow in a grand ceremony. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Local

News in brief

KD 750,000 purchase reports denied

KUWAIT: The Amiri Diwan denied "false social media reports" of the purchase of fruit and vegetables worth KD 750,000 for a three-month period, underlining that the allocated budget is only an estimate. Actual spending is carried out on an as-needed basis in honor of visiting dignitaries, and is not intended for staff or employees, read a statement quoting an Amiri Diwan source. The limits of this spending do not exceed the budget, which is approved temporarily pending authorization by regulatory authorities, added the statement. — KUNA

Demonstrators jailed

KUWAIT: The public prosecution decided to jail the owner of the "Ateej Al-Misyam" Twitter account - a bedoon - for 21 days at the central prison along with a number of bedoon demonstrators. Informed source said the public prosecution charged the demonstrators with illegally gathering, having a group account on WhatsApp and spreading false news, and accused one of them of urging to kill officials from the central agency for illegal residents. The source said the prosecution is waiting for the technical report from state security to compare it with the confessions of the Twitter user, and whether there are those who support him inside or outside Kuwait. The prosecution is also waiting for the state security technical report that will show all moves of the suspect, as preliminary investigations revealed that he runs 16 accounts on Twitter, most under fictitious names. — Al-Qabas

275,000 to spend Eid abroad

KUWAIT: It is expected that 275,000 people will leave the country to spend the Eid Al-Adha holidays abroad, according to statistics by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation regarding flights between Aug 8 and Aug 17. As for expenditure, reading numbers in the balance of payments issued by Central Bank of Kuwait showed that travel spending was not affected by the financial situation both public and private that dominated after 2014, when oil prices dropped, and those numbers remained high although no quality increases on salaries occurred for many years. The daily average spending in general on travel is more than \$36 million and includes all tourism facets, entertainment, shopping and other expenses by Kuwaitis abroad, bearing in mind the figures also include university and treatment expenses. Studies by the World Tourism Organization show Kuwaitis spend 11 percent of their income on tourism and travel and are in first place among other Gulf nationals. — Al-Qabas

Companies to complain against ministry if not reinstated

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Companies that carried out projects for the Ministry of Public Works (MPW) plan to meet soon to discuss submitting complaints against the ministry if it does not implement its decision to reinstate them and allow them to participate in tenders. This comes nearly two weeks after a government petitions panel decision which acquitted several local companies that were suspended by the public works ministry over contractual flaws in rain-hit projects. The companies were excluded and banned from submitting their offers for any tender, based on the state of the projects of these companies during the rain crisis in November.

The sources said these companies justified their not guilty plea by saying that they received a certificate for their projects' sound execution from MPW when the project were completed, and this is a certificate the ministry does not give to anyone except after making sure that what was agreed upon was done. They also said the investigation committee that the Cabinet formed to probe the rain crisis proved the companies did not commit any violations while carrying out their projects, and allowed the companies to return to tendering.

Parliamentary sources said Minister of Public Works and State Minister for Housing Affairs Jenan Bushehri is

expected to be grilled over the matter during the upcoming parliamentary term. They said the minister will face a double grilling as some aspects will cover MPW and others the housing ministry, because MPs accuse her of negligence in building the infrastructure of Sabah Al-Ahmad City and repeating the same mistake in South Abdullah Al-Mubarak City. Sources expected the minister's grilling can gather parliamentary support of 10 MPs to submit a no-confidence motion.

Firearms use

In other news, Deputy Interior Minister Sheikh Khalid Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah issued a decision with regards to police using firearms. The decision, issued with immediate effect, considers firearms as rifles and pistols of all types, automatic weapons, launchers and grenades of all types that may kill or injure those against whom they are used. The decision also alluded to stun guns as means of enabling members of the police force to carry out their mission to arrest and control wanted and dangerous persons. It gave detailed rules and descriptions of when and how weapons should be used, and how police should act with crowds.

Medical teams

Separately, Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah issued a decision to organize the hajj medical services team, and the decision will be in effect for the next Hijri year 1441 corresponding to 2020. The decision called for naming the head of the team from clinical consultants of hospitals and specialized centers for two consecutive years only, while the deputy head will be named from administrative employees who serve in supervisory jobs. The team should comprise of 24 doctors, 26 nurses, 16 pharmacists, six from preventive health, six from medical emergencies, six from medical supplies, 20 administrators and six workers.

Passengers caught with drugs at airport

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Three passengers were arrested after arriving in Terminal 1 (T1) and Terminal 5 (T5) of Kuwait International Airport with possession of drugs. Airport customs arrested the suspects after hashish and psychoactive drugs were found on them during the search, security sources said.

In other news, firemen battled a blaze which gutted the warehouse of the main building of the Communication and Navigation College of the Public Authority of Applied Education and Training yesterday. The building was evacuated before firefighters extinguished the flames. No injuries were reported, and a case was filed for investigations to reveal the cause of the fire.

Separately, the supervisory team of engineering follow-up at the municipality in Jahra said power was cut from seven violating homes in Jahra as part of a campaign to fight the presence of "bachelors" in residential areas.



KUWAIT: Some of the drugs found with the suspects.

Legalese

Types of visas



By Attorney Fajer Ahmed

Kuwait is a very interesting and dynamic country. What I love about Kuwait most is that it is very diverse. I keep repeating this in my articles and will continue to do so - our diversity is a blessing. It is what makes Kuwait the creative hub that it is, and this is a reason to celebrate Kuwait and embrace our unique differences.

Kuwait follows a very common classification for visas used internationally and in the region, and Kuwait's most common entry visas are touristic, family, student, business and work - private sector, government, domestic labor and contractor. With that said, I know from the emails that I receive from my readers and from my experience as a lawyer that there are still a lot of questions on the types of visas. So here are a few questions and their answers.

Expired tourist visa

Question: My visa has expired - I am on a tourist visa. I know I would probably have to pay a penalty - how much is it?

Fajer: Depending on the type of permit, the penalties are as follows: Residence: KD 2 daily, two months from the date of entry. Visit: KD 10 daily, one month from the date of entry. Tourism: KD 2 daily, three months from the date of entry.

Working on tourist visa

Question: I have many friends working in Kuwait on a tourist visa or on their husbands' visas - is this legal?

Fajer: No. It is not legal to work under a tourist visa in Kuwait or on a dependent visa. With that said, I have seen this many times, especially with teachers. It does not make sense that schools are allowed such practices - teachers need to be qualified to be teaching our students and there have to be strict regulations in place. If you are going to do so, be prepared to be deported for violating visa regulations, as it is a violation to work under tourist visas in many countries, resulting in deportation or even a ban from the country or region.

Different name

Question: I am coming to Kuwait in a month and I got my visa. But my name is different than how it is spelled in my passport. Can I still enter the country?

Fajer: If there is any difference in the entry visa data from the passport data, then the entry visa is considered to be cancelled or invalid and prohibits the holder from entering the country.

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India Ashamed: Outrage grows over lawmaker

America's racial legacy front and center in 2020 campaign

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ALTAMIRA: A police officer patrols the surroundings of the Altamira Regional Recovery Centre after at least 57 inmates were killed in a prison riot, in the Brazilian northern city of Altamira, Para State, on July 29, 2019. — AFP

57 killed in Brazil prison as gangs clash

16 decapitated; government struggling to control overcrowded jails

SAO PAULO: A bloody clash between two prison gangs on Monday left at least 57 inmates dead with 16 of them decapitated, authorities in the state of Para said, the latest deadly clash as Brazil's government struggles to control the country's overcrowded jails. State authorities said the riot began around 7 am local time at a prison in the northern city of Altamira, and involved rival gangs.

Prisoners belonging to the Comando Classe A gang set fire to a cell containing inmates from the rival Comando Vermelho, or Red Command, gang, Para's state government said in a statement. Most of the dead died in the fire, they said, while two guards were taken hostage, but later released. "It was a targeted act," state prison director Jarbas Vasconcelos said in the statement, adding there was no prior intelligence that suggested an attack would take place.

"The aim was to show that it was a settling of accounts between the two gangs." Videos circulating online showed inmates at the prison celebrating as they kicked decapitated heads across the floor. Reuters was unable, however, to independently verify the footage. Elected on a tough-on-crime mes-

sage, far-right President Jair Bolsonaro has benefited from a sharp drop in homicides so far this year.

Nonetheless, endemic prison violence has been a stubborn public security challenge in one of the world's most violent countries. In May, at least 55 inmates died during prison attacks in the northern state of Amazonas. Weeks of violence in Amazonas in 2017 resulted in 150 prison deaths as local gangs backed by Brazil's two largest drug factions went to war.

Brazil's justice ministry said in a statement that it was working with Para authorities to identify those behind the latest attack, adding it had opened some space in the federal prison system where those gang leaders would be transferred. Brazil's incarcerated population has surged eight-fold in three decades to around 750,000 inmates, the world's third-highest tally. Prison gangs originally formed to protect inmates and advocate for better conditions, but have come to wield vast power that reaches far beyond prison walls.

The gangs have been linked to bank heists, drug trafficking and gun-running, with jailed kingpins presiding over criminal

empires via smuggled cellphones. In the country's violent northeast, prison gangs have grown powerful by moving cocaine from Colombia and Peru along the Amazon's waterways to the Atlantic coast, where it heads to Africa and Europe. Murderous disputes often arise as they clash over territorial control.

The Red Command hails from Rio de Janeiro, but has expanded deep into northern Brazil as it seeks to diversify its income. That expansion has often led to confrontations with Brazil's largest and most powerful gang, the First Capital Command, headquartered in Sao Paulo. The Comando Classe A gang is seen as a relatively small gang, and is little known outside Para. Its high-profile attack against the Red Command could give it a nationwide reputation. Bolsonaro's government has proposed moving powerful incarcerated drug lords to federal lockups, and building more prisons at the state level.

But with the vast majority of prisons run by Brazil's overstretched state governments, Bolsonaro is likely limited in terms of what he can achieve from Brasilia. In February, Justice Minister Sergio Moro unveiled his signature crime-fighting bill,



ALTAMIRA: Relatives of inmates wait for information about their loved ones after a riot at the Altamira Regional Recovery Centre in the Brazilian northern city of Altamira, Para State. — AFP

including proposals to toughen prison sentences and isolate gang leaders in maximum-security lockups. That bill has since

struggled in Congress, with the government giving its pension reform legislation priority. — Reuters

Dominic Cummings: Downing Street's disruptor in chief

LONDON: Dominic Cummings, picked last week by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to be his top adviser, is a combative and unorthodox political strategist credited with masterminding the unexpected 2016 Brexit vote victory. The director of the official Leave campaign, Cummings is hailed as an innovative disruptor who will bring his win-at-all-costs mentality to delivering Brexit-alongside an instinct for radical reform of government. Portrayed by actor Benedict Cumberbatch as a tortured genius in a TV drama this year about the EU referendum, the 47-year-old is not your typical political aide.

Famously described by ex-prime minister David Cameron as a "career psychopath", Cummings is a divisive figure within British conservative circles who has made a host of enemies with his acid-tongued approach to political debate. He has been compared to Steve Bannon, US President Donald Trump's former chief strategist, and is similarly a keen student of military theories and tactics. Cummings' elevation, like Bannon's, is seen as a risky move, with some skeptical that his uncompromising and caustic style can succeed at the heart of British government.

'Strategically single-minded'

"Dominic Cummings is the disruptor's disruptor—he's strategically single-minded and ideologically iconoclastic," said Tim Bale, politics professor at Queen Mary University of London, who featured him in his 2011 tome "The Conservative Party: from Thatcher to Cameron". "Civil servants and party apparatchiks may well have their noses put out of joint by his adviser, but for Johnson that's a price well worth paying if he can hang on to (power) and get us out of the EU." Opposition parties have decried Cummings' appointment, noting that he was

found in contempt of parliament in March for refusing to appear before a committee probing fake news during the referendum campaign.

In trademark style, he dismissively accused its members of having "greater interest in grandstanding than truth-seeking". On a personal blog where he posts everything from political musings to lengthy treatises, Cummings argued last month that Britain's current Brexit-fuelled political dysfunction was "a once in 50- or 100-year crisis" to be exploited. "Such crises also are the waves that can be ridden to change things normally unchangeable," Cummings wrote.

'Us against them'

Born in Durham, northern England, to a father who worked as an oil rig project manager and a mother who was a special needs teacher, Cummings attended a local private school before winning admission to elite Oxford University. A Russophile with a passion for Dostoyevsky, Cummings reportedly headed to the country after graduation and helped set up an airline in the 1990s which however failed to get off the ground. After returning to Britain, he first cut his teeth in politics by spearheading several campaigns, including against Britain adopting the euro.

In an early sign of his take-no-prisoners approach, Cummings was made Conservative Party director of strategy in 2002 but left the role after eight months, branding then party leader Iain Duncan Smith "incompetent". He became special adviser to education minister Michael Gove—later a leading Brexiteer—making a name for himself by developing an "us against them" bunker mentality within the department towards the rest of government. He is said to disdain Britain's apolitical civil service, viewing it as a block on innovation.

'Wild and unpredictable ride'

After a period in the political wilderness, Cummings was picked to lead the Brexit referendum campaign. The victory crowned his reputation as a political maverick who could deliver against the odds. The data-driven campaign used social media nimbly and was seen as reaching voters typically ignored by Britain's main parties—something that could soon come in useful for Johnson as the likelihood of snap elections grows. —AFP

Makeshift shrines honor victims of British knife crime

MANCHESTER: A cluster of flowers and candles marks the spot where Jodie Chesney, 17, was stabbed in a park in east London in an attack with no obvious motive. In honor of her favorite color, purple ribbons have been tied to a railing, alongside a message also written in purple: "Choose life, drop the knife! RIP Jodie." Jodie's memorial is one of dozens to be found on roadsides, parks and outside victims' homes as Britain struggles to tackle a surge in knife crime.

In the year to March, knife crime offences rose 8% to a record high of around 44,000. London still has the most stabbings overall, but in some parts of Wales, North Yorkshire and East Anglia, the rate soared by over 25 percent compared to a year earlier. The number of fatal stabbings rose to 285 in England and Wales in 2018, the highest level since records began more than 70 years ago. Campaigners blame cuts to police, youth and mental health services.

Often the perpetrators and victims are in still in their teens. Yousef Makki, 17, was stabbed to death in Hale Barns, a village in Greater Manchester, in March this year. Earlier this month, another boy, also 17, was cleared of his murder. Makki's family have protested against the verdict.

At the spot where Makki was stabbed along a residential road, people have left flowers and photos taped to a tree trunk. More flowers and balloons mark the place outside a block of flats in London's Hackney area where Joshua White,

29, was stabbed through the heart in broad daylight in April. Two teenagers have been charged with his murder, and police are attempting to extradite an 18-year-old from Ireland in relation to the attack.

Jodie Chesney's father Peter is seeking to create a more permanent tribute to his daughter and is setting up the Jodie Chesney Foundation, a charity aimed at tackling knife crime. "The whole idea is to turn something so bad into something good, and do what we can to help with the knife crime problem by educating people, trying to spread the word and change the culture," he told Reuters. Two men and two boys have been charged with her murder, which all four deny. The trial is due to start in September.

Patrick Green is chief executive of the Ben Kinsella Trust, a charity named after a schoolboy who was fatally stabbed in Islington, London, in 2008. He said that the surge in offences committed with knives could lead to even more fatal incidents and showed that extra funding and measures taken to address root causes would take time to take effect. "We just haven't got a handle on this. For the sake of a quarter of an inch, in terms of a wound, that's the difference between survival and death," Green told Reuters.

Britain has allocated 35 million pounds (\$43.54 million) to police for violence reduction units, and new Prime Minister Boris Johnson has promised more. The force has suffered big staffing and funding squeezes under austerity measures by the last two Conservative-led governments. Former PM Theresa May in March dismissed claims that an increase in police numbers would help solve knife crime. But Britain's most senior police officer, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick, said there was a link. — Reuters

International

South Africa corruption fighter seen amplifying the ANC battles

Moves against Ramaphosa and Gordhan divide ANC

JOHANNESBURG: To allies of President Cyril Ramaphosa, South Africa's anti-corruption watchdog is a wrecking ball who is abusing her office and could derail efforts to clean up government and turn the economy around. To Ramaphosa's opponents, she is holding the country's top officials to account without fear or favor. Busisiwe Mkhwebane, who was plucked from relative obscurity when she was appointed public protector in 2016, denies playing politics.

She says some of her most attention-grabbing investigations were the result of complaints raised by members of the opposition, which she has a duty to scrutinize. But her recommendations for disciplinary action against Ramaphosa and one of his closest allies, public enterprises minister Pravin Gordhan, have placed her at the centre of a bitter power rivalry in the governing African National Congress (ANC) between supporters of the president and his scandal-plagued predecessor Jacob Zuma. Political analysts warn that the powers of Mkhwebane's office, which played an important role in keeping Zuma in check, can just as easily be used to settle political scores. The public protector has authority enshrined in the constitution to investigate alleged wrongdoing by public officials and demand remedial action.

Because Ramaphosa and others are bound to comply, the consequences of her investigations can be far-reaching. One danger, analysts say, is that Mkhwebane will tie up Ramaphosa and his allies with questionable investigations, which will take them months to fight in the courts. "The public protector is polarising politics and exacerbating factionalism in the ANC," said Ebrahim Fakir, an analyst at the Johannesburg-based Auwal Socio-Economic Research Institute. "She could distract

Ramaphosa from critical tasks like creating jobs and attracting investment."

Zuma's pick?

Mkhwebane, who did not respond to questions submitted by Reuters last week, remains an enigmatic figure to many South Africans. A former security analyst and mid-level bureaucrat, she worked in the public protector's office between 1999 and 2005 before moving to the home affairs ministry. She did a stint in the South African embassy in China before joining the state security agency in 2016.

When her candidacy was discussed before a parliamentary committee, two opposition parties, the Democratic Alliance (DA) and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), said they had been tipped off that she was Zuma's pick and were worried about her links to the state security agency, a ministry staffed by Zuma loyalists.

ANC lawmakers, who made up roughly half the members on the parliamentary committee that recommended her nomination, said they found her interview impressive. But Mkhwebane had less legal experience than some other applicants, and former colleagues have since raised questions about her competence. An official who worked with Mkhwebane at the home affairs ministry told Reuters her approach to the law at that time was reckless.

Mkhwebane supported a policy change to house refugees in processing camps pending a decision on their status, which would have been in contravention of the constitution and an international refugee convention, according to the official, who requested anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. Only when home affairs got a legal opinion from the foreign ministry advising against



President Cyril Ramaphosa

the move did Mkhwebane back down, the official said.

Selective justice?

One of the main accusations against Mkhwebane is that she is selective in the cases she pursues. Mkhwebane says she has issued more than 100 reports since she took office and dealt with more than 34,000 complaints. Many of those haven't attracted much media attention.

But when she has taken on high-profile cases, such as her investigations into an apartheid-era bank bailout by the central bank, a donation to Ramaphosa's 2017 campaign for ANC leader or an investigative unit set up by Gordhan while he was tax commissioner, they have often ended up

in the courts. Part of the problem, legal experts say, is that she has made errors that fuelled suspicions of bias. South Africa's highest court ruled last week that Mkhwebane's investigation into the bailout was flawed and that she had misrepresented important facts under oath. Pierre de Vos, a constitutional law expert, said her reports concerning Ramaphosa and Gordhan also contained errors. In blog posts, he described her finding that Ramaphosa had misled parliament about the donation as a "legal and factual mess" and called the Gordhan investigation "irrational". Ramaphosa has said he will challenge Mkhwebane's findings in court. A judge on Monday granted Gordhan's request for an urgent interdict to stay disciplinary proceedings against him. —Reuters



Legal experts say reports riddled with errors

Eritrean accused of pushing boy under train is father-of-3

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: An Eritrean man accused of killing an eight-year-old boy by pushing him under a train is a Swiss-based father-of-three who will be examined for a psychiatric disorder, authorities said yesterday. German prosecutors laid murder and attempted murder charges against the 40-year-old, who had yesterday also pushed the boy's mother onto the tracks at Frankfurt's main station, and tried but failed to do the same to a 78-year-old woman.

The mother, also 40, was able to roll off the tracks at the last moment to avoid the arriving ICE train that killed her son. The man, who was arrested shortly after, did not previously know the victims and showed no signs of alcohol or drug use, said Frankfurt public prosecutors spokeswoman Nadja Niesen. "The crime

suggests a psychiatric disorder," she told a press conference.

"In the course of the subsequent investigation, the accused will certainly be psychiatrically examined, to allow an assessment of his criminal culpability." The horrific crime dominated newspaper front-pages and TV news bulletins, while citizens laid flower wreaths, candles and stuffed toys at the site of the killing. A memorial service was scheduled at the station at 1630 GMT.

German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer cut short his summer holiday to meet the heads of major security agencies in Berlin yesterday before giving a press conference. Frankfurt prosecutors said in a statement that "a 40-year-old man from Switzerland with Eritrean citizenship is accused of having first pushed a 40-year-old woman ... and then her eight-year-old son in front of an approaching ICE express train.

"Subsequently, he tried to push another woman into the track bed but failed." While the mother could roll off after the fall and move herself onto a narrow footpath between two tracks, her child was caught by the arriving train and died, on the spot, of his



FRANKFURT AM MAIN: A man suspected of pushing an 8 year-old boy and his mother in front of a train in Germany's Frankfurt railway station is led out of the district court after being at the committing magistrate in Frankfurt am Main yesterday. —AFP

injuries." The man ran down a platform and across tracks but was followed by passers-by, including an off-duty police officer, and overpowered by police two blocks from the station.

Niesen said the man had not yet spoken about his motive. He had lived

in Switzerland since 2006, was a married father of three, and had told police he had arrived several days ago by train from Basel, Niesen said. If formally charged, tried and then found guilty, he would face a likely term of life in prison, she said. —AFP

Israel jails Palestinian lawyer over shootings

JERUSALEM: An Israeli military court jailed a prominent Palestinian lawyer for 13 and a half years yesterday for shooting at Israeli vehicles in the occupied West Bank, the army said. Tareq Barghout, a Ramallah-based lawyer who represented Palestinians accused by Israel of security-related offences, was himself arrested in February, along with Palestinian Authority official Zakaria Zubeidi.

The army said in a statement that Barghout was convicted as part of a plea bargain. "Barghout fired at Israeli buses and at security forces on a number of occasions," it said. Zubeidi, a former head of a militant group who later became an official of the PA commission for Palestinians in Israeli jails, is still awaiting trial. Both men were charged in May with carrying out shooting attacks in the Ramallah area between November 2016 and January 2019, in which three Israelis were slightly injured.

According to Israel's Shin Bet domestic

security agency the pair used Zubeidi's official PA vehicle for transport. Israeli lawyer Leah Tsemel, representing Barghout, said that he alone fired the shots. "He said in his statement that he opened fire after feeling that Palestinians were being treated very unjustly by Israeli courts," she said. She said that he was also distressed by having to accompany bereaved Palestinians to receive from Israeli authorities the bodies of loved ones killed in conflict with Israeli forces.

"Once, Barghout fired from a distance at a settlers' bus to make them understand that they can never feel secure in the occupied territories," Tsemel said. Excluding annexed east Jerusalem, more than 400,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank alongside more than 2.5 million Palestinians. International law considers the settlements to be illegal and a barrier to peace between Israelis and Palestinians. They are built on land Israel seized in the Six-Day War of 1967, which the Palestinians claim as part of their future state.

Crisis-hit UN agency

In another development, Switzerland yesterday said it was suspending funding to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees after an ethics report revealed alleged mismanagement and abuse of authority at



RAFAH: Palestinian children fill jerrycans with drinking water from public taps at a refugee camp in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. —AFP

the agency's highest levels. The internal report by UNRWA's own ethics department, a copy of which has been seen by AFP, includes allegations of sexual misconduct, nepotism and discrimination.

The Swiss foreign ministry told AFP in an email that it had already made its annual contribution of 22.3 million Swiss francs

(\$22.5 million, 20.2 million euros) to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). But Bern said it was "suspending any additional contributions" to UNRWA—already in crisis due to US funding cuts—pending the findings of United Nations investigators who are examining the ethics report. —Agencies

Mauritania releases 'blasphemy' blogger

NOUAKCHOTT: Mauritania has released a blogger who drew international attention after being accused of blasphemy, his lawyer and the campaign group RSF said yesterday. Cheikh Ould Mohamed Ould Mkhaitir, 36, had been initially sentenced to death but was then given a jail term on appeal. He

remained in detention despite having already served the sentence - a situation that sparked a chorus of protest from rights groups. "(He) was released yesterday from the place where he was under house arrest... (but) is not completely free in his movements," his attorney Fatimata Mbaye said.

Mkhaitir "is no longer in Nouakchott," the Mauritanian capital, Mbaye said, without giving further details. His release came in the final days of the presidency of Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, who had previously argued that to free Mkhaitir would endanger the blogger as well as the public. Mkhaitir

was sentenced to death for blasphemy in December 2014 after he wrote a blog that challenged decisions taken by the Prophet Mohammed and his companions during holy wars in the seventh century.

He repented after being given that sentence, prompting an appeal court on November 2017 to downgrade the punishment to a two-year jail term - a decision that sparked protests in the conservative Saharan nation. His lawyers said he should have been released immediately, having already spent four years behind bars, but remained confined. —AFP

Cameroon conflict turns farmers into 'food beggars'

DOUALA: John Tabi, a cocoa farmer from Cameroon's Southwest Region, barely ekes out a living selling water sachets in a refugee camp in Douala, after fleeing a separatist insurgency back home. The crisis has reduced him and his family of five to "beggars depending on crumbs from humanitarian aid", Tabi, 52, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "For three years running, I can no longer have access to my cocoa farm, which is my source of income, because of the conflict," he said. Thousands of small-scale farmers in Cameroon's English-speaking Southwest and Northwest regions have been forced off their land by armed conflict between government forces and Anglophone separatists seeking to form an independent state called Ambazonia.

The crisis began with demands by Anglophone Cameroonians for a bigger say in the Francophone-dominated government, sparking strikes and protests in late 2016 and escalating into an uprising a year later. The resulting conflict has left at least 1,850 people dead and more than half a million displaced inside the country, according to a May 2019 report by Human Rights Watch. Hospitals and hundreds of villages have been burned, with more than 80 percent of schools closed and 800,000 children deprived of education, according to the United Nations. The Norwegian Refugee Council has called it the world's most neglected displacement crisis, edging towards full-blown war. Meanwhile, abandonment of farms will likely increase hunger and poverty, and cripple the economy, warned Celestin Tawamba, president of the Cameroon Employers' Association, GICAM. "The food scarcity in the country since the beginning of the Anglophone crisis is of an unprecedented scale," Tawamba said in an interview in Yaounde.

Towns in lockdown

Crops have been left unprotected from the effects of extreme weather, pests and diseases, said Christopher Ekungwe, government delegate for agriculture in the Southwest Region. "Drought-resistant and improved seeds, fertilisers, spraying machines and other assistance meant for farmers cannot be distributed because of permanent lockdown in most of the towns," he said.

Farmers said the violence had made it harder for them to cope with climate challenges. Erratic weather, including prolonged rains, has caused black pods on cocoa trees and blight in some food crops like yams. Rising temperatures, exacerbated by the rapid disappearance of local forests, have also affected crop yields, they said. Daniel Elume, a farmer in Mutengene in the Southwest Region, used to apply pesticides to his plantain and cocoyam before the onset of heavy rains.

"This is no longer possible since I cannot access my farm nor get weather-resistant seeds. Everything now has been destroyed," he added. More than 560,000 displaced people, mostly women and children, are sheltering in makeshift refugee camps in French-speaking towns in Cameroon and in neighboring Nigeria, relying on food assistance to survive. "It's unfortunate - food producers have become food beggars," said Mary Ajong, a vegetable farmer from Tiko in the Southwest, now living in Douala. —Reuters

International

Freedom, money, babies: Indian women rescued from slavery count their losses

Series of rescues highlight the plight of pregnant women

CHENNAI: Five months into her pregnancy, Soniya was still carrying heavy sacks up steps at the rice mill in south India where she was forced to work to pay off a family debt. By the time she was rescued, her baby had died. Soniya spent four years in debt bondage, the most prevalent form of slavery in India, to pay off a family loan of 50,000 Indian rupees (\$725). Like many women in her situation, she had no access to health care. Her rescuers said she appeared malnourished, frail and on the point of collapse, had her hands wrapped around her stomach and refused to speak.

"Health checks are not mandated after a rescue, but the lost expression in her eyes suggested that something was amiss," said Megraj Kasim, the local officer in charge of rescue and rehabilitation of bonded workers. "We rushed her to a hospital, but it was too late," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation from Vellore district in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. A series of rescues this year have highlighted the plight of the hundreds of pregnant and lactating women working in brick kilns, rice mills and on farms across India, often to pay off debts they did not incur.

"The women are silenced into submission by threats, which is why their trauma is often unheard," said Helen Barnabas, a counselor with the International Justice Mission, an anti-trafficking charity. "In almost every rescue, there is at least one pregnant woman or one nursing a newborn, who have been denied medical access, forced to

work and gone through trauma that they are rarely able to articulate. The cruelty is unimaginable." India's labor ministry did not respond to emails or calls from the Thomson Reuters Foundation on the issue.

'Heartbreaking' stories

India identified more than 135,000 bonded workers in its 2011 census despite banning the practice in 1976. It

“Women silenced into submission by threats”

says more than 300,000 people have been pulled out of slavery since 1976 and has committed to rescue and rehabilitate more than 10 million bonded laborers by 2030. Kasim said the testimonies of women who had lost their children were the toughest to record, but gave the "true

picture of the extent of exploitation". "The women don't speak easily and we work very hard on gaining their trust," he said. "But when they trust you enough to speak, their accounts are heartbreaking. Even the toughest officials are moved by their suffering, especially if they lose a child."

Kasim has now mandated health checks in all rescues in his region, a move the Tamil Nadu government is looking to enforce across the state in the future. Barnabas said women from tribal areas were often told to treat themselves like their grandmothers did using traditional herbs, depriving them of access to modern medicine. "But the tragedy is that when they lose their child, they often don't blame the mill owners but themselves and say they have angered their gods and goddesses," she said. "It takes them years to understand that it was not their fault."

Born into bondage

Ashtama Devi, 35, spent the last trimester of her pregnancy in the searing heat of a brick kiln in the northern state of Haryana. She went back to work within 15 days of her delivery, leaving her baby boy in the care of her seven-year-old son in their tin roofed hut next to the brick kiln. When they were rescued six months later, the child had blisters all over his body that Devi attributed to the intense heat he was exposed to from birth. "I baked bricks and worked 14 hours every day (during my pregnancy)," said Devi by phone from Delhi after she was rescued last month.

"My employer would beat up my husband when he asked for permission to take me to the doctor." She recalled how during her two earlier pregnancies, health workers in her home village ensured she had nutritional supplements and she also received 1,400 rupees cash from the government when she delivered. In bondage, she had no such care and gave birth to an underweight baby. "My baby weighed 2 kg (4.4 lb) when he was born. He is really weak," she said.

Devi, who was lured into bondage with an advance payment of 15,000 rupees and the promise of a better life, was among 80 people rescued last month, 32 of whom were children. Nirmal Gorana, convener of the National Campaign Committee for Eradication of Bonded Labor - a network of campaigners - said Devi's baby was severely malnourished when he was rescued and his condition is still critical. "The children when we reached the site were all visibly weak, had skin diseases and none of them had any clothes on. They were living in the searing heat next to brick kiln under a tin roof shed," Gorana said.

Manki Devi, who was among those rescued from Haryana, gave birth earlier this month to a baby that died within an hour. For Soniya, who still believes she is pregnant and is undergoing counseling, the days ahead will be tough, Barnabas said. "We find that they go through long spells of depression before they really understand what happened," she said. "And then the sadness will be replaced by rage." — Reuters

News in brief

2 shot dead in Mississippi

WASHINGTON: Two people died and a police officer was wounded in a shooting yesterday at a Walmart in Mississippi, US media reported. DeSoto County Sheriff Bill Rasco told the Commercial Appeal newspaper that the suspect had been shot and wounded in the shooting in the city of Southaven. The two people shot dead were believed to be Walmart employees, the sheriff said, and the suspect was an employee until Monday. He said the suspect and wounded police officer had been taken to local hospitals. Southaven is a suburb of Memphis, Tennessee, which lies just to the north over the state line. — AFP

2 Somali refugees charged

WASHINGTON: The US Justice Department announced Monday the arrest of two refugees from Somalia who were allegedly planning to travel to Egypt to join the Islamic State group. Ahmed Mahad Mohamed, 21, and Abdi Yemani Hussein, 20, were living in Tucson, Arizona when they hatched a plan to enlist in the radical Islamist group's branch in Sinai, according to an indictment filed in the Arizona federal court. They told an undercover FBI agent whom they believed was an IS follower that they wanted to "kill so many people" and "behead those kuffar," or infidels, and become notorious around the world. "I am abu jihad, that's my name," Hussein told the agent in June, according to the indictment. The two were arrested on Friday at Tucson International Airport after checking into a flight for Cairo. — AFP

Four murdered in Canada

ONTARIO: Four counts of first-degree murder have been laid against a 23-year-old man who was arrested at a home where three women and a man were found dead, Canadian police announced on Monday. Menhaz Zaman was taken into custody at the scene of the crime on Sunday, when York Regional Police (YRP) responded to a call shortly before 3 pm EDT to a residence in Markham, Ontario, 30 km (18.6 miles) north of Toronto. Upon arriving they found three women and one man dead. Police have declined to identify the deceased, or the cause of death. "We do believe that the man we have in custody that's now been charged is responsible for these murders," Andy Pattenden, a media relations officer with the YRP, told reporters on Monday. — Reuters

US move to resume death penalty bucks international trend

GENEVA: The United Nations human rights office said yesterday the Trump administration's decision to reinstate the death penalty at the federal level goes against the domestic and international trend to abolish or halt executions. The US Justice Department last Thursday reinstated a two-decades-long dormant policy allowing the federal government's use of capital punishment and immediately scheduled executions for five federal inmates.

The United Nations has long opposed the death penalty, arguing for its abolition or at least a moratorium. Critics in the United States say it is disproportionately applied to minorities and the poor. "It's also based on the unacceptable risk of executing innocent people," UN human rights spokesman Rupert Colville said at a news briefing.

"And there have been reports in the United States showing, using DNA evidence etc, that innocent people have been executed there," he said. Colville said the Justice Department's decision was "rolling back progress." "I would also note that the decision by the US Attorney General (William Barr) very much goes against the trends in the United States as a whole, as well as against the international trend," Colville said.

The last federal execution in the United States took place in 2003. Since then, protracted litigation over the drugs historically used in injection executions prevented the government from continuing the practice, according to Justice Department officials. US President Donald Trump has called for increasing the use of the death penalty for drug traffickers and mass shooters, a request the Justice Department has since laid the groundwork to carry out.

Currently there are 62 federal inmates on death row, including Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who planted a deadly bomb at the Boston Marathon in 2013. — Reuters

America's racial legacy front and center in 2020 campaign

WASHINGTON: When Barack Obama was elected as America's first black president in 2008, many believed it was a watershed moment for a country bearing the scars of slavery. Just over a decade later, as the 2020 presidential campaign heats up, the divisive issue of race is occupying center stage, showing how far the United States has come—and how far it still has to go.

"The fact that we are as racially polarized as we are now shows that electing a black person president is not a panacea to solving America's racial problems," said Andra Gillespie, an associate professor of political science at Emory University. "These are systemic and long-lasting issues that have been around as long as the country," Gillespie said. President Donald Trump has shown no qualms about exploiting racial tensions for political gain and has made white identity politics a centerpiece of his 2020 reelection strategy.

Jake Neiheisel, an associate professor of political science at the University of Buffalo, said that despite Obama's election, many people were "pretty skeptical of the idea of a post-racial society." "I don't think they would have predicted the rise of a Donald Trump," Neiheisel said, "but it's not terribly surprising historically." "You move in one direction you're going to have a counter-movement."

The 1861-65 Civil War which led to the emancipation of African-American slaves was followed by a period known as Reconstruction—the reintegration of the southern states into the union—and of blacks into American society. Any gains

for African-Americans under Reconstruction were short-lived, however, and were largely reversed during the Jim Crow era of racial segregation which lasted until the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act of the 1960s.

Since then, American politicians have generally trod carefully when it comes to issues of race. Not so for Trump. "The civil rights movement created some norms against saying things that were blatantly racist," said Celeste Montoya, an associate professor of women and gender studies at the University of Colorado. "Donald Trump has kind of broken those norms."

Racial resentment

Trump rose to political prominence as a "birther"—questioning Obama's origins—and he launched his 2016 campaign with a vitriolic attack on immigrants. Since then, he has been embroiled in one racial controversy after another. In 2017, Trump reacted to clashes between neo-Nazis and counter-protestors in Charlottesville, Virginia, by saying there were "very fine people" on both sides.

This month, he said four Democratic lawmakers of color should "go back" to where they came from. Most recently, Trump disparaged the African-American congressman whose district encompasses Baltimore, a majority black city which the president called a "dangerous & filthy place." Vincent Southerland, executive director of the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law at New York University, said Trump is "a symptom of this larger disease of racial inequity that we are constantly grappling with." "In order to turn away and move it to the past, we have to first confront it and I think that's something that we have not quite yet done," Southerland said.

Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign slogan "harkens back to a period of time when America was not actually great for a whole host of reasons for a lot of people," he said. Montoya said Trump has successfully used racial resentment to mobilize voters. "Immigrants and racial

The targets of Trump's racially charged ire

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has unleashed a vitriolic barrage in recent weeks against fierce adversaries, and most of them are minorities. Each has accused Trump of seeking to sow discord in the country while rallying his base of largely white male conservatives ahead of the 2020 elections. Trump has a reputation for punching back hard, then doubling down as his critics cry foul. Here is a look at those recently targeted by the president.

'Con man' Al Sharpton

The outspoken and controversial Reverend Al Sharpton has been a fixture in the African-American community for 30 years, rising from an impassioned supporter of black causes in New York to influential civil rights activist. When he announced Monday he would be visiting Baltimore to defend the majority-black east coast city that Trump recently attacked as "rat and rodent infested," the president pounced. "Al is a con man, a troublemaker," Trump, who has known Sharpton for decades, boomed on Twitter. "Hates Whites & Cops!"

Sharpton, now 64, made a name for himself as a voice for the disaffected, often marching in support of victims of police brutality. He was occasionally jailed for his activism. As his stature grew, he found himself accused of misusing funds, ran into tax trouble, and faced accusations of stoking racial divisions. He has tempered his approach in recent years, and began hosting a cable television show in 2011, but he remains provocative. On Monday he fired back at the president, saying "I make trouble for bigots," and that Trump "has a particular venom for blacks."

'Racist' Elijah Cummings

Last weekend saw the president launch an ugly attack



Civil rights activist Al Sharpton



US Representative Elijah Cummings

on Elijah Cummings, a well-liked and respected 23-year veteran of Congress. Cummings, who is black, is a high-profile Trump critic in Congress where he chairs the House Oversight Committee, which is conducting investigations of Trump and his administration. He was born and raised in Baltimore, and represents the Maryland city just 45 miles northeast of the White House.

On Sunday, in language that Democrats immediately decried as racist, Trump branded Cummings's congressional district a "disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess" where "no human being would want to live." Trump pressed on, blasting Cummings himself as "racist," and saying "his radical 'oversight' is a joke!" Cummings, 68, prides himself on being an efficient, respectful lawmaker, but he is also prone to passionate outbursts. He has largely opted to stay above the fray over Trump's attacks, tweeting Sunday: "Mr President, I go home to my district daily. Each morning, I wake up, and I go and fight for my neighbors."

'Anti-Israel' squad

Trump's weeks-long racially charged tweet storms



CALIFORNIA: Traffic moves through an interchange along Interstate 580 in Oakland, California. — AFP

minorities become the scapegoats for why people are suffering," she said. To some extent this is politics as usual, according to Neiheisel. "Arguably, politics has always been about group conflict," he said. "If you can pit people against each other that's an easy way to mobilize."

Reparations

Race has also featured prominently in the Democratic primary contest as the candidates seek to reforge the multi-racial coalition of voters who propelled Obama to victory. Racial inequality and the "Black Lives Matter" movement have been a subject of debate among the Democrats and the candidates have also been discussing whether reparations should be paid to descendants of slaves. Senator Kamala Harris, one of two African-American candidates in the Democratic race, surged in the polls after attacking former vice president Joe Biden over his record on racial issues

while serving in the US Senate. "Part of that is a response to Trump and the rhetoric that he has raised and his efforts to make race a central issue of the campaign from a negative standpoint," Southerland said. But it's also because Democrats need black votes if they hope to recapture the White House. "In order to excite and turn out communities of color, you need to signal to them that you're paying attention to the inequalities and experiences that they have," Gillespie said.

The relatively poor turnout of African-Americans for Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton in 2016 is frequently cited as one of the main reasons for her upset loss to Trump. While blacks voted overwhelmingly for Clinton they did not cast ballots in the overall numbers seen during Obama's two successful bids for the White House. "If Democrats can't turn out voters of color, they're not going to win this election," Gillespie said. — AFP

began mid-month with his startling call for four ethnic minority congresswoman—all US citizens—to "go back" to other countries if they don't like America. Trump's demeaning tweets, in which he assailed the lawmakers as "a bunch of Communists" who "hate" Israel and America, were aimed at the so-called squad. The powerful, progressive first-term lawmakers are Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, the first two female Muslim members of Congress, along with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ayanna Pressley.

Trump has taken particular issue with Omar, a Somali refugee who found herself in hot water this year when she suggested money is why so many US politicians support Israel. Ocasio-Cortez is a populist firebrand who introduced the Green New Deal, which sets out drastic measures to cut carbon emissions. Trump branded it a socialist takeover of the economy. Tlaib made waves when she used crude language to describe her desire to impeach Trump, while Pressley raised eyebrows for warning that the Democratic Party did not need "any more black faces that don't want to be a black voice." Each has rebuked the president for his tweets. — AFP

International

India ashamed: Outrage grows over lawmaker accused of rape

Protesters want India's ruling party to sack a state lawmaker

NEW DELHI: Protesters stepped up demands yesterday for India's ruling party to sack a state lawmaker accused by a young woman of raping her, holding several demonstrations just days after the accuser was critically injured in a highway collision. Opposition groups say Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is protecting Kuldeep Singh Sengar, a legislator from the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, whom the woman accused of the rape in 2017.

"Why do we give people like Kuldeep Sengar the strength and protection of political power and abandon their victims to battle for their lives alone?" Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, a leader of the main opposition Congress party, asked on Twitter. She called on Modi to immediately sack Sengar, named on Monday in a report to police, who are investigating a car crash at the weekend that has left the victim battling for her life.

Sengar denies the charges, but the case has put the spotlight on the crime situation in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state. Its chief minister, Yogi Adityanath, a Hindu monk-turned-politician, has said

law and order in the state has improved since his party took power in 2017. A party spokesman in the state, Rakesh Tripathi, said a disciplinary panel suspended Sengar last year and asked for his explanation. "He has not been sacked yet because the charges haven't been proven," Tripathi added.

Mayawati, a former Uttar Pradesh chief minister and leader of a major regional political party, said the ruling BJP was protecting Sengar, and asked India's Supreme Court to intervene. Congress party workers staged a demonstration in the state capital of Lucknow, where the victim is in hospital. "My daughter is critical, there is no improvement in her condition," her mother said yesterday.

Dozens of opposition lawmakers protested outside India's parliament, holding placards with slogans such as "India Ashamed #Unnao", referring to the site of the crime. Elsewhere in the Indian capital, women and students' groups also held protests. Modi, who has repeatedly cited women's issues as a priority for his government, including schemes to promote education and hygiene, has been silent on the case. —Reuters



RAEBARELI, India: Photo shows the wreckage of a car of Indian teenager who leveled rape allegations against BJP lawmaker Kuldeep Sengar, following a collision with a truck, near Raebareli in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. —AFP

UN: Afghans dying at 'unacceptable' level amid peace push

KABUL: Civilians are being killed and wounded at a "shocking and unacceptable" level in Afghanistan's war despite a push to end the 18-year-old conflict, the UN said yesterday. The latest information from the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) shows a 27 percent drop in casualties for the first half of 2019 compared to the same period last year - which was a record - but nonetheless, 1,366 civilians were killed and another 2,446 injured. While the UN welcomed the decrease, it "continues to regard the level of harm done to civilians as shocking and unacceptable," UNAMA said in a statement.

The agency "acknowledges that parties have announced efforts to reduce civilian casualties, but they are insufficient." UNAMA also said that for the second quarter running, US and pro-government forces caused more civilian deaths than the Taliban and other insurgent groups. During the first half of 2019 pro-government forces, including the US, killed 717 civilians, an increase of 31 percent from a year earlier. Most of the deaths came

from US and Afghan air strikes, often in support of national forces on the ground.

Colonel Sonny Leggett, spokesman for US Forces-Afghanistan, disputed UNAMA's data and said the US military investigates all civilian casualty allegations in what is a "complex environment". "USFOR-A rejects UNAMA's methods and findings. Sources with limited information and conflicted motives are not always credible," Leggett said in a statement. "We follow the highest standards of accuracy and accountability and always work to avoid harm to civilian non-combatants."

Afghanistan's bloody toll is climbing amid a months-long, US-led push to forge a peace deal with the Taliban that would see foreign forces quit the country in return for various security guarantees. Earlier this month as part of that effort, Taliban officials met at a historic summit with Afghan representatives at an "intra-Afghan dialogue" in Doha. Delegates issued a vague resolution that included a pledge to reduce civilian casualties to "zero", but in the weeks since, ordinary Afghans have continued to be killed and wounded.

"Everyone heard the message loud and clear from Afghan delegates in the Doha talks - 'reduce civilian casualties to zero!'" UNAMA head Tadamichi Yamamoto said in a statement. "We urge all parties to heed this imperative, to answer the call of Afghans for immediate steps to be taken to reduce the terrible harm being inflicted." Child



KABUL: An Afghan boy looks on next to damaged homes near the site of an attack in Kabul after the deadly assault targeting a political campaign office. —AFP

casualties represented almost one-third of the overall total of civilian casualties, with 327 deaths and 880 injured, UNAMA said. A UN tally found last year was the deadliest on record, with at least 3,804 civilian deaths caused by the war - including 927 children. —AFP

More than 160 land defenders murdered in 2018: Watchdog

PARIS: At least 164 land and environmental activists were murdered last year for defending their homes, lands and natural resources from exploitation by mining, food and logging firms, Global Witness said yesterday. The charity watchdog's annual land defenders report found "countless" more people were silenced through violence, intimidation and the use and misuse of anti-protest laws across the world. By far the most dangerous place for activists and indigenous communities was the Philippines, which saw 30 murders in 2018, the report said.

Colombia and India saw 24 and 23 deaths linked to environmental activism in 2018, while Guatemala was the deadliest nation for land defenders per head of population with 16 confirmed killings. "This is a phenomenon seen around the world: land and environmental defenders, a significant number of whom are indigenous peoples, are declared terrorists, thugs or criminals for defending their rights," said Vicky Tauli-Corpez, UN Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Peoples.

"This violence is a human rights crisis

but it is also a threat to everyone who depends on a stable climate." The biggest single massacre documented by the group in 2018 occurred in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, with 13 people murdered after protesting the environmental impact of a copper mine. At least eight land defenders involved in disputes with representatives of the soy industry were killed in 2018 in the Brazilian state of Para alone, the report said.

In the Philippines, which overtook Brazil as the deadliest place for land defenders, one incident saw a group of gunmen shoot dead nine sugarcane farmers including a number of women and children on the island of Negros. The lawyer representing families of the victims was shot dead days later, Global Witness said. A week ahead of a landmark UN report expected to emphasize the vital role indigenous peoples play in protecting nature, the charity also highlighted what it said was a "worrying global trend" in the intimidation and jailing of defenders.

It said investors including development banks were fuelling the violence by financing abusive projects and sectors, and named a number of well-known companies accused of facilitating rights violations. "It's not good enough for foreign multinationals that are connected to these land grabs to profess ignorance," the report said. "They have a responsibility to proactively ensure that the land they are profiting from has been leased legally, with the consent of the communities who have lived on it for generations."



MEDELLIN: People take part in a demo against the murder of social leaders in Medellin, Colombia. —AFP

Fracking protest 'precedent'

In Britain, the charity documented the case of three anti-fracking activists who in September were sentenced to jail for protesting at a site run by the energy firm Cuadrilla. They were freed in October but have still not had their convictions for the crime of "public nuisance" overturned. One of the protesters, Simon Blevins, said their case set a worrying precedent for environmental

activists in Britain. "There has been a lot of scaremongering that even turning up with a placard can put you in trouble and stop you getting jobs, which of course has a deterrent effect on future protest." The overall land defender death toll in 2018 fell from a peak of 207 in 2017, but Global Witness stressed the true number of deaths could be far higher and go unreported or occur in remote regions. —AFP

Indonesia returns containers of waste to France and HK

JAKARTA: Indonesia has returned seven shipping containers of illegally imported waste to France and Hong Kong (HK), an official said yesterday, marking the latest move by a Southeast Asian nation to send back rubbish to their wealthy places of origin. The containers were loaded with a combination of garbage, plastic waste and hazardous materials in violation of import rules, according to customs officials on Batam Island near Singapore.

"The containers left on Monday and some officials were there to see the ship depart," head of local custom office Susila Brata said yesterday. Earlier, customs spokesman Sumarna, who like many Indonesians goes by

one name, told AFP that five containers were destined for Hong Kong and two were headed back to France.

Authorities were still waiting for clearance to return another 42 containers of waste at the port, including shipments from the United States, Australia, and Germany. Jakarta has stepped up monitoring of imported waste in recent months as part of a push back against serving as a dumping ground for foreign trash. For years China received the bulk of scrap plastic from around the world but closed its doors to foreign refuse last year in an effort to clean up its environment.

Huge quantities of waste have since been redirected to Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, Indonesia and to a lesser degree the Philippines. Global concern over plastic pollution has been spurred by shocking images of waste-clogged rivers in Southeast Asia and accounts of dead sea creatures found with kilos of refuse in their stomachs. Around 300 million tons of plastic are produced every year, according to the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), with much of it ending up in landfills or polluting the seas, in what has become a growing international crisis. —AFP



BATAM, Indonesia: An Indonesian custom officer examines a process as they prepare to return containers full with hazardous rubbish to original countries. Indonesia has returned seven shipping containers of illegally imported waste to France and Hong Kong. —AFP

Philippines is 'deadliest nation for land rights'

BANGKOK: More than three people were murdered each week last year while protecting their land from encroaching industries, a human rights group said yesterday, with a four-fold increase in killings related to conflicts over water. At least 164 farmers and land rights activists were killed worldwide last year, with the Philippines accounting for the most casualties for the first time since Britain-based Global Witness began reporting such deaths in 2012.

In 19 countries surveyed, mining was linked to 43 deaths, with fatal attacks also recorded at hydropower projects and in disputes involving agribusiness and logging companies. "Much of the persecution of land defenders is being driven by demand for the land and raw materials needed for products we consume every day, from food to mobile phones, to jewellery," said Alice Harrison, a campaigner at Global Witness.

"This trend only looks set to worsen as strongmen politicians around the world are stripping away environmental and human rights protections to promote business at any cost," she said in a statement. After the Philippines with 30 victims, Colombia had 24, followed by 23 in India and 20 in Brazil. Guatemala had 16, a five-fold increase from the previous year, the report showed. A spokesman for Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte did not respond to an email and phone calls seeking comment.

Nearly 300 farmers, indigenous people and land rights activists have been killed since Duterte took office in 2016, according to Philippine human rights groups. "The Duterte regime's intensified militarization of communities has had catastrophic effects," said Cristina Palabay, secretary general of land rights group Karapatan. "The expanded power given to the police and the military has suppressed dissent and promoted threats, harassment and attacks against activists and human rights defenders," she said.

Earlier this month, the United Nations human rights agency passed a resolution to investigate the mass killings during Duterte's war on drugs, which human rights groups say has also been used against farmers and activists. Presidential spokesman Salvador Panelo called the UN resolution "grotesquely one-sided, outrageously narrow, and maliciously partisan". While Global Witness recorded fewer killings worldwide last year compared to 2017 in the previous year, it noted the increasing use of lawsuits, arrests and death threats to intimidate campaigners and stifle activism, even in developed countries.

Killings related to conflicts over water jumped to 17 from four the previous year, underlining the deadly consequences of warmer temperatures, erratic rainfall and dwindling groundwater, particularly in Latin America, Africa and South Asia, it said. The attacks were largely connected to opposition to proliferating hydropower projects, as well as corruption in management of local water sources, Harrison said. "With climate breakdown and increasing drought, it is highly likely that we'll begin to see a rise in conflicts over water sources involving whoever controls them," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. —Reuters

Analysis

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Trump nominee sparks worries of intel politicization

President Donald Trump's choice of a lawmaker with limited experience to oversee the massive US intelligence community has sparked concerns over the possible politicization of crucial national security decisions. Trump announced the nomination Sunday of Republican Representative John Ratcliffe to replace Dan Coats as Director of National Intelligence, the person who coordinates the 17 agencies that make up the US intelligence community.

Coats is leaving after 24 months during which Trump has regularly ignored and undermined his spy chiefs, keeping them in the dark especially on his plans for relations with Russia. While the departure is not a surprise, the choice of Ratcliffe has sparked worries among lawmakers. "I'm gravely concerned when it appears that the president is trying to look for someone who will be a political loyalist rather than that independent voice standing up for the intelligence community," Democratic Senator John Warner told CNN.

Key Republicans were cautious about the nomination, some thinking that, despite his inexperience in the field, he might have Trump's ear, unlike Coats. "I don't know John, but I look forward to getting to know him," said Senator Richard Burr, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, which must approve the nomination.

Fox News regular

Coats' willingness to make clear his disagreement with Trump on important security matters earned the former senator and ambassador to Germany respect across the political spectrum. Ratcliffe, by comparison, has made his name over four years in the House of Representatives as a staunch defender of the president. Like many of Trump's appointees, he frequently appears on Fox News repeating conservative conspiracy theories and alleging that special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian election interference was a political hit-job by Democrats working with US intelligence. "So was the Trump investigation really about our national security - or was it politically motivated?" he said last year.

Former small-town mayor

That view - entirely contrary to how US spy chiefs see the Russia investigation - could bode ill for an intelligence community whose relationship with Trump has always been tenuous. Ratcliffe, 53, would take over a crucial job that involves collating and distilling intelligence from the CIA, the National Security Agency, the FBI, the Pentagon and other bodies for the president. The DNI helps prioritize the threats and risks the country faces short- and long-term. All previous directors have been former diplomats steeped in security and military issues, senior Pentagon officials, and intelligence agency chiefs.

Ratcliffe's resume is thin: Before arriving in Congress in 2015, he was mayor of a small, very wealthy lakeside suburb of Dallas, Texas for eight years, and a federal district attorney for just one year. "Ratcliffe would be the first DNI without significant intelligence or ambassadorial experience," said John McLaughlin, former CIA deputy director. The intelligence community has struggled with politicization under Trump. He took office rejecting a DNI report that said Putin directed the 2016 election interference to hurt the campaign of Trump rival Hillary Clinton. His legitimacy questioned, Trump countered that he himself was under attack by the "criminal deep state". Trump has also dismissed intelligence on North Korea and Iran to declare his own "facts."

Earlier this month, Sue Gordon, Coats' deputy director of national intelligence, said his independence has been important in the current political environment. "The intelligence community has been able to keep its eyes in the boat, because he plays it down the middle, even when it's unpopular," she told CBS News' "Intelligence Matters" program. "There is something great about people who understand the world in the way intelligence officers understand the world," she added. — AFP



John Ratcliffe

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US President Donald Trump arrives in Newport News, Virginia yesterday, before departing for Jamestown, Virginia to give remarks at the 400th anniversary of the First Representative Legislative Assembly. — AFP

Inside a Trump-era purge of military scientists

They're members of a prestigious academic panel with top-secret clearances who've advised the Pentagon on some of America's most vexing national security issues since the Cold War. Over 60 years, they've won 11 Nobel prizes and conducted hundreds of government studies. The advisory group, known as Jason, is a team of some 60 of America's top physicists and scientists who spend each summer in La Jolla, California, conducting studies commissioned by the Pentagon and other US government agencies.

On March 28, Trump appointee Michael Griffin - the Pentagon's chief technology officer - unexpectedly moved to terminate the group. Lisa Gordon-Hagerty, the head of the National Nuclear Security Administration, objected, telling Griffin's office the scientists were crucial for keeping America's nuclear stockpile secure, according to an NNSA official and others affiliated with the Jason program. Gordon-Hagerty's agency offered to take responsibility for the program. She only needed Griffin's signature to make it happen.

Griffin refused. He declined comment, but a Defense Department spokeswoman said the Pentagon decided it had less need for the studies than previously thought. "The department remains committed to seeking independent technical advice and review. This change is in keeping with this commitment, while making the most economic sense," said spokeswoman Heather Babb. Jason's supporters, backed into a corner, managed to keep the group alive, temporarily for now, for eight more months. Democrats in Congress are trying to get Jason funded through a different Pentagon office not run by Griffin, but it's unclear whether the Republican-controlled Senate will go along.

A day after Griffin moved to axe Jason, a 35-word blurb in the Federal Register announced the end of two other independent scientific boards, including the Navy Research Advisory Committee, which had advised the Navy and Marine Corps for 73 years. The efforts to kill the scientific panels show how the Trump administration's crackdown on the role of independent science in the US government is reaching into areas long thought immune from political influence.

"These are institutions of great technical expertise," said Sherri W Goodman, a former member of the International Security Advisory Board, a State Department panel suspended shortly after Trump took office. "They are great repositories of national expertise and also scientific expertise that have helped keep America's competitive edge militarily."

This may be just the beginning. A June executive order signed by Trump requires all federal agencies to slash a third of their independent advisory committees by Sept 30, with the goal of ultimately reducing the total number of such committees to no more than 350 from about 1,000 now. The move will cut back on red tape and costs, Trump officials say. Jason, for instance, receives about \$8 million in taxpayer financing a year. "Formal boards are only one of many avenues for senior leaders to receive advice from experts, but some boards outlive their mission," said Lisa Hershman, the Defense Department's acting chief management officer.

The Trump administration is not the first to seek to reduce independent advisory panels, though its effort appears more ambitious in terms of the number of cuts. Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who served under Presidents George W Bush and Barack Obama, cut a handful of boards during his tenure. Gates declined to comment, but a former defense official said Gates felt senior military officials lost time rebutting recommendations. "Gates looked at it and said you guys may decide they're not worth the effort," said Bill Boves, a former vice admiral in the US Navy and vice-chair of the Naval Research Advisory Committee until it was disbanded earlier this year.

In the case of the naval panels, two former members said they were told Navy Secretary Richard Spencer was frustrated the groups took months to turn out recommendations. Instead of depending on advisory committees, a Navy spokesman said, Spencer preferred to hear from experts on a case by case basis.

Yet others say killing the committees will weaken independent assessments of crucial military and scientific issues. "The pattern of resistance that has been directed at independent science advisors suggests that it is their independence that is unwanted," said Steve Aftergood, a government secrecy specialist with the Federation of American Scientists. Reuters' account of the effort to disband Jason is built from interviews with the outgoing and incoming chiefs of Jason, panel program administrators, and officials at the Pentagon and National Nuclear Security Administration. Reuters also reviewed emails and correspondence involving Jason.

Independent group, pink slip

The Jasons, drawn from America's elite scientists, are hand-picked by the existing membership. They are known for fiercely guarding their independence and, at times, ruffling feathers. Named after the leader of the Argonauts who sought the Golden Fleece in Greek mythology, they were formed after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the first satellite to orbit Earth, in 1957. Fearing it was losing the space and technology war, the United States created the Jason program.

In the 1960s, the Jasons invented a type of sensor that could detect enemy guerrillas in Vietnam and communicate their location to US bombers. Four decades later, the group pushed back when the Pentagon sought to appoint some of Jason's scientists. "They speak their mind," said David Wright, a senior scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists, a non-profit advocacy group. "They've tried very hard to be independent of the agency that is paying them. Jason can be a pain in the ass. It doesn't always give people the answers they want."

More recently, the Jasons determined that a rare jungle cricket, not a mysterious radio frequency weapon, likely caused the odd sound that US diplo-

with space-based defense issues, according to people familiar with their research schedule.

Prior unclassified studies reveal their criticism of the science associated with space-based military programs. In 2008, for instance, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence asked the scientists to examine the issue of High Frequency Gravitational Waves, which have several theoretical applications, one of which is for space-based sensors that could be used to detect hidden activities, such as below-ground nuclear tests.

The Jasons examined the supporting research conducted by government-backed scientists. They slammed it. "The calculation for the required gas pressure is ridiculous," they wrote. "It is simply and grossly the wrong calculation." The group called another conclusion "particularly inept". Two years later, the scientists studied the effectiveness of tests by the Missile Defense Agency of their ballistic missile defense technologies, and spotlighted more weaknesses.

Cold war, cold shoulder

As the Jason program's funding deadline neared, scientists with Jason and Mitre Corp officials suddenly couldn't get a meeting with the Pentagon, an agency they had worked with since the Cold War. Senior officials turned them away, according to emails reviewed by Reuters and people familiar with the communications. Mitre officials and Jason scientists both contacted Griffin's office. A secretary told them to submit their request for a meeting via an online form, emails show. The request was rejected.

In an April 8 email, Williams asked Griffin's office to continue the program, noting there would be no economic cost to the Defense Department. "We ... would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this with Dr. Griffin as soon as possible." Three days later, Williams' request was rejected, emails show. Disbanding the program would have had a ripple effect across US government agencies that use Jason research. For the summer of 2019, the Jasons had been asked to conduct 15 separate studies by seven government agencies.

Most of the scheduled studies are classified, but some are not. The National Science Foundation, for instance, had asked the scientists to determine what regulations would be appropriate to safeguard American intellectual property. Another study was Congressionally mandated for the National Nuclear Security Administration, or NNSA, to examine the aging of nuclear weapon pits, the explosive core in many types of US nuclear weapons. The agency had relied on Jason's research for decades to help secure nuclear stockpiles.

On April 9, NNSA head Gordon-Hagerty told the House Armed Services Committee Jason's research was crucial. "I can tell you they are rich in history and their technical expertise is sound," she testified. Gordon-Hagerty declined an interview request, but her office pointed to her House testimony in response to Reuters questions about Jason. Gordon-Hagerty's semi-autonomous agency is part of the Department of Energy and has long been considered bipartisan. Before the Trump administration tapped her to lead the NNSA in 2017, Gordon-Hagerty served as the Director of Combating Terrorism on the National Security Council during the administrations of Bill Clinton and George W Bush.

If the Pentagon didn't want responsibility for the Jasons, Gordon-Hagerty decided in April, the NNSA would take over the contract, scientists said. Drawing up a new government contract can take months. Gordon-Hagerty had two weeks to get it done before the Jasons would cease to exist on April 30. At that point, the Jasons would have to cancel outstanding studies and effectively disband.

Gordon-Hagerty asked Griffin's office to sign a one-month contract extension, according to Jason and an NNSA official. It would cost Griffin's office nothing, since the Jasons had money in the bank to stay operational for a month. All that was required: a signature on a piece of paper to make it legal. Griffin, as head of the office that let out the contract, needed to approve the decision. He said no.

Asked about Griffin's refusal, Pentagon spokeswoman Babb said: "I have nothing more to provide." "It appears they effectively tried to kill the program," Williams told Reuters. At the last moment, Gordon-Hagerty's agency managed to rush through an unorthodox paperwork maneuver: It published a formal notice of its intent to issue a contract for Jason later. That was enough to persuade Mitre to temporarily fund the program out of its own pocket. The Jason program was saved for another eight months. Beyond that, its future is in doubt. — Reuters

Jasons known for fiercely guarding their independence



mats in Cuba had suspected caused them to fall ill in late 2016. No definitive cause of the illnesses has been determined. The Jason contract operates under the auspices of the US Department of Defense, with the Pentagon funding DOD studies. Other government agencies pay for studies they commission. Each study costs about \$500,000, with 12 to 15 conducted a year, say Jason members, who are paid about \$1,200 a day for their time.

The contract was due for renewal March 31. In January, Mitre Corp, the McLean, Virginia, nonprofit that manages federally funded research centers and oversees Jason, submitted a proposal to continue managing the program as it has every five years since the early 1990s. The Pentagon told Mitre it would reply by March 16. That date came and went with no word. On March 28, three days before the contract was due to expire, Mitre received a letter from Washington Headquarter Services, the contracting arm of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, saying it had decided to cancel calls for bids on the renewed contract.

"The requirement has changed from multiple studies being projected to only one study being needed for the Under Secretary of Defense, Research and Engineering," Sharon Hilton, a contracting officer with Washington Headquarter Services, wrote Mitre. Issuing a new contract "does not make economic sense at this time". Jason chairwoman Ellen Williams, a physics professor at the University of Maryland, said the rationale for gutting the program was "ridiculous." The Pentagon only pays for studies it commissions, she noted, while other government agencies pay for their own studies. "It was quite a shock," Williams said.

A 'Star Wars' collision

At the center of the conflict: Trump appointee Griffin, the Undersecretary of Defense for Research and Engineering. The GOP-controlled Senate confirmed his appointment in Feb 2018. Griffin is known as an outspoken advocate for space-based missile defense systems, an area that has drawn tough scrutiny in the past from Jason scientists. During the Reagan administration, Griffin played a central role in the military's Strategic Defense Initiative, an ambitious idea of space-based weaponry dubbed by some as "Star Wars".

On March 12, the Defense Department established the Space Development Agency, responsible for advancing next-generation military space capabilities. The agency was put under Griffin's direction. Laura Grego, a senior scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists, said Griffin "clearly wants" to pursue space-based missile defense. "He's frustrated that people are being held back by what he sees as silly objections," she said. The Jasons have long been skeptical of space-based weapons systems. One study the group plans to conduct this summer deals specifically

Business

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Trump wants 'a large cut' from US Fed

Political pressure complicates Fed's expected rate cut

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump yesterday called on the Federal Reserve to cut the benchmark interest rate significantly, moments before the central bank was due to open its two-day policy meeting. "I would like to see a large cut," Trump told reporters at the White House, his latest move in a constant campaign to pressure monetary policymakers. "I'm very disappointed in the Fed," he said.

Markets overwhelmingly expect the central bank today will cut in the key lending rate by 25 basis points—the first cut in more than a decade—amid a slowing global economy impacted by trade uncertainty and sluggish business investment. That would undo the Fed's most recent increase in December, which was the last of four in 2018 and the US economy picked up steam.

But Trump seems to be calling for a deeper cut of 50 basis points or perhaps more. But a cut of that size is typically used only when the economy is experiencing a steep slowdown. The current economic expansion is now entering its 11th year, making it the longest on record. And with steady job growth, low unemployment and asset prices running high, economists are split as to whether the world's largest economy needs stimulus.

But the Commerce Department yesterday also reported that inflation remained tame last month, confirming that there is slim likelihood of a breakout in price pressures. Other economists say rate increase in December was a mistake.

Fed Chairman Jerome Powell, the target of Trump's ceaseless barbs, has signaled the bank is likely to lower rates due to economic uncertainties. Trump has constantly berated the Fed and its chairman for failing to provide additional juice to the economy, which he has promised will grow by three percent and more each year. The central bank's challenge is to tune out politics ahead of today's announcement, and base

the direction of monetary policy on the economic data.

Why cut rates now?

Powell and other Fed officials have said repeatedly they expect the US economy to continue to grow and for inflation to eventually pick up, which makes the course correction now a bit unusual. Unemployment, one of the two metrics the Fed is required by law to focus on, is at the lowest in nearly 50 years. A strong jobs market would normally cause wages to rise, fueling inflation, the second key metric for the Fed.

However, inflation has been largely absent, hovering below-sometimes well below—the two percent target. And Trump's aggressive trade tactics have brought business investment to a screeching halt, at a time when major economies are slowing, and Brexit is weighing on Britain and the European Union.

That gives the Fed space and justification to inoculate the US economy. Traders see a rate cut as a certainty, with less than a quarter still betting on a 50 basis point cut—something usually reserved for a dire situation. And many economists say another cut is likely this year, and as many as three by early 2020. The Fed raised the key lending rate nine times from December 2015 to December 2018, including four times last year, as the US economy picked up steam. Officials wanted to raise the policy rate to a more normal level, so it would have ammunition available to help stimulate a recovery with rate cuts.

The December hike was somewhat controversial given indications the trade wars were starting to impact the economy, and amid sharp declines in stock prices. However, in the face of Trump's vocal attacks, the Fed may have wanted to show it could ignore the political pressure. Now the Fed is caught in a dilemma of doing what Trump wants while convincing observers it is the right thing to do.



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo, US President Donald Trump walks with Jerome Powell, Federal Reserve chairman, at the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

Political pressure

The problem with a central bank doing the bidding of politicians, is markets no longer believe monetary policymakers will act as needed—even if unpopular—when prices start to rise. Once that inflation-fighting credibility is lost, it takes years to recover, as the United States saw in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and many countries have seen since. That means the Fed would have to hike rates much more aggressively to clamp down on price increases, which would

be likely to harm businesses and slow the economy. The federal funds rate is the interest banks charge each other for very short term loans, and sets the base for all other types of lending such as mortgages and credit cards. Lowering borrowing rates makes it easier for businesses to get loans to invest in new projects, and for consumers to buy homes, cars and other items, which creates demand that keeps the economy humming. US demand also helps support the global economy, through solid imports.

Powell's predecessor, Janet Yellen, said over the weekend that she favors a cut now given low inflation and a weakening global economy. The Fed has limited weapons in its arsenal and has been struggling lately with a key one: communication. Powell and other officials have stumbled recently with confusing and contradictory statements amid the changing economic environment. Markets will be listening closely to Powell at the press conference today to see what signals he sends about future moves. — AFP

BP says quarterly profit sinks on lower oil prices

LONDON: BP's profits slumped by 35 percent in the second quarter on the back of sliding crude oil prices, the British energy major said yesterday. Profits after taxation tanked to \$1.8 billion (1.6 billion euros) in the three months to the end of June from \$2.8 billion a year earlier, BP said in a results statement, adding that this partly "reflects lower oil prices".

Weaker crude prices translate into falling profits and revenues for the energy sector. The energy major also took a \$634-million impairment charge on the back of asset sales in Egypt and the United States.

BP added however that its underlying replacement cost profit—a widely-watched measure which strips out exceptional items and changes in the value of oil inventories—was broadly unchanged at \$2.8 billion. That beat the average analyst forecast of \$2.48 billion, according to Bloomberg.

BP noted that this reflected the company's "continued good operating performance" thanks to its growth strategy that was launched in 2016. "At the midpoint of our five-year plan, BP is right on target," said BP Chief Executive Bob Dudley in yesterday's earnings release. "Reliable performance and disciplined growth across our businesses are delivering strong earnings, cash flow and returns to shareholders."

"And this is also allowing us to grow businesses that can make a significant contribution in the energy transition, helping deliver the energy the world needs with lower carbon."

Revenues dipped four percent to \$73.747 billion in the second quarter, but production rose four percent to 3.8 million barrels of oil equivalent per day. Output remains boosted by last year's vast purchase of US shale oil and gas operations from mining titan BHP. Benchmark Brent crude oil prices averaged \$62.63 per barrel in the reporting period. That was down from \$67.24 a year earlier. — AFP

Texas shale pioneers face stark challenges

MIDLAND, Texas: Seven years ago, Diamondback Energy Inc went public with a modest parcel of drillable land in the Permian Basin of West Texas. Like dozens of other Permian startups, the firm then pursued a classic wildcat strategy - borrowing to buy up acreage, acquire competitors and quickly boost output in the booming shale field. Today, Diamondback is the 7th largest producer in the top US oil region, according to researcher Wood Mackenzie.

But Diamondback differs from most of its peers in a crucial way - it's poised to make more cash than it spends. The firm promised to reward investors by buying back up to \$2 billion in shares and delivering \$750 million in free cash flow next year if US oil prices remain at about \$55 per barrel. It started paying shareholders a dividend last year and raised it by 50 percent this spring.

"That's a big pivot for our industry, living within cash flow and not being part of that 'drill, baby, drill' crowd," Diamondback Chief Executive Travis Stice said in an interview.

Only a handful of independent shale firms collect more than they spend. Total overspending by a group of 29 such firms totaled \$6.69 billion in 2018, according to Morningstar data provided to Reuters by the Sightline Institute and the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis. Diamondback

was among the outspenders, but Morningstar projects it will produce free cash flow this year.

The stark challenges facing the companies that pioneered the Permian signals a seismic shift in the shale economy - driven by investor demands for returns and a flood of investment from major oil firms including Chevron, Exxon Mobil, BP and Royal Dutch Shell, with their boundless budgets and integrated operations stretching from the oilfield to the service station. To survive and thrive, independent shale drillers must continue expanding production while slashing costs, returning profits to shareholders, and expanding into new operations such as pipelines to achieve efficiencies, according to interviews with a dozen shale executives and financiers.

Not all will make it. Six North American exploration and production firms have filed for bankruptcy this year and others are on the brink, according to law firm Haynes and Boone LLP. Smaller producers on average plan to spend 20 percent less this year than last, with some slashing budgets as much as 60 percent, according to researcher Drillinginfo. The industry's new focus on cash flow requires scrutinizing every cost down to "pennies," Stice told Reuters, and shifting into what shale firms increasingly call a "manufacturing" strategy for drilling.

That means placing multiple wells on one patch of gravel and fracking them one after the next, then connecting them to a pre-built processing systems that link to pipelines.

A Diamondback rig that Stice can see just behind his backyard will stay in that location for six months, moving 30 feet at a time to drill eight wells in four oil layers stacked on top of each other like a pile of books. With horizontal



MIDLAND: Pump jacks operate at sunset in an oil field in Midland, Texas. — Reuters

drilling technology, the rig targets oil from a few miles away, beneath a Midland, Texas, shopping mall.

"It used to be we'd do one well, and it took 60 truckloads to move a rig," Stice said. Now it takes four to eight hours to start on the next well. "The guy that wins the game in manufacturing is the guy that can manufacture at the lowest cost," Stice said.

Cash is king

Shale firms used to lure investors with bold talk of newfound oil reserves under the ground. Now they talk about how cheaply they can get it out - emphasizing the flow of cash over the flow of crude. Exploration firms for decades saw their stock prices surge on new discoveries. Investors assumed oil was scarce and prices would rise. But the West Texas shale boom has upended that mindset with a flood of output that has made the United States the world's top oil producer, overwhelmed domestic refiners, sent exports soaring - and kept a tight lid on prices.

Today's shale investors want quick

profits and have little use for statistics on reserves or soaring production. Two years ago, Permian bellwether Pioneer Natural Resources said it would target 1 million barrels of daily production by 2026. This year, Pioneer CEO Scott Sheffield told analysts that goal was "no longer a focus."

Investors had warned the company that they would dump its stock if it "added any rigs at all this year," Sheffield said in the first-quarter call with analysts. In May, the shale company disclosed it had laid off a quarter of its staff to save \$100 million and "remain competitive."

Smaller, private-equity backed firms have traditionally assembled acreage, proved the reserves and sold out fairly quickly to a bigger firm. That strategy needs a "complete rethink," said Todd Dittmann, a managing director at investment firm Angelo Gordon.

Energy investors, he said, are now more interested in firms that prove themselves capable of the operational "blocking and tackling" needed to profitably grow production. — Reuters

Business

BTC wins top performance awards

Hino Middle East & West Asia annual dealer conference in Muscat



KUWAIT: Hino Motors Ltd, Japan recently held the annual dealer conference in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. Wide range of topics related to latest trends in truck market as well as Hino's market position were reviewed, and presentations were made focusing on Hino brand image. Major highlight of the event was the Distributors Awards ceremony for outstanding performance.

Bahrah Trading Co (BTC), a subsidiary of Al-Sayer Holding and the authorized distributor for Hino in Kuwait, attended the event in which distributors from Middle East and West Asia region were also present. At the event Bahrah won 4 prestigious

awards from HINO including:

- Sales Performance Award
- Service Department of the year Award
- Parts department of the year Award
- 3 S Award

For Bahrah and Hino team, the award is yet another success story in their continuing quest for excellence in customer service by efficiently adapting the Total support philosophy of Hino Motors Ltd. Yoshikazu Kayano Managing Director, Koji Nagata GM and Satoshi Matsumoto Dy. GM from Hino Motors Middle East complimented Bahrah and con-

veyed their wishes for further success.

Hino has maintained a proven record as one of the world market leaders with representation and presence in GCC and Africa since 1960s with trucks for powerful driving performance, durability, and reliability featuring tomorrow's technology for today's environment.

Since the inception of Hino distributorship, within a short span of time, Bahrah exemplified itself with several distinctions and have been able to build further momentum in sales, service and parts operations. Mubarak Al Sayer CEO & Bengt Schultz COO of Al-Sayer Holding congratulated Team Bahrah on the new

milestone and expressed anticipation of scaling further heights.

"We are totally committed to our customers who repose their trust in us in supplying them reliable products and provide them adequate support when and where needed. In turn the customer benefits from better value for their investment. We thank our loyal customers and Hino team members for their valuable support, that motivate us to further improve on the total support concept, towards making HINO the most preferred brand" said Hamza Melakandy General Manager BTC.

Nintendo's Q1 net profit drops 46% on forex losses

TOKYO: Japanese entertainment giant Nintendo said yesterday its net profit in the first quarter dropped 46 percent due to exchange rate losses, but reported steady sales of its Switch gaming platform. Net profit for the April-June period fell 45.7 percent from a year earlier to 16.6 billion yen (\$150 million), but the Kyoto-based consumer gaming juggernaut kept full-year forecasts unchanged.

"Hardware and software sales increased 13.2 percent and 25.9 percent respectively," the company said, with "Super Mario Maker 2" and "Mario Kart 8 Deluxe" both selling well. Net profit shrank "as a result of foreign exchange losses of 12 billion yen and other factors," it said.

Sales rose 2.4 percent to 172 billion yen while operating profit fell 10.2 percent to 27.4 billion yen.

For the fiscal year to March 2020, Nintendo forecasts a 7.2 percent decline in bottom-line profit but the company has set a higher sales target. "Nintendo has maintained positive momentum as sales of Switch are expanding steadily, together with powerful titles," Hideki Yasuda, an analyst at Ace Research Institute in Tokyo, told AFP ahead of the release of the earnings.

"Nintendo is expected to stay on course to growth," he said. Nintendo said in April that sales of its portable Switch console were projected to rise six percent to 18 million units for the current fiscal year, with the release of new titles in its popular Super Mario, Pokemon and Zelda franchises.

The Switch has become a huge global seller, helped by innovative, family-friendly titles that have won critics and gamers alike. The Japanese giant announced earlier this month the release of a scaled back, cheaper version of the console, with an expected release in September ahead of the key holiday shopping season. Switch Lite, which will sell for \$199.99, will be a strictly handheld device that can't be connected to television sets. —AFP

Gulf Air adds extra flights for upcoming hajj season

MANAMA: Gulf Air, the national carrier of the Kingdom of Bahrain, is proud to announce that it will add 38 extra flights to Jeddah and Madinah to facilitate pilgrims' movement to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj. Starting from 28 July, the additional flights will operate to provide expanded capacity due to the increasing demand during the Hajj season. The airline's regular schedule consists of three to four daily flights to Jeddah and seven weekly flights to Medina and annually adds more flights during the Hajj season to facilitate such demand.

Gulf Air's Deputy Chief Executive Officer Captain Waleed Abdulhameed Al-Alawi said: "Each year we have increased our flights to and from Jeddah and Medina to cater to the high numbers of pilgrims flying



into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to perform the Hajj pilgrimage". He also added: "This is a journey of a lifetime where our Muslim brothers and sisters travel to Makkah and Madina to complete a core pillar in the Islamic religion. From the entire Gulf Air family, we wish all pilgrims safe journeys and successful Hajj".

Gulf Air operates a strong network of routes to and from the Saudi cities of Dammam, Riyadh, Gassim, Madina and Jeddah. With multiple daily flights, the airline facilitates travel to and from Saudi and connects travellers to its extended network through Bahrain International Airport.

Sony first quarter net profit down on one-off factors

TOKYO: Japanese entertainment giant Sony yesterday reported a fall in first-quarter net profit due to one-off factors, with operating profit up thanks to strong demand for its image sensors. While announcing quarterly figures, the PlayStation manufacturer downgraded its full-year revenue forecast as analysts said the firm's recovery was levelling off. Sony's bottomline profit dropped 32.8 percent to 152.1 billion yen (\$1.4 billion) for the April-June quarter on sales of 1.93 trillion yen, down 1.4 percent.

The plunge in net profit reflects in part the firm's exceptional first quarter results last year, fuelled in part by the sale of a share of

its stake in Spotify. But its operating profit rose 18.4 percent to a record 230.9 billion yen. Sony spent years struggling to recover from deep financial trouble, a process that entailed aggressive restructuring, the loss of thousands of jobs and the sale of business units and assets.

"Sony achieved a V-shaped recovery and its growth is now levelling off," said Hideki Yasuda, an analyst at Ace Research Institute in Tokyo. Sony saw a slowdown in its games and network businesses, including an online service that allows users to enjoy music and video titles via their PlayStation accounts. Operating profit in that sector fell more than 11 percent. Sony has said it expects revenue from this core sector will sag due to a continued fall in game hardware sales, as well as the cost of developing a next-generation console and unfavorable foreign exchange rates. "PS4, which has long spearheaded Sony's revival, is now peaking," Yasuda said.

"Investors are focusing how Sony can

smoothly transfer from PS4 to PS5," he added. Sony revised its sales forecast down for the fiscal year to March 2020 to 8.6 trillion yen from an earlier estimate of 8.8 trillion yen. The downward revision was due to sales declines in games and electronics products, although its mobile phone business returned to the black for the quarter, Sony said.

The firm left its full-year net profit forecast unchanged at 500 billion yen, down 45 percent from the previous fiscal year. Annual operating profit forecast was also unchanged. Sony CFO Hiroki Totoki said the US-China trade dispute would be a potential risk for the company. "While paying close attention to geopolitical risks such as a trade issue, we will monitor developments and consider advance measures so that we should not fall behind," Totoki said.

The firm said it saw a slowdown in its electronics and solution sector due to a decline in sales of television sets, smartphones and digital cameras. But sales of

image sensors remained brisk, with operating profit from the sector up 70 percent thanks to robust demand for high-spec smartphones. "Image sensor is a significant business, which is one of the pillars of Sony Group's growth strategy," Totoki said, adding that it would step up efforts to develop next generation image sensors.

US hedge fund Third Point, holding a stake in the Japanese conglomerate, is reportedly demanding a spinoff of Sony's image sensor business. Its entertainment sector is expected to remain promising as "Spider-Man: Far From Home" and "Men in Black: International", both released late June, have captured the box office. And "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood," starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Brad Pitt, will hit the screen in late August. Sony released the quarterly earnings after the closing bell. Its shares, which jumped more than 3.7 percent for the past month, ended the session down 0.08 percent to 5,859 yen. —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.	
EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	304.900
Euro	341.790
Sterling Pound	377.470
Canadian dollar	232.660
Turkish Lira	54.440
Swiss Franc	308.920
US Dollar Buying	297.550
ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.803
Indian Rupees	4.435
Pakistani Rupees	1.920
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.726
Nepali Rupees	2.767
Singapore Dollar	223.780
Hongkong Dollar	39.977
Bangladesh Taka	3.590
Philippine Peso	5.983
Thai Baht	9.927
Malaysian ringgit	77.980
GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	81.361
Qatari Riyal	83.798
Omani Riyal	792.463
Bahraini Dinar	810.150
UAE Dirham	83.068
ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	21.650
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	18.373

Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.225
Tunisian Dinar	109.680
Jordanian Dinar	430.860
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.203
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.367
Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd	
Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	304.540
Canadian Dollar	268.420
Sterling Pound	370.930
Euro	340.770
Swiss Frank	303.605
Bahrain Dinar	809.885
UAE Dirhams	83.320
Qatari Riyals	84.555
Saudi Riyals	82.105
Jordanian Dinar	430.820
Egyptian Pound	18.375
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.728
Indian Rupees	4.431
Pakistani Rupees	1.898
Bangladesh Taka	3.606
Philippines Peso	5.971
Cyprus pound	18.115
Japanese Yen	3.805
Syrian Pound	1.595
Nepalese Rupees	2.773
Malaysian Ringgit	74.820
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.645
Thai Bhat	10.870

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL		
CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.362464	0.376364
Czech Korune	0.005207	0.014507
Danish Krone	0.041372	0.046372
Euro	0.331818	0.345518
Georgian Lari	0.102770	0.102770
Hungarian 0.000943	0.001133	
Norwegian Krone	0.030938	0.036138
Romanian Leu	0.054778	0.071628
Russian ruble	0.004797	0.004797
Slovakia	0.009123	0.019123
Slovenia	0.027971	0.032971
Swedish Krona	0.300761	0.311761
Swiss Franc		
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.201868	0.213868
New Zealand Dollar	0.195593	0.205093
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.225892	0.234892
US Dollars	0.300800	0.306100
US Dollars Mint	0.301300	0.306100
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.002990	0.003791
Chinese Yuan	0.042779	0.046279

Hong Kong Dollar	0.036884	0.039634
Indian Rupee	0.003849	0.004621
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002721	0.002901
Korean Won	0.000247	0.000262
Malaysian Ringgit	0.070377	0.076377
Nepalese Rupee	0.002683	0.003023
Pakistan Rupee	0.001313	0.002083
Philippine Peso	0.005990	0.006290
Singapore Dollar	0.217125	0.227125
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001355	0.001935
Taiwan	0.009682	0.009862
Thai Baht	0.009555	0.010105
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.00013
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.802598	0.810664
Egyptian Pound	0.018669	0.022029
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000210	0.000270
Jordanian Dinar	0.425139	0.434139
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000151	0.000251
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021429	0.045429
Omani Riyal	0.786815	0.794723
Qatar Riyal	0.083092	0.083928
Saudi Riyal	0.080220	0.081520
Syrian Pound	0.001293	0.001513
Tunisian Dinar	0.102113	0.110113
Turkish Lira	0.047226	0.057070
UAE Dirhams	0.082379	0.083207
Yemeni Riyal	0.000991	0.001071

Business

Ooredoo Kuwait announces its partnership with Oasis Club miles

Members of 'Nojoom' program can exchange points for KU's Oasis Club miles

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait announced its partnership with the Oasis Club, the frequent flyer program of Kuwait Airways, allowing members of the Nojoom rewards program to exchange their points for Oasis Club miles, which customers can use to redeem flights on Kuwait Airways. Customers can simply go to the Nojoom section in the MyOoredoo App, choose transfer points and then select Kuwait Airways. The miles will be accrued at the end of the month in the respective Oasis Club membership account.

Meshal Al-Mutairi, Head of Oasis Club said that "Kuwait Airways aims at setting the standard for customer orientation and become an admired airline to fly with. It also provides customer-oriented services that meet the individual needs and preferences of their customers. For clients who look for best-

in-class services, we provide them a premium product. For clients seeking value for money, we provide a reliable economical product. Kuwait Airways also generously rewards its frequent flyers through its loyalty program Oasis Club, where members earn miles by flying on their flights as well as through various partners of Oasis Club."

Fatemah Dashti, Senior Manager Internal Communications and Public Relations at Ooredoo stated that Ooredoo Kuwait is committed to providing customers with a comprehensive experience that enriches their lives and meets their expectations, this is portrayed through the Nojoom Rewards Program which has been tailor made to offer members free upgrades, vouchers and discounts from a large variety of partners to meet their lifestyle needs."

Ooredoo customers can earn more

Nojoom points from our most recent partners which include Crowne Plaza Hotel, Eureka, Landmark Group (Homecentre, Centrepoin), Alshaya Group, Jarir bookstore, Alrifai, Mashawi, Chocolateness, Cozmo, Breezyn, Floward, Joyalukkas, Safat Home and many more to come, to ensure that all customers get a rewarding experience.

Established in 2012, the Nojoom Rewards Program has been continuously revamped to match the Kuwaiti lifestyle, which is modern and youthful and meets local and international trends. Nojoom has been awarded the best loyalty program in the Middle East and Africa for three consecutive years in 2012, 2013, and 2014. The revamped Nojoom rewards program has many new benefits which include earning points from partners, transferring



Nojoom points to friends and family, donate Nojoom points for charitable causes, and redemption for partners' cash vouchers.



Huawei announces H1 2019 revenue: 23.2% yoy growth

KUWAIT: Huawei announced its business results for the first half of 2019: \$58.34 billion in revenue, a 23.2 percent increase over the same period last year. The company's net profit margin for H1 2019 was 8.7 percent.

According to Huawei's Chairman, Liang Hua, operations are smooth and the organization is as sound as ever. With effective management and an excellent performance across all financial indicators, Huawei's business has remained robust in the first half of 2019.

In Huawei's carrier business, H1 sales revenue reached \$21.29 billion, with steady growth in production and shipment of equipment for wireless networks, optical transmission, data communications, IT, and related product domains. To date, Huawei has

secured 50 commercial 5G contracts and has shipped more than 150,000 base stations to markets around the world.

In Huawei's enterprise business, H1 sales revenue was \$4.59 billion. Huawei continues to enhance its ICT portfolio across multiple domains, including cloud, artificial intelligence, campus networks, data centers, Internet of Things, and intelligent computing. It remains a trusted supplier for government and utility customers, as well as customers in commercial sectors like finance, transportation, energy, and automobile.

In Huawei's consumer business, H1 sales revenue hit \$32.1 billion. Huawei's smartphone shipments (including Honor phones) reached 118 million units, up 24 percent YoY. The company also saw rapid growth in its shipments of tablets, PCs, and wearables. Huawei is beginning to scale its device ecosystem to deliver a more seamless intelligent experience across all major user scenarios. To date, the Huawei Mobile Services ecosystem has more than 800,000 registered developers, and



Liang Hua

500 million users worldwide.

"Revenue grew fast up through May," said Liang. "Given the foundation we laid in the first half of the year, we continue to see growth even after we were added to the entity list. That's not to say we don't have difficulties ahead. We do, and they may affect the pace of our growth in the short term."

He added, "But we will stay the course. We are fully confident in what the future holds, and we will continue investing as planned - including a total of \$17.44 billion in R&D this year. We'll get through these challenges, and we're confident that Huawei will enter a new stage of growth after the worst of this is behind us."

The report includes the highlights of activities and initiatives in the field of social responsibility undertaken by the Bank as a leading financial institution in Islamic banking, and one of the key national institutions supporting the community at all levels.



ahli united bank



Corporate Social Responsibility Report for 2018 Youth & Environment

steady pace, Ahli United Bank continues to affirm its leadership in the field of CSR which is the responsibility of every member in the society, in line with the vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah 'New Kuwait 2035', which includes number of pillars that will serve the State and contribute to driving the process of development."

Dashti added: "2018 was a pivotal year in the Bank's CSR vision, where the focus areas of youth and environment received great attention, through a number of activities, including strategic partnerships, sponsorships, training programs, field visits and successful campaigns targeting all segments of society".

Savings surge

Robust consumer spending blunted some of the hit to GDP from weak exports, business investment and a slowdown in inventory accumulation. The economy grew at a 2.1 percent rate last quarter, pulling back from the first quarter's brisk 3.1 percent pace. The economy is slowing largely as the stimulus from last year's \$1.5 trillion tax cut package fades.

Consumer prices as measured by the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index edged up 0.1 percent in June as food and energy prices fell. The PCE price index gained 0.1 percent in May. In the 12 months through June, the PCE price index rose 1.4 percent after a similar increase in May. Excluding the volatile food and energy components, the PCE price index rose 0.2 percent last month, increasing by the same margin for a third straight month. That lifted the annual increase in the so-called core PCE price index to 1.6 percent from 1.5 percent in May. The core PCE index is the Fed's preferred inflation measure and has undershot the US central bank's 2 percent target this year. —Reuters

Turkey's Albayrak sees more rate cuts; says bank reacts to data

ANKARA: Turkish Finance Minister Berat Albayrak said yesterday he expects more sharp interest rate cuts from the central bank, which should bring down inflation, and pushed back against investor concerns over government interference. Albayrak - speaking a week after Turkey's central bank delivered a sharper than expected rate cut, stoking concerns about its independence - said the bank makes policy decisions based on data sets and has entered an easing era.

At a rare press conference, the minister also acknowledged the budget deficit would be higher than target by year end, at less than 3 percent, and he predicted contrary to many economists that the recession-hit economy will log positive growth in 2019. Turkey's economy tipped into recession after last year's currency crisis, which was its worst in nearly two decades and sent inflation soaring to above 25 percent.

The central bank responded with aggressive policy tightening that remained in place until Thursday, when it cut its key policy rate to 19.75 percent, from 24 percent, and set the stage for more.

"With the serious loosening of interest rates in Turkey in the recent period, and based on the fact that the interest rate trend will come down more clearly and strongly in the coming period, we have entered a period of interest rate cuts,"

said Albayrak, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan's son-in-law.

"We need to express this here: the central bank makes its monetary policy and interest rate decisions based on its data set." The rate cut was Turkey's biggest since at least 2003, and it was the first policy decision under new bank governor Murat Uysal, who took the reins after Erdogan sacked former governor Murat Cetinkaya some three weeks ago.

Erdogan, who has long urged lower rates, said he made the move because Cetinkaya did not follow instructions. In the depths of last year's crisis, the government announced a target budget deficit-to-GDP ratio of 1.9 percent. Albayrak said yesterday that though it will rise this year, debt levels are not a problem for Ankara. One of the worst hangovers from the crisis is up to \$20 billion in debt that energy and construction sector companies can no longer afford to service, and that sits largely on Turkish banks' balance sheets.

Earlier this month, Reuters reported that the efforts to clean up the debt have stalled after initial plans for restructurings were put on hold. Albayrak said the government will not compensate losses. "The private sector will conduct this process by themselves. There is no such thing as: 'The government should do this, compensate losses'," he said. "We will equally support the demands of all sectors." — Reuters

Ahli United Bank releases its annual CSR report - 2018

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) has released its annual Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) report 2018 entitled "Youth and Environment" which includes details about the Bank's performance in various relevant fields, including employment opportunities, education and health, as well as social, cultural and charitable programs, being a part of the Bank's commitment to support sustainable development in Kuwait.

The report showcased the Bank's success in forging successful and fruitful partnerships with several community-focused organizations, including the Red Crescent Society, Al-Manabr Al-Quraniya Society, Loyac Organization and Omniya Recycling Factory. Such partnerships have contributed to the continuity and sustainability of the social initiatives and activities adopted by the Bank, making it a role model for community efforts and programs.

The report highlighted in numbers the success of the Bank's CSR efforts. The plastics recycling project with Omniya Recycling Factory resulted in the collection of 2 tons of plastic, equivalent to 20 m3 of landfill through placing bins in the Head Office, all branches of the Bank, and having collection points in a number of areas of Kuwait, such as Al-Mubarakia, Rumaithiya and Bayan near the Bank's branches. This is in addition to the positive impact of this partnership in reducing the amount of waste and promoting the recycling culture, as well as creating opportunities for the presence of ambitious projects by Kuwaiti youth. Environmental awareness efforts for the

Bank's employees have also succeeded in saving electrical consumption by 50 percent through using energy-saving lamps and increasing paper savings rate by 8 percent during 2018 compared to 2017.

The report includes the highlights of activities and initiatives in the field of social responsibility undertaken by the Bank as a leading financial institution in Islamic banking, and one of the key national institutions supporting the community at all levels.

The report sheds light on the Bank's initiatives in social responsibility. The report covers a wide range of community support and development initiatives, aimed at enhancing the Bank's positive contribution to supporting youth and their programs. The Bank's program was also focused on events that support protecting and conserving the environment, including organizing the "Fun Run" activity with financial proceeds allocated to charity for lighting of remote areas outside Kuwait by using solar-powered lamps. The Bank also celebrated Earth Day as a reflection of its care for the planet we live in. Parks and public places received a share of the Bank's social responsibility efforts.

Youth have always been at the forefront of the Bank's CSR Program through a number of strategic partnerships and sponsorships, including the "Qalam Academy" initiative to develop the seeds of creativity among participants, being the first of its kind to promote, encourage and develop youth writers and authors. The people of determination have been the focus of attention by the Bank to encourage them and integrate them into the society. The Bank's participation in "Partners to Employ Them" campaign was a practical translation of this direction.

Commenting on the report, Sahar Dashti, General Manager Customer Protection and head of the Bank's CSR Team, said: "At a

mind, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell early this month signaled the US central would ease monetary policy. A strong labor market and signs that the economy was not slowing abruptly, however, saw financial markets dialing back expectations of a 50 basis point rate cut today.

Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity, gained 0.3 yesterday as an increase in services and outlays on other goods offset a decline in purchases of motor vehicles. Data for May was revised up to show consumer spending rising 0.5 percent instead of the previously reported 0.4 percent advance. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast consumer spending climbing 0.3 percent last month.

The data was included in last Friday's second-quarter gross domestic product report, which showed consumer spending increased at a 4.3 percent annualized rate, accelerating from a tepid 1.1 percent pace in the January-March period. US financial markets were little moved by the data.

Weak eurozone data backs Draghi's case for more easing

PARIS/BERLIN: A series of weak economic data from France, Germany and the eurozone as a whole yesterday painted a meager growth outlook for the single currency bloc, lending support to doves among ECB policymakers who favor more rate cuts and bond buys.

French growth slowed unexpectedly in the second quarter on weaker household spending and German consumer morale worsened for the third month in a row heading into August, adding to signs that the eurozone economy as a whole is cooling. The lackluster read-out of data from the currency bloc's two biggest economies backs European Central Bank President Mario Draghi's assessment that the growth outlook is deteriorating and the bank should inject more monetary stimulus.

In a further sign of economic weakness, German consumer price inflation, harmonized to make it comparable with other eurozone figures, eased to 1.1 percent in July from 1.5 percent in the previous month, preliminary data showed.

This undershot a Reuters forecast of 1.3 percent and was the lowest since November 2016. It also marked the third month in a row that German inflation remained well below the ECB's target level of close to but below 2 percent for the eurozone as a whole. "Consumers cheer, savers cry. Mario Draghi will definitely not raise interest rates during his term of office," KfW economist Sebastian Wanke said. Draghi's term as ECB president is due to end on Oct. 31 and IMF chief Christine Lagarde has been nominated to succeed him.

Sooner than later

Adding to the clouded outlook, euro zone economic sentiment deteriorated to



FRANKFURT AM MAIN: Mario Draghi, President of the European Central Bank, speaks during a press conference on Eurozone monetary policy in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. — AFP

hit its lowest level in more than three years in July, European Commission data showed yesterday. "This adds to evidence ... that the eurozone economy will expand by a meager 1 percent or so this year, strengthening the case for ECB action sooner rather than later," said Melanie Debono from Capital Economics.

The French economy grew 0.2 percent in the April-June period, down from 0.3 percent in the previous three months, according to preliminary data from the INSEE statistics agency. That was just below a Reuters poll of 28 economists, which had an average estimate of 0.3 percent. Until now the French economy has proven more resilient than some neighbors such as Germany because it is less dependent on exports and thus less exposed to global swings. But household spending, the traditional motor of French growth, grew only 0.2 percent, the slowest rate in a year despite a more than 10 billion euro (\$11.1 billion) package of measures launched by President Emmanuel Macron to boost purchasing power.

In Germany, the economy is widely expected to have contracted in the second quarter and sentiment surveys suggest the third quarter might not bring any improvement, raising the specter of a technical recession in Europe's largest economy. —Reuters

Moderate US consumer spending, inflation support rate cut

WASHINGTON: US consumer spending and prices rose moderately in June, pointing to slower economic growth and benign inflation that could see the Federal Reserve cutting interest rates today for the first time in a decade. The report from the Commerce Department yesterday was released as officials from the Fed were due to gather for a two-day policy meeting against the backdrop of an uncertain economic outlook.

The 10-year old economic expansion, the longest in history, is facing headwinds from trade tensions, fears of a disorderly departure from the European Union by Britain and weak global growth. With those risks in

Business

Focus on core banking business helped KFH achieve solid H1 results: Al-Nahedh

43% of net operating income contributed by KFH subsidiaries

KUWAIT: Group Chief Executive Officer at Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Mazin Saad Al-Nahedh said that KFH has achieved positive financial results in H1 2019 thanks to the focus on core banking business, indicating profits were mainly driven by revenue from the core business. Financing income reached KD 460.5 million in H1 2019, an increase of 8.6 percent compared to the same period last year.

Al-Nahedh added during TV interviews to comment on the financial results for H1 2019 that the total operating expenses decreased by 1.6 percent to KD 151.7 million compared to H1 2018. Net operating income increased by 2.1 percent to KD 240.7 million compared to the same period last year.

Al-Nahedh pointed out that the contribution of KFH



Mazin Al-Nahedh

subsidiaries in the net operating income reached to about 43.2 percent. "KFH's total exiting deals reached KD 42.4 million in H1 2019, achieving KD 11.3 million profits, compared to KD 2.8 million in H1 2018. Avoiding the capital consumption and to be in line with the sustainable profits, KFH's strategy focuses on exiting from non-strategic investments," Al-Nahedh revealed.

He added that the Group's non-performing financings

decreased to 1.90 percent, as per the CBK's accounting principles, compared to 1.99 percent in the end of 2018. Total debt coverage ratio stood at 400.11 percent and 263.63 percent for KFH solo and the Group respectively in H1 2019. Al-Nahedh pointed out that the total the Group total provisions and impairment charge reached KD 100 million, including Financing, investment and other provisions. Total provisions reached KD 636.9 million for the Group as of the H1 2019.

Regarding the potential Acquisition of AUB, Al-Nahedh explained that any updated development will be timely disclosed as per regulations and procedures. Al-Nahedh added that in view of the market outlook, KFH-Turkey recorded precautionary provision of KD 40 million, stressing that KFH-Turkey enjoys high quality assets.

In addition, he revealed that KFH signed an initial contract to sell its shares in Aref Investment Group. Once completed, KFH will disclose the financial impact as per the applicable procedures. KFH has posted net profits of KD 107.7 million for the first half of 2019 for KFH shareholders compared to KD 95.2 million for the same period last year, an increase of 13.1 percent. Earnings per share for H1 of 2019 reached 15.64 fils, compared to 13.84 fils for the same period last year i.e. an increase of 13 percent.

Total assets increased by 5.5 percent compared to the end of last year to reach KD 18,747 billion, an increase of KD 976.8 million at the end of H1 this year. Depositors' accounts reached KD 12,837 billion, an increase of KD 1,057 billion or 9 percent compared to the end of last year.

UK to get £3.6bn boost as speedy tech gives factories 5G whizz!

KUWAIT: Super-fast mobile internet is set to deliver a £3.6 billion productivity boost to Britain's economy, the first factory trials indicate. The Worcester Bosch factory is the first in the UK to be kitted out with revolutionary 5G technology. Early tests have already demonstrated an increase in productivity of 1 per cent at the boiler manufacturer in Worcester.

In the factory next door, machine tool manufacturer Yamazaki Mazak has seen a 2 per cent productivity boost since trials began earlier this year. The two companies form part of the Worcestershire 5G consortium, which was launched with Government backing to test how 5G can boost factory output. Manufacturing contributed £182 billion to the UK economy last year. So a 2 per cent rise in productivity could translate to a £3.64 billion increase.

Carl Arntzen, the chief executive of Worcester Bosch, estimates that it has saved tens of millions of pounds for the company. He said its engineers aim for a 3 per cent productivity improvement every year, which normally takes 'hundreds of projects targeting tiny little improvements here and there.'

'So to effectively reach a third of their target in one project for them was like utopia.' 5G was rolled out in Britain this year, with operators such as EE and Vodafone the first to launch high-speed internet in some cities for mobile phone customers. It is so fast it allows machines in factories to communicate with one another instantly - a phenomenon known as the 'internet of things'. It has a response time of up to 1 millisecond, which means robots can interact with one another automatically. The Mail on Sunday was given an exclusive tour of the Worcester Bosch factory to see 5G in action.

The company, which employs 1,200 staff at the plant, has attached hundreds of white sensors the size of cigarette packets to some of its machines as part of the test. Tasks which would take humans hours to complete are carried out in minutes by these robots, speeding up the production line.

Test ground: The Worcester Bosch factory is the first in the UK to be kitted out with revolutionary 5G technology.

The sensors transmit vast amounts of data to computers in real-time, which analyse it so that any faults are detected early, preventing a machine from breaking down.

That is vital to the factory's overall output because every minute counts. If one machine goes down, it could halt work at the factory, which could cost the business millions of pounds. The company calls it 'preventative maintenance'.

In one instance, a welding machine is churning out heat exchangers for the boilers. Sensors attached to it and linked to 5G measure vibrations and relay to a computer any fluctuations in speed and performance. Arntzen said the company, which was bought by the German Bosch Group in 1992, is now making decisions on smart information instead of 'dumb assumptions'.

'Once a quarter, for example, we take one of those big presses offline, strip it down and do a full maintenance test on it. History has taught us if we do that four times a year those machines will carry on running,' he said. 'But if we monitor how that machine is running in real time and we only need to do that twice a year then that saves us the downtime and contributes to our overall productivity gain.'

how the mobile revolution will speed up production

5G is the latest and fastest version of mobile internet. It allows machines to run themselves automatically. Most factories now use broadband to connect machines or computers to the internet. But when factories are using moving machines that need to interact then 5G's 'low latency' - the time it takes machines to connect to each other - is a game changer.

5G will be beamed to our phones from so-called 'small cells'. These inconspicuous boxes are needed because 5G's higher frequencies mean radio waves cannot travel long distances from traditional phone masts. Arntzen, whose company builds around 270,000 appliances a year, hopes that in the next few years they can use 5G to monitor boilers remotely so that they can be fixed before breaking down.

'We are going to take away the risk that this appliance is going to break down in the middle of winter when you most need it because we're monitoring it,' he said.

The Government has injected nearly £5 million into the Worcestershire 5G testbed. Dozens of major companies, including US internet giant Verizon, have visited the site to see how 5G has helped Worcester Bosch. Mazak is using augmented reality glasses and microphones to connect engineers fixing machines in factories around the country to people sitting at computers in Mazak's base in Worcester.

That is especially useful for less experienced engineers who might not be able to fix the problem themselves and can transmit high-quality video to more experienced ones who can help out with a problem. Mark Stansfeld, a former O2 executive who chairs the Worcestershire 5G consortium, said he wanted to turn Worcestershire into a hub for 5G innovation. He added: 'Why do our children have to leave and go to London when you can have a business here, attract great businesses and live here? 5G is an enabler.'

Anil Kapoor is Malabar Gold & Diamonds' new brand ambassador

KUWAIT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one among the largest global jewellery retailer with 250 showrooms has signed Bollywood Icon Anil Kapoor to its star-studded list of brand ambassadors. Anil Kapoor who is known for his versatile and natural acting has appeared in numerous Hollywood, Bollywood movies and television series. His career has spanned almost 40 years as an actor, and as a producer since 2005. He has also won numerous awards in his career, including two National Film Awards, one Screen Actors Guild Award and six Filmfare Awards in varied acting categories.

Anil Kapoor will be seen in the new TV commercial series by Malabar Gold & Diamonds named 'Malabar



Anil Kapoor

Promises' which will be released soon. Malabar Gold & Diamonds already have Kareena Kapoor Khan, Tamannaah Bhatia and Miss World Manushi Chhillar

(2017) as their brand ambassadors. "We are happy to welcome Mr Anil Kapoor to the Malabar Family. We have been associating with Mr. Anil Kapoor over the last 5 years for various store inaugurations, so this was a natural progression of our relationship. His fame and recognition in India as well as globally will undoubtedly complement and strengthen our communication strategy to achieve the aggressive expansion plans we have in India as well as globally," said MP Ahammed, Chairman - Malabar Group.

"I only endorse brands that I believe in and can support, as it comes with a lot of responsibility," says Anil Kapoor on the occasion. "I am humbled and thrilled that a brand like Malabar Gold & Diamonds has shown faith in me and chosen me as the face of their brand. I have attended many inauguration events of Malabar Gold & Diamonds in India and abroad so this is like a big warm homecoming for me."

The Group currently operates retail outlets spread across ten countries in the India, Middle East, Southeast Asia and America. The company also plans major expansion in international market includes new territories such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Australia, Canada, Egypt and Turkey etc.

VIVA wins Golden Strategic Award 2019

KUWAIT: VIVA, Kuwait's fastest-growing and most developed telecom operator, announced that it has been recognized with the "Golden Strategic Award 2019" for the best website nationwide, at the annual event held by the Excellence Awards Academy - Dubai for the Golden Shield Awards for Smart Websites and Applications, and social media platforms across the Pan Arab region.

On this occasion, Abdulrazaq Bader Al-Essa, Corporate Communications Director at VIVA said: "The award reflects our excellence in providing modern digital services to our customers that meet different needs and with ease and flexibility. VIVA always endeavors to foster its leading position in the local and regional telecommunications market, through a suite of world-class digital products, services and solutions."

He added: "The VIVA website and its application, including its official social media platforms, create an important portal that VIVA is constantly seeking to update, to communicate with its customers, respond to their inquiries, provide them with ease and comfort, and keep them posted with the latest offers and packages."

Infiniti QX50 employs ProPILOT

KUWAIT: This month marks the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landings, a seismic achievement in the history of mankind. Lessons learned from July 20, 1969, are still felt today, with the innovations of space travel percolating down into everyday situations of the 21st Century - such as driving.

During a speech on a warm sunny day in September 1962, US President John F. Kennedy exclaimed, "We choose to go to the moon!" Fewer than seven years later, this audacious goal was accomplished when Neil Armstrong safely piloted the Eagle lunar module onto the moon's surface.

Despite this success, however, the landing was not a smooth one. Six thousand feet above the moon and five minutes into the descent, the crew realized that the module's pre-programmed autonomous landing system had failed. As the module soared past the designated landing spot, Armstrong took direct control of the craft, overriding the autonomous system to land safely on the surface of Earth's nearest neighbor.

That day, Armstrong made a strong case for humans to retain ultimate control over their machines.

And this is an approach INFINITI has followed when developing driver assistance technologies for its new models. The INFINITI QX50 employs a suite of advanced ProPILOT Assist technologies that merge seamlessly with driver inputs. The result is a vehicle that lets owners enjoy everyday moon landings of their own.

As driver assistance technology develops, INFINITI believes these systems can help reduce the stress of driving. The QX50's ProPILOT Assist system can do many things, including maintaining set speeds and distances on the highway, for instance, or helping to keep the car in the center of its lane, even around gentle curves.

However, INFINITI still wants to let drivers retain control of their vehicles. This doesn't just form a more emotional connection between car and driver - it also gives the driver the option to override the driver assistance technologies.

These everyday moon landings - the desire for a level of human control and finesse in the face of



autonomous technologies - aren't just limited to driving. Take autonomous lawnmowers, for example. This is an innovation that saves owners from having to cut the grass every other weekend, the gift of time for many, but some owners often finish the job themselves, purely to create the perfect stripes in their freshly mown grass. At airports, autonomous parking pods enable passengers to travel to and from their desired terminal with ease. But it's often still down to the passenger to decide when to close the doors for the ride. The machine won't necessarily know that another passenger might be running to catch the last pod in the dock - something a human may recognize before they hit the go button.

And it's this human-centric approach that INFINITI adopted when developing the QX50's ProPILOT Assist driver assist technologies. None of its features

are designed to remove control from the driver, but are designed to make driving less stressful. Like Armstrong landing the Eagle lunar module, the machine can do some of the heavy lifting, but the driver brings the finesse.

INFINITI is committed to developing new driving technologies, with the technology as an enhancement to the driving experience, rather than a replacement. INFINITI models such as the QX50 are still capable of delighting drivers with a fun and rewarding experience at the wheel, but the car makes that experience less stressful.

As the Apollo 11 mission demonstrated half a century ago, the combination of human control and advanced technology means we can all enjoy our own everyday moon landings from the comfort of our own cars.



Technology & Science



Johnson's unveils first major brand transformation in 125-year history

Johnson's develops all-new generation of baby care products

KUWAIT: After 125 years, Johnson's has announced a complete transformation of its brand and products in response to modern parenting needs and preferences. The brand surveyed more than 26,000 parents around the world, including from the GCC, to ascertain the most pressing requirements for parents today, and has responded through the delivery of a major evolution, both in terms of product ingredients, and look and feel.

Acknowledging that everything about parenting has changed in the past 40 years and recognizing that a strong population of GCC millennial parents are adopting new parenting principles, Johnson's developed an all-new generation of baby care products that serve the pressing issues of parents today. Labelled "a new standard of gentle", the transformation focuses primarily on creating products for the changing demands and expectations of young mothers that have adopted a simpler, more natural and eco-friendly approach to nurturing their children.

With more and more parents across markets such as Egypt, UAE, and KSA citing product quality as their main concern for babies, the response reaffirms Johnson's commitment to delivering products built by and for today's modern parent. The Johnson's promise has always been to craft products so mild that they can be used for every age and stage of a baby's life. But gentle goes beyond what's in the bottles; it is the heartbeat of the brand. Choosing gentle is rooted in the insight that parents want to create a better world for

their children, a world where every baby can flourish.

"This is a proud and pivotal milestone for Johnson's," says Vivian Nasamu-Odior, Marketing Director of Johnson's(r) Baby for Africa, Middle East and Turkey. "We have taken modern parenting and put it at the very heart of our evolved Johnson's(r) range. Each product is carefully crafted to be the gentlest it can be, while enhancing the connection and experience between parent and child at every stage of their development. We believe in a gentle world and want to be gentle with our children, their dreams and ambitions, which is reflected in every aspect of our completely new range and characterised by our five promises."

Complementing the new range, Johnson's communicated its five bold promises to ensure a new standard of gentle through safety and innovation. The first and third promises are to only use ingredients that serve a purpose, and to be honest and open. New formulas are simpler and gentler, and are developed to be even milder than before, boasting 100 percent total ingredient transparency. Using more naturally derived and 50 percent fewer ingredients, the new range is even kinder without dyes and sulphates, and as always is free of parabens and phthalates.

Knowing that parents in the region are particularly concerned about the safety and standard of their products and look for quality products they can trust, Johnson's ingredient transparency and easier to read ingredient



labels offers parents clarity and reassurance that they are choosing the best for their baby. The second promise is to never stop raising the bar when it comes to what's best for your baby. As leading baby skin care experts, they partner with leading health authorities, scientists, paediatricians and dermatologists to understand the unique needs of babies at different stages of their development, and to understand healthy baby skin. That research informed the new range and new standards in

baby skin care.

Promise number four is to think like a parent first. Johnson's scientists are parents first, which means they develop products with the same care and rigor they would want for their own children. This mentality is to ensure that good enough is never quite good enough when it comes to our babies.

In addition, the new range is easier to use. Several of the products offer creamier quick lathering washes for easier rinsing, as well as

light, fast absorbing formulas, without the greasy after-feeling, making it easier for parents to handle their baby during bathing. Recognizing that the Middle East climate adds extra demands for baby's skincare, the new range offers improved conditioning across the hair care range and the right amount of moisturisation, without altering the feeling of baby's natural skin.

Bath time is also made easier to navigate with the new Johnson's. Ergonomic bottles that prevent leaking are fitted with pumps for convenient, one-hand use, allowing parents' attention to remain focused on baby. The Johnson's transformation is underpinned by a final promise: its fundamental mission to create a world where every baby can thrive. That's why the Johnson's line now ranges from newborn to active baby, to kids. This includes the new cotton touch collection blended with real cotton, and the expanded 'kids' line designed for an interactive, stimulating bath time experience to help develop communication and social skills.

As fragrance helps create direct connection to memory and emotion, Johnson's(r) took the iconic fragrance that mother's love, and refreshed certain notes to specially create a gentle scent that is even more precious, helping parent and baby to bond.

Each product therefore goes beyond cleansing and moisturizing - they turn moments of care at every age and stage into opportunities to strengthen baby's connection to their parents and the world.

Dell Technologies adds Russia to its digitally advanced markets

DUBAI: Dell Technologies has announced that its Middle East, Turkey, Africa (META) region is now being expanded to include Russia, with the change coming into effect immediately. The re-mapping of the CIS markets follows Dell Technologies' view that these countries have similar needs and customer requirements, leading to Russia joining the digitally advanced markets in the META region.



Mohammed Amin

The region will be led by Mohammed Amin, Senior Vice-President, Middle East Russia, Africa & Turkey (MERAT) and Boris Shcherbakov, Vice-President, Russia will continue to lead the local Russian business operations for Dell Technologies, reporting to Mohammed. As ICT continues to be a key driver of socio-economic growth, Russia is accelerating its national digitization agenda across both government and industry and remains a key growth market for Dell Technologies.

Combined with the need to stay ahead of the digital maturity curve and complete

in a new world, companies in Russia are also making a concerted push to transform their business with technologies such as multi-cloud; Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Security - segments in which Dell Technologies has the broadest, industry-leading portfolio of end-to-end solutions.

Aongus Hegarty, President, EMEA Commercial Business, Dell Technologies said: "With the expansion of our META business to include the Russian market we are looking to increase the focus on this important country and to better serve our customers there. We look forward to continuing to build relevance and success for our customers and partners under Mohammed's strong leadership and focus, and of course with Boris' continued expertise in Russia, we are confident that we will unlock new opportunities and continue building the momentum."

Mohamed Amin, Senior Vice President - Middle East, Russia, Africa, Turkey, Dell Technologies said: "Russia is a market with significant potential and is poised to dramatically accelerate its adoption of disruptive technologies in the coming years. This is closely linked with trends we are seeing within the META region as well, so this change will allow us to extend our growth strategy and business roadmap to Russia. Within the META region, we have also built in-depth experience and seen double-digit growth year-on-year, while being the trusted partner of choice to companies as they embark on implementing their digital strategies. I am humbled by the trust placed in me and look forward to working closely together with our Dell Technologies Russian team, customers and partners."

ThreatQuotient launches META operations in partnership with StarLink

DUBAI: ThreatQuotient, a leading security operations platform innovator, today announced a strategic partnership and value added distributor (VAD) agreement with StarLink. According to the terms of the agreement, StarLink will promote and distribute ThreatQuotient's platform, ThreatQ, through its extensive network of channel partners and solution providers across the Middle East, Turkey and Africa.

The ability for organizations to continuously ensure the security of their data and support the business needs of their customers is becoming a more critical factor of success; and the success of cybersecurity strategies within an organization is leaning more and more on threat intelligence to relieve the workload that security teams are facing, and support organizations in making the right choices for solutions to map and monitor their risks in real time. ThreatQ's security operations solutions will help enterprises stay ahead of threats and will help StarLink's customers handle incidents more efficiently, and to determine with more precision the measures they need to take to reduce risk and protect their environment.

"Like many regions, there is a growing need in Middle East, Turkey and Africa for strengthened security operations and improved threat intelligence management which is why ThreatQuotient is excited to expand our footprint into these markets with the support of StarLink," said Anthony Perridge, VP of International at ThreatQuotient. "We are confident in StarLink's long term competencies in cybersecurity through their extensive portfolio of security solutions, a solid channel network, and years of expertise and market



Nidal Othman

knowledge. We look forward to joining StarLink's impressive portfolio of technology solutions, and maintaining innovative, competitive programs that drive efficiency for our mutual customers and offer the highest quality threat intelligence tools available."

Large and small threat intelligence teams benefit by using ThreatQ to apply customer-defined scoring of intelligence, quickly deploy threat data to existing sensor grids, and cornerstone workflows to focus on time to detect (TTD) and time to respond (TTR). ThreatQ also enables a shared understanding across teams and tools within an organization's defense infrastructure. The platform serves reactive use cases (responding to events) as well as proactive use cases (anticipating threats, orchestrating and synchronizing threat intelligence across systems), and supports future use cases by adapting to changing business needs. Leveraging an integrated self-tuning Threat Library(tm), Adaptive Workbench(tm) and Open Exchange(tm), ThreatQ has become the foundation of security operations and threat management systems across the globe.

Nidal Othman, Co-founder and Managing Director, StarLink commented that "Even after deploying multiple layers of security, organizations are continuing to fall victim to intrusions. This is mainly due to having traditional methods of security systems. What is lacking is an advanced security strategy. This is where



Anthony Perridge

ThreatQ's Threat Intelligence Platform can help enterprises accelerate their security operations with a threat-centric approach." He added, "We are looking forward to add value to this partnership through our regional expertise and capabilities and grow ThreatQ's market share in this region."

ThreatQ enables teams to make a significant leap forward in their current capabilities to manage intelligence by automating several historically manual, time-consuming and repeatable tasks, saving customers a significant amount of time and further augmenting their ROI.

Bangladesh 'extremely worried' over low male tiger population

DHAKA: A lower-than-expected population of male Bengal tigers in the world's largest mangrove forest has sparked fears about the long-term viability of the endangered species in Bangladesh, officials said yesterday. A poaching crackdown by authorities in the Bangladeshi part of the Sundarbans mangroves saw an increase in the big cat population from 106 to 114 four years ago, according to a census published in May.

But closer analysis of the data found the number of male

tigers was lower than the typical ratio of one male for every three tigresses, with the figure now at one male for every five females, officials said. "We are extremely worried. The standard ratio should be one male for every three female tigers," Jahidul Kabir, the government's conservator of forest wildlife, told AFP. "In the Sharankhola range, we found only two males against 19 female tigers," he said, adding the future of the tiger population in the Sundarbans could be at stake if the forest continues to lose male tigers.

Authorities are planning to capture male tigers from other parts of the forest and introduce them in the Sharankhola range, which is the densest tiger habitat in the mangroves. The census was conducted on 1,656 square kilometers of forest last year and used camera traps to count the big cats. The Sundarbans, which also straddle parts of eastern India, is home to some rare flora and fauna including Irrawaddy dolphins and

Bengal tigers, both declared endangered because of poaching and loss of habitat. Alarm bells rang in 2015 when a census found that only 106 tigers were living in the forest, less than a quarter of the 440-strong population in 2004. Since the 2015 findings, authorities have undertaken a series of measures to boost the number of Bengal tigers in the forest - one of the world's last remaining wild habitats for the big cats.

As part of the measures, the size of the wildlife sanctuary in the forest was more than doubled. An elite security force launched a major crackdown against pirates-turned-poachers active in the forest. Monirul Khan, a zoology professor and a tiger expert at the state-run Jahangirnagar University, said he believed poaching was behind the low male tiger numbers. "No doubt this is a worrying trend. And the possible reason is poaching," Khan said. "Male tigers are aggressive and they cover bigger territory, which make them vulnerable to poaching." —AFP

Climate change blamed for deaths of Arctic reindeer

OSLO: Some 200 reindeer have been found dead from starvation in the Arctic archipelago Svalbard, an unusually high number, the Norwegian Polar Institute said Monday, pointing the finger at climate change. During their annual census of the wild reindeer population on the group of islands in the Arctic ocean, about 1,200 kilometers from the North Pole, three researchers from the polar institute identified around 200 deer carcasses believed to have starved to death last winter.

Ashild Onvik Pedersen, head of the census, said the "high degree of mortality" was a consequence of climate change, which according to climate scientists, is happening twice as fast in the Arctic as the rest of the world. "Climate change is making it rain much more. The rain falls on the snow and forms a layer of ice on the tundra, making grazing conditions very poor for animals," she told AFP. —AFP

Plastic junk spawns desert island disaster in Pacific

Marine scientist calls for tighter restrictions on single-use plastics

WELLINGTON: Floating plastic garbage has swamped a remote Pacific island once regarded as an environmental jewel and scientists say little can be done to save it while a throwaway culture persists. Henderson Island is an uninhabited coral atoll that lies almost exactly halfway between New Zealand and Peru, with 5,500 kilometers of ocean in either direction. Despite its extreme isolation, a freak confluence of geography and ocean currents means Henderson has one of the highest concentrations of plastic pollution on the planet.

"We found debris from just about everywhere," said Jennifer Lavers, an Australian-based researcher who led an expedition to the island last month. "We had bottles and containers, all kinds of fishing stuff and it had come from, well, you name it—Germany, Canada, the United States, Chile, Argentina, Ecuador. "It was a real message that every country has a responsibility to protect the environment, even in these remote areas."

Henderson lies at the centre of the South Pacific gyre, a vast circular ocean current that runs anti-clockwise down the east coast of Australia and up the west coast of South America. The gyre should be a boon for the 10-kilometre-by-five speck of land, carrying rich nutrients into the waters surrounding Henderson to feed huge colonies of sea birds.

The atoll's ecosystem is so rich that Henderson was included on the UN World Heritage List in 1988, with the body hailing it as an untouched paradise. "As one of the last near-pristine limestone islands of significant size in the world, Henderson Island retains its exceptional natural beauty with its white, sandy beaches, limestone cliffs, and rich and almost undisturbed vegetation," it said.

South Pacific garbage patch

But three decades later, the gyre has become a marine conveyor belt dumping endless waves of plastic detritus onto Henderson's coast, making it the hub of what has become known as the South Pacific Garbage Patch. Lavers led her first expedition there in 2015 and on the island's East Beach found there were about 700 items of plastic per square meter, one of the highest concentrations found anywhere in the world.

Compounding the problem, the churning waves have reduced more than half the waste to tiny particles almost invisible to the human eye, making them impossible to clean up but easily digested by wildlife such as birds and turtles. Lavers organized a clean-up effort on her most recent trip to the island last month and her team collected six tons of plastic garbage from the beach over two grueling weeks.

They were unable to take away the rubbish because their ship could not find a safe mooring on the rugged coastline, instead storing it above the high-tide line for future removal. Lavers admitted it was "heartbreaking" to make such a mammoth effort only to see more garbage floating ashore where they had just cleaned. "We'd be having our lunch and watching it replenish in real time as things like buoys and bits of rope washed onto the beach," she said.

The marine scientist, who plans further trips to Henderson in 2020 and 2021, said the experience underlined the fact that clean-ups were not a long-term solution to the ocean's pollution crisis. "It just speaks to the importance of shutting off the tap at the source," she said, calling for tighter restrictions on single-use plastics. "There's already so much debris in the oceans, we really need to do all we can to prevent any more getting out there." — AFP



AT SEA: This handout photograph shows a beach clean-up team member collecting rubbish from a beach on Henderson Island, an uninhabited member of the Pitcairn Islands archipelago in the South Pacific Ocean. — AFP

Dozens of live pangolins found hidden on bus

HANOI: Dozens of live pangolins smuggled from Laos were discovered "dehydrated and weak" on a bus in central Vietnam, police and conservationists said yesterday, in a country where the endangered mammals are a highly-prized delicacy. The small, docile pangolin is the most trafficked animal in the world, and is found across Asia and Africa, with one snatched from the wild every five

minutes, according to the World Wildlife Fund. In Vietnam pangolin meat is considered high-end and hard to find and their scales are used in traditional medicine to treat allergies and impotence. Police on Monday found 30 pangolins stuffed into boxes on a bus in Ha Tinh province, arresting the driver and his wife on suspicion of trafficking the animals from Laos. Four were already dead and many of the surviving animals were in bad shape, said Truong Van Truong from the NGO Save Vietnam's Wildlife.

"Most were dehydrated and weak because they were kept in a tight space for a long time," he told AFP. The pangolins were tied into individual sacks and crammed into a box, where they might have been kept for weeks with little water or food, he added. They will be nursed back to health before the strongest are released back into

the wild. Police said the driver and his wife were paid to transport the animals from neighboring Laos.

The rescue comes on the heels of major wildlife seizures over the past week in Vietnam, both a consumption and transport hub for illegal wildlife in Asia. Police arrested a wildlife trafficking suspect and two others after finding seven dead tiger cubs in their car in a Hanoi parking lot Thursday. On the same day 125 kilograms of rhino horn encased in plaster was seized at the capital's airport.

Often described as scaly ant-eaters, pangolins curl into a ball when scared, making them easy prey for hunters. They once roamed free in Vietnam's forests, but numbers have dwindled dramatically thanks to rampant poaching and habitat loss. They are categorized as "critically endangered" according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature. — AFP



HA TINH: This handout from Save Vietnam's Wildlife shows pangolins, which were found in a bus, in Ha Tinh province. — AFP

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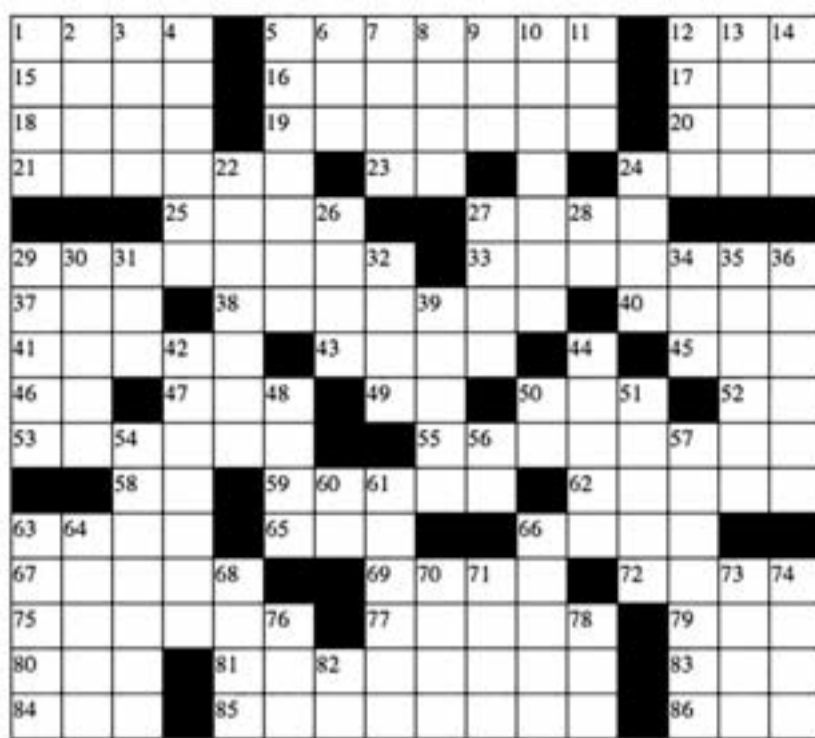
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ACROSS

1. Indicating the most important performer or role.
5. A member of the Muskogean people formerly living in northern Alabama.
12. A doctor's degree in dental surgery.
15. English tennis player who won many women's singles titles (born in 1945).
16. The dialect of Ancient Greek spoken by Arcadians.
17. A former agency (from 1946 to 1974) that was responsible for research into atomic energy and its peacetime uses in the United States.
18. Pompous or pretentious talk or writing.
19. Ancient Greek or Roman galley or warship having three tiers of oars on each side.
20. The cry made by sheep.
21. Food that is discarded (as from a kitchen).
23. A doctor's degree in religion.
25. A thin wedge of material (wood or metal or stone) for driving into crevices.
29. Comprising the lichens which grow symbiotically with algae.
33. Resembling or characteristic of or appropriate to an elegy.
37. Not in good physical or mental health.
38. Gull family.
40. Mentally or physically infirm with age.
41. Scar where the umbilical cord was attached.
43. City in eastern Belgium.
45. A white linen liturgical vestment with sleeves.
46. A metric unit of length equal to 1000 meters (or 0.621371 miles).
47. (informal) 'johnny' was applied as a nickname for Confederate soldiers by the Federal soldiers in the American Civil War.
49. A form of address for a man.
52. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
53. A mountain peak in the Andes in Bolivia (21,391 feet high).
55. Of or relating to the peoples who speak the language of the Arawak.
58. A radioactive transuranic element produced by bombarding plutonium with neutrons.
59. An indehiscent fruit derived from a single ovary having one or many seeds within a fleshy wall or pericarp.
62. Swelling from excessive accumulation of serous fluid in tissue.
63. An island of central Hawaii (between Molokai and Kauai).
65. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
67. (Maine colloquial) Temporary summer resident in inland Maine n1.
69. The capital and largest city of Mongolia.
72. A doctor's degree in music.
75. A warning against certain acts.
77. Deciduous shrub of North America.
79. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
80. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
81. Low stinging nettle of Central and South America having velvety brownish-green toothed leaves and clusters of small green flowers.
83. (informal) Roused to anger.
84. Last or greatest in an indefinitely large series.
85. Situated between the earth and the moon.
86. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

1. The compass point that is one point south of southwest.
2. A fine grained mineral having a soft soapy feel and consisting of hydrated magnesium silicate.
3. The sixth month of the civil year.
4. Old material that is slightly reworked and used again.
5. A city in northern Nigeria.
6. Canadian hockey player (born 1948).
7. Harsh or corrosive in tone.
8. A deep orange-red variety of chalcedony.
9. A sweetened beverage of diluted fruit juice.
10. Individual serving of minced e.g. meat or fish in a rich creamy sauce baked in a small pastry mold or timbale shell.
11. Water frozen in the solid state.
12. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
13. An administrator in charge of a division of a university or college.
14. Any of a number of fishes of the family Carangidae.
22. (botany) Outer tissue of bark.
24. Scottish writer of rustic verse (1770-1835).
26. Common black European thrush.
27. Having little physical or spiritual strength.
28. A ductile gray metallic element of the lanthanide series.
30. Tropical American tree grown in southern United States having a whitish pink-tinged fruit.
31. Being five more than one hundred fifty.
32. Perennial of wet and marshy places in the northern hemisphere.
34. A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
35. Bright with a steady but subdued shining.
36. A small tent used as a dressing room beside the sea or a swimming pool.
39. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
42. Correction by erasing.
44. American patriot who rode with Paul Revere to warn that the British were advancing on Lexington and Concord (1745-1799).
48. A small cake leavened with yeast.
50. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
51. A woman of refinement.
54. A name for the Old Testament God as transliterated from the Hebrew YHWH.
56. An intensely radioactive metallic element that occurs in minute amounts in uranium ores.
57. Preaching the gospel of Christ in the manner of the early church.
60. A soft white precious univalent metallic element having the highest electrical and thermal conductivity of any metal.
61. Constituting or relating to a tail.
64. Remote and separate physically or socially.
66. Genus of tropical plants with creeping rootstocks and small umbellate flowers.
68. (military) Signal to turn the lights out.
70. Tall New Zealand timber tree.
71. A facial expression characterized by turning up the corners of the mouth.
73. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
74. An informal term for a father.
76. The 19th letter of the Greek alphabet.
78. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
82. A soft gray ductile metallic element used in alloys.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

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



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

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



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

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



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

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



Leo (July 23-August 22)

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



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

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



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Your close relationships are taking on great importance in your life at this time. Those near and dear to you are your priority and focus. You have a deep emotional desire to feel needed and cared for. When these emotions aren't being fulfilled, you may find yourself struggling in all aspects. Today should bring good will and acceptance your way. You may feel deep and meaningful connections with those you love today. Libra, enjoy the harmony in your world today.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

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



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

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



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

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



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

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



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

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

Wordsearch Puzzle

Baby Shower

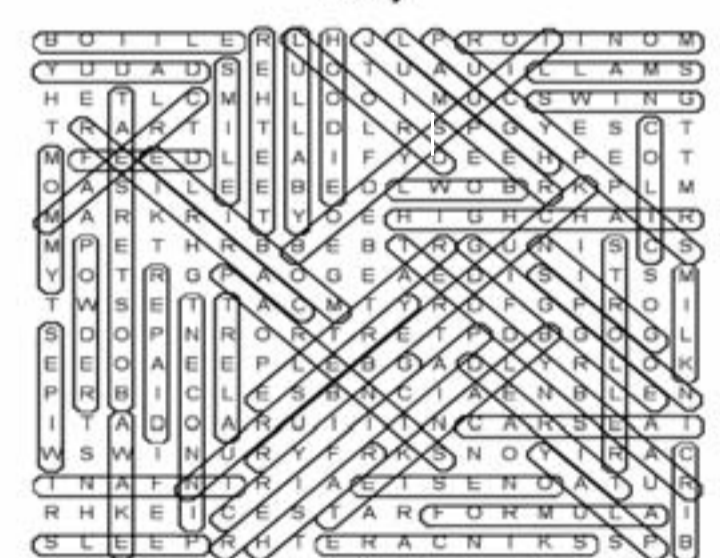
Find and circle all of the Baby Shower words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 32 letters spell a secret message.



- | | | | |
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| BALLOONS | FINGER FOOD | GUESTS | SANDWICHES |
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Yesterday's Solution

Baby



- | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| ALERT | DADDY | LULLABY | RUBBER DUCK |
| AWAKE | DIAPER | MILK | SIPPY CUP |
| BLANKET | DRDOL | MOBILE | SKIN CARE |
| BODYSUIT | FEED | MOMMY | SLEEP |
| BOOSTER SEAT | FORMULA | MONITOR | SMALL |
| BOTTLE | GIGGLE | NURSERY | SMILE |
| BOWL | GRIN | ONESIE | SPOON |
| CAR SEAT | HIGHCHAIR | PACIFIER | STROLLER |
| CARRIER | HOODIE | PARENTS | SWING |
| COLIC | INFANT | PLAY | TEDDY BEAR |
| CREAM | INNOCENT | POWDER | TEETHER |
| CRIB | JUMPER | RASH | TIRED |
| CRYING | LAUGH | RATTLE | WIPES |

The hidden message is: THE LITTLEST FEET MAKE THE BIGGEST FOOTPRINTS IN OUR HEARTS

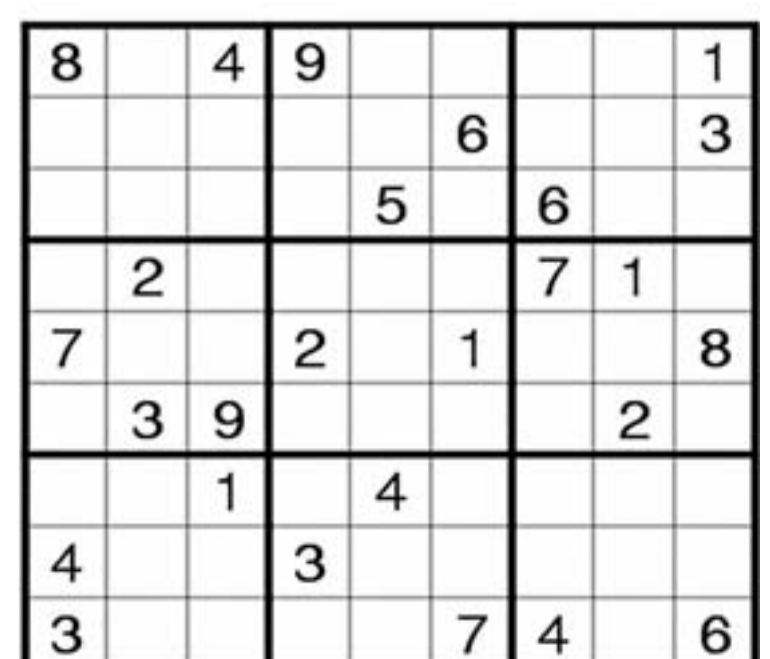
Yesterday's Solution



Daily Sudoku



Yesterday's Solution



Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, JULY 31, 2019



People walk under the installation of more than 3,000 floating balloons called "Bubble Sky" by Portuguese artist Patricia Cunha in Court Saint-Emilion, at the Bercy village, in Paris, yesterday. — AFP



A robotic chef named Sophie prepares a bowl of laksa, a local dish of rice noodle in curry sauce during a demonstration in Singapore. — AFP photos



A robotic chef named Sophie prepares a bowl of laksa, a local dish of rice noodle in curry sauce.



A robotic chef named Sophie prepares a bowl of laksa, a local dish of rice noodle in curry sauce.



A robotic chef named Sophie prepares a bowl of laksa, a local dish of rice noodle in curry sauce.

Sophie the robot whips up oodles of Singapore noodles

A Singaporean engineering company has built a robot that can serve up a piping hot bowl of laksa, one of the city-state's most well-known dishes, in just 45 seconds. The electric sous-chef, dubbed Sophie by its creators, can blanch noodles, add pre-cooked prawns and ladle spicy coconut soup—all with minimum spillage, at the rate of around 80 bowls an hour. "It's excellent. I would say there's no difference between the one created by the robot and human," said Paul Yong, a guest at Friday's launch event catered by Orange Clove, which developed the machine with a local engineering company. The robot will let chefs cut down on repetitive tasks and focus on understanding customers' needs, said Tan Tun Lim, the assistant sales director for Orange Clove.

Sophie will cut the staffing of the laksa station from two chefs to one, whose main role will be to replenish the ingredients and keep the station clean. Tan said the company chose to make a robot that served laksa as it was one of their most popular live station dishes, but they are working on adapting the design to serve a local stir fried dish and prawn noodle soup. Another local firm earlier this month said it will roll out 300 robot cleaners by March next year to help clean hotels, shopping malls and government buildings, while drones are being trialled to inspect building facades for defects, currently a laborious manual process. — AFP

Body found in Loire 'probably' of missing French techno fan



A graffiti artist works on a mural depicting an image of a missing man called Steve, standing crossed armed with a message that reads 'What is the police doing?' in the western French city of Nantes. — AFP

A body found in the River Loire is "very probably" that of a young techno fan who went missing last month at an island rave in western France that ended in a controversial police raid, a source close to the case told AFP Monday. The corpse was found not far from where 24-year-old Steve Maia Canico was last spotted at the all-night event on June 21-22 in the city of Nantes, which saw officers disperse revelers with teargas and allegedly force some into the river.

"The body is in a state of advanced decomposition and an autopsy will be performed as quickly as possible," the prosecutor in Nantes, Pierre Sennes, told AFP, adding that forensics would confirm the identity. The source on the case said the autopsy took place yesterday. Footage shared on social media showed scenes of chaos as police carrying batons moved in on the revelers by the river.

Local authorities said 14 people were subsequently rescued from the water after the clashes, with Canico's friends fearing he was swept away. Since his disappearance, posters have been put up around Nantes demanding "Where is Steve?". On July 20, hundreds of protesters formed a human chain along the Loire observing a minute of silence for the missing man. France's National Police Inspectorate—which oversees the work of the police—has launched an investigation into the actions of the police in Nantes. There were also questions over why local authorities had allowed the event to go ahead at an insecure riverside venue without a barrier. French police have come under fire for their heavy-handed techniques, including at a recent peaceful climate rally in Paris and at nationwide weekly protests by anti-government "yellow vest" demonstrators. — AFP



The Kinks to release 50th anniversary box set of 'Arthur' album

The Kinks will release a 50th anniversary box set of 'Arthur Or The Decline And Fall Of The British Empire' featuring five unreleased tracks and a lost Dave Davies solo album. Following the reissue of 'The Kinks Are The Village Green Preservation Society', the iconic rock group's seminal 1968 record, in October, the band are following it up with another treat for fans, in the form of a jam-packed version of their seventh studio album, featuring previously unreleased track 'The Future' and much more. Frontman Sir Ray Davies said: "I started 'Arthur' before the end of 'Village Green'. The albums piggyback one another because they are joined. I'd already written the song 'Arthur'. "I think I wrote 'Australia' when I was still living at 87 Fortis Green so it was quite early on. I remember taking it over to Dave, he lived in Cockfosters at the time, and playing it to him." "We were laughing at the irony in the line, 'nobody's got a chip on their shoulder.'" The four CDs, comprised of a total of 81 tracks, also feature 28 previously unreleased versions of songs. Among the gems, are two new recordings of Ray with The Doo Wop Choir, 'Arthur & The Emigrants', one previously unreleased track, and three previously unreleased 'The Come Dancing Workshop Ensemble' recordings, and Ray's remixes of 'Australia' and 'Shangri-La'. 'The Great Lost Dave Davies Solo Album' was recorded in the middle of the sessions for 'Arthur', which was released in 1969. Dave commented: "One of the reasons the album wasn't finished was because I felt The Kinks' management and record company were

forcing me too much. "I felt very comfortable being in The Kinks and it seemed fulfilling to be part of a band. I didn't really want for more. I couldn't see the point." Ray admitted it was an emotional experience listening to his brother Dave's solo music again, because he felt like the songs made up the "backstory" of the 'You Really Got Me' band. He added: "Hearing Dave's songs again after all this time, I found them quite moving because they were like the backstory of what The Kinks were going through at the time." The siblings and the group's former drummer Mick Avory infamously feuded for years, and despite talks of working on a new album with Ray, Dave insisted they still need to "iron out a few" kinks before working together again. The singer went on a national news channel last year to announce that they had been back in the studio for the first time in 25 years, but Dave admitted it wasn't entirely true as they'd only discussed the prospect and need to argue out their creative differences first. He spilled: "I thought, 'What is Ray talking about now?'" However, he added: "We've been talking about maybe trying to work on new Kinks material. "I said, 'We shouldn't go public yet because we've got to iron out a few things.' "He said, 'Yeah.' Of course, he left and the next thing he's on TV saying we're doing it. Typical Ray." 'Arthur Or The Decline And Fall Of The British Empire' the reissue is released on October 25 via BMG.

FORMER MACCABEES STAR ORLANDO WEEKS TO RELEASE DEBUT SOLO ALBUM

Former Maccabees star Orlando Weeks will release a solo album next year. The British indie rockers - also comprised of Hugo White, Felix White, Rupert Jarvis and Sam Doyle - announced their split in August 2016, and now the band's lead vocalist has announced a series of shows this September to test out his new material in front of a live audience for the first time. The run kicks off in Glasgow on September 21, and concludes with two intimate shows at London's Hoxton Hall on September 27 and September 28, and tickets go on sale on Friday at 9am. An announcement on his Facebook page reads: "Orlando Weeks is proud to present a run of very intimate performances in the UK this September to mark the start of a new project. Weeks will be performing new solo material, which will be released as an album next year. "The tour marks the first time Orlando will perform these songs live with a band. "The shows are an opportunity to hear this new music first, live and in an intimate setting exclusively, ahead of any recorded music being released. Tickets go on-sale this Friday, August 2nd at 9am local time. (sic)" Orlando has admitted it hasn't been an easy ride working on a solo record. He said: "The album I've been working on for the last eighteen months is very nearly done. "For me, holding my nerve has been a large part of finishing a record, and there's a certain confidence that comes from discovering a song can survive in a room full of strangers. "The flip side of that is that you unearth problems you wish had stayed buried. "There's every chance it won't work, but that's the gamble." Announcing their disbandment in a group statement, they said: "After 14 years as a band we have decided to call it a day. The decision has obviously been an incredibly difficult one, given that The Maccabees has been such a huge part of our lives until now. We are very proud to be able to go out on our own terms, at our creative peak and off the back of the best and biggest shows we have ever done. There have not been fallings out and we are grateful to say that we are not leaving the group behind as a divided force. It has been a rare and absolutely incredible time that we all feel very lucky to have shared. "Love to anyone who has ever stood by our band, bought our records, come and seen us play, or cared and contributed in whatever capacity it may have been. We have always valued it immeasurably, tried to honor it as best we could and can only say thank you to you all very deeply and sincerely ... There will be some farewell celebration shows announced in the near future. "Once again, especially to fans of The Maccabees, thank you for the countless good times that we will never forget. Take care and we will be in touch soon." The "Toothpaste Kisses" hit-makers also said they would all continue to make music in some capacity going forward. They added: "Though there are no concrete plans at this stage, we are all planning to continue making music. "We are excited about the future and intend to move on, with some sadness, but with appreciation, affection and huge pride at the music we have made and all that we have achieved together." The Maccabees formed in 2002 and released four albums: 2007 debut 'Colour It In', 'Wall of Arms' in 2009, 2012's 'Given to the Wild' and 'Marks To Prove It', which came out in July 2015. Orlando's solo tour dates can be found by visiting orlandoweeks.co.uk



Tools' first album in 13 years is titled Fear Inoculum

Tool's first album in 13 years is called 'Fear Inoculum'. The 'Vicarious' rockers - comprising singer Maynard James Keenan, bassist Justin Chancellor, guitarist Adam Jones and drummer Danny Carey - haven't released a record since 2006's '10,000 Days' but they have now unveiled the details of their new record, which is released a month today. Alongside a moving piece of artwork, the band wrote on Instagram: "FEAR INOCULUM, Aug 30th, 2019 Album Art, Lead Track, and Pre-Order info TBA. Thank you for your patience. (sic)" Tool also announced their back catalog is coming to streaming services for the first time on Friday. Justin previously admitted they have been very "picky" about what has made it onto the track list. Speaking in 2016, he said: "We're about 90 percent there, it's been like a crazy science project-kind of like a petri dish. "We've just been really picky over what we want to put on this new album and really want to come up with something completely unique. "Plus, we have endless amounts of material to sift through, so it's just

been a process... a little different from last time." Meanwhile, the band's frontman recently hit the headlines after he expressed his disappointment that Justin Bieber is a fan of his band. The 'Sorry' hitmaker's wife Hailey Baldwin hit out at the 55-year-old singer after he claimed it was a "bummer" that the 25-year-old pop star is a long-time follower of his group's music. Taking to Twitter, Hailey fired back: "You must be unhappy with yourself that you want to make people feel small who express their admiration for you. Very childish and hurtful thing to do. I hope u find security within yourself. Sad place to be. (sic)" Maynard posted the comment online after Justin posted lyrics from the band's 2006 track 'The Pot' to his Instagram account after he and Hailey had enjoyed a drive whilst listening to Tool tracks. Asking his followers if they recognized the lyrics, the 'What Do You Mean' hitmaker wrote: "Who are you to wave your finger? / You must have been outta your head / Eye hole deep in muddy waters / You practically raised the dead."



Beyoncé in talks with Disney to create new movie

Beyoncé is in talks with Disney to produce another project. Following the success of the remake of the 1994 animated classic 'The Lion King' - which has banked \$968 million worldwide in just two weeks, becoming the fifth highest-grossing film of 2019 - Disney has opened discussions with the 37-year-old R&B sensation to embark on a partnership which would give the star "free reign" to make film's "under the Disney umbrella". A film insider told The Sun newspaper's Bizarre column: "Beyoncé's deal with Disney for 'The Lion King' was one of the biggest it has done to date. Now they want to expand it by giving her free reign to create her own movies under the Disney umbrella." The 'Formation' hitmaker is already producing projects with her entertainment company Parkwood Entertainment, however, Disney bosses are looking to strike up a deal which could earn the singer "millions". The insider added: "She is producing projects with Parkwood Entertainment but Disney bosses would like her to do the same for them in a partnership that would make her millions. "The conversations are ongoing but it's an exciting proposition." In 'The Lion King', Beyoncé voiced lioness Nala alongside Donald Glover who took on the role of Simba and the 'Halo' hitmaker also featured on the official soundtrack and released her own album 'The Lion King: The Gift', which features guests including her husband Jay Z, Pharrell Williams and Kendrick Lamar. Speaking about her inspiration for the LP, Beyoncé said: "I wanted to make sure we found the best talent from Africa, and not just use some of the sound or my own interpretation of it. I wanted it to be authentic to what is beautiful about the music in Africa. A lot of the drums, chants, all of these incredible new sounds mixed with some of the producers from America, we've kind of created our own genre."

Paul Walter Hauser joins Disney's Cruella

Paul Walter Hauser has joined the cast of Disney's 'Cruella'. The 32-year-old actor - who is best known for his roles in 2017 Tonya Harding biopic 'I, Tonya' and 2018 drama 'BlacKkKlansman' - has boarded the upcoming live-action prequel to '101 Dalmatians', which is set to hit screens in December 2020. Although his role has not been confirmed, it is suspected he will play Horace, who is one of Cruella de Vil's henchmen. Emma Stone is taking on the part of the titular villainess - who in the 1961 animated classic '101 Dalmatians' tries to steal Roger and Anita's Dalmatian puppies to complete her dog fur coat. Dame Emma Thompson is also part of the cast but her role is as-yet unknown. Little else is known about the plot of upcoming film, which follows the life of a young Cruella, although it has been claimed that the project will have an 80s punk vibe. Craig Gillespie - who helmed 'I, Tonya' in 2017 - is on board to direct. Alex Timbers was initially set to helm the project but was forced to walk away from the movie due to scheduling issues. 'Cruella' is being produced by Andrew Gunn, Marc Platt and Kristin Burr. Paul will next be seen on screens in Clint Eastwood's 'The Ballad of Richard Jewell' where he will play the titular character who is wrongly accused of planting the bomb during the Olympic Park bombing during the 1996 Atlanta Games. The upcoming movie follows Jewell as his life is transformed after the police leaked that he was a suspect in the incident. Jewell - who found a suspicious backpack in the Olympic Park, before clearing the area and saving lives - quickly went from being considered a hero, to one of the most disliked people in the US.



Jason Momoa to star in and produce Netflix thriller Sweet Girl



Jason Momoa is to lead Netflix's upcoming thriller 'Sweet Girl'. The 39-year-old actor is reportedly set to star in and produce the streaming service's upcoming revenge tale which will be helmed by Brian Andrew Mendoza from a script by Gregg Hurwitz and Philip Eisner, with polishing by Will Staples. Though there is no word on when the movie will begin shooting the 'Aquaman' star will portray a distraught husband who embarks on a mission to bring violet justice to those responsible for the death of his wife, all while protecting the only family he has left, his daughter. This isn't the first time Momoa has teamed up with Mendoza and the pair worked together on Netflix and Discovery Canada's TV series 'Frontier' as well as 2018 action film 'Braven'. Brad Peyton and Jeff Fierson of ASAP Entertainment will also produce while Martin Kistler will serve as executive producer. Confirming his involvement in the project in a statement, Momoa said: "I'm excited to partner with Netflix once again. I'm putting a dream team together from Brad and Jeff to my best friend, Brian, who has been my partner for over 10 years. It's a dream come true to collaborate with him and deliver his vision." Fierson added: "Brad and I are ecstatic about bringing another project to Netflix, who have truly made us feel like we have a home to make groundbreaking original features and series. "Additionally, Jason and Brian are like family, so to re-team with them on a movie after working for three seasons of Frontier, is a dream come true. When we first read this script, we knew there was only one actor who could bring the gravitas and depth to the role of Cooper, and that's Jason."

— Bang Showbiz

Lifestyle | Music & Movies



In these file photos Hamed Sinno (center), the lead singer of Lebanese band Mashrou' Leila, performs on stage at the Dubai International Marine Club during a music festival in the United Arab Emirates. — AFP photos

Lebanon cancels gig by gay-friendly band for fear of 'bloodshed'

A high-profile music festival yesterday called off a concert by Lebanese gay-friendly indie band Mashrou' Leila over security concerns, saying it wanted to avoid "bloodshed". Mashrou' Leila, whose singer is openly gay and whose outspoken Arabic lyrics tackle often taboo social issues, sparked controversy in Lebanon this month. Lebanese clerics called for the band to cancel their August 9 performance at the summer festival in the seaside resort of Byblos, charging that two of their songs—titled "Idols" and "Djin"—were offensive to Christians.

The complaints came after lead singer Hamed Sinno shared an article on Facebook containing an image in which the Virgin Mary's face was replaced by that of American pop diva Madonna. "In an unprecedented step and as a result of the latest series of developments, the committee is forced to cancel the Mashrou' Leila concert," the Byblos festival committee said in a statement. The decision aims "to avoid bloodshed and preserve the safety and security" of festival-goers, it added.

There was no immediate reaction from Mashrou' Leila but activists and fans condemned the cancellation as an attack on freedom of expression in the small

Mediterranean country. "This is a step back for Lebanon, which has always prided itself on embracing diversity and being a centre for music, art and culture in the region," said Aya Majzoub, Lebanon researcher at Human Rights Watch.

On Monday, the Catholic Information Centre, an authority that works with Lebanese authorities to censor artistic content, reiterated calls for the concert's cancellation. It accused the band of prompting "ideas and actions that are offensive to the faith and its religious symbols".

'Why didn't they apologize?'

The band issued a statement earlier this month saying they "respected all religions and their symbols", and were saddened by "the distortion of the lyrics of some of our songs". They were expected to hold a press conference to issue a formal apology so the concert could go ahead, under an agreement between the Byblos festival and Lebanese authorities.

"We tried as much as possible to reach a solution... Why didn't they apologize?" asked the festival's artistic director, Naji Baz. "I'm not sure an apology would have been enough anyway because things got out of control,"

Baz added. Baz said organizers had no choice but to cancel the concert, which would have attracted a turnout of around 4,000 people.

"The situation became hysterical with direct threats being made to the security and safety of the audience and the performers," he told AFP. Mashrou' Leila have often played in Lebanon since forming in 2008 while its members were still students at the American University of Beirut.

But it has created waves in the religiously conservative Middle East. They have sparked controversy in Egypt and were banned from performing in Jordan. After a Mashrou' Leila concert in Egypt in 2017, at which members of the audience waved a rainbow flag, Egyptian authorities launched a crackdown on the country's LGBT community. Religiously diverse Lebanon is one of the Middle East's more liberal countries, but its myriad of recognized sects still wield major influence over social and cultural affairs. — AFP



In this file photo (From left) Musicians Haig Papazian, Carl Geroges and Hamed Sinno of Mashrou' Leila pose for a picture in New York.



This court sketch shows US rapper ASAP Rocky (second left, in green shirt) during his trial at the district court in Stockholm. — AFP photos



Renee Black (center), mother of US rapper ASAP Rocky, returns to the district court in Stockholm after lunch.

US rapper A\$AP Rocky pleads self-defense at assault trial

US rapper A\$AP Rocky pleaded not guilty to assault at his trial in Sweden yesterday over a street brawl, saying he acted in self-defense in a case that has stirred diplomatic tensions and outraged fans. The 30-year-old rapper, whose real name is Rakim Mayers, was arrested on July 3 along with three other people following the fight in Stockholm on June 30. One of them, the rapper's bodyguard, was later released. At the start of the trial on Tuesday morning prosecutor Daniel Suneson told the court that he believed that Mayers, and the two other accused, had assaulted the plaintiff, a 19-year old man, together.

Suneson said the accused had punched, kicked, and hit the plaintiff with a bottle. He then went on to show the court parts from the some 550 pages of the preliminary investigation. The evidence highlighted included surveillance footage and maps to establish a timeline of the events leading up to the brawl.

Video evidence

The prosecution then went on to show a number of videos, including ones published by US celebrity news outlet TMZ, where the rapper can be seen throwing a young man to the ground and then aiming several punches at him while he is down. The court was also shown videos published to the rapper's Instagram account, in which the young man can be seen arguing with the musician over a pair of headphones. The artist appears to repeatedly ask the man and his friend to stop following him and his entourage. One of the young men can also be seen hitting the artist's bodyguard.

However the prosecution also showed videos retrieved from the phones of members of the artist's entourage, as well as 13 minutes of security footage from a fast food restaurant. Suneson told the court the videos showed the lead up to the fight and also proved that the videos posted to the artist's Instagram had been edited to remove instances where the bodyguard grabbed and pushed the plaintiff prior to

the fight. The prosecutor also showed text conversations between members of the artist's crew, stating that the video uploaded to Instagram had been "cleaned up a bit". A\$AP Rocky was dressed in a green t-shirt and sweatpants, and sat in the courtroom with his lawyer Slobodan Jovicic.

The lawyer told the court his client acted in self-defense. "He admits that he threw the plaintiff on the ground, that he stepped on his arm and punched or pushed his shoulder," Mayers' lawyer Slobodan Jovicic told the court, but added that it was a case of "self-defense". The rapper's mother Renee Black was seated on the front row of the visitors' bench, and waved at her son as he left the court when it took a recess for lunch.

Robert C. O'Brien, US Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, had also travelled to Sweden to attend the trial. US President Donald Trump has called for the rapper to be freed, drawing complaints of interference from Swedish politicians. "The president asked me to come here and support these American citizens and we're working to bring them back as soon

as possible," O'Brien told AFP, declining to comment on what he thought of the prosecution's case.

#FreeRocky

On July 5, the Stockholm District Court ordered that Mayers be kept in custody while the case was being investigated. He has remained in a Swedish remand prison awaiting trial. The musician, who had his breakthrough in 2011 with the release of the mixtape "Live. Love. A\$AP", was on a European tour and has had to cancel over a dozen shows following his arrest. Throughout his detention, fans, fellow artists and US Congress members have campaigned for his release. An online petition called #JusticeForRocky has garnered more than 630,000 signatures. Social media campaigns have urged fans to boycott Swedish brands such as IKEA.

Trump has repeatedly tried to intervene. He personally called Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven to discuss the matter. In a subsequent tweet, Trump said he vouched for the rapper and offered to pay his bail, even though Sweden's justice system has no provisions for bail. The district court deemed Mayer to be a flight risk and ordered his continued detention.

Lofven's press secretary Toni Eriksson told AFP that "the prime minister was careful to point out that the Swedish justice system is completely independent". Upon learning that the case would go to trial, Trump vented his frustration on Twitter. "Very disappointed in Prime Minister Stefan Lofven for being unable to act," Trump tweeted, adding: "Give A\$AP Rocky his FREEDOM." Several Swedish politicians fired back at Trump for trying to interfere in the judicial process. "Political interference in the process is distinctly off limits! Clear?" former Swedish prime minister Carl Bildt tweeted. — AFP



In this file photo ASAP Rocky attends Rihanna's 4th Annual Diamond Ball at Cipriani Wall Street in New York City.

Queen, Adam Lambert to play Central Park show for foreign aid

Legendary group Queen along with Adam Lambert will headline New York's 2019 Global Citizen festival, an event aimed at drumming up support for preserving international aid to eradicate extreme poverty. Entertainment mogul Pharrell Williams, pianist Alicia Keys, pop group OneRepublic, R&B prodigy H.E.R. and singer-songwriter Carole King will also play the September 28 festival in Central Park, organizers announced yesterday. Taking place each year since 2012 as world leaders gather in New York for the UN General Assembly, Global Citizen distributes tickets for free to supporters who pledge to take actions such as sending letters to their governments in support of development aid.

"After next year we will have only ten

short years to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals," said Hugh Evans, the CEO of Global Citizen. "The policies and progress that we make this year, and into 2020, will determine whether we successfully eradicate extreme poverty by 2030, and failure is not an option for the world's poor." Among its 2019 goals, Global Citizen said it would urge the US government to enact the "Keeping Girls in School Act" aimed at addressing obstacles that keep girls out of school like child marriage and difficulty accessing sanitary products. The festival will be hosted by Australian acting couple Hugh Jackman and Deborah-Lee Furness, with co-hosts to include Forest Whitaker and Rami Malek. — AFP



In this file photo member of British rock band Queen Brian May (left) and US singer-songwriter Adam Lambert performs during the 91st Annual Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Nailed it: Sanders teams with Cardi B to push US youth vote

US presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders teamed up with rapper Cardi B Monday to encourage young voters to turn out for the 2020 election. The unlikely duo met at a nail salon in Detroit to film a campaign video aimed at younger voters—a fitting spot for Cardi B, who is known for her elaborate manicures in addition to chart-topping hits. "We (are) working on a way to involve more young people in the political process," Sanders, 77, told CNN before filming began. "They are voting in large numbers, but not enough numbers."

Democratic polling shows Sanders is the number two candidate in a crowded field seeking the party's nomination to defeat Donald Trump, although Sanders has about half the support of the leader Joe Biden. After the shoot, Cardi B posted a picture on Instagram of her

interviewing the Vermont senator in the salon.

"Thank you Senator Bernie Sanders for sitting with me and sharing your plans on how you will change this country," the Grammy-winning artist captioned the image. She added she had asked her followers to suggest questions for the left-wing Sanders and advised them to "stay tuned to see how he will fight for economic, racial and social justice for all." According to Sanders, he and the 26-year-old rap superstar discussed a range of issues, including raising the minimum wage, canceling student debt, and climate change.

This is not Cardi B's first foray into the political arena. Earlier this month she was vocal in her support for Sanders, tweeting, "We let him down in 2016," when he lost to Hillary Clinton. In January, Cardi B, born Belcalis Almanzar, posted a profanity-laced video on Instagram blasting Trump and the US government shutdown. — AFP

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Actress Natalia Bizeva performs in a show called 'We, the Roma' at the Romeni Theatre in Moscow.— AFP photos



Actress Luiza Abbasova performs in a show called 'We, the Roma' at the Romeni Theatre.



Moscow's Roma theatre plays on against troubled backdrop

With passionate songs, flowing dresses and the wild strumming of guitars, a Moscow theatre has staged colorful aspects of Roma culture since the shows' heyday in the early Soviet era. Calling itself the "world's only" Roma theatre, the state-funded Romeni Theatre occupies a huge building close to the city center and holds near-nightly shows. It was founded in the 1930s as a symbol of the "friendship of the peoples", a phrase coined by Joseph Stalin for relations between the USSR's many ethnic groups—even though Soviet authorities persecuted numerous non-Russian minorities.

Today, some 200,000 Roma live in Russia, according to official statistics, mostly in the European part of the country. And, like elsewhere in Europe, the communities often have tense relations with their neighbors. In June, a massive inter-ethnic brawl in the village of Chemedanovka in the Penza region, some 550 kilometers (350 miles) east of Moscow, led to an ethnic Russian man dying from a stab wound and the Roma community being forced to leave.

On stage at the Romeni Theatre however where the vast majority of the actors and singers are ethnically Roma, performances portray little of such harsh realities. A show called "We, the Roma" recounts the Roma people's mythical odyssey from ancient Egypt to the Russian provinces, via flamenco-infused detours into Spain. "Our audience aren't looking for subtle dramatic acting, they come to see something exotic," singer Valeria Yamsheva tells AFP in the wings. "Take any song, and nobody will sing it like a Rom would, nobody! Forgive my lack of modesty," says actor Nikolai Lekarev.

'Vision of integrating'

The theatre continues a pre-revolutionary tradition, Lekarev says. Writers, merchants, aristocrats, and even notorious holy man Grigory Rasputin, once caroused at a hugely popular Moscow restaurant called Yar that had a world-famous Roma choir. When it opened in 1931, the Romeni Theatre had an ideological role as Soviet authorities sought to document and celebrate the different cultural traditions of the USSR. In this way, Moscow wanted to nip any nationalist movements in the bud.

"The USSR was unique in its vision of integrating its Romani populations... and demanding that Roma incorporate themselves as equal citizens within the broader Soviet 'friendship of the peoples'," says US historian Brigid O'Keefe. The Soviets encouraged nomadic Roma to switch to a settled lifestyle and a "Roma elite" formed around the Romeni Theatre, says Kirill Kozhanov, a linguist from the Russian Academy of Sciences. In 1969, the Romeni troupe moved to its current building in a hotel for party officials.

Roma soul

Celebrated by Russian literary giants like Leo Tolstoy, the notion of a romantic, wild "Roma soul" was popular in the Soviet Union as well. Politically inoffensive Roma artists featured in popular films and television shows. With the breakup of the Soviet Union, however, any idea of brotherhood between peoples faded away, while underlying tensions came to the forefront.

"In the Soviet Union, the Roma were romanticized and



Actors perform in a show called 'We, the Roma' at the Romeni Theatre.

portrayed as people who spent their time singing and dancing, but in the 1990s, the media began to describe them as criminals," Kozhanov says. Frequently accused of drug dealing, Roma suffered in the social and economic chaos following the Soviet breakup. The brawl in Chemedanovka became a front-page story, with many Roma houses torched and hundreds forced to leave their homes. Three years ago, a conflict over the gas supply to a Roma village in the central Tula region prompted authorities to send in 500 riot police.

Stigmatised

"The authorities never say they don't want Roma. But in fact they don't act to combat stereotypes or work toward Roma integration," Kozhanov says. Despite the Soviet efforts, many Roma communities are isolated and have high levels of illiteracy, child marriage and poverty. The official population of 200,000 is dwarfed by the some 2.5 million living in Romania and Bulgaria, according to Council of Europe figures.

The only Russian NGO that provided legal help to Roma was forced to close in 2014 after authorities demanded that it register as a "foreign agent" under a controversial law because it received funding from abroad. In this context, the Romeni Theatre is increasingly isolated.

Modern methods

A similar institution in Chisinau, the capital of ex-Soviet Moldova with a large Roma population, has long since closed. "For the authorities, the theatre is a political symbol and demonstrates a measure of (official) respect," says Kozhanov, while criticizing its "rather dated method of cultural promotion." The venue mainly attracts an older crowd, and its shows are far from packed. Social media is now a much more effective way of reaching the public, Kozhanov suggests. Meanwhile on TV, Roma artists frequently do well on the Russian version of the singing competition "The Voice". — AFP



This photo shows Singaporean rap artist Joshua Su posing during an interview with AFP in Hong Kong.— AFP



This photo shows Singaporean rap artist Joshua Su posing during an interview with AFP in Hong Kong.

Gay Boy OK: Singapore rapper comes out in song

When Singaporean musician Joshua Su came out to his parents, he decided to use an unconventional method—he released a new track where he raps: "G-A-Y-B-O-Y OK". His song "I'm OK" recounts his struggles growing up in the conservative city-state, where depictions of homosexuality are censored and sex between men is technically illegal under a colonial-era law. Su descended into depression and attempted suicide, highlighting the challenges of coming out in a country where public acceptance of homosexuality is increasing but activists say official policies perpetuate discrimination.

"At the time I felt that it was wrong for whatever reason," the 34-year-old told AFP. "Maybe it was my Christian upbringing, or that society at that time depicted that it was wrong to like guys, or that there's no such thing as liking guys in textbooks or magazines." A song with a gay theme is particularly unusual for Singapore. While the city is modern in many ways, attitudes towards homosexuality are often criticized as outdated including when it comes to portrayals in the media and arts. Films focusing on homosexuality may be hit with a 21 and over age rating while official guidelines on radio broadcasts forbid the promotion of gay "lifestyles". Su, known as The G3sha, believes his latest track will not air on Singapore radio. Instead his fans have accessed it online and through social media.

'Am I sick?'

Despite the censorship, the government is tolerant of the LGBT community, with the city-state hosting a large gay pride rally every year. Officials nevertheless maintain that Singaporeans are at root conservative and most would not be in favor of repealing the ban on sex between men, even though it is no longer actively enforced. "This is a society which is not that liberal on these matters," said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in a 2017 interview. Su blames the lack of representation of gay characters in the media in part for his struggles—he recalled not knowing how to handle his attraction to boys growing up, or even "what being gay was".

Three questions that he would ask himself every day became part of his track: "Am I sick? Is this a disease? Can I be cured?" Su released the three-minute song through his own record label, accompanied by a music video shot in

Singapore that featured his childhood photos and depicts the rapper holding his thumb and index finger in front of his eye in the "OK" sign during the chorus. He went to an all-boys Catholic school, where he said going along with his classmates while they made fun of effeminate boys became part of his "defense mechanism".

"Used to think that being gay was not okay/We laughed at all the boys, sissy, Ah Gua and gay," he raps. His attempts to hide his sexuality from everyone around him created a growing sense of isolation, which he says contributed to years of depression. "There was no one for me to confide in and it became a very bad downward spiral," he said. "There was one day... I actually took maybe 20 pills, then I just went to sleep. So next thing I know I'm already in the hospital."

'No positive role models'

Su is not alone in his experiences. Leow Yangfa, the director of Singaporean NGO Oogachaga, which provides counseling and support services to the LGBT community, says young people questioning their sexuality may have trouble finding support. "For a lot of young people, there will be issues of invisibility, meaning that there will not be many or any positive role models of LGBT adults, whether in their community or in local media," he said. "In our local mainstream schools there is very minimal or insufficient appropriate sexuality education that covers LGBT issues."

Su, whose day job is in marketing, has been based in Hong Kong for the last five years, where he said a more open society made him feel free to be himself. After meeting others in the LGBT community, Su was able to accept his sexuality though he only told a small group of friends, who encouraged him to release his coming out track. It was released earlier this month. Su admitted being "quite anxious and nervous" about how his relatives would take it, especially members of his large extended family. His parents messaged him and acknowledged that they had heard the song—but quickly changed the subject. "So maybe (they're) still not very ready to talk about it," he said, adding: "But for me, I feel that in their own way they kind of accept it." — AFP

Mega-hit 'Old Town Road' breaks US singles chart record

Overnight sensation Lil Nas X continued his wild ride of pop music domination Monday, taking the reins of the record for longest stretch atop the US singles chart at 17 weeks with his infectious country-trap smash "Old Town Road." The viral mega-hit that mashes banjo twangs with thumping bass from the unknown artist-turned-industry maverick topped the Billboard record of 16 weeks on the industry's most closely watched singles chart. That was set by 1995's "One Sweet Day" by Mariah Carey and Boyz II Men and matched by the 2017 Latin juggernaut "Despacito" by Luis Fonsi, Daddy Yankee and Justin Bieber.

"YEEE TF HAWWWW," Lil Nas X tweeted after the news broke. After first grabbing attention on the video-sharing app TikTok, Lil Nas X, 20, soared into the public consciousness when his genre-bending hit booted Ariana Grande from the Billboard chart's top overall spot in April, also fending off advances from pop royalty including Bieber and Taylor Swift. Since then, the internet meme king has shrewdly goosed his numbers by releasing remix after remix of the snappy track, most notably with country star Billy Rae Cyrus, which is the version listed on the Billboard chart.

As long as remixes are in line with the original sound of a song, the streams, downloads and sales are included in one composite number. Just last week, Lil Nas X released yet another new version featuring a member of BTS, the wildly popular South Korean group—a remix nicknamed "Seoul Town Road" that appeared to ensure the artist would ride right into the history books.

'Loner cowboy'

In its unprecedented 17th week on the Billboard Hot 100, "Road" notched 72.5 million US streams and 46,000 downloads sold. Its numbers again bested breakout pop star Billie Eilish, whose song "bad guy" has held the number two spot for seven total weeks. To create his masterpiece Lil Nas X bought a backing track online for \$30 from a Dutch producer, pairing it with an eerie sample from the Nine Inch Nails song "34 Ghosts IV." Controversy famously stoked the artist's rise to fame after Billboard removed the fusion novelty song from the country charts but left it on the rap list, triggering accusations that the Atlanta musician's work was pigeonholed purely because he is black.

He never returned to the country chart—despite the collaboration with Cyrus—but his unstoppable hit has stayed atop the Hot R&B/Hip Hop and Hot Rap songs

chart for 17 weeks. In a lengthy Instagram post filled with emojis, the artist born Montero Lamar Hill said that he was struggling just last year: "I jokingly/seriously saw myself as a loner cowboy needing to run away from it all."

His breakout song "needed to be funny, it needed to be catchy, it needed to be hip hop, it needed to be country & it needed to be short," he continued. "This song has changed my life and the way I see the world around me in less than a year," he said. "It's just the beginning!"

Adding another nuance to the young artist's journey navigating the mostly white, often macho world of country and the perceived tough guy realm of rap, Lil Nas X came out last month as queer. "wow man last year i was sleeping on my sisters floor, had no money, struggling to get plays on my music, suffering from daily headaches, now i'm gay," he joked on Twitter the night before breaking the record. Since catapulting to celebrity Lil Nas X has also dropped an EP entitled "7," which includes the original version of "Road" and its Billy Rae Cyrus remix along with a song featuring rap star Cardi B.

Asked earlier this month whether she was worried about the prospect of losing her record to the novice artist, diva Carey deadpanned: "Darling, no." On Twitter he had invited the pop icon to record a remix of the song with him, which she responded to by posting a picture of herself in a cowboy hat with the caption "One Sweet Town Road!" Lil Nas X had told TMZ he might send Carey roses upon breaking her record, and hours after sealing the deal he tweeted: "mariah carey is a legend and i love & respect her." — AFP



In this file photo Lil Nas X performs onstage during the 2019 BET awards at Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles, California.— AFP

Fears grow for India's missing coffee tycoon

BANGALORE: Indian police yesterday launched a major hunt for coffee tycoon V G Siddhartha, amid mounting fears for the billionaire who admitted in a letter before disappearing that he had "failed as an entrepreneur". The founder of the Cafe Coffee Day chain that beat Starbucks at its own game in India was last seen Monday night walking across a bridge in the southern state of Karnataka. His chauffeur alerted police when Siddhartha did not return.

Police divers, backed by local fishermen, searched the Nethravathi River near Mangaluru while senior Karnataka politicians flocked to the tycoon's home. Shares in the coffee chain fell 20 percent as worries over the company grew and

its board held an emergency meeting. Coffee Day Enterprises said directors had discussed a letter to the board purportedly signed by the 57-year-old chairman in which he admitted mistakes handling his affairs.

"I am very sorry to let down all the people that put their trust in me," said the letter, which was released by the company. "I fought for a long time but today I have given up as I could not take any more pressure from one of the private equity partners forcing me to buy back shares." He also said he had faced "a lot of harassment" from the Indian tax authorities. "My intention was never to cheat or mislead anybody, I have failed as an entrepreneur," he

declared in the letter, which was dated July 27.

Siddhartha's family has been in the coffee business for more than 130 years. On taking it over, he set up the Cafe Coffee Day chain in 1996 and also became one of the world's biggest coffee traders, as well as the owner of Asia's biggest coffee plantation. Siddhartha owned about 12,000 hectares of plantations and his Amalgamated Bean Company (ABC) is India's largest exporter of green coffee.

Cafe Coffee Day has more than 1,700 stores, mainly in India, but also in Malaysia, Egypt, Czech Republic and Austria. US giant Starbucks has so far managed to open just over 150 stores in India. Siddhartha married a daughter of S M

Krishna, a former foreign minister and chief minister of Karnataka, making him one of the country's best-connected tycoons. But his empire came under pressure after the tax authorities launched raids on company offices in several cities in 2017. Reports said Siddhartha was in talks with Coca-Cola about selling a major stake.

Siddhartha left Bangalore on Monday night at first telling his family he was going to the hill resort of Sakleshwara, reports said. Police say he told his driver to go to Mangaluru instead. The driver was ordered to stop on a bridge near Mangaluru and he got out while talking on the telephone. — AFP



V G Siddhartha

Moroccan monarch pardons thousands

RABAT: Morocco's King Mohammed VI has marked 20 years on the throne by pardoning thousands of prisoners, including some from the "Hirak" protest movement that rocked the country in 2016. On the eve of the royal anniversary yesterday, an official statement announced 4,764 people were to be pardoned including some detained during the months of protests in the long-marginalized northern Rif region. No further details were given.

The Al-Hirak al-Shaabi, or "Popular Movement", was sparked by the death of a fisherman but soon spiralled into demands for more development and action against corruption and unemployment. More than 400 protesters are thought to have been arrested and tried in connection with the demonstrations, but no official figures are available. Around 250 of them have previously been pardoned. On Monday night the king also pledged a government reshuffle and an injection of "new blood" into political and administrative positions to help tackle inequality.

In a speech at his palace in the northern city of Tetouan, the 55-year-old monarch, who succeeded his father Hassan II in 1999, welcomed progress in infrastructure and freedoms in the country but said the efforts had not had "sufficient impact". A new constitution passed by a July 2011 referendum strengthened the powers of the prime minister and parliament. But the king retains overall authority as head of state, chief of the military and the country's top Islamic authority as well as

tight control over key sectors of the economy.

King Mohammed also announced the launch later this year of a committee charged with elaborating a new development model to tackle social inequalities, while also urging a government reshuffle. The committee will serve as an advisory body to make suggestions to improve reforms in fields such as education, health, agriculture, investment and taxation, said the monarch in the speech.

The king enumerated some key achievements of his rule, with emphasis on infrastructure developments such as highways, high-speed railway, ports, renewable energy and urban development. "What undermines this positive result is that the effects of the progress and the achievements made has not, unfortunately, been felt by all segments of the Moroccan society", he said.

Special emphasis was also laid on the need to open up the economy to foreign investors and revamp the public sector. Such projects and reforms require new leaders in decision-making positions, he said. "I ask the head of government to submit to me, after the summer break, proposals to fill executive posts in the government and the civil service with high-level national elites chosen on merit and competence", he said.

The king also reiterated his "policy of the outstretched hand toward Algeria", invoking the "brotherhood" and "joy" expressed in Morocco after the Algerian team won the African Cup of Nations. Shared borders have been closed between the two North African neighbors since 1994. The two countries are at loggerheads over a set of issues including the Western Sahara, a disputed territory considered by Morocco as an integral part of its sovereign lands, but also claimed by the Algerian-backed Polisario Front. — Reuters



This handout picture provided by the Moroccan Royal Palace yesterday shows Morocco's King Mohammed VI (center) delivering a speech marking the 20th anniversary of his accession to the throne, with his brother Prince Moulay Rachid (right) and son Prince Moulay Hassan (left) seated alongside him, in the northern city of Tetouan overlooking the Mediterranean. — AFP

Water meant for hurricane victims dumped on farm

SAN JUAN: Tens of thousands of water bottles destined for desperate Puerto Ricans after devastating back-to-back hurricanes slammed into the US island territory remain unopened on farmland almost two years later, emergency aid officials confirmed Monday. Aerial images captured by AFP show a sea of water bottles, packaged into massive bundles, heaped on what appears to be a private estate in the Higüillar neighborhood in Dorado, 40 km west of San Juan.

In some pictures, the ground isn't visible through the piles. In others, broken pallets can be seen among the stacks. A spokesman for the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) confirmed it had provided the water bottles as part of relief efforts for Hurricane Maria, which occurred in September 2017. The water had expired, and the bottles were assumed to be in the process of disposal and recycling. The spokesman declined to give further details on how many bottles of water there were, how long they had been on the farm, and why the water had been allowed to expire. He added that all the issues were "under review by the legal department".

Large sections of Puerto Rico spent months without electricity or water after consecutive hurricanes - Irma and Maria - battered the American territory in September 2017, leaving nearly 3,000 dead. The Puerto Rican government has come under fire for its hurricane recovery efforts, which have largely been viewed as slow and sloppy. In early July, prosecutors charged six former government officials with embezzling \$15 million in hurricane reconstruction money. — AFP



DORADO, Puerto Rico: Tens of thousands of water bottles meant for victims of Hurricane Maria are seen sitting in a vacant lot 40 km west of San Juan on July 28, 2019. — AFP

Talks cancelled as Sudan killings...

Continued from Page 1

"There will be no negotiation today with the Transitional Military Council as our negotiating team is still in Al-Obeid and will return only tonight," a second negotiator, Sateh Al-Haj, said. Another protest leader told AFP on condition of anonymity that talks would resume after "calm returns to the streets as dialogue was the only way to break the overall political impasse".

The chairman of Sudan's ruling military council, General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, condemned the killings. "What happened in Al-Obeid is sad. Killing peaceful civilians is an unacceptable crime that needs immediate accountability," the chairman of Sudan's ruling military council told journalists, according to state television.

The UN children's agency UNICEF called on the authorities "to investigate" the killings and hold the perpetrators accountable. "No child should be buried in their school uniform," UNICEF said, adding that the pupils killed were between 15 and 17 years old. Authorities announced a night-time curfew in four towns in North Kordofan state following the deaths in Al-Obeid, as the main protest group, the Sudanese Professionals Association, called for nationwide rallies against the "massacre".

All schools in the state have been told to suspend classes. "The Janjaweed forces and some snipers, without any mercy, confronted school students with live ammunition," the SPA said, referring to the RSF which has its origins in Arab militias that were originally deployed to suppress an ethnic minority rebellion that erupted in Sudan's

western region of Darfur in 2003. The SPA said more than 60 people were wounded in Al-Obeid.

Doctors linked to the protest movement say that more than 250 people have been killed nationwide in protest-related violence since December when demonstrations first erupted against now ousted president Omar Al-Bashir. Residents of Al-Obeid said the schoolchildren's rally had been over shortages of bread and fuel in the town. It was a sudden tripling of bread prices that was the spark for the mushrooming protests that brought an end to Bashir's three decades of iron-fisted rule.

The teenagers' deaths had prompted calls for yesterday's planned talks to be suspended. "We cannot sit at the negotiating table with those allowing the killing of revolutionaries," Siddiq Youssef, a prominent protest leader, said in a statement. Yesterday's talks were to cover issues including the powers of the joint civilian-military ruling body, the deployment of security forces and immunity for generals over protest-related violence, according to protest leaders.

The power-sharing deal agreed on July 17 provided for the establishment of a new governing body of six civilians and five generals. But the publication on Saturday of the findings of an investigation commissioned by the military into the deadly dispersal of a Khartoum protest camp in June has triggered angry demonstrations. Shortly before dawn on June 3, gunmen in military fatigues raided the site of the weeks-long sit-in outside army headquarters, shooting and beating protesters.

Doctors linked to the protest movement say the raid left 127 people dead and scores wounded. Protest leaders have rejected the findings of a joint investigation by prosecutors and the ruling military council which concluded that just 17 people were killed on June 3, with a total of 87 deaths between that day and June 10. — AFP

Interior ministry firm on tackling...

Continued from Page 1

Dosari added the ministry is keen to preserve human rights and dignity in Kuwait, praising the continuous cooperation between the ministry, IOM, UN and embassies accredited to the country to combat human trafficking. The official noted that Kuwait's achievement in this field constitutes an international recognition in its sincere desire to combat such a crime and reflects

real efforts to take all necessary measures to put international laws and conventions into practice.

He pointed out the lifting of Kuwait in the annual report of the US State Department to "the second degree" comes as a culmination of efforts exerted by all concerned parties to combat this humanitarian crime, which is contrary to the teachings of the Islamic religion and international treaties. Dosari said the report by the US State Department is also a positive indicator of the views of the committees that tackle human trafficking cases, whether they are preemptively revealed, received or followed up. Kuwait had also contributed to the enactment of a law on domestic labor and the establishment of its own administration to deal with complaints submitted by workers, which aims at preserving their rights, Dosari noted. — KUNA

18 killed as Pak jet crashes into...

Continued from Page 1

"The sound was so scary," he added. The military's information wing said the plane was on a routine training mission when the accident occurred, adding that rescue officials had extinguished the fire caused by the crash and moved the injured to a local hospital. An AFP reporter at the scene said smoke was still rising from the wreckage and destroyed homes, while pieces of the plane were visible on a nearby roof. Hours after the crash rescue workers could be seen combing through the smoldering site, gathering debris and inspecting the

scene while ambulances swarmed the area.

Military officials had also cordoned off the crash site while a crowd of residents stood nearby, some of them sobbing. Prime Minister Imran Khan offered his condolences to the affected families and wished a "quick recovery for the injured", according to a tweet by the Pakistani government.

Pakistan has a chequered aviation safety record, with frequent plane and helicopter crashes over the years. In 2016, a Pakistan International Airlines plane burst into flames after one of its two turboprop engines failed while travelling from remote northern Pakistan to Islamabad, killing more than 40 people. The deadliest air disaster on Pakistani soil was in 2010, when an Airbus 321 operated by private airline Airblue and flying from Karachi crashed into the hills outside Islamabad while coming in to land, killing all 152 on board. — AFP

Sports

Rendon hits a grand slam as Nationals defeat Braves

WASHINGTON: Anthony Rendon hit a grand slam to break a sixth-inning tie, and Patrick Corbin allowed two runs in six innings as the Washington Nationals beat the visiting Atlanta Braves 6-3 on Monday. Rendon (2-for-5) lofted a shot to left off reliever Chad Sobotka for his 125th career homer and the third grand slam of his career. That gave him 500 RBIs in the majors with 23 homers and 80 RBIs this season. He leads major league third basemen with a 1.020 on-base-plus-slugging percentage. Corbin (9-5) allowed five hits and a walk while striking out eight. He has not lost since June 11. Atlanta starter Dallas Keuchel (3-4) gave up four runs on six hits with four walks and four strikeouts in 5 1/3 innings. After the Braves tied the score 2-2 in the top of the sixth, Washington rallied in the bottom of the inning. With one out, Yan Gomez walked and Adrian Sanchez singled. Sobotka replaced Keuchel and struck out Trea Turner before walking Adam Eaton to load the bases. Rendon then unloaded on a 2-0 fastball.

PADRES 8, ORIOLES 1

Fernando Tatis Jr and Frammil Reyes hit back-to-back home runs on the first two pitches of the game, and Eric Hosmer later drove in five runs with two homers as San Diego defeated visiting Baltimore. The Padres hit five homers in the game, with Luis Urias also connecting for his first of the season. San Diego rookie Chris Paddack (7-5) gave up a run on three hits and two walks, with five strikeouts in 5 1/3 innings. David Hess (1-10), who was recalled from Triple-A to make the start, gave up four of the five San Diego home runs. He was charged with five runs on six hits with seven strikeouts in 4 2/3 innings.

ROCKIES 9, DODGERS 1

Jon Gray allowed three hits in eight strong innings. David Dahl homered, and Colorado beat Los Angeles in Denver. Ian Desmond went 3-for-3 and Nolan Arenado had two hits and drove in two runs to help the strug-

gling Rockies get a rare win over Los Angeles. Colorado, which came into the game having lost 17 of 22 in July, is now 3-8 against the Dodgers this season. Cody Bellinger had two hits and Will Smith had a double and scored the lone run for Los Angeles.

MARLINS 11, DIAMONDBACKS 6

Miguel Rojas homered for the third straight game, leading host Miami over Arizona. The D-backs' Ketel Marte hit his 23rd homer of the season, a three-run blast. However, it wasn't enough for Arizona, which lost three of four games in its series against the Marlins, who have the worst record in the National League. Rojas has just four homers this year—all of them in the first or second inning. On Sunday, he joined Hanley Ramirez in 2006 as the only players in Marlins history to hit leadoff homers in consecutive games.

REDS 11, PIRATES 6

Jose Iglesias hit a grand slam in a 10-run second inning, and Cincinnati went on to beat visiting Pittsburgh. Joey Votto and Eugenio Suarez had three hits each, and Votto also drove in two runs for the Reds. Cincinnati handed the Pirates their ninth consecutive loss, their longest losing streak since dropping 10 in a row from July 29 to Aug. 7, 2011. Reds starter Sonny Gray (6-6) went 5 1/3 innings, allowing four runs and six hits. Alex McRae (0-3) made the first start of his major league career and allowed seven runs (five earned) and six hits in 1 1/3 innings. He walked two and didn't record a strikeout.

BLUE JAYS 7, ROYALS 3

Cavan Biggio hit a go-ahead solo home run in the eighth inning and added an RBI single in a three-run ninth as visiting Toronto defeated Kansas City. Teoscar Hernandez also hit a solo home run and Randal Grichuk hit a two-run shot and had three RBIs for the Blue Jays in the opener of a three-game series. Tim Lincecum (1-1)



WASHINGTON DC: Trea Turner #7 of the Washington Nationals was unable to turn a double play over Freddie Freeman #5 of the Atlanta Braves who is out at second base on a fielder's choice in the eighth inning at Nationals Park. — AFP

pitched around a single in the seventh inning to earn the win. Royals starter Brad Keller (7-10), who had won his three previous starts and four straight decisions, allowed four runs on eight hits and no walks while striking out five in seven-plus innings.

TIGERS 7, ANGELS 2

Miguel Cabrera homered and drove in three runs. Jordan Zimmermann earned his first victory of the season, and Detroit beat Los Angeles in Anaheim, Calif. In

the first inning, Cabrera hit his sixth homer of the season. He added a two-run, bases-loaded single in the eighth to stretch the Tigers' lead to 5-2. Zimmermann (1-8) hadn't won in his previous 13 starts this year. He also was winless in his final four starts last year, but he managed to keep the Angels' offense in check, giving up two runs on four hits in 5 1/3 innings for his first victory since Sept. 5, 2018. JaCoby Jones, Harold Castro and Jordy Mercer each had two hits for Detroit. Kole Calhoun hit his third homer in six games for the Angels. — Reuters

Drug-tainted Aussie swimmer facing four-year ban

SYDNEY: Australian swimmer Shayna Jack has been notified that she faces a four-year suspension after testing positive to a banned drug, unless she can prove her innocence, a report said yesterday. Jack, part of Australia's 4x100m freestyle team that set a world record last year, tested positive to the banned drug Ligandrol, which helps build muscle mass, out of competition late last month. The Daily Telegraph said the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority had told Jack she will receive a four-year suspension, the standard penalty for athletes who test positive for anabolic agents. The 20-year-old will be able to contest the sanction as part of normal processes. Jack returned home days before the world championships in South Korea, citing "personal reasons". On

Sunday she strenuously denied intentionally taking the banned substance, which she intimated could be found in contaminated supplements.

Swimming Australia head coach Jacco Verhaeren, who arrived back in Brisbane from the meet yesterday, said he believed Jack could "definitely" bounce back from the doping scandal. "There are cases where the athlete's name is cleared and it was all a mistake or contamination or whatever it was. And sure they come back from that," he told reporters. The revelation has proved a huge embarrassment for Australian swimming, coming after Olympic champion Mack Horton's high-profile protest against Chinese rival Sun Yang at the world championships.

Horton refused to share a podium with Sun, who was cleared of wrongdoing after being accused of smashing vials of blood following a test last year, a decision that is the subject of a World Anti-Doping Agency appeal. Australia's newspapers have plastered the story across both their back and front pages, while the social media backlash has been swift, with the swimmer being inundated by trolls calling for her to be banned and denouncing her as a "hypocrite".



Shayna Jack

Her manager Phil Stoneman said Monday that the 20-year-old did not ingest the drug via supplement tablets and was now examining her diet. "It could be meat, it could be mushrooms, it could be anything. It could be something in a bottle," he told national broadcaster ABC. "It's a bit of jigsaw puzzle as to how this has come into her

system." The Australian team was only told of her positive result on Saturday, with Horton later calling the revelations "disappointing". The controversy, which comes on the heels of the "Sandpapergate" cheating scandal that rocked the national cricket team last year, risks doing further damage to Australia's sporting reputation. — AFP

Koepka surges to victory at WGC St Jude

LOS ANGELES: World number one Brooks Koepka birdied three of the first six holes on the way to winning his first career WGC title Sunday at the St Jude Invitational. Koepka outclassed third-ranked Rory McIlroy in a last-duo duel of four-time major champions, their first ever pairing in a final round, for the victory at TPC Southwind in Memphis, Tennessee. "It's so special. It gives me chills thinking of it," Koepka said. "It's one of my favorite stops on the tour and to win here is very special for me."

Koepka, who defended a major title at this year's PGA Championship, fired a bogey-free five-under par 65 to finish on 16-under 264 after 72 holes and defeat American Webb Simpson by three strokes. It was the seventh career US PGA title for Koepka, the 2017 and 2018 US Open champion and 2018 and 2019 PGA Championship winner. His other prior US tour wins came in 2015 at Phoenix and in last year's CJ Cup in South Korea.

"I've been playing so well as of late," Koepka said. "Everything comes if you wait. If you keep playing well and putting yourself in contention good things will happen." The final round brought only more frustration for McIlroy, who missed the cut last week at the British Open in Portrush, Northern Ireland, but had taken a one-stroke lead after firing a 62 on Saturday. Koepka praised the tournament's charity, the St. Jude Children's Hospital in Memphis, saying it put the highs and lows in golf into a greater perspective.

"I've taken a trip to the hospital. It changed my life," he said. "It puts everything in perspective, how little golf means, how much life matters." Simpson was second on 267 after a closing 64 with Australia's Marc Leishman third on 268 and McIlroy sharing fourth on 269 with England's Tommy Fleetwood and Matthew Fitzpatrick. Spain's Jon Rahm was seventh on 270 with England's Ian Poulter another stroke adrift.

Rory misses big early

Koepka sank a nine-foot birdie putt at the par-5 third hole to grab a share of the lead at 12-under, with



MEMPHIS: Brooks Koepka plays a shot on the 11th hole during the final round of the World Golf Championship-FedEx St Jude Invitational at TPC Southwind on July 28, 2019. — AFP

McIlroy then missing a four-footer for birdie. Dropping another nine-foot birdie putt at the par-4 fifth lifted Koepka atop the leaderboard, then he rolled in a tricky 20-footer for birdie at the sixth to seize a two-stroke lead at 14-under.

Koepka's uncanny iron shots continued at the par-4 10th when he landed his approach to eight feet and sank the birdie putt for a three-stroke edge on McIlroy, who opened with 11 pars before making a bogey at the par-4 12th. Simpson eagled the third and birdied three of the first four on the back nine as well as the par-5 16th and reached the clubhouse only two adrift of Koepka.

McIlroy found his first birdie from 18 feet at the par-3 14th to reach 12-under, one behind Simpson. But Koepka would not falter down the stretch. He sank a clutch six-foot par putt to at 14 to stay on 15-under. Koepka went well right and McIlroy hit into trees left off the 15th tee, but while Koepka rescued par with a tense nine-foot putt, McIlroy missed one from just inside that distance for a bogey to fall four back. Koepka sank a 12-foot birdie putt at the par-4 17th, stretching his margin to three strokes, and he closed out with a par for the triumph. — AFP

Tsitsipas gets top billing at the Washington ATP

WASHINGTON: Stefanos Tsitsipas began a historic hardcourt run at last year's ATP Washington Open and the 20-year-old Greek star returns this week as the top seed and world number six. And it might not be too much longer before the devoted video blogger tests his on-camera talents in the acting realm.

Tsitsipas, an Australian Open semi-finalist who crashed out in his first match at Wimbledon earlier this month, will open against US wildcard Tommy Paul in a second-round match Wednesday in the US Open tuneup.

"I've matured a lot since last year," Tsitsipas said. "I found a new challenge on the ATP Tour. I was hungry and very excited. I was very hungry to make the transition to the ATP, many chances to play the big guys. That's what got me so upsize." Tsitsipas — seeking a fourth ATP title after wins at Stockholm last October, Marseille in February and Portugal in May — has definitely had big matches against the top stars.

He dropped finals to 18-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal last year in Barcelona and Canada, to 20-time Grand Slam winner Roger Federer in March at Dubai and to world number one Novak Djokovic, a 16-time Grand Slam champion, in May at Madrid. Tsitsipas reached the 2018 Washington semi-finals before losing to eventual champion Alexander Zverev, then the next week became the youngest player to beat four top-10 rivals in an ATP event, reaching the Canadian Open final before losing to Nadal.

Sign of things to come

The effort lifted him from 32nd to 15th in the ATP rankings and was a sign of things to come, notably a win in the ATP NextGen Finals and the ATP's Most Improved Player award. But his big breakthrough came in January at the Australian Open, where he saved all 12 break points he faced to defeat third-ranked Federer in the fourth round on the way to the semi-finals, where he lost to Nadal. His Wimbledon loss, in five sets to Italy's Thomas Fabbiano, left more time for his video work. Tsitsipas has hired Swedish videographer Hugo Ljungquist to improve his "Greek Abroad" video blogs.

"I decided it was time to step it up," he said. "For me to be able to do it each season I thought it would be nice to have a videographer travel with me instead of film it myself." Stressing "the tennis is the most important," Tsitsipas added: "I have a lot of aspirations. I'm a big fan of Robert De Niro, (Martin) Scorsese, Bradley Cooper and the voice of Morgan Freeman — obviously you've got to have his voice."

This week, Tsitsipas has got a new doubles partner in Nick Kyrgios, an Australian of Greek and Malaysian heritage. They open against Colombian top seeds Juan Sebastian Cabal and Robert Farah. "He's known for playing pretty good doubles and I thought playing before singles would help me get used to conditions faster." Tsitsipas said of his decision to team up with the mercurial Kyrgios. "We both have aggressive mindsets on the court and we like to be in control of the points. We're both tall guys, good serves. I guess character-wise (there are) differences but I think we share lots of things in common so that's why I decided to play with him." — AFP

Jeremy Lin in tears as he hits 'rock bottom'

TAIPEI: Basketball star Jeremy Lin broke down in tears during an emotional appearance in Taiwan when he described hitting "rock bottom" and feeling abandoned by the NBA as he languishes as a free agent. Lin — the first Asian-American to win an NBA title — was part of the Toronto Raptors team that won the championship last season but he was often benched during the play-offs as he struggled with his form.

The man behind the 'Linsanity' hysteria of 2012 became an unrestricted free agent this summer and is still without a team as the new season approaches. Lin wept as he recounted his recent career trajectory while on stage at a church in Taiwan, from where his parents emigrated to the United States. "Free agency has been tough because I feel like in some ways the NBA has kind of given up on me," he told the crowd in a heartfelt interview.

He said he had waited years to play for the Raptors but felt his time with the team was his "worst shooting of his entire career". Lin averaged only 3.4 minutes in the play-offs and one minute on the court during the championship finals. Free agency was "the last straw that broke the camel's back", he said, after which he hung his head and cried. "Every year it gets harder," Lin added after he managed to compose himself.

"In English there's a saying, it says once you hit rock bottom, the only way is up but rock bottom just seems to keep getting more and more rock bottom for me." Lin, a devout Christian, was speaking at a New Taipei City Sunday church event which was also broadcast on the religious channel Good TV. Lin has struggled with injuries and inconsistency since he sparked 'Linsanity' for the New York Knicks in 2012 when he led them to a seven-game win streak to level their record at 15-15. — AFP

Sports

England captain Root returns to no 3 spot for Ashes opener

Stokes appointed as vice-captain, praises new found 'maturity'

BIRMINGHAM: England batsman Joe Denly confirmed yesterday he will drop to number four for England's opening Ashes Test against Australia, with captain Joe Root replacing him at number three in the order. Root has previously made clear he prefers batting at four but the Yorkshireman is understood to have approached England coach Trevor Bayliss after last week's Test win over Ireland about returning to his old position of first-wicket down when the Ashes opener starts at Edgbaston on Thursday.

Although England beat Ireland by skittling out the visitors for 38 in their second innings at Lord's, they only managed 85 all out themselves in their first innings. Bayliss has long wanted Root, England's best batsman, to bat at number three following a succession of top-order collapses that have seen the skipper walking out to bat at four when two cheap wickets have fallen. Root averages 48 at number four in the order but a shade over 40 when batting at number three.

But with England openers Jason Roy and Rory Burns having played just eight Tests between them, the logic in having 81-Test veteran Root bat at number three is clear. Denly, speaking at Edgbaston on Tuesday, said: "Joe Root will bat at three and I'll be batting at four. "He rang me the other day and told me he wanted to bat three and for me to go in at four. I think Rooty just wanted to get involved in the game, get up there and get out in the middle. "I'm very excited. I wasn't too fussed where I'd be batting, it's just great to be in the eleven. I've batted at four before for Kent and throughout my career, so it really wasn't a big issue."

Stokes hails new maturity

England's Ben Stokes says learning not to try to "please everyone" helped him mature and regain the Test vice-captaincy ahead of the Ashes series starting this week. The 28-year-old, fresh from playing a pivotal role in England's thrilling World Cup victory earlier this month, has been appointed as Joe Root's number two for the five-Test series against Australia.

The all-rounder was banned and fined by the England and Wales Cricket Board for bringing the game into disrepute following a street brawl in Bristol in 2017. He missed five months of international cricket, including the last Ashes tour of Australia, before being cleared of affray in a court case in August 2018. "One thing I have stopped trying to do is please everyone, which is probably a downfall I would look back on," he told the BBC. "I'm not a different person. I think maturing is the best way of saying it and having a understanding of a lot more things."

Stokes, who has been described as the "real heartbeat" of the England team by Australia great Ricky Ponting, said now he focused solely on making those closest to him happy. "Trying to please everyone every minute of every day was something I always tried to do," said Stokes. "Just try and keep the people happy who are important to you and make an impact on the way your career can go."

Stokes, who was rested for last week's one-off Test match with Ireland, said being stripped of the vice-captaincy had been hurtful. "To have the role taken away was very disappointing and it did hurt," he said. "To have it back just before the Ashes, I'm super excited. Joe (Root, Test captain) and I work really well



LONDON: England's Joe Root leaves the field after losing his wicket on the first day of the first cricket Test match between England and Ireland at Lord's cricket ground. —AFP

together. "He doesn't have a yes man stood next to him — I'll tell him what I think." The five-Test series begins on Thursday at Edgbaston, with England bidding to

regain the Ashes after a 4-0 thrashing in Australia in 2017-18. The Australians are looking to win their first series in England since 2001. —AFP

Five memorable Ashes series

LONDON: England and Australia begin the latest edition of the Ashes at Edgbaston tomorrow, with the home side looking to wrestle back the urn. AFP Sport looks at five of the most memorable series between cricket's oldest rivals:

2005: England win Ashes thriller

The 2005 Ashes was one of the greatest series in cricket history and saw England triumph over their fiercest rivals for the first time in nearly 19 years. It appeared to be business as usual for long-suffering England fans when Australia won the first Test at Lord's by 239 runs. But when Australia fast bowler Glenn McGrath was ruled out of the second Test at Edgbaston after treading on a ball during practice on the morning of the match, England took charge. England's Andrew Flintoff starred with both bat and ball when Australia were 175-8, chasing 282 for victory, a home win looked assured. But Australia edged their way closer before last man Michael Kasprovicz was caught behind off Steve Hammon to give England victory by a mere two runs. The third Test was drawn and England survived a brilliant four-wicket burst from leg-spin great Shane Warne to win the fourth Test at Trent Bridge. England, now needing a draw at 2-1 up to regain the Ashes, were in danger of defeat on the last day at the Oval until Kevin Pietersen's breathtaking 158 and a fine fifty from Ashes Giles rescued them following a top-order collapse.

1981: Botham's Ashes

Rarely has one man done as much to win an Ashes as Ian Botham in 1981. He started the series as England captain but, after a defeat in the first Test at Nottingham and the embarrassment of bagging a pair in a draw at Lord's, Botham resigned as skipper. England were still in dire straits after being made to follow-on in the third Test at Headingley, with former England wicketkeeper Godfrey Evans, who had become an odds-setter for British bookmaker Ladbrokes, making them 500/1 outsiders to win the match. Botham's astonishing counter-attack innings of 149 not out, however, meant Australia were set a target of 130 before fast bowler Bob Willis's inspired 8-43 saw England to an astounding 18-run win. Botham's scarcely believable return of five for one in 28 balls at Edgbaston ensured England won the fourth Test by 29 runs. There were more heroics in the fifth Test when Botham's blistering 118 set up a 103-run victory at Old Trafford that clinched the series.

1974/5: Lillee and Thomson run riot

Australia's Dennis Lillee was returning from a back injury and fellow fast bowler Jeff Thomson's previous Test had yielded unimpressive figures of 0-110. Yet they still ran through England's batsmen in frightening fashion. In the first four-and-a-half Tests Thomson took 33 wickets at 17.93 before he damaged his shoulder playing tennis on the rest day of the penultimate Test in Adelaide. Australia won the series 4-1, with England captain Mike Denness dropping himself at one stage. England's only win came in the final Test when Thomson was missing through injury and Lillee broke down early.

1948: Australia's 'Invincibles'

An Australia side captained by Don Bradman in his final Test series swept all before them in an undefeated tour during which they won the Ashes 4-0. Underlying their superiority, Australia were set a seemingly impossible target of 404 on the last day to win the fourth Test at Headingley. Yet they got there for the loss of just three wickets, with Arthur Morris making 182 and Bradman an unbeaten 173. But the series is best remembered for Bradman's final Test innings at the Oval when, needing four for an average of exactly a hundred, he was bowled for a duck by leg-spinner Eric Hollies and had to make do with a mark of 99.94.

1932/33: 'Bodyline'

The most controversial Ashes series of them all was brought about by a desire to curb Bradman's phenomenal run-scoring. England captain Douglas Jardine's response was to deploy 'leg theory' — bowling short to a packed legside field — with supremely accurate fast bowler Harold Larwood the spearhead of the attack. It worked to the extent England won the Ashes 4-1, with Bradman's average for the series reduced to 56.57. But the use of what became known as "Bodyline", which saw batsmen having to defend themselves rather than their stumps, was condemned as "unsporting" by Australian officials and almost provoked a breakdown in diplomatic relations. —AFP

Langer predicts hostile reception for Bancroft

BIRMINGHAM: Australia coach Justin Langer says an Ashes return for Cameron Bancroft would be "a great story" but knows he will face a hostile reception from England fans after his ball-tampering ban. Bancroft, 26, is set to open the batting in tomorrow's first Test at Edgbaston, with Australia's top order also likely to feature David Warner and Steve Smith.

If that is the case, it would mean all three players who were banned for their roles in the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa last year would be in Australia's XI. Smith and Warner have already experienced plenty of boos from English crowds during the recent World Cup. Bancroft, not selected for the one-day tournament, will almost certainly

experience more of the same given he was the one who actually applied sandpaper to the ball during a Test away to South Africa in a blatant flouting of cricket's rulebook.

"It would be a great story if he comes back into the team," Langer said at Edgbaston yesterday. "His development after what happened in Cape Town has been extraordinary." Langer, a former Australia opener, said: "We know what the reception is going to be. There's nothing we can do about it. We don't know (how he will cope) actually, but we'll find out. "He's a good kid and as tough as anyone you could meet. To endure the scrutiny of the past 14 months, especially the first part of it, I think he's had a pretty good dress rehearsal."

Langer confirmed batsman Usman Khawaja, who missed Australia's World Cup semi-final defeat by England at Edgbaston with a hamstring injury, had been passed fit and would play in the opening match of the five-Test series. "He's a seasoned pro for us, he averages 40-odd in Test cricket, his hammy is good, he's running well, he's passed all the fitness tests, so he's ready to go," Langer said.

Andy Murray is 'quite close' to singles return

WASHINGTON: Three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray says he is "quite close" to being able to play singles matches and a "best-case scenario" could see it happen at Cincinnati in two weeks. The 32-year-old British star, who feared he could be forced into retirement before undergoing right hip surgery in January, returned to the court in June but has played only doubles while rehabilitating and seeing how his hip responds.

"In terms of moving and feeling and waking up the next day, I'm feeling good," Murray said. "I'm quite close but there's stuff that would need to get better." Murray, paired with brother Jamie in men's doubles at the ATP Washington Open, said Monday he feels no hip pain and will practice singles this week while playing doubles and plans to do so against next week in Canada. "I'll play singles as soon as I feel ready," Murray said. "I'm going to practice singles and play doubles to compete and each week I'll see. I'll keep on that path until I'm ready."

Murray, the former world number one who is now ranked 222nd, downplayed the idea he might compete in the US Open, which starts August 26, but didn't slam the door on the possibility. "Best case scenario probably would be Cincinnati," Murray said. "If I wasn't in Cincinnati, I would

probably wait until after the US Open. "I wouldn't want my first tournament to be playing best-of-five (sets) either." But Murray, whose Grand Slam singles titles include the 2012 US Open and 2013 and 2016 Wimbledon crowns, warned he has hopes of regaining his peak form.

"I'm playing better than I was last year. I can extend my leg behind me. I can push off for serves. It's brilliant," he said. "The question I have now is why not? Why can't I get back where I was? What's the reason? There isn't one. It just takes time." Earlier this month at Wimbledon, Murray said it would be up to 18 months before he returned to singles and the US Open was a "pretty unlikely" prospect.

"I'm closer than what I maybe thought I was," Murray said. "After Wimbledon I started doing a few singles drills. At one point brief practices. It felt great." "This latest comeback I didn't have any particularly high hopes. I've had high hopes for most of them before." Murray played a set Sunday and about eight games Monday in the US capital heat but is missing match fitness instead of fighting hip pain. "The conditions here are tough and that's the thing I'm needing. My conditioning isn't great. My time in the gym has been on strengthening the hip," Murray said. "These last few months have been brilliant. Just not being in pain, it's amazing what that will do to you."

Murray said if he had to play singles next week, "I could do it, but to get where I would want to be I'd have to get back in the gym and get my cardio better." Murray's most recent singles match was a five-set first-round loss at the Australian Open in January to Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut.

India's 'lame duck' selectors under fire over Windies series

NEW DELHI: Indian cricketing greats slammed the national selectors for making too many changes and accused them of bowing down to skipper Virat Kohli, with Sunil Gavaskar calling them "lame ducks" ahead of

the West Indies series. Pressure has mounted since India lost their World Cup semi-final against New Zealand, with former captains Gavaskar and Sourav Ganguly leading the onslaught.

India have brought in a host of younger players for their three Twenty20 internationals, three one-day matches and two Tests starting on Saturday. Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Shikhar Dhawan, KL Rahul, Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja are the only players selected in all three formats for the tour, while rising stars Manish Pandey and Shreyas Iyer are in the limited-overs team. "I'm opposed to too many players being moved around.

I'm for stability, not a stop-start type of an environment," Ganguly told The Print news website.

"We haven't won a global tournament since the 2013 Champions Trophy. "We have to find a way to move beyond the last-four stage. Look at what England did in the recent World Cup. Learning from 2015, they transformed themselves into world beaters." Ganguly said there had to be "clear" communications between the selectors, team management and players. "We don't need cameos only, we need match-winning innings or spells. Learn from Virat, Rohit (Sharma) and (Jasprit) Bumrah... Mohammed Shami too." —AFP



CAPE TOWN: In this file photo taken on March 25, 2018 Australian batsman Cameron Bancroft gets ready to play a shot during the fourth day of the third Test cricket match between South Africa and Australia at Newlands cricket ground. —AFP

Fast bowler James Pattinson is also set to feature in what would be his first Test since February 2016, lining up alongside Pat Cummins and one of Mitchell Starc, Peter Siddle or Josh Hazlewood in Australia's pace attack.

"There's probably three to be fair — Starcy, Peter Siddle and Josh Hazlewood — for one spot," added Langer. Australia hold the Ashes but have not won a Test series away to England since 2001. —AFP



Andy Murray

Murray delayed his flight home due to hip pain. "It was completely gone. I wasn't even certain after the operation if I'd ever be healthy again," Murray said. "A few months later I'm feeling better and feel like I can get back on the singles court."

Murray left in tears

Last year at Washington, Murray won a rain-delayed third-round match at just after 3 a.m., weeping at the end of the match he was so overcome with emotion at gutting out a win through the pain. He withdrew later that day. "Here last year I was just in a lot of pain," Murray said. "I was struggling a lot. It was really bad. I was upset. My hip

was really, really painful."

After trading harsh words with tournament officials then, both Murray and organizers have moved past the tough moment. "What happened last year was a shame," Murray said. "I was going through a tough time when it happened. I like it here. I'm happy to be back and have the opportunity to play with my brother again, which I haven't done for three years." Jamie Murray, 33, won the Washington doubles title last year with former partner Bruno Soares. The Murrys have not played together since the 2016 Rio Olympics but did help Britain's 2015 Davis Cup victory. —AFP

Sports

Sudan footballers hoping for a revolution boost to loved sport

'I need shoes, equipment and proper training, but there's nothing'

KHARTOUM: He has no kit or support system but 17-year-old footballer Emad Salim hopes Sudan's uprising will bring a boost to his beloved sport and help its players step onto the world stage. "There are no facilities or the equipment we need," said Salim, son of a farmer, before booting a ball across a dirt pitch in a Khartoum neighborhood. "I need shoes, equipment and proper training, but there's nothing."

At sunset, friendly football matches are played on patches of open ground across the capital, with teenagers like Salim kicking up clouds of dust. The pitches have no markings, are full of holes and the goal posts are almost always without a net. "There is nobody to motivate me," said Salim, a resident of Tuti Island, where the Blue Nile and White Nile meet in the capital. "I hope the revolution changes this," he said, referring to the months-long mass protest movement that led to the ouster of longtime president Omar Al-Bashir in April.

Many say Bashir's three decades of iron-fisted rule sidelined the sport — a national pastime. There are no competitive youth leagues in Sudan, meaning young players like Salim can only play in friendly matches between local clubs. Their skills are further cramped by poorly maintained pitches, which cause regular injuries that often end many talented players' careers before they even take off.

The matches are "disorganized" and players lack any kind of training or management, said the vice president of the Sudanese Football Association, Al-Fatih Bani. Local clubs avoid improving facilities because there are no competitive leagues for youths, he said. While there are some 30 well-maintained pitches in the country, they are privately owned and open only to the elite, Bani added.

Poor record

Sudan has never qualified for the World Cup, even though the country was a pioneer of the sport on the continent. Along with Egypt and Ethiopia, it helped to found the African Football Confederation, but has only won the African Cup of Nations once in 1970 when it hosted the tournament. The last time Sudan qualified for the continent's biennial tournament was in 2012, even though it has been expanded to a 24-nation format.

In 1989, Omdurman-based Al-Merrikh became the only Sudanese team to win an African club trophy. Sudanese football fans are often seen sporting the shirts of international clubs instead of their national team, the result of its poor record brought on by decades of official neglect, according to Bani.

"Many talented players do not get the opportunity to improve and advance," said Monzer Hassan, a coach of a youth team. "A complete lack of football academies deprives these talented players from honing their skills," he said, adding that every player dreams of playing for the two leading Sudanese clubs, Al-Hilal and Al-Merrikh.

A Sudanese player has never been picked up by a European club, said Bani, but the country is a lucrative destination for foreign players as Sudanese clubs are hungry for professionals. "Bashir's regime hurt the sport immensely," said Mohamed Harun, an Al-Hilal board member. "His Islamic regime considered football a tribal activity that did not deserve support or investment." For those like Salim or Bani, the revolution that ousted Bashir could herald a turnaround. "I hope the revolution gives a strong push to football in Sudan," said Bani. — AFP



KHARTOUM: Sudanese youths play football on a dirt field in the capital. — AFP

De Rossi eager to run out at Boca's iconic Bombonera

BUENOS AIRES: World Cup winning Italian veteran Daniele De Rossi said he cannot wait to play in the iconic Bombonera stadium as he was unveiled by new club Boca Juniors on Monday. The 36-year-old midfielder has signed a one-year contract with the Argentine giants after bringing down the curtain on his 18-year Roma career at the end of last season. He was cheered wildly when presented to fans at the Bombonera stadium and given the number 16 shirt — the same as he wore at Roma.

"If you love football, if you like great stadiums full of passion, no-one should deny themselves an experience like this," he said when asked if he had a message for footballers in Europe. Boca are one of the most successful sides not just in Argentina but the whole of South America. They have been Argentine champions 33 times, bettered only by historic rivals River Plate with 36, and won the Copa Libertadores — the continental equivalent of the Champions League — six times, just once less than fellow-Argentines Independiente

who lead with seven. "My aim is the same as Boca's ... to win the Libertadores, win the league. From what I've heard it's to win everything," said De Rossi, who helped Italy claim the 2006 World Cup during a 117-cap career. While many former Boca players — such as Diego Maradona, Walter Samuel and Carlos Tevez — have gone on to enjoy successful careers in Italy, De Rossi is the first major Italian star to play for the Buenos Aires outfit. De Rossi said he was looking forward to playing in "a stimulating atmosphere, because that stimulus is the most important thing for me since I live football 24 hours a day. It's like it devours me, it eats me up: I don't want somewhere that will turn me off."

Evra to start coaching career

Former France and Manchester United defender Patrice Evra has called time on his playing career, according to the Italian daily Gazzetta dello Sport. "My career as a player is officially over," the 38-year-old told the paper. Evra made his name with Nice and Monaco before Alex Ferguson signed him for Manchester United in 2006. He would go on to make almost 300 appearances for the club, winning five Premier League titles and the Champions League.

He moved to Juventus in 2014, winning two Serie A titles, before spells at Marseille and West Ham. He also played 81 times for France and captained them at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa which became famous for the French team strike at



BUENOS AIRES: Argentina's Boca Juniors president Daniel Angelici poses with Italian midfielder Daniele De Rossi (L) and his jersey during his presentation at the Bombonera stadium. — AFP

Knysna as they were eliminated in the group stages. Evra said that he was now turning his attention fully to coaching.

"I started the course for the UEFA B licence as a coach in 2013," he said. "Now, I want to finish that so that I can take the A licence. In other words, in a year and a half I will be qualified to manage a team." Evra

was quick to praise the influence of his former Manchester United boss. "He predicted that two of his players would become top level coaches: Ryan Giggs and Pat Evra," he said naming himself in the third person. "I think of Sir Alex as a father. He accepted me just as I am, sometimes a leader, sometimes arrogant." — AFP

Bale left out of squad for Munich friendlies

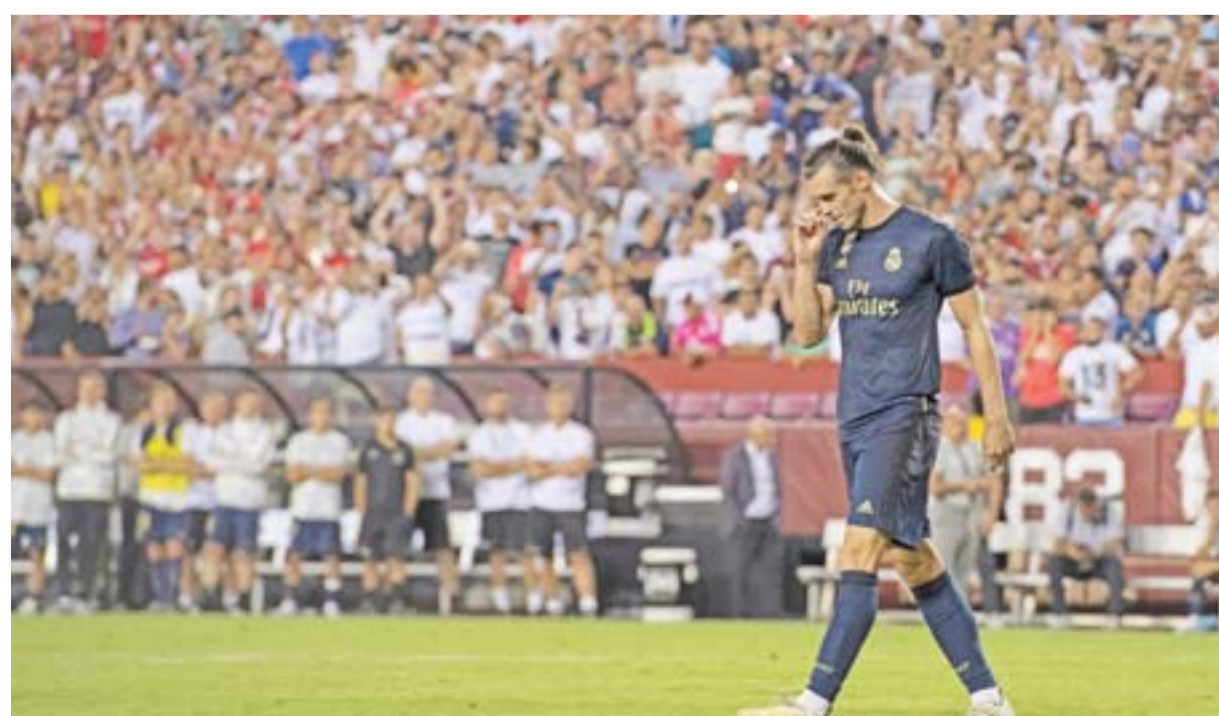
MADRID: Gareth Bale's future at Real Madrid took another twist when he was left out of the Spanish side's squad for two friendly matches in Munich. "Bale did not travel in order to resolve his future," Spanish sports daily Marca reported yesterday, adding that Real Madrid were still in talks with Chinese side Jiangsu Suning who had offered the Welshman a three-year-deal worth £1 million (\$1.1 million) a week.

However the Chinese club appear to have shut the door on Bale and sports daily As says he could be headed for a Premier League return. "Bale wanted to stay (at Real Madrid) but Zidane has made that impossible," said As. "The preferred destination for Bale is the Premier League which closes its transfer window on August 8. There are only 10 days to find a team there." Real Madrid held up the proposed transfer to Jiangsu Suning on Sunday in a dispute over the fee and the Chinese club announced

Monday they had signed Croatian striker Ivan Santini from Anderlecht instead.

Bale, 30, has been at the centre of transfer talk since Zinedine Zidane returned as coach of Real in March. The Frenchman has made no secret of his desire to offload Bale who joined Real Madrid in a then world record £85 million move from Tottenham in 2013. The Spanish press has been mooting a possible return to Champions League finalists Tottenham although Bale's salary demands are likely to be far beyond the pay structure at the north London club.

Bale's agent Jonathan Barnett has already insisted that any deal which sees the Welshman leave the Bernabeu would have to be a permanent one and not one that sees him shipped out on loan. "Gareth is one of the best players on the planet. I can guarantee you he will not be going on loan to any club," said Barnett. Bale was not the only familiar name missing from the 24-man squad for Munich. Goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, who shipped seven goals last week against Atletico Madrid, is injured while James Rodriguez came back late from holiday after playing for Colombia in the Copa America. Following the Spurs match, Real will face either Fenerbahce or Bayern Munich today. — AFP



LANDOVER: Real Madrid's Welsh forward Gareth Bale smiles after scoring a goal during the International Champions Cup football match between Real Madrid and Arsenal at FedExField. — AFP

Schweinsteiger aims to show 'best of MLS'

ORLANDO: Bastian Schweinsteiger hopes Atletico Madrid's final game of their US tour won't descend into a flurry of mayhem and red cards when the MLS All-Stars take on Diego Simeone's team today. Atletico's 7-3 win over Real Madrid in New Jersey on Friday saw both La Liga clubs reduced to 10 men in an unusually highly charged pre-season encounter.

Atleti continue their preparations for the forthcoming La Liga season when they take on the best of Major League Soccer in Orlando, with a near sell-out crowd of 25,000 expected at Exploria Stadium. German World Cup winner Schweinsteiger, who plays in MLS for Chicago Fire, believes Simeone's side were fired by the presence of Los Blancos and is adamant his teammates, coached by Orlando City's James O'Connor, can prosper without kicking lumps out of the opposition.

"Intense games are always good but the other night I am sure the rivalry between the teams also played a part," Schweinsteiger, the former Bayern Munich and Manchester United midfielder said. "I think this will be different — we don't want to hurt anyone, we just want to play our way and we want to show what is the best of MLS." The All-Star game in MLS, like those in the NBA and Major League Baseball, is designed as a mid-season exhibition respite.

Although with Simeone preparing for a strong challenge in La Liga and the Champions League, the Spaniards — who have spent upwards of 219 million euros (\$240 million) this summer following the departures of Antoine Griezmann, Lucas Hernandez and Rodri — will be very competitive. "I like this All-Star concept a lot, you play with the best players in the league, have a different coach — this one is Irish — and we are playing against a top team from Europe so will be a good test," Schweinsteiger said.

"They have invested a lot of money in new players, they are very strong, very tough and they have a very good coach. It won't be easy but if we show our quality we can definitely compete. Their approach is dictated by Simeone. He's done an amazing job over the last five years and they have become one of the top teams in Europe. That's why it will be interesting."

Focus on Felix

Atletico, who take their tour to Mexico at the weekend, remain angry with Barcelona over the sale of French star Antoine Griezmann, whose 120 million euro (\$135 million) transfer was contested by Atleti.

Discussions between the two Spanish giants are on-going, but Simeone refused to be drawn into a war of words with his recently departed striker. "I value the performance from him," the Argentine told AFP. "He has answered everything on the field and wish him nothing but the best at Barcelona. And that is it."

With Griezmann gone, the focus now is on Portuguese wonderkid Joao Felix who was signed earlier this summer from Benfica for 126 million euros (\$142 million). Compatriot Nani, who will play for the MLS All-Stars at his home ground today, predicts a bright future for the 19-year-old midfielder who impressed in the previous match against Real.

"He has been showing his potential to be a future star for Portugal, he had a great season with Benfica last year but he is still young," the former Manchester United midfielder said. "He has started well and already shown he is talented so let's see how he gets on." — AFP

Chelsea ban fan over use of racist language

LONDON: Chelsea has permanently banned one supporter from Stamford Bridge for the use of racially abusive language and threatening and aggressive behavior during last season's home game with Manchester City. The Premier League club has also temporarily excluded five other supporters for periods of between one and two years for the use of abusive language and threatening and aggressive behavior at the fixture on December 8.

Chelsea, who have not released any names over the incidents, said they had delayed reaching a decision in the cases in order to ensure they did not prejudice the related police investigation. The Crown Prosecution Service recently announced it had elected not to initiate any criminal prosecutions. According to the club, all individuals sanctioned as a result of their investigation were offered the right to appeal and, where applicable, those appeals have been heard.

Referring to the supporter handed a lifetime ban from the ground, a club statement on Tuesday read: "While the club respects the decision of the CPS (not to charge the individual with a criminal offence), the question that it had to determine was not whether a criminal offence had been committed, but rather whether the individual acted in breach of the ticketing terms and conditions.

"In this regard, the club operates to the civil standard of proof, which is entirely different to the criminal standard. In reaching its decision, the club took into account the denial made by the individual as well as a range of other evidence, including video evidence and evidence from two lip-reading experts — both of whom advised that the individual had used words that are racially abusive." The statement added: "In this case the behaviour of all six individuals crossed the line of what is acceptable." Chelsea chairman Bruce Buck in December blamed a "deeply unpleasant but vocal minority" for shaming the club's fans in an open letter following incidents of abuse.

In other news, sin bins will be introduced for dissent in English grassroots and youth football from the start of the new season, the Football Association (FA) announced yesterday. The rule will apply to all leagues up to step five in the National League System, which is immediately below the English Football League, and tier three in women's football.

Players who show dissent to an official in adult football will be shown a yellow card and sent to the sin bin for 10 minutes. For matches of shorter duration, they will spend eight minutes off the pitch. The FA started piloting sin bins two seasons ago and then extended the trial to 31 leagues last season. — AFP

25 Rendon hits a grand slam as Nationals defeat Braves



26 England captain Root returns to no 3 spot for Ashes opener



27 Sudan footballers hoping for a revolution boost to loved sport



ITEN: A Kenyan professional athlete who admits to doping sits for an interview with AFP at Iten, known colloquially as the 'world's running capital', legendary for producing some of Kenya's most elite athletes and a training ground for other international top distance runners. — AFP

Kenya struggles against doping

'You cannot compete with people already using and expect to earn something reasonable'

ITEN: At first Alex did not want to dope. The Kenyan runner wanted to compete clean, earn an honest living, and lift his family out of poverty through grit and determination. But his resolve crumbled as he realized he could not match his opponents, athletes he knew were doping and beating the system set up to catch drug cheats. Soon, Alex was boosting his performance with erythropoietin (EPO), a substance banned by the world doping watchdog but poorly regulated in Kenya.

"I had to use it, in order to earn a living. You cannot compete with people already using and expect to earn something reasonable," said Alex, who spoke with AFP on condition of anonymity and asked that his name be changed. "Sport today is not clean." Kenyans are legendary marathoners, making up 38 of the world's top 100 runners in 2019. But the country's anti-doping authorities have struggled to stamp out a culture of drug use in its fabled athletic fraternity.

Alex trains in Iten, hallowed ground for aspiring Kenyan runners who dream of following their idols from the high plateau above the Rift Valley to the Olympic podium and record books. But most do not make the big league. Nearly a thousand Kenyans earn a living competing in marathons across the globe, according to the Athletics Integrity Unit, runners whose times — though unnoteworthy at home — would make them stars anywhere else. They are not taking home the tens of thousands on offer at major marathons but pick up a

few hundred, maybe the odd thousand, in second and third-tier races.

These prizes are fiercely coveted by the enormous pool of talented Kenyans. Placing anywhere high-up could support whole families for months, in a country where many live on little more than \$1 a day. It is among this class of competitor — professional grade, but not elite — that doping is most rampant and unchecked, athletes say. "You don't have to be an elite athlete, be on the national team, go to the big races, to make money," said a pharmacist in Eldoret, a city near Iten, who sells EPO to runners for \$20 (17 euros) a dose.

'We need more testing'

Kenya was forced to confront its doping problem in 2016 when a string of high-profile scandals almost saw the country blacklisted from the Olympic Games in Rio. It scraped through, promising to stamp out cheating through tough new laws penalizing users and dealers and a newly-established anti-doping agency (ADAK).

Drug tests jumped ten-fold in a matter of years. A blood testing laboratory approved by the World Anti-Doping Authority (WADA) opened in Nairobi in 2018. For the first time, Kenya was able to create biological passports for about 40 of its top athletes. Big names — including Olympic gold medalists Jemima Sumgong and Asbel Kiprop — were among the Kenyan stars to test

positive in the years after the Rio scare.

But a whole class of international-grade runners, one step below the best, have gone virtually undetected. These athletes are not subjected to regular testing by ADAK, which does not have the funds or manpower to monitor such a huge pool of runners. "It is simple: we need to do more tests," ADAK head Japhet Rugut said.

Many race organizers cannot afford to run comprehensive drug tests for all competitors, so eschew it altogether. Tony, another athlete who admits to doping, opts to compete in these races where scrutiny is low or non-existent. If there is testing in place, he avoids placing in the top three to evade suspicion, he said. Tony trains in a squad of 15 runners in Iten — at least a quarter of whom are doping, he estimated. "If people stop cheating, I'll stop. I cheat because others have cheated," said Tony, not his real name.

Alex, who started using EPO in 2017, said he had never been tested. "In life, you have to take risks to win something reasonable," he said. Rugut said it was difficult to test "thousands and thousands" of athletes, so ADAK was focusing on deterrence. "If people think they can compete, and there is nobody to test them, they may be tempted," he said.

Easy money

Efforts to curb the supply of doping substances have been hamstrung in Kenya by lax regulation and the

absence of a scheme to trace the drugs back to suppliers, hospitals and pharmacies. Spot inspections are also rare, if ever. "There's no one there. There is no controlling body. It's pretty easy as long as you have a license," said the pharmacist in Eldoret, who declined to be named for fear of prosecution.

He admitted to selling EPO to athletes, without prescription, for years, legally importing the hormone from India used to treat patients with anaemia. But his real customers are runners seeking to boost the amount of oxygen being carried by their blood. In a September 2018 report, WADA described doping in Kenya as largely "opportunistic" and unsophisticated, listing EPO, corticosteroids and nandrolone as the drugs of choice. But there can be serious consequences to doping.

The pharmacist said he was aware of the risks of misusing EPO — heart attacks, stroke and high-blood pressure have been associated with its misuse — but athletes did not care. "They do it anyway, and they want it to exist," he said. "We do it for the money. In Kenya, you can do anything for money." Tony said he knew there were dangers "and I could die anytime". "But I take the risk, because I have to take care of myself and my brothers and sisters." Many athletes are convinced there is no point going clean, because the system is rigged from the top down. "In Kenya, most people are corrupt. To get rid of doping or cheating in athletics, you have to fight corruption first," said Tony. — AFP

Police end Neymar rape probe over lack of evidence

SAO PAULO: Police in Brazil probing rape allegations against football superstar Neymar have closed the case due to a lack of evidence, the Sao Paulo attorney general's office said Monday. The police decision will be sent to prosecutors, who will have 15 days to evaluate the case, a spokeswoman for the attorney general's office told AFP. A final ruling on the case will be made by a judge.

A spokesman for Neymar said he was not able to comment on the police decision. Neymar has vehemently denied allegations he raped a Brazilian woman in a Paris hotel in May. The ugly affair, which has dominated headlines and conversations in the soccer-mad country for weeks, overshadowed Brazil's preparations for the Copa America. Hosts Brazil went on to win South America's showcase tournament earlier this month without their biggest player, who was injured in a warm-up friendly before the opening match.

The scandal blew up on June 2 when Neymar published a seven-minute video on Instagram, where he had first been in

contact with Najila Trindade, revealing that he had been accused of rape. In an attempt to defend himself against the allegations, Neymar's video was accompanied by WhatsApp messages and images of his encounter with Trindade — without her consent, possibly breaking Brazilian law.

The drama quickly snowballed. Extracts of a televised interview with Trindade, in which she accused Neymar of "aggression together with rape," aired just one hour before he was about to enter the pitch for the pre-Copa game between Brazil and Qatar. Neymar tore his right ankle ligament in the 20th minute, ruling him out of the tournament. In the following weeks, Neymar was questioned by police over the WhatsApp messages.

He also appeared before police in Sao Paulo, where Trindade had filed her complaint at the end of May. As the case dragged on, police filed a defamation suit against Trindade — who was dropped by multiple lawyers — after she insinuated the force was corrupt. "The police are bought, aren't they? Or am I crazy?" she told television channel SBT last month in response to questions over the police investigation of an alleged theft of a tablet device from her home that contained a short video she claims has conclusive evidence she was assaulted. Despite the seriousness of the allegations, polls have shown that most Brazilians believe Neymar is innocent. Controversy has followed the Paris Saint-Germain player, who flew back to France earlier this month. Neymar, who joined PSG in 2017, has made clear he wants to return to Barcelona. — AFP

Bodyguard defends viral bowling action

PARIS: A Transylvanian bodyguard has become a cricket internet sensation due to his bowling technique, but stands by his unorthodox style. A video of Pavel Florin playing in the European Cricket League for Cluj Cricket Club against France's Dreux yesterday has been watched hundreds of thousands of times on Twitter and garnered hundreds of comments. "Maybe someone says my bowling is not beautiful or not effective but I don't care, because I love cricket," he told the European Cricket League.

Reaction on the social media platform varied from mickey-taking to support for Florin, a fitness fanatic who says he works as a bodyguard. One user replied to a post by broadcaster @FoxCricket saying: "If that's the standard there may be a chance for me in the euro leagues.... #Pies." Another account was in more

of a positive mood: "Good on em! Got 2 start somewhere!" Former Australia batsman Mark Waugh responded: "I reckon that would be very hard to hit!"

The 40-year-old Florin, who took up cricket at the age of 32, is featuring in the first edition of the 10-over eight-team European tournament which includes sides from the Netherlands, Spain and Italy. In an interview with the competition's website in May, the Romanian said his role model was South African AB de Villiers and revealed his top score was 36 in a league match for Cluj.

Asked if he had ever been a hero for his team, Florin said: "I drove 500km during night time for nine straight hours just to reach the match in the morning. I stayed 14 overs on the ground and scored 34 runs not out. "I would not call it a hero act, but it is the match that gave me confidence that I can be a good cricket player." The Romanians lost their third and final pool stage fixture to Dreux, based to the west of Paris, by 95 runs, a result which means they must settle for a place in the second-tier 'minor' semi-finals held on Friday. Two 'major' semi-finals also take place at the end of the week, as well as the final, in the Spanish town of La Manga. — AFP