



5 Zain awards five customers with Range Rover Evoque mega prizes



21 War horses: Syria's Arabian beauties plod way to recovery



24 Egypt rescues 2,000-year old catacombs from rising water



28 Liverpool held at Everton to surrender top spot



Assembly to discuss imposing health fees on foreign visitors

Lawmaker urges minister to fine firms over roads

Jordan king meets Kuwaiti speaker



AMMAN: Jordanian King Abdullah II receives Kuwait's Speaker of the National Assembly Marzuq Al-Ghanem yesterday. Ghanem conveyed greetings from HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the King, who returned the sentiment. The king commended the strong and historic relations linking Kuwait and Jordan. Ghanem also lauded Jordan for its ties with Kuwait and stance on issues of Arab and Islamic importance, namely the Palestinian cause and the status of Jerusalem. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly holds a regular session tomorrow after a long pause because of the national holidays and is expected to discuss a draft law to impose health charges on foreigners who visit the country, in addition to other issues. The Assembly will also debate a draft law on health insurance, besides amendments to the anti-corruption law and others.

The draft law obliges foreigners who arrive in Kuwait on short visits or those who obtain temporary residence permits to obtain health insurance covering their duration of stay in the country. The bill, which was presented and approved by the health committee over two years ago, also stipulates that the interior ministry will not issue a visit visa or a temporary residence until applicants present such health insurance.

The committee report states that the bill aims at plugging a loophole in the health insurance law of 1999 that requires only expatriates with permanent residence in Kuwait to obtain health insurance. The health ministry sharply increased charges on medical services provided to expatriates in late 2017 and MPs recently warned Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah against reconsidering the charges, which many consider too steep. Sheikh Basel had said he plans to restudy the charges imposed in Oct 2017, hinting at a possible reduction of some charges. But several MPs warned

they will question him if he does so. Nothing has happened since then.

MP Saleh Ashour yesterday urged Minister of Public Works Jenan Bushehri to use financial guarantees submitted by contractors who were involved in road projects in the country. The ministry had said that roads which were severely affected by heavy rains throughout this exceptionally rainy season will be repaired once sufficient budgets are prepared for them. But the lawmaker criticized the minister over the statement, saying that she should instead use financial guarantees of those companies because of their bad work. Ashour also said the minister should use the fines imposed by the ministry on those contractors.

The Assembly's financial and economic affairs committee yesterday criticized a draft law for commercial insurance submitted by the government. Head of the committee MP Salah Khorshid said the committee discussed the bill with representatives of the ministry of commerce and objected to a proposal to set up an independent authority for insurance. The lawmaker said that it was the government that wanted the Assembly to reduce the number of public authorities and agencies, and now it is the commerce ministry which is proposing a special authority for insurance. But Khorshid said the commerce ministry agreed to scrap this provision and said it will find an alternative for the proposed independent authority.

News in brief

Amir granted Prince Naif Award

KUWAIT: In appreciation of HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's efforts to boost Arab security, serve just Arab causes, spread the spirit of fraternity and consolidation amongst Arab states and the wisdom he has shown in various positions he assumed, the Arab Interior Ministers' Council granted the Prince Naif Award for Arab Security in the outstanding category to the Amir on the conclusion of its 36th meeting. — MoI

Teen stabbed to death

KUWAIT: Investigations are in progress with an Egyptian juvenile who stabbed a fellow Egyptian juvenile to death. Security sources said the suspect claimed the victim had insulted and slandered him during an earlier fight, which made him lure the victim to another meeting to sort the problem out, then stabbed him to death. The sources added the suspect suffered a nervous breakdown during interrogation. The knife used in the crime was confiscated. — A Saleh

Residency data on civil IDs

KUWAIT: The Egyptian consulate in Kuwait said Kuwaiti authorities have issued a new resolution pertaining foreigners' residency law and its amendments, including new regulations cancelling residency visa stickers on expats' passports. Addressing Egyptians in Kuwait, the consulate explained that all Kuwaiti exits will allow expats into Kuwait using their civil IDs from March 10, provided they hold valid passports and civil IDs, as all residency data will be recorded on civil IDs. — A Saleh

Sheikh Ahmad re-elected OCA chief

BANGKOK: Kuwait's Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahd Al-Sabah was re-elected president of the powerful Olympic Council of Asia yesterday. Sheikh Ahmad, considered a major powerbroker in world sport, won a new five-year term until 2024, the OCA said, extending a reign that started in 1991 over the body that controls the Asian Games and other regional events. "I will do all I can to continue working for this organization," he said at the OCA general assembly in Bangkok. — AFP

Saudi cabinet approves tourism visa

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia's cabinet has approved electronic visas for foreign visitors to attend sporting events and concerts, local media reported, as the world's top oil exporter tries to diversify its economy and open up its society. "Embassies and consulates will be able to issue the visas within 24 hours of receiving a request," the daily Arab News reported on Saturday, citing a cabinet decision last week. — Reuters

Protests swell as Bouteflika files for re-election

ALGIERS: Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has submitted official papers confirming he will seek re-election, Ennahar TV said yesterday, despite mass protests against the move. There was no official confirmation, but state news agency APS published his asset declaration, which is a formal requirement to run in the election. Tens of thousands of protesters had been rallying throughout the day in cities around Algeria to call for Bouteflika to step down. Numbers were

approaching the levels of Friday when demonstrators filled the center of the capital Algiers in one of the biggest outpourings of dissent - rare in Algeria - since the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings.

Bouteflika, 82, in shaky health for years, submitted his official election papers at the Constitutional Council in Algiers yesterday, the private TV channel said. He did not have to do so in person, state news agency APS had said earlier. Bouteflika, rarely seen in public since he suffered a stroke in 2013, was still in Switzerland for unspecified medical checks at the weekend, Swiss media reported. A Reuters witness said trucks from Bouteflika's campaign arrived at the Constitutional Council yesterday afternoon.

Continued on Page 24



MARSEILLE, France: Protesters hold Algerian flags during a sit-in yesterday against Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's bid for a fifth term in office. — AFP

Dragon capsule successfully docks on ISS

WASHINGTON: SpaceX's new Dragon capsule successfully docked on the International Space Station yesterday, NASA and SpaceX confirmed during a live broadcast of the mission. "We can confirm hard capture is complete," NASA said. The announcement was met with applause at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. The docking began at 1051 GMT, more than 400 km above the Earth's surface, north of New Zealand - and 27 hours after the cap-

sule's launch on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from the Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral in Florida.

Although the contact appeared slow, the ISS and the capsule were moving at a speed of over 27,000 kilometers per hour in orbit around the Earth. On board the ISS, the crew - American Anne McClain, Russian Oleg Kononenko, and Canadian David Saint-Jacques - were scheduled to open the airlock. The mission is a test launch with only a dummy on board the capsule ahead of a manned flight scheduled for later this year.

The Dragon capsule will remain on the ISS until Friday before detaching to splash down in the Atlantic. It will be slowed by four parachutes, in what is the one of the mission's riskiest stages.

Continued on Page 24



This video grab taken yesterday shows a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket docked with the International Space Station (ISS) during the Demo-1 mission. — AFP

Trump warns of 'socialist nightmare'

NATIONAL HARBOR, Maryland: US President Donald Trump rallied rightwing activists Saturday with a speech offering conservative red meat on immigration, trade and the threat of "socialism" as he sought to move on from a bruising week in domestic and international politics. "We believe in the American dream, not in the socialist nightmare," he said to boisterous applause from hundreds of supporters at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) near Washington. "America will never be a socialist

country," Trump added in a mammoth two-hour speech that seemed to draw energy from the fervent reception offered by some of his influential supporters in the room. It was his first public appearance since coming home empty-handed, and to criticism from all sides, after a nuclear-disarmament summit with North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un. He told CPAC the meeting was "very productive" - but that he would not "make a deal just for the sake of doing it".

The White House is also smarting from explosive testimony on Capitol Hill by Trump's former lawyer and fixer on Wednesday that branded him a cheat and a racist. Trump, often speaking in mocking tones, portrayed the Green New Deal climate strategy touted by the left of the Democratic party as a socialist plan that will devastate the fossil fuel and

Continued on Page 24



NATIONAL HARBOR, Maryland: US President Donald Trump hugs the US flag as he arrives to speak at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference on Saturday. — AFP

Local

Amir meets top officials; receives letter from Mauritanian President

Amir attends graduation of KU honor students today



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



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

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Amir met His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. He also received Chairman of Kuwait's Supreme Judicial Council and the Cassation Court, and President of the Constitutional Court Justice Yousef Jassem Al-Mutawaa, as well as

First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

In addition, His Highness the Amir met Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Mauritania's visiting Foreign Minister Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed who delivered to His Highness a letter from Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz on boosting bilateral relations.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received His Highness the PM Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, Justice Mutawaa, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh.

In other news, His Highness the Amir is set to patronize and attend the graduation ceremony of hon-

or students from Kuwait University (KU) for the academic year 2017/2018 today at 10:30 am at Sheikh Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah stage in Shuwaikh. Separately, His Highness the Amir sent a cable to Senegalese President Macky Sall, congratulating him on winning the election and starting his second term as leader of his country. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables. —KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Chief Justice Yousef Jassem Al-Mutawaa.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a letter from Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, delivered by Mauritania's Foreign Minister Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed.

Kuwaiti, Mauritanian FMs discuss relations

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met yesterday with his Mauritanian counterpart Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, and the two officials discussed issues of mutual interest, in addition to regional and international developments. Officials and diplomats at the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry attended the meeting.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled also met with the

outgoing Sudanese Ambassador to Kuwait Mohi Al-Deen Salem. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled hailed the Ambassador's efforts on boosting mutual relations between the two countries. The meeting was attended by the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister's Office Director Ambassador Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and several ministry officials.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled received a copy of credentials of Malawi's new ambassador to Kuwait. During the meeting, Sheikh Sabah Khaled wished the new diplomat the best of luck on his new duty in Kuwait, hoping that bilateral relations between both friendly countries would be further developed. Several senior officials of the Foreign Ministry attended the meeting. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with his Mauritanian counterpart Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed. —KUNA photos



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with the outgoing Sudanese Ambassador to Kuwait Mohi Al-Deen Salem.

Kuwait, Jordan discuss military cooperation

KUWAIT: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah met at Bayan Palace yesterday Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Jordanian Armed Forces Lieutenant General Mahmoud Freihath and his accompanying delegation, on issues of common interest. The two sides discussed bilateral relations and mutual interests, said Defense Ministry. The meeting was attended by Lieutenant General Mohammad Al-Khedhr, the Military Attache of the State of Kuwait to Jordan, Colonel Turki Al-Meshaal, and Jordanian Attache to Kuwait Lieutenant Abdullah Bni Yassen.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chairman of Kuwait's National Guard Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the visiting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Jordanian Armed Forces

met yesterday and discussed ways of boosting bilateral military cooperation. During the meeting, Sheikh Meshal applauded the role of the Jordanian Armed Forces in promoting and bolstering Kuwaiti-Jordanian relations in the military area, the National Guard said in a press release.

They also discussed ways of cementing cooperative relations between the National Guard and the Jordanian army by means of sharing personnel visits, meetings and expertise, according to the release. The Jordanian general voiced willingness to consolidate bilateral cooperation in order to serve both brotherly countries' mutual interests, it added. The meeting was attended by a number of senior officials of the National Guard and the Jordanian guest's accompanying delegation.

In other news, Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad received yesterday at Bayan Palace Chairman of the Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) Abdulrahman Al-Nemash. During the meeting, they discussed issues of common interest, where Nemash also gave Sheikh Nasser a copy of a book on Kuwait's strategy to promote integrity and fight corruption. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Jordanian Armed Forces Lieutenant General Mahmoud Freihath. —KUNA photos



Deputy Chairman of Kuwait's National Guard Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Jordanian Armed Forces Lieutenant General Mahmoud Freihath.

Palestine sole focus of 29th AIPU conference

AMMAN: Issues connected with Palestine will be the sole focus during the course of the 29th Arab Inter-parliamentary Union (AIPU) Conference, said Arab Parliament President Ali Abdel Aal yesterday. In his opening speech to the conference — witnessing the participation of representatives from 17 Arab parliaments including Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem — Abdel Aal condemned the US decision to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, saying that the step was "out of the boundaries of international legitimacy."

Abdel Aal, who is the Egyptian parliament speaker, affirmed that Jerusalem remains the capital of Palestine, stressing that the two-state solution is the only way to resolve the Palestinian cause. In regards to the title of the conference 'Jerusalem - the eternal capital of the State of

Palestine,' the Egyptian top lawmaker said that the decision was made in reaction to the decision by the US administration, which gave American legitimacy to Israel.

Arabs continue to fight for the Palestinian cause and the liberation of the people of Palestine, extending hands for peace in all recent international functions and conferences to promote the two-state solution, said Abdel Aal, affirming all efforts in this current conference will be dedicated towards boosting Arab parliamentary efforts to achieve justice for Palestine.

Delivering his speech to the event, Jordanian King Abdullah II's representative and Jordanian parliament speaker Atef Al-Tarawneh stressed the importance of standing together as Arabs during the current critical situation sweeping the region. The Palestinian cause is a central issue for Arabs and no peace in the region could be achieved without an independent State of Palestine and Jerusalem as the future capital. The two-day AIPU conference began earlier yesterday to coordinate efforts among Arab parliaments on Palestine. Chief amongst the decision made in the opening session was the formation of a committee, which includes Kuwait, Jordan, and Palestine to compose the final communique of the conference. —KUNA



AMMAN: A group photo of participants in the 29th Arab Inter-parliamentary Union (AIPU) Conference. —KUNA

Local

Middle East occupies special place in Russian foreign policy: Lavrov

Russian Foreign Minister praises Kuwaiti-Russian 'genuine friendship'

MOSCOW: The Russian Federation described relations with Kuwait as a "genuine friendship" based on equality, mutual respect and constructive cooperation. In an interview, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Kuwait and Russia celebrated the 55th anniversary of establishing bilateral diplomatic ties last year. "We will not stop at this point, we will work together to move forward to give further dynamism to our relations and move to a new level," Lavrov said. He praised the results of the visit of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Russia and his talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in November 2015, saying that the visit showed a huge potential of bilateral cooperation between the two countries. He stressed the importance of exerting more efforts to cement cooperation, expand the volume of trade exchange, enhance investment cooperation and implement promising joint projects in many fields.

Special space

The Russian Minister noted that he will begin a working trip to Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, during the period from March 3 to 7. He confirmed that the Middle East region

occupies a special space in Russian foreign policy, noting that Russia has deep-rooted relations and fruitful cooperation with the countries of this region. Lavrov stressed his country's commitment to work on building a democratic and multipolar world, in which people can determine their own economic and social development patterns while preserving their cultural and civilizational identity. "Russia is building relations with the Gulf states on the basis of mutual respect," he said, adding that strengthening ties would meet long-term interests and promote peace and stability throughout the Middle East.

The Russian Foreign Minister explained that during his Gulf tour, the talks will focus on discussing the prospects of developing bilateral cooperation relations, in light of the agreements reached at the highest levels. Moreover, Lavrov said that Russia attaches great importance to strengthening coordination with GCC countries in the field of foreign policy, adding that the talks, to be held during his tour, will also tackle the situation in Syria and the issue of the Palestinian-Israeli settlement. He added that these committees will hold meetings during this year, noting that the sixth session of the Russian-Kuwaiti joint committee for economic, com-

mercial, scientific and technological cooperation will be held in Kuwait during the talks to be held with the Kuwaiti leadership. He stressed the importance of the role played by different business events, pointing out to the fourth International 'Arabia Expo 2019', and the holding of the 12th session of the Russian-Arab Business Council in Moscow from April 8 to 10.

Lavrov described these events as "a unique opportunity to discuss ways to develop practical cooperation between Russia and the countries of the region in the commercial and economic fields." Lavrov also underlined the importance of facilitating transport links and simplifying visa procedures between Russia and GCC countries, saying that this would help to promote trade exchange and develop cultural, humanitarian and tourism links.

'Stabilized' situation

In response to a question on Syria, the Russian Foreign Minister said that the situation in Syria has stabilized after the successful operations carried out by the Syrian

government forces with the support of the Russian Air Force. He added that the so-called Islamic State (IS) had been eliminated, noting that it is still early to talk about the final elimination of the terrorist threat in Syria. He said that much more work to be done to eliminate the dormant cells of the radical groups, especially in Idlib, where a large part of

which is still under the control of militants from the Sham Liberation Army, which is carrying out provocative operations against the

Syrian and Russian civilian and military bodies. He stressed the need to continue the effective response to terrorism, urging Turkey to implement the Memorandum on Stabilization of the Situation in Idlib signed by Turkey and Russia on 17 September 2018. He explained that the Russian-Turkish memorandum, which includes the need to establish a buffer zone in Idlib and the elimination of all radical groups, has not yet been fully implemented.

Lavrov noted that the 'Astana track' of Syria proved effective, recalling that the decisions made in the framework of Astana, which led

to the establishment of reduced-tension areas and create conditions under which refugees can voluntarily return home. "We are working actively with our Iranian and Turkish partners to implement the resolutions of the Syrian national dialogue conference," Lavrov said, adding that issues of ensuring the stability of the situation in Syria, pushing forward the process of political settlement and launching the work of the constitutional committee were discussed during the summit of the guarantor states (Russia, Iran, Turkey) held in Russia's Sochi on February 14.

Essential element

Speaking about the Israeli-Palestinian settlement, Lavrov stressed that the solution of the Palestinian issue is an essential element in ensuring stability in the Middle East and North Africa. He stressed his country's efforts, within the framework of the UN Security Council, to create conditions for continued contacts between Palestinians and Israelis. Lavrov recalled that in the fall of 2016, President Vladimir Putin had proposed holding a high-level Palestinian-Israeli meeting in Moscow without preconditions. He reiterated Russia's readiness to welcome the leaders of Palestine



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov

and Israel, stressing that direct negotiations would help find a way out of the current impasse.

The Russian official highlighted the unilateral US moves and their negative effects on the Middle East peace process, recalling that US President Donald Trump had promised to do his utmost to achieve an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. Lavrov stressed the importance of the efforts made by the international community to ease the tension in the region, resume the Palestinian-Israeli settlement process based on international legitimacy, and launch direct negotiations between the two parties, noting that Russia regards the Middle East Quartet as a useful framework for achieving this goal. — KUNA

Electronic link eyed to fight visa trafficking

By Meshaal Al-Enezi and A Saleh

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel said work on finalizing the procedures needed to electronically link labor recruitment between Kuwait and Egypt is in progress. Aqeel stressed that e-connection with Egypt or any other country exporting workers to Kuwait does not necessarily mean opening the door to hire more laborers from that country. "The basic goal of the process is to put an end to fake contracts and visa trafficking, which result in the leakage of marginal labor into the local labor market," Aqeel noted that e-connection would regulate the recruitment of foreign labor under the supervision of Kuwait and concerned countries. Aqeel added that e-connection with Egypt came after studying Egypt's e-connection with Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and stressed that the manpower authority is

currently working on finalizing the needed procedures.

Runaway juvenile

Two juveniles escaped from the juvenile social care hostel on Feb 22, Ministry of Social Affairs' official spokesperson and assistant undersecretary for co-op affairs Abdul Aziz Shuaib confirmed, noting that the ministry had immediately reported the matter to police. Shuaib added that on discovering the escape, a search was conducted for the two runaway juveniles - one was found and returned, while the other is still at large. Accordingly, a case was filed with the police. Shuaib explained that the runaway juvenile had been detained at the hostel pending further litigation and a final court order. He noted that the ministry had referred the entire matter to its legal affairs department for investigations to hold those responsible legally accountable. "In addition, we contacted the juvenile's family to urge him to give himself up," he concluded.

Health services

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah issued a number of ministerial decisions adjusting the prices of some health ministry services and pricing new ones that used to be free. The new price

list included licensing private medical facilities, licenses for medical practitioners and assistant jobs, licenses for pharmacies, medicine companies, medicine warehouses, fees collected for examining medicines, pharmaceuticals and food supplements at health ministry labs, services provided by the medical council, the licenses of transporting and disposing medical waste and the licenses of handling ionized and non-ionized radiations and transport of any radioactive materials.

Teaching French

French language supervisors strongly denied that Education Minister Hamed Al-Azmi plans to cancel teaching French in schools, explaining that a proposal had been made to stop teaching French at Kuwait University and Public Authority for Applied Education and Training colleges. Meanwhile, Azmi announced that Abdul Razaq Al-Baseer School in Rumaithiya has been opened to receive students from the closed Mulla Al-Kandari School. He added that Palestine Secondary School will be reopened after connecting electricity to it.

Food security

Chairman of Kuwait Union of

Kidnap

Criminal detectives arrested a citizen in industrial Jahra for kidnapping a Kuwaiti woman following a personal dispute. The victim was injured after being beaten, Al-Rai reported yesterday. The incident began on Jahra Road near Saad Al-Abdullah Security Sciences Academy, when the suspect abducted the woman after beating her. He then sped off despite attempts by passersby to help her, so they called police and gave them his car's license plate number. Police found the car at a gas station on Fourth Ring Road with its windows broken. The suspect was later arrested and the victim released. Investigations are ongoing.

Reckless driver subdued

A policeman subdued a reckless driver who was bragging on social media with his acts, so a patrol was sent and found him. The driver resisted and attempted to escape. This prompted a policeman to pull out his pistol and threaten to shoot him, while another policeman brought him under control, Al-Rai reported. His car was impounded.

Drunk driver caught

A drunken citizen beat and insulted a policeman before being controlled and taken along with her friend - who was also drunk - to Salmiya police station. A



Minister of State for Economic Affairs Mariam Al-Aqeel

Consumer Cooperative Societies Khaled Al-Hudaiban said providing enough farms, increasing productivity and encouraging industries are basic elements in securing Kuwait's food supplies. Hudaiban refuted the justifications used by poultry companies for the lack of egg supplies in the local market and stressed that the main reason is that these companies prefer exporting eggs. In another concern, Hudaiban said the finance ministry's decision to cut 30 percent of co-ops' revenues is unfair, adding that the society has special tools to control prices in various co-ops. He added the society is keen on Kuwaitizing leading positions in co-ops.

Oil ministry hosts Kuwaiti-Russian joint committee meeting

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Oil announced yesterday that it will host a delegation from the Russian Federation today, setting the stage for the Kuwaiti-Russian Joint Committee meeting for Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation. The Ministry mentioned in a press statement that the three-days-meeting will be chaired by the Kuwaiti Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Dr Khaled Al-Fadel, while the Russian side will be headed by the Russian Minister for North Caucasus Federal Affairs Sergey Chebotarev. The meeting will discuss a number of topics related to joint cooperation between the two countries, it added. The Kuwaiti-Russian Joint Committee was established in 1995 and held five sessions alternately. — KUNA

News in brief

Single counter permits

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Commerce said yesterday that 1,285 commercial licenses for companies were issued via Kuwait single business counter in February. The permits included 1,232 for individuals' companies, 20 for very small businesses (VSBs) and 33 others for mobile vendors, the ministry said in a press statement. The ministry had also received 4,471 applications for establishing companies, 2,633 of which had been approved. Up to 1,074 companies were founded, 1,561 in the process. Moreover, there had been 1,771 permits' applications for individuals' companies, 1,232 of which had been issued and 645 in the process. The single counter had also received 115 applications to launch VSBs, 37 had been approved. Formation of nine companies had been accomplished, 28 underway, in addition to 36 ones for granting licenses to very small companies, 20 of which had been released, 16 in the process. Furthermore, there had been 120 applications for granting permits for mobile vehicles, 33 had been licensed and 87 still being processed. — KUNA

Flashpoint returnees' database

TUNIS: Arab ministers of interior yesterday called for promoting security cooperative efforts and updating databases of extremist groups' fighters. The calls were made by the ministers during the 36th session of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers held in the Tunisian capital. Tunisian Minister of Interior Hisham Al-Frati addressed the gathering by calling for more concerted security cooperation among Arab countries, especially those which are facing such serious challenges as terrorism, organized crime, cybercrime, immigration and human trafficking. Saudi Minister of Interior Abdulaziz Al Saud whose country has taken over the council's rotating presidency termed terrorism and extremism as a direct threat to the entire world. Therefore, he emphasized, Arab countries need to step up efforts and coordination for resolutely fighting such threats. The Council's Secretary-General Mohammad bin Koman regarded the return of terrorist fighters from flashpoints as the most serious security threat to the Arab world. In this context, he called for updating the database of those terrorists in order to curtail this phenomenon through precautionary measures. — KUNA

Firemen tackle Sabah Al-Salem house blaze

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Firemen from the Mishref and Qurain fire stations responded to a call about a blaze in a Sabah Al-Salem house yesterday. The fire was on the first floor of a house. The flames were put out and no injuries were reported.

Car auction

The Interior Ministry's Traffic Department announced the sale of several impounded cars at the Kuwait Public Transport Company (KPTC) garage in Mina Abdullah. The license plate numbers and owners' names were published in papers on Thursday, Jan 10, 2019 to refer to the sales committee. The sales will be through a public auction on Wednesday, March 6, 2019. Interested buyers can inspect the cars at the garage one day before the auction.

Interior Minister meets EU official

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah met yesterday with European Union (EU) Counter-terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove. Friendly talks, issues of mutual concerns, especially on the security level and ways to enhance them, were discussed during the encounter, the Ministry of Interior said in a press release. Meanwhile, de Kerchove expressed his gratitude to the Kuwaiti minister for his hospitality and stressed the importance of their discussion to enhance the relationship between Kuwait and the EU. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah meets with European Union Counter-terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Damage left by a fire reported in a Sabah Al-Salem house yesterday.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Kuwait City landmarks captured from the Arabian Gulf Road. —Photo by Joseph Shagra

Kuwait's Al-Hunaidi wins Amir Horse Jumping Cup grand prize

Held under sponsorship of His Highness the Amir

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sponsored the Amir Horse Jumping Cup, which concluded Saturday night by holding the 2019 Grand Prize of hurdles at the Equestrian Club. His Highness deputized Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, deputy minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs, to attend the trophy-giving ceremony.

Yara Al-Hunaidi of Kuwait won the grand prize of His Highness the Amir Horse Jumping Cup, at the end of the three-day championship. Kuwait's Nora Al-Qaood came second in the same competition while Kuwaiti Rakan Al-Hasawi came third. The Grand Prize was held

for hurdles 145cm high. Kuwaiti Ali Al-Kharafi won the mini-grand prize for the 135cm-high hurdle competition. Fahad Al-Masoud won the 115cm hurdles event, Ali Al-Saqer won the 105cm hurdle competition and Misk Al-Rashood won the U-16 race.

Sheikha Hessa Fahad Al-Sabah, chairperson of the organizing committee and president of the Equestrian Club, attributed success of the cup to the patronage of His Highness the Amir. Director General of the Public Authority for Sport (PAS) Humoud Fulaiteh said the authority was paying a great attention to equestrian, and commended the competitions among the jockeys. —KUNA



Held at the Equestrian Club



Mosaed Al-Shuaibi rides a horse over a hurdle during the Amir Horse Jumping Cup.



Liyan Al-Essa rides a horse over a hurdle during the Amir Horse Jumping Cup.



Kadi Al-Marshoud rides a horse over a hurdle during the Amir Horse Jumping Cup.



Ibrahim Al-Abdulmohsin rides a horse over a hurdle during the Amir Horse Jumping Cup.



KUWAIT: Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, deputy minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs, and other officials pose with the winners at the conclusion of the Amir Horse Jumping Cup. —Photos by Amiri Diwan and Yasser Al-Zayyat



Bandar Jomaa rides a horse over a hurdle during the Amir Horse Jumping Cup.



Abrar Al-Musallam rides a horse over a hurdle during the Amir Horse Jumping Cup.



Ibrahim Al-Abdulmohsin rides a horse over a hurdle during the Amir Horse Jumping Cup.

Local



From the 'All Zainers Are Winners' event at the Avenues mall.

Zain awards five customers with Range Rover Evoque mega prizes

Company concluded 'All Zainers are Winners' campaign at Avenues mall

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced Mohammed Fuad Mohammed Al-Sirri, Jawad Majeed Abbas Kout, Mishari Adel Ahmad Saleh, Tamer Sayed Ahmad Mahmoud, and Hind Khalaf Mlaweh as the lucky winners of five Range Rover Evoque 2019 mega prizes during the final draw of the company's latest promotional campaign 'All Zainers are Winners' held at the Avenues mall.

Zain organized this special event to conclude its 'All Zainers are Winners' campaign, which was launched last January and offered valuable instant prizes to all prepaid and postpaid customers throughout the month of February with the aim of sharing the joys of Kuwait's national festivities with all Zain customers. At this celebrated time of year, the company is always committed to launching unique promotional campaigns refreshed with the most wonderful offerings to celebrate Kuwait's national festivities with its customer base, considered the biggest in Kuwait.

During the concluding event, Zain hosted a special live episode that featured Q8 Pulse 88.8 FM stars Talal Al-Yaqout, Khalid Al-Ansari, and Osama Fouada, where the final draw was conducted with the

presence of the representatives of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The lucky winners of the five mega prizes were announced and contacted on air during the special live show.

During the event, many exciting competitions and activities centered around the campaign were organized for the attending crowds. Winners who participated in the event's activities were awarded with valuable prizes and smart devices. The event

also witnessed a special draw with valuable smart devices for all customers named 'Zain', as well as the talented Arabiska band that thrilled the audience with a unique music performance throughout the event. "All Zainers are Winners, which ran from 20 January until 28 of February, offered valuable instant prizes to all prepaid and postpaid customers, including free minutes, free Internet GBs, free bonus credit, and many more. To be eligible for one of the instant prizes, prepaid customers had to simply recharge their lines with KD 5 or more, while postpaid customers had to simply pay their bills through one of Zain's digital channels (Zain's website, Zain app, or Zain Connect portal) with KD 5 or more. Customers received their gifts instantly as soon as they paid/recharged.

All Zain prepaid and postpaid customers had chances to win one of five Range Rover Evoque 2019 mega prizes during the final draw that was held at the end of the campaign. Every customer received one point for each KD 1 paid/recharged during the campaign period. The more points a customer collected, the more chances they had for winning one of the mega prizes.

Zain has long considered itself a key partner of the Kuwaiti society, especially during national celebrations. The company launched this exciting campaign to show its commitment in sharing the joys of Kuwait as a leading national company, and will spare no efforts in being an integral part of



Q8 Pulse stars with Zain officials during the event.

the many occasions that are of interest to the local community. By launching this exciting promotional campaign, Zain continues to reinforce its leadership position and its pledge in offering the best services and offers to meet customers' professional and personal telecommunications needs.

Zain always aspires to new levels of excellence in all services it offers to its customers. Through the launch of this new

campaign, Zain affirmed its continuous efforts in meeting customers' needs and aspirations, and delivered its promise to offering the best services and latest technologies. The company constantly looks at ways to improve the experience of its customers, including providing them with the latest solutions to better serve their needs through the biggest and most advanced network in Kuwait.



Q8 Pulse
88.8 FM stars
hosted
in live show

also witnessed a special draw with valuable smart devices for all customers named 'Zain', as well as the talented Arabiska band that thrilled the audience with a unique music performance throughout the event. "All Zainers are Winners, which ran from



Mohammed Al-Sirri, winner of the Range Rover Evoque 2019 mega prize.



Tamer Mahmoud winner of the Range Rover Evoque 2019 mega prize.



From the special live show during the event.



From the event.



From the event's activities.

French speaking countries announce 'Francaponie' celebration

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Belgian Ambassador to Kuwait Piet Heirbaut announced a two-week-long 'Francophonie' celebration in Kuwait. Seventy Francophone countries celebrate the French language and the values it represent every March. In Kuwait, celebrations will be held from March 10 to 25, 2019, with many of the events to take place at the French Institute in Jabriya. "Throughout the coming weeks, the highlights of the festival include French-language films, concerts, exhibitions, contests like dictation and quizzes, video games and a bazaar," he said.

"The celebration is known all over the world and the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) promotes a world vision based on respect for cultural

and linguistic diversity," Heirbaut told reporters during a press conference held at his residence in Salam. OIF's work aims at supporting education, training and research, with special focus on young men and women. "We also strive to promote peace, democracy, human rights and sustainable development," he said.

One of the films to be featured and celebrated at the festival is a short film titled 'Hearts and Minds', which highlights the tireless efforts of the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining. Other countries have cooperated with the event, and Canadian, Lebanese, Moroccan, Egyptian, French, Romanian and Belgian films will be showcased. Representatives of various French-speaking countries attended the press conference along with several local media publications.



KUWAIT: Officials pose for a group photo at the event. — Photo by Joseph Shagra



Anger over 'forced' video of India pilot

US wants to know if Pakistan used F-16 jets to down India warplane

Page 8

Page 9



BAGHOZ: Smoke billows after shelling on the Islamic State (IS) group's last holdout of Baghouz, in the eastern Syrian Deir Ezzor province. — AFP

On brink of defeat, IS unleashes car bombs

IS using car bombs, mines, tunnels to defend last bastion

NEAR BAGHOZ: Islamic State launched car bombs and suicide attackers against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) assaulting Baghouz, in a last-ditch effort to stave off defeat in its final patch of territory, fighters from the US-backed force said yesterday. Capturing the village in eastern Syria will be a milestone in international efforts to roll back the jihadists, whose self-styled "caliphate" covered roughly one third of Syria and Iraq at its height in 2014.

But it is universally accepted that the group, which has been in territorial retreat since then and suffered its major defeats in 2017, will remain a security threat as an insurgent force with sleeper cells and some desolate pockets of territory. The SDF had said it expected a "decisive battle" yesterday after advancing gradually for 18 hours to avoid land mines sown by Islamic State (IS), whose fighters are also using underground tunnels to stage ambushes and then disappear.

By midday, however, there was no sign of the battle being over, and a spokesman for the US-led international coalition supporting the SDF said the pace of the advance had ebbed. "ISIS fighters have been using suicide vests and car bombs to slow down the SDF

offensive and hide from Coalition strikes in the area of Baghouz," Col Sean Ryan said. "They still hold civilians and are lacing the tunnels with IEDs as well," he said,



Foreign fighters holed up in town near Iraq border

referring to improvised explosive devices.

The SDF has previously estimated several hundred IS insurgents to be inside Baghouz, mostly foreigners, and the coalition has described them as the "most hardened" militants. But Ryan said their hiding underground made it difficult to determine current numbers. From a position about 3 km from the front line yesterday afternoon, warplanes and the pounding of artillery could be heard overhead as plumes of smoke rose over Baghouz. An SDF commander there told Reuters that IS had sent explosive-ridden vehicles towards advancing fighters the night before. Air strikes destroyed two of them, and the SDF fired on a third to blow it up, he said.

The jihadists also shelled the approaching force. Sinjar Shammar, from the Kurdish YPG which spearheads the SDF coalition, was wounded when shrapnel from a shell struck the armored vehicle he was driving. "My comrade was sent to the hospital. His leg is gone," said Shammar, 22, as his arm was being bandaged at a first-aid point. "(But) morale is great (at the front line). I will return to the comrades in a bit... God willing, we will triumph."

Shriveled 'Caliphate'

After declaring a modern-day caliphate across large swathes of territory it had seized in flash offensives in Syria and neighboring Iraq, IS attracted thousands of foreigners to live under its rule and defend its realm. But its rapid expansion also attracted an array of ene-

mies, both local and international, who began rolling back those gains. As IS territory shriveled, thousands of fighters, followers and civilians retreated to Baghouz, a small cluster of hamlets and farmland along the Euphrates River.

Over the last few weeks, they poured out in greater numbers than expected, holding up the final assault. An SDF commander told Reuters on Thursday that many of the people leaving the enclave had been sheltering underground in caves and tunnels. After extricating the remaining civilians, the SDF resumed its assault on Friday evening. It has not ruled out the possibility that some militants have crept out, hidden among non-combatants.

The SDF commander-in-chief said on Thursday that his force would declare victory within a week. He was later contradicted by US President Donald Trump, who said the SDF had retaken 100 percent of the territory once held by IS. Washington has about 2,000 troops in Syria, mainly to back the SDF against IS. Trump announced in December he would withdraw all of them, but the White House partially reversed itself last month, saying some 400 troops would stay. — Reuters

India refuses to share 'proof of airstrikes' in Pakistan

MUZAFFARABAD: A top Indian minister said yesterday the government would not share proof that "a very large number" of militants were killed in air strikes inside Pakistan this week, after doubts were raised there were any casualties in the attack that stoked tensions between the nuclear-armed rivals. The flare up appeared to be easing on Saturday after Pakistan handed back a captured Indian fighter pilot on Friday night, amid efforts by global powers to prevent another war between the arch enemies.

However shelling across the Line of Control (LoC) that acts as a de facto border in the disputed Kashmir region, a frequent feature in recent weeks, continued, said military officials on both sides. Hostilities escalated rapidly following a suicide car bombing on Feb. 14 that killed at least 40 Indian paramilitary police in Indian-controlled Kashmir. India accuses Pakistan of harboring the Jaish-e Mohammad Islamist group that claimed the bombing. Indian warplanes carried out air strikes on Tuesday inside northeast Pakistan's Balakot on what New Delhi called militant camps.

Islamabad denied any such camps existed, as did local villagers in the area when Reuters visited. Nevertheless, Pakistan retaliated on Wednesday with its own aerial mission. Pakistan said the Indian bombs hit a largely empty hillside without hurting anyone. Some Indian opposition leaders have asked the government to share evidence of the strikes. But India's Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, one of



LAHORE: A Pakistani girl holds a candle during a vigil for peace yesterday as tensions soar between India and Pakistan. — AFP

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's top lieutenants, said "no security agencies ever share operational details".

"It's a very irresponsible stand," Jaitley said at a conference organized by the India Today media group. "The armed forces must have, and our security and intelligence agencies must have, a full leeway in dealing with situations, and if anybody wants operational details to be made public ... he certainly does not understand the system."

Indian Air Force officials said earlier it was up to the political leaders to decide when and how to release evidence of the Balakot strike. Jaitley dismissed suggestions that the rapid escalation in tensions with Pakistan had anything to do with India's domestic politics ahead of a general election due by May. Pollsters expect the ruling party to benefit from the nationalistic passion sweeping the country.

Pilot walks across the border

Indian Air Force Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, who became the face and symbol of the biggest clash between India and Pakistan in many years, walked across the border just before 9 pm on Friday in a high-profile handover shown on live television. Defense Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met him at a New Delhi defense hospital on Saturday, where he was seen in his air force jumpsuit. He will undergo medical checks before re-joining active duty, officials said. Pakistan's military said on Saturday its air force and navy "continue to be alert and vigilant", while two of its soldiers were killed after exchanging fire with Indian troops along the LoC. India's military said that Pakistan was firing mortar shells across the LoC. Pakistan touted Abhinandan's return as "a goodwill gesture aimed at de-escalating rising tensions with India" after weeks of unease that threatened to spiral into war. — Reuters

For Russians, growing worries over 'eternal poverty'

SAINT PETERSBURG: At a Saint Petersburg cafe, a singer performs Soviet-era tunes for 50 pensioners enjoying a mid-day meal. In the basement of a central apartment block, the cafe offers free food for the elderly—a group particularly hard hit by the economic strains causing growing anger in Russia. Despite icy pavements making crossing the northern city difficult, the Dobrodromik-or "good little house"-is full. Inside, pensioners are served hearty stews and given the chance to have a chat, or even a dance. They are overwhelmingly women. "Prices are rising every day. So this cafe is a very, very good idea." 72-year-old Rimma Antsiferova said.

She receives a monthly pension of 10,000 rubles (\$150/135 euros). After paying her local taxes and buying medicine, Antsiferova is left with only \$45 to live on. "And recently, the price of transport went up," she said. Businesswoman Alexandra Syniak and her husband Yevgeny Gershevich opened Dobrodromik this winter to "thank the elderly". In the evening, it turns into a regular restaurant but between noon and mid-afternoon, pensioners from all corners of Saint Petersburg come to eat a warm meal.

'Never been as hard'

Following an oil boom in the 2000s, Russians have seen their purchasing pow-

er steadily decline over the last five years. The trend is showing no sign of slowing, despite Russia recovering from a 2015 recession brought on by a fall in oil prices and Western sanctions over Moscow's actions in Ukraine. When he was re-elected for a fourth presidential term last year, President Vladimir Putin promised to halve Russia's poverty rate. But soon afterwards, his government raised value-added tax and hiked the retirement age for the first time since the 1930s—a hugely unpopular move.

"It's never been as hard for people as it is now," said Igor Nikolayev, director of the FBK Strategic Analysis Institute in Moscow. And this anxiety is starting to show in opinion polls. According to a January survey by the independent Levada centre, 61 percent of Russians "feel shame for the eternal poverty and insecurity" of their country, compared to 56 percent in 2015. Putin's personal approval rating has taken a hit, too. In January, Levada found his approval rating at 64 percent—the lowest since 2014.

Inflation, VAT up

Levada's director Lev Gudkov said that different surveys show support for Putin, who has been in power since 1999, falling by a third. "Discontent has spread from urban centres to smaller, industrial towns where the working population is most affected by falling incomes," Gudkov said. "This is linked to the refusal of the state to provide social guarantees, and funds being used for geopolitical projects rather than going on the people," he said. Gudkov said real incomes in Russia have fallen by "around 13 percent" since 2014. "It is painful for people who live on the average salary," he said. The average monthly wage is 42,600 rubles (\$650/570 euros). — AFP

International

Al-Qaeda-linked Syria group kills 21 regime, allied forces

Kurds set free nearly 300 IS-linked Syrians

BEIRUT: A Syrian jihadist group linked to Al-Qaeda killed 21 regime and allied forces yesterday near Idlib province, in one of the deadliest breaches of a six-month-old truce deal, a monitor said. "At dawn, 21 fighters from the regime forces or allied militia were killed in an attack by Ansar Al-Tawhid jihadists," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. "Five jihadists were also killed." Rami Abdel Rahman, the director of the Britain-based monitoring group, said.

Ansar al-Tawhid has ties to the larger Hurras Al-Deen group, which is also active in the area. Both are considered semi-official franchises of Al-Qaeda in Syria. The area of Idlib and small parts of the adjacent provinces of Hama and Aleppo are mostly controlled by the rival Hayat Tahrir al-Sham organization. HTS is led by fighters who formerly belonged to Al-Qaeda's ex-affiliate in Syria. A military source quoted by state news agency SANA confirmed soldiers had been killed and wounded in an attack on their positions near Idlib province.

Loyalists forces had killed some assailants, the source added without giving precise figures. Referring to the attack, the foreign ministry said Syria "will not allow terrorists and those who are behind them to carry on with their attacks against innocent civilians and the armed forces". Yesterday's deadly assault was carried out against regime positions in the village of Masasna, in the north of Hama province, the Observatory said. "It was one of the highest casualty

figures among regime ranks since the Putin-Erdogan deal," the Observatory's Abdel Rahman said.

He was referring to an agreement reached in the Russian resort of Sochi between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Under the September 17 deal, Turkey was supposed to exert its influence over anti-regime groups in the Idlib region to get them to pull back their fighters and heavy weapons from a demilitarized zone.

The agreement was meant to stave off a planned offensive by the regime and its Russian backers that aid groups feared could spark the eight-year-old Syrian conflict's worst humanitarian crisis yet.

The government assault on the last major bastion of forces opposed to President Bashar Al-Assad's rule has indeed been held off but the deal's provisions have not been implemented and the de facto truce looks shakier than ever. Since the Sochi agreement, HTS has consolidated its grip on the Idlib province and Turkey appears to be in no position to deliver on its commitment. Breaches of the demilitarized zone have spiked in recent days. Another 20 regime and allied forces were killed in three days of clashes about a week ago.

300 IS-linked Syrians

Meanwhile, nearly 300 Syrians suspected of belonging to the Islamic State jihadist group have been freed because they have "no blood on their hands", Kurdish authorities who were holding them



IDLIB, Syria: Photo shows blood amongst the rubble, debris, and broken furniture at the scene of a reported suicide attack on a restaurant in the rebel-held northern Syrian city of Idlib. — AFP

said. Their release was announced late Saturday by the semi-autonomous Kurdish administration of northern Syria, which said in a statement that 283 Syrians had been set free.

Tribal chiefs and other local officials had lobbied for their release. The statement said they were men who "have no Syrian blood on their hands", suggesting that they did not take part in any fighting. "They had lost their way... violated the traditions of the Syrian society and the law, and some of them had been deceived... but they remain our Syrian children," it said.

Releasing them is a gesture of "cooperation, fraternity and clemency," said the statement posted on the website of the US-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The prisoners were released in several areas of northern Syria held by Kurds, including the city of Raqa, which was the de facto Syrian capital of the IS "caliphate", the statement added. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based war monitor, said it was not the first release of IS-linked prisoners by Kurdish authorities, but the number was particularly large this time. — Agencies



They have 'no blood on their hands'

What is a Jew, a Semite, Zionist?

PARIS: What is the difference between a Jew, a Semite and a Zionist? With such terms are often confused or misused, here is a guide to what each word means.

Jew

Originally a Jew was an inhabitant of the ancient kingdom of Judah that existed in the Middle East, centered on Jerusalem, from around 940 to 586 BC. The term Jew originates in the Biblical Hebrew word "yehudi", which means "from the Kingdom of Judah". The word passed into Latin as "judaeus"; the "d" was dropped as it evolved into "giu" in Old French, later moving into early English in various forms from the year 1,000. It also is the root of Judaism, the Jewish religion which is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions and established more than 3,500 years ago.

Its principle tenet is that there is only one God, who is the creator of the universe and with whom Jewish people have a special relationship. Jews can be atheist, being Jewish by heritage but not believing in the God of the Bible. Jewish

law says the faith is transmitted through the mother, even if in the Bible people are identified by their paternal ascendants. Israel's 1970 "Law of Return", which gives Jews the right to live in the country, defines a Jew as a "person who was born of a Jewish mother or has become converted to Judaism and is not a member of another religion."

Semite

Jews are not the only Semites: this term refers to people linked through related languages including Hebrew but also Amharic, Arabic and Aramaic. Created by German historian August Ludwig Schloetzer (1735-1809), the word is drawn from the name of one of the sons of the Bible's Noah, Shem, who is considered the ancestor of all Semites. His descendants are said to have migrated from the Arabian peninsula to Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine around 3,000 years ago, and then into the Horn of Africa around 700 BC. Today Semitic languages are spoken by hundreds of millions of people in the Middle East and North Africa. The term anti-Semitic, however, refers to a person who is specifically hostile towards Jews.

Zionist

The term comes from "Zion" which is a synonym for Jerusalem but also for the land of Israel. It also has a spiritual



PARIS: File photo shows Anti-Semitic graffiti written on letter boxes displaying a portrait of late French politician and Holocaust survivor Simone Weil. — AFP

meaning. It takes its name from Mount Zion, which was first used to describe the site of the ancient Jebusite city which became Jerusalem, but today refers to a hill just outside the walls of the Old City, on its southwestern edge. The terms Zionist and Zionism developed in the late 19th century to refer to the aspirations of Jewish people—who were exiled, dispersed and persecuted—to have their own independent homeland.

It had its first political expression in

the 1896 pamphlet "The State of the Jews" by Austro-Hungarian journalist and writer Theodor Herzl. A year later, the first Zionist congress was held in Basel, Switzerland, where it was stated the aim of Zionism was to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine. Jews had already begun moving there and establishing agricultural communities in the 19th century, their flow accelerated by the rise of pogroms and anti-Semitism. — AFP

Extradition of Cameroon separatists 'illegal and unconstitutional'

LAGOS: A Nigerian court has condemned as "illegal and unconstitutional" the arrest and deportation of Cameroonian separatists who had applied for asylum in Nigeria, the lawyers representing them said Sunday. In January 2018, Nigeria arrested and deported 47 anglophone separatists who had fled Cameroon following a crackdown by the authorities.

The move was denounced by UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, which said most of them had filed asylum claims and accused Nigeria of breaching international agreements. "Justice Chikere declared the arrest and detention of the 12 applicants illegal," said a statement from Nigerian law firm Falana & Falana, referring to a ruling issued this week in the capital Abuja.

"Consequently, Justice Chikere declared the deportation of the applicants illegal and unconstitutional, awarded N200,000 (\$550, 320 euros) to each of them and ordered the federal government to ensure that they are brought back to Nigeria forthwith." Among the 12 claimants was separatist leader Julius Sisiku Ayuk Tabe, president of the self-declared "Republic of Ambazonia", who was arrested along with his supporters on January 9 by Nigerian intelligence agents.

The group was sent back to Cameroon on January 26, and Ayuk Tabe was put on trial for "terrorism" in December at a military court in Yaounde, Cameroon's capital. At the hearing, defense lawyer Femi Fakana argued that the arrest and detention of refugees and asylum seekers constituted a breach of Nigeria's constitution and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. — AFP

5 children killed in attack in Hodeida

DUBAI: Five Yemeni children were killed in an attack on their home in flashpoint Hodeida province, the UN and medics said, months into a ceasefire agreed by the government and rebels. The UN children's agency (UNICEF) said that the five children were "playing at home" when they were killed on Thursday. It did not give details on the nature of the attack or the perpetrators.

"Each day, eight children are killed or injured across 31 active conflict zones in the country," UNICEF executive director Henrietta Fore said in a statement Saturday. Medics in the Tuhayta district, in southern Hodeida, yesterday confirmed to AFP that they had transferred dead and wounded children to a hospital in the government-held Khokha district nearby.

The Red Sea province of Hodeida has witnessed

some of the Yemen war's most intense fighting, which has eased since the government and Houthi rebels agreed to a ceasefire in the area in December. The Iran-backed Houthis have battled the government and its allies in a coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for control of the impoverished country for four years. Hodeida, held by the rebels since 2014, has witnessed intermittent clashes between the Houthis and pro-government forces since the ceasefire went into effect on December 18.

Around 10,000 people—mostly civilians—have been killed and more than 60,000 wounded since Saudi Arabia and its allies joined the conflict in 2015, according to the World Health Organization. Rights groups say the real figure could be five times as high. The conflict has triggered what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with more than 10 million people at risk of starvation. Over 24 million Yemenis—more than three quarters of the country's population—are now dependent on some form of aid for survival, according to the UN. — AFP



HODEIDA: Sudanese troops with a military coalition in Yemen backed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates detect mines at a facility of the Red sea mills company in the Yemeni port city of Hodeida. — AFP

News in brief

Nigerian pipeline explodes

WARRI: A major Nigerian oil pipeline has exploded, local police said yesterday, forcing nearby residents to flee and raising suspicions of possible sabotage. The Nembe Creek Trunk pipeline runs from an oil terminal in Bonny to the state of Bayelsa with capacity of 150,000 barrels per day. The explosion happened on Friday. "We have not been officially briefed on the incident, but it occurred," Bayelsa State Police spokesman Asim Butswat said. "No lives were lost as a result of the explosion and we can't confirm if it was an attack by militants or an equipment failure unless the people managing the facility go there" to determine the cause, he said. OPEC member Nigeria is Africa's biggest producer of crude oil. Ndiana-Abasi Mathew, a public relations official for Aiteo, the company that manages the pipeline, confirmed the incident in a text message on Saturday. — AFP

Angry protests in east DR Congo

GOMA: Bandits shot dead six people in eastern DR Congo overnight, sparking angry protests by residents who blockaded the main street running through Goma city yesterday, officials said. "We have just recovered the bodies of five civilians and a soldier who were killed" during an overnight gun battle, the city's deputy prosecutor Claver Kahasa said. "Armed bandits came into Goma to the Ndosho neighborhood and have left the town bereaved by shooting dead five civilians," said city mayor Timothee Muissa Kiense. Since the start of the year, at least 25 people have been killed in a string of shootings in Goma by unidentified gunmen, often referred to as bandits. "The population is very clearly angry, there is a lot of tension," said the mayor, whose city is the capital of North Kivu province and home to one million people. — AFP

Australia to bar 'some' visitors

SYDNEY: Visitors who have been convicted of violence against women and children will be kicked out or barred from entering Australia, Immigration Minister David Coleman said yesterday, as Canberra steps up its crackdown on foreign criminals. The new laws, which came into force Thursday, build on existing legislation requiring visitor visas to be cancelled if the holder has been sentenced to 12 months or more in jail. "Australia has no tolerance for domestic violence perpetrators," Coleman said in a statement, adding that no minimum sentence threshold was required. "If you've been convicted of a violent crime against women or children, you are not welcome in this country." — AFP

Flash floods leave 20 dead

KANDAHAR: At least 20 people were killed by flash floods in southern Afghanistan's Kandahar province, the UN said yesterday, as heavy rains swept away homes and vehicles and potentially damaged thousands of houses. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said widespread flooding inundated Kandahar city and surrounding districts in the province, with 97mm of rain falling in affected areas in the last 30 hours. "At least 10 people, including children, are still missing," said the UN agency in a statement. "It is anticipated that up to 2,000 homes may have been damaged", with severe damage to infrastructure also being reported. Kandahar's deputy governor Abdul Hanan Moneeb said the flooding was the worst in at least seven years, with many nomadic herders camped in the area swept away by the floodwaters along with their livestock. — AFP

International

Washington wants to know if Pakistan used F-16 jets to down Indian warplane

US Embassy investigates reports of 'violation of military sale agreements'

ISLAMABAD: The United States said yesterday it was trying to find out if Pakistan used US-built F-16 jets to down an Indian warplane, potentially in violation of US agreements, as the stand-off between the nuclear-armed Asian neighbors appeared to be easing. Pakistan and India both carried out aerial bombing missions this week, including a clash on Wednesday that saw an Indian pilot shot down over the disputed region of Kashmir in an incident that alarmed global powers and sparked fears of a war.

A Pakistan military spokesman on Wednesday denied Indian claims that Pakistan used F-16 jets. Pakistan returned the captured Indian pilot on Friday in a high-profile handover. Islamabad touted as a "peace gesture", which appeared to significantly dial down tensions, but both sides remain on high alert.

At the Line of Control (LoC), the de facto border between the two countries in the disputed Kashmir region, there was relative calm in the past 24 hours, both armies said yesterday. But Indian security forces said they were carrying out major anti-militancy operations on their side on Kashmir and had shot dead two militants. The US Embassy in Islamabad said yesterday it was looking into reports that Pakistan used F-16 jets to shoot down the Indian pilot, a potential violation of Washington's military sale agreements that limit how Pakistan can use the planes.

"We are aware of these reports and are seeking more information," a US Embassy spokesperson said. "We take all allegations of misuse of defense articles very seriously." While Pakistan has denied using F-16 jets during a dogfight that downed an Indian Mig-21

warplane over Kashmir on Wednesday, it has not specified which planes it used, though it assembles Chinese-designed JF-17 fighter jets on its soil. Pakistan has a long history of buying US military hardware, especially in the years after 2001 when Islamabad was seen as a key partner in the US-led War on Terror.

Pakistan bought several batches of F-16 planes, built by Lockheed Martin Corp. from Washington before relations soured and the United States cut off subsidized sales in 2016. It is not clear what exactly these so-called "end-user agreements" restrict Pakistan from doing. "The US Government does not comment on or confirm pending investigations of this nature," the US Embassy added. On Thursday Indian officials displayed to reporters parts of what they called an air-to-air missile that can only be fired from F-16 jets, alleging they were used to bomb its side of the disputed Kashmir border on Wednesday.

A Pakistan military spokesman told reporters on Wednesday that Pakistani jets "locked" on Indian targets to demonstrate Pakistan's capacity to strike back at India, but then chose to fire in an empty field where there would be no casualties. Pakistan said its mission on Wednesday was in retaliation for India violating its airspace and sovereignty a day earlier, when Indian jets bombed a forest area near the northern city of Balakot. India said it struck at militant training camps, but Islamabad denied any such camps existed, as did some villagers in the area when Reuters visited.

Militancy operations

Cross-border shelling in the past few days has killed



BHIMBAR: Pakistani soldiers stand next to what Pakistan says is the wreckage of an Indian fighter jet shot down in Pakistan controlled Kashmir at Somani area in Bhimbar district near the Line of Control. — AFP

seven people on the Pakistani side and four on the Indian side of Kashmir. But yesterday it was relatively quiet near the de facto border of Kashmir, the source of two of the three wars India and Pakistan have fought since independence from Britain in 1947. "By and large the LoC was calm last night but you never know when it will become active again," said Chaudhry Tariq Farooq, a minister in Pakistani Kashmir. "Tension still prevails."

In Indian-administered Kashmir, troops yesterday shot dead two militants after a three-day gun battle

that also killed five security force personnel, taking the total death toll to 25 in the past two weeks. The fresh anti-militancy drive was launched after a Kashmiri suicide bomber, a member of a Pakistan-based militant group, killed 40 Indian paramilitary police on Feb 14. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has also come down hard on separatist groups operating in Kashmir, including by banning the Jamaat-e-Islami party, two of whose clerics were detained in raids on Saturday night. — Reuters



Islamabad denies India allegations

Side-front in Britain's Brexit drama - the US Congress

WASHINGTON: With Britain deadlocked on negotiating its divorce from the European Union, an unexpected side-front is emerging - the US Congress. Conservatives who pushed the June 2016 referendum that ended in the shock decision to leave the 28-member bloc dangled the prospect of a free trade agreement with the United States as proof that Britain would not be isolated.

But while nationalist-minded President Donald Trump has welcomed Brexit, the main hitch to Britain's exit has raised alarm among key US lawmakers - the prospect of the return of a physical border that divides Ireland. The elimination of the border between the Republic of Ireland and British-ruled Northern Ireland was a key component of the Good Friday agreement of 1998 — brokered with the United States and made possible through the fruition of the integrated EU — which largely ended three decades of conflict that killed around 3,500 people.

Representative Peter King, long one of the highest-profile supporters in Congress of a unified Ireland, warned at a recent event in Washington that the direction of Brexit would be critical to any future US trade deal. "It's important for us, as Irish Americans, to make clear when we deal with the British that this is very, very important to us," he said. "And if the British want to consider any type of trade agreement with the United States, it's important that a soft border be maintained."

While King is a Republican, his stance has appeared to gain steam since the Democrats won control of the House of Representatives in November due to the party's historic Irish base and its generally more skeptical take on free trade. Representative Richard Neal, a co-chairman of the Friends of Ireland Caucus who has voiced unease about Brexit's effects, has taken charge of the powerful tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee, which will review any trade deal. Eleven lawmakers led by a Democrat recently introduced a resolution that would state the House of Representatives' opposition to a hard border in Ireland.

'Hugely complex issue'

Daniel Dalton, a British Conservative member of the European parliament who visited Washington for talks with US lawmakers, voiced concern that the Irish question could hold up a US-Britain trade agreement. He rebuffed, ever politely, US lawmakers' worries on Ireland, saying that nobody was out to end the Good Friday agreement.

"I think the worry is a little bit that there might be an assumption from people here and that they jump into a discussion on what is a hugely complex issue when there is no will from London or from Dublin to have a hard border," Dalton said. "That is a point that we have to make time and time again," he said. "The issue is how do we ensure that the Good Friday agreement isn't accidentally breached - which is a very different position to start off from." — AFP

Migrants scramble aboard Calais ferry, sparking police sweep

LILLE: Dozens of migrants hoping to reach Britain scrambled aboard a cross-Channel ferry in northern France, sparking a 12-hour manhunt as police combed the ship to find them, officials said yesterday. Around 100 migrants broke into the dock area of the port of Calais late Saturday, and dozens managed to get onboard the ferry that had just arrived from Dover, England.

A total of 63 migrants were detained, many of whom had tried to hide aboard the Danish-operated DFDS 'Calais Seaways', regional authorities said. Yesterday morning, firemen talked down the last group of about a dozen migrants who had climbed high above the deck to a catwalk attached to the ship's funnel.

The migrants managed to get aboard the ferry by using a maintenance ladder at high tide, senior regional official Jean-Philippe Vennin said. "Two of the

migrants fell into the sea and were quickly rescued by firemen," he added. Police offloaded vehicles arriving from Britain on the ferry before making a top-to-bottom search of the ship. Those detained were taken to Calais police headquarters, Vennin said. Cross-Channel ferry traffic was delayed overnight with at least two forced to remain at sea before being allowed into port. The 'Calais Seaways' was itself moved overnight so the harbor could resume operations.

To reach the port area, "the migrants crossed a pedestrian gangway normally used by employees and I am convinced the place had been cased and that last night's operation was orchestrated by people smugglers," harbor master Jean-Marc Puissesseau told reporters after the police search ended. "It's not normal to have 100 migrants break into a secure area such as a harbor. There must be a failure somewhere," local mayor Natacha Bouchart said, before blaming police force cutbacks. "We must reinforce our police forces on the eve of Brexit which people smugglers exploit in a bid to promote their trafficking," regional president Xavier Bertrand said on Twitter.

Diversifying ways

Migrants, many from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, and smugglers have diversified ways of trying to cross the Channel. Many still hide in trucks headed



CALAIS: Firemen of the Grimp (Groupement de reconnaissance et d'intervention en milieu périlleux) attempt to get migrants to come down from a ferry funnel yesterday in the northern French port of Calais. — AFP

to the ports, but more recently others have attempted to cross the Channel aboard small vessels and lifeboats stolen from local harbors or acquired by traffickers. On Friday, a French court jailed two Iraqis and an Iranian for organizing illegal migrant boat trips to Britain.

A 30-year-old Iranian, considered the group leader, received an 18-month sentence, while his two accomplices, aged 39 and 32, were each jailed for a year. Some

500 people attempted to cross the Channel last year—most of them in November and December, compared with just 13 such known attempts in 2017. French interior ministry figures showed that 276 people successfully reached British waters. In December, London dispatched a Royal Navy cutter to help coastguard vessels survey the 21 miles (33 kilometers) of sea that separates France and Britain at its narrowest point. — AFP

Austria's Jews wary of far-right charm offensive

VIENNA: David Lasar's family is sadly not unusual among Austria's Jewish community in having lost several members in the Holocaust. But in one respect Lasar stands out—his membership of the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ). At its foundation, the FPÖ was led by two former members of the Waffen SS, so 66-year-old Lasar's choice of political home might well be considered surprising. Lasar says he initially joined in the late 1990s as the FPÖ was "the only party close to the people, to employees and workers who had been forgotten by the left, while the centre-right was the party of capitalism and big business".

Now as an FPÖ MP he says he has an added reason for throwing his lot in with the party. "We are fighting tirelessly against anti-Semitism, especially anti-Semitism imported through immigration. "We are the only party to be fighting against this, together with our partners in government," he says, referring to the centre-right People's Party (ÖVP) of Chancellor Sebastian Kurz. Since entering the coalition government at the end of 2017, the FPÖ has made great play of its efforts to foster a rapprochement with the Jewish community, and to establish relations between the party and Israel.

But the Jewish community has largely kept its distance in the face of repeated scandals suggesting that anti-Semitic attitudes are still present in the party's milieu. As for Israel, its government has maintained an official boycott of all FPÖ ministers, including Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache and Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl, who while not an FPÖ member herself, was nominated for the post by the party.

'Political calculation'

Benjamin Hess, co-president of the Austrian Union of Jewish Students insists: "We see no change at all within the FPÖ." Hess himself confronted Strache in a TV program last year for having shared an anti-Semitic image on his Facebook page in 2012. "It's easy to say: 'I'm against anti-Semitism, it's much harder to distance yourself from it in reality,'" Hess says. He and others who are still skeptical of the FPÖ point in particular to the party's deep ties to the "Burschenschaften", student fraternities known for their strident pan-German nationalism and whose alumni include many high-ranking FPÖ politicians.

Strache, who himself flirted with neo-Nazism in his youth, has tried to clean up the party's image, insisting that it rejects anti-Semitism and expelling some of its more embarrassing members. He has also made trips to Israel, being welcomed on his last visit in 2016 by junior members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party. He also visited the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem.

Lasar says he has also been to Israel on behalf of the party to foster better relations with the Israeli right, and boasts that he has made "excellent contacts". "The political calculation is obvious," says Bernhard Weidinger from the DÖW institute, which researches the Austrian far-right. When the current government came to power the European Jewish Congress (EJC) warned that "the Freedom Party can not use the Jewish community as a fig leaf and must show tolerance and acceptance towards all communities and minorities," in an allusion to the FPÖ's anti-Muslim rhetoric.

The "imported anti-Semitism" that Lasar speaks of has become a favorite theme of Strache's too, particularly as since 2015 the country has received some 150,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, many of them from Muslim countries. In February, Strache launched his new think-tank with a podium discussion on "Islamic anti-Semitism". — AFP

Italy chooses a centre-left leader to battle populists

ROME: Supporters of Italy's fractured centre-left opposition Democratic Party (PD) chose a new leader yesterday who they hope can take on the ruling populist coalition led by the far-right Lega. The PD was left reeling and languishing in the polls since the anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) and the anti-immigrant Lega won power in elections and formed a government in June of last year.

The three leadership candidates are little known internationally, with Nicola Zingaretti, who has been compared to Britain's Labor chief Jeremy Corbyn, the favorite to win. Around 7,000 polling stations, including 150 abroad, are being staffed by 35,000 volunteers with voting due to end at 1900 GMT. Zingaretti, 53, is currently the president of the Lazio region, which includes Rome, and is a former Italian Communist party member as well as a founding member of the PD in 2007.

He was a member of the European parliament and is a supporter of European federalism who has criticized austerity measures. Roberto Giachetti, 57, is considered the closest candidate to former PD leader and prime minister Matteo Renzi's more centrist free-market politics and was previously a member of the Radical and Green parties. He lost the Rome mayoral election to M5S's Virginia Raggi in 2016. The third candidate, Maurizio Martina, 40, was agriculture minister in the governments of Renzi and his PD successor, Paolo Gentiloni. He briefly took over as PD leader when Renzi stepped down last year.

The candidates have been using social media to try to get more than a million people out to vote. Those voting must sign a declaration of PD support and pay a fee of two euros (just over two dollars). A candidate can win outright with over 50 percent of the vote, or a party conference on March 17 will choose between the top two candidates. All three candidates have excluded an alliance with the M5S, which won 220 seats in the lower house elections last year compared to the PD's 112. — AFP

International

Anger over 'forced' video of India pilot amid new deaths in Kashmir

Deadly tensions simmer with fierce shelling across the frontier

NEW DELHI: A furious backlash erupted in India yesterday over a video of an Indian pilot shot down by Pakistan praising his captors, as deadly tensions simmered between the neighbors with fierce shelling across their Kashmir frontier. Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, whose MiG fighter was shot down Wednesday as he chased Pakistani jets over disputed Kashmir, crossed over at the Wagah frontier late Friday several hours after the scheduled time.

His capture had become the centerpiece of hostilities between the arch-rivals after a February 14 suicide bombing in Kashmir killed 40 Indian paramilitaries. Abhinandan, who ejected to safety but was set upon by a crowd on the Pakistani side of the Kashmir ceasefire line, had a noticeable black eye and was immediately taken for a medical checkup before a debriefing by military and intelligence agencies. Media reports said Abhinandan's return to India had been held up because the pilot was forced to make the video before getting his freedom.

In the heavily edited video distributed by the Pakistani military just before his release, he praised the professionalism of the Pakistani army and criticized Indian media for creating war hysteria. "The army personnel saved me from the mob. The

Pakistani army is very professional and I am impressed by it," he said. Omar Abdullah, a former chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir state, said the video tainted Pakistan's gesture to return the pilot so quickly. "Sadly the image you paint for us is marred terribly by the video he's forced to record just before you sent him back," Abdullah said on Twitter.

"That high moral ground you had bequeathed to yourselves slipped at the end." Indian media slammed the video as "distasteful" and said it breached international norms for prisoners of war. "There is no peace without dignity and Pakistan just forgot that basic lesson in violation of Geneva convention," wrote Rajdeep Sardesai, a top editor with the India Today group. India's feverish social media also slammed the video, which was tweeted by the Pakistan government but later taken off its official account.

'Just want peace'

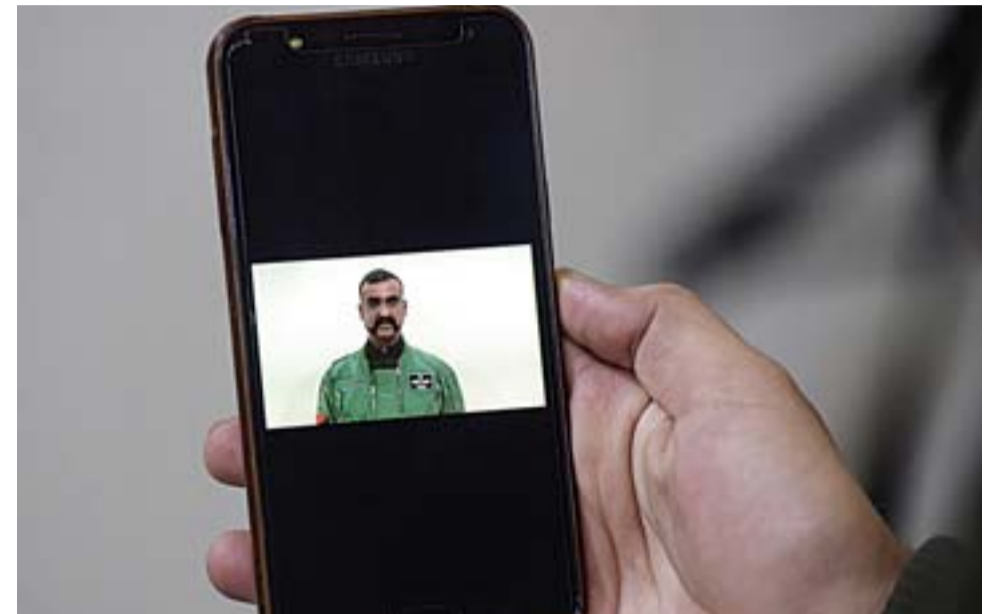
Pakistan's foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said the country had acted with prudence in releasing the pilot. "There was no pressure on Pakistan to release him nor any compulsion," he told BBC Urdu. "We wanted to convey to them that we do not want to increase your sorrow, we do not want to mistreat your citi-

zens, we just want peace."

Pakistan media praised the government for releasing the pilot, with lawyer Shahzaib Khan writing in the Express Tribune that Prime Minister Imran Khan had "done Pakistan proud by not engaging in chest thumping or war-mongering for political gain." Some social media users though criticised the military video, calling it "cheap" and "unnecessary". "Not a good idea. This will backfire," said Gul Bukhari, a prominent critic of the government and the powerful military.

Abhinandan was captured a day after Indian planes bombed what New Delhi said was a militant camp in Pakistan, in retaliation for the Kashmir suicide bombing claimed by a Pakistan-based militant group. The end of the air raids did not stop more violence raging in Kashmir, with both sides firing mortars and artillery over the frontier Saturday. Two Pakistani army soldiers were killed in Nakiyal sector in one cross border exchange of fire, the Pakistan military said.

"Pakistan Army troops gave a befitting response by targeting Indian posts," said a statement that accused the Indian army of deliberately targeting civilians. At least 12 civilians have been killed on either side of the frontier since the start of the week, including a mother and her two children



ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani man watches the latest video statement released by Pakistan's military authorities of the Indian Wing Commander pilot Abhinandan Varthaman on his smartphone in Islamabad. —AFP

whose house was pulverized by a mortar shell on the Indian side on Friday. Two civilians on the Pakistan side have also been killed since Friday afternoon. Five

Indian security personnel were killed Friday in a gunfight after troops laid siege to a house where militants were hiding in Handwara district. —AFP

Bangladesh cracks down on chemical warehouses after deadly inferno

DHAKA: Bangladesh is cracking down on chemical warehouses in an historic Dhaka district a week after a fire killed 70 people in buildings used for deodorant and plastics storage, an official said yesterday. Five task forces led by military officers, police and officials have raided Old Dhaka buildings and cut off utilities to at least 50 buildings in the past three days after chemical warehouses were found in their basement and under floors. The owners of the buildings have been ordered to relocate the flammable chemicals to safer places outside the capital as part of the initiative launched on Thursday. "We are determined there will be no flammable chemical warehouses in any Old Dhaka residential area," Dhaka's mayor Sayeed Khokon said. He said the drive would continue until April 1.

The crackdown is in response to a massive fire which broke out on February 21 at Chawkbazar, a 300-year-old historic Old Dhaka district, killing at least 70 people and injuring another 50. Fire service officials said a warehouse of deodorant and granular plastic in one of the five buildings that caught fire fuelled the inferno, which took more than 12 hours to control. The disaster recalled a June 2010 fire in the nearby neighborhood of Nimtoli in which 123 people were killed. Again a blaze ripped through residential buildings that doubled as chemical warehouses. Residents said chemical storage is a lucrative business in Old Dhaka, which was founded by the Mughals in 1608, where building owners allegedly bribe authorities to turn a blind eye to the stores. On Saturday the taskforce faced resistance from Old Dhaka traders, prompting the authorities to halt the drive for several hours. It resumed after intervention by the mayor. According to one survey conducted in 2015, some 70 percent of Old Dhaka residential buildings, home to three million people, are used to hoard chemicals and other goods. —AFP

Lost decade: 10 years on, Pakistan still reeling from notorious cricket attack

LAHORE: Whenever umpire Ahsan Raza looks at his scars from the deadly militant attack on Sri Lanka's cricket team in Lahore, 10 years ago, he shudders. Raza, 44, was lucky to survive the gun, grenade and rocket assault which changed not only his life, but also the landscape of cricket in Pakistan. Raza, then a reserve umpire for the second Test, was on his way to the Gaddafi Stadium with other match officials when the team bus just a few yards ahead of them came under fire, killing eight police and bystanders and wounding six others.

Two bullets pierced his lungs and liver, and after emerging from a coma, it was nearly six months before Raza could walk again. "My wounds have healed but whenever I look at them I remember the gruesome incident," Raza told AFP. "Whenever someone mentions that incident I request him not to remind me of that tragedy." The attack proved a heavy blow to cricket-loving Pakistan: international games were suspended in the country, and a decade later most foreign teams still refuse to tour. With Pakistan playing their home series in the United Arab Emirates, the national cricket board estimates it has missed out on nearly \$200 million in revenues. Even the Pakistan Super League, a star-studded Twenty20 tournament, is mainly played in the UAE although it is gradually inching back to Pakistan by holding more games there each year. After the attack on the Sri Lankan team, it was six years before Pakistan hosted any international cricket when minnows Zimbabwe toured in 2015.

Gradual return

Under heavy security, Gaddafi Stadium hosted the PSL final in March 2017, and a World XI also played three Twenty20 internationals in Lahore. But the biggest event was Sri Lanka's return for a one-off Twenty20 international in



LAHORE: This file photo shows Pakistani policemen standing beside a car allegedly used by gunmen during an attack on a bus which was carrying the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore. —AFP

October 2017 - eight years after they were attacked and airlifted from the same stadium. Fittingly Raza, who also officiated during the Zimbabwe series, was one of the on-field umpires in the Sri Lanka match. "I was very emotional that day," he said. "To their credit PCB (Pakistan Cricket Board) has taken gradual steps and I am 100 percent confident that more foreign teams will come in the near future." The West Indies also played three Twenty20 internationals in Karachi in last May.

From next week eight PSL games will be held in Lahore and Karachi, including the March 17 final, with the PCB confirming the games will go ahead as planned despite escalating tensions over the fiercely disputed Kashmir border with India resulting in military skirmishes in recent days. Former

Pakistan captain Asif Iqbal believes hosting the PSL matches will gradually restore the confidence of foreign teams, but it has been a long, slow process and the major nations are still staying away.

"International cricket will return to Pakistan but it will be through a process which has already started with the holding of the final rounds of the PSL in the country and tours by the World XI, Sri Lanka and the West Indies," said Iqbal. Last year, New Zealand refused to play a Twenty20 series in Pakistan, and in January, Australia turned down a request to visit for two one-day internationals. However, the PCB is hopeful it will convince a major team to tour the country this year starting with Sri Lanka, who are scheduled to play two Tests against Pakistan in October. —AFP



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Peugeot plans US return 30 years after exit

Some 30 years after exiting the United States due to plunging sales, Peugeot is preparing a return to a market where it previously knew glory at the famed Indianapolis 500. PSA Group Chief Executive Carlos Tavares said this week that the Peugeot - a brand known for its lion logo - is the parent company's pick for the US market. The company plans to sell Peugeot autos in the US by 2026 in line with a multi-step 10-year plan first announced in 2016.

The comeback is being devised as PSA, which also sells cars under the Citroen and Opel brands, faces pressure from investors to diversify its revenues beyond Europe at a time when US sanctions have torpedoed ambitions in Iran and the Chinese auto market has slowed considerably. What kind of cars will be sold? What will be the silhouette? Will Peugeot work through existing dealerships, an expensive proposition in some key cities, or sell directly to customers and skip certain markets?

For now, the automaker isn't offering many details. "We believe we're being frugal," said Larry Dominique, chief executive of PSA North America. "We believe we're being very careful and making sure that we do this the right way because new brands entering the US and Canadian market does not happen very often."

Auto experts say the ambitious plan will not be easy to execute. "I think Peugeot will struggle to get back into the US market," said longtime industry consultant Maryann Keller. "It will be expensive and take years." "No one under the age of 50 recalls seeing a Peugeot on the road," Keller said, adding that 1970s reruns of the schlumpy Peugeot-driving detective "Columbo" are not top of mind any more.

Saturated market

Peugeot plans initially to sell vehicles in the US that are imported from China and Europe. "Yes we understand there's tariff discussions going on right now and so forth," Dominique said. "But the expectation is we will initially import." Peugeot plans to launch in a single US state and will then ramp up. The company has identified 15 US states and four Canadian provinces that are especially receptive to imports. The company will explore US manufacturing if there are volumes to justify it.

Peugeot faces myriad challenges to be successful in a market that is huge but also already saturated with some 40 brands and looks to be stable at best in overall sales after a series of records earlier in this decade. US consumers have tilted heavily towards sport utility vehicles, pickups and other large vehicles, which composed around 69 percent of the 17.3 million vehicles sold last year.

Peugeot can compete in these markets with models that have sold well in Europe such as the 3008 and 5008 SUVs. But the brand's smaller sedan models, which sell well in Europe, are deeply out of favor in America. Peugeot also could face tough competition from new entrants, especially China, whose groups such as GAC, Great Wall and Kandi plan to market in the US in the coming years.

Niche proposition?

Peugeot exited the United States in 1991, having clearly been surpassed by Japanese rivals. In that year, it sold 3,500 vehicles. Peugeot vehicles triumphed at the Indianapolis 500 three times in the early 20th Century and the brand to this day figures prominently at other races such as the 24 Hours of Le Mans in France. The cars are tough to find these days in the United States. The collector's website Hemmings.com lists one 1987 505 GLS model for \$6,495 in Nebraska.

Back in the day, Peugeot was known for innovative engineering "but only by really car-savvy people - and mainstream American consumers probably didn't know anything about them," said Ivan Drury of Edmunds.com. At this point, Peugeot has a "clean slate" in the US, Drury said. Italian brands Fiat and Alfa Romeo have had mixed success since being introduced in the US a few years. Sales of Fiats nosedived 43.8 percent in 2018 to 15,521, while Alfa Romeo's sales dipped 0.6 percent to 23,800.

Karl Brauer of Kelley Blue Book warned that Fiat's performance in the US could be a template for what happens with Peugeot. Fiat "bailed out at roughly the same time that Peugeot bailed out and then it came back into the market almost a decade ago and it's never really gotten a strong following," Brauer said. "I think it's going to be a big challenge for them."

But Dominique said Jaguar Land Rover and Subaru were two examples of brands that had succeeded in carving out niche offerings in cars. "The idea is to focus on customer satisfaction and profitability, not volumes," Dominique said. "When the volume justifies the investment then we will consider industrialization." Peugeot launched a car-sharing application, Free2Move, in October in Washington DC. The cars for now are General Motors vehicles, but Peugeot is working to have its own models used. —AFP



Jump electric bicycle and scooters available to rent by-the-mile through the Uber smartphone application are seen near a road in Santa Monica, California on Feb 26, 2019. —AFP

Uber aims to be 'Amazon of transportation'

Uber, the ridesharing behemoth set to launch a stock offering soon, is aiming beyond sharing car rides to becoming the "Amazon of transportation" in a future where people share instead of owning vehicles. Uber laid out its vision of a transformed world of personal mobility as it steered toward a keenly anticipated stock market debut that will follow an initial public offering of shares by US rideshare rival Lyft announced on Friday.

"Cars really were, for us, a kind of starting place," said transportation policy and research chief Andrew Salzberg at an Uber media event in Santa Monica, California. "Once we've built this platform for mobility there are a whole host of business lines we can build beyond that." The Southern California beach city was teeming with electric scooters and bicycles from Uber and rivals that may be checked out with a smartphone app.

"The idea that every time you walk outside there is this electric, fun-to-ride vehicle waiting to take you to your next destination is really incredible," said Nick Foley, head of product for Jump, the electric bike startup acquired by Uber. "It's more than just an app to book a bike; it's an app where you can have reliable micro mobility booking or a could book a car if the weather isn't nice." Foley believed that a shift to mobility as a smartphone-summoned-service will alter lifestyles as dramatically as did the mass market debut of the automobile.

Smartphone transit hub

Combining electric motors with light-weight scooters or bicycles, and having them on streets to be used on demand, provides an ideal method of getting around in traffic-troubled cities, according

For Morocco Jewish activist, Zionism feeds anti-Semitism

For rights activist Sion Assidon, a Moroccan of Jewish descent who also describes himself as Berber and Arab, Zionism breeds anti-Semitism in today's Arab world but aversion to Israel's policies is not a form of racism. "Anti-Zionism is a political position and if declaring oneself to be 'anti-Zionist' is seen as a racist act, that is serious," said the 70-year-old campaigner who opposes French President Emmanuel Macron proposal to turn anti-Zionism into a crime. For Assidon, "we must not limit ourselves to condemning one form of racial hatred alone, forgetting Muslims and gypsies," for example. Why pass on Islamophobia? he asks.

Assidon is an activist to the bone. He spent 12 years behind bars, from 1972 to 1984, for "endangering national security" during the reign of the late King Hassan II, along with dozens of other opposition figures. Last month, he took part in a demonstration in Casablanca, Morocco's economic capital, called by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against a concert by Enrico Macias in protest at pro-Israeli positions adopted by the French singer, who is of Algerian Jewish descent.

Although a renowned critic of the authorities, the leftist activist does share the same analysis as King Mohammed VI on one point at least: you can oppose Israel's policy of settlement building on Palestinian land at the same time as standing up for the coexistence of religious identities.

'Coexistence'

"You mustn't confuse Zionism with Judaism: The Israeli government says it represents Jews the world over, but that's not true," Assidon insisted. A keen historian and business owner based in Mohammedia, a city on the Atlantic between Rabat and

Casablanca, Assidon believes "anti-Semitism is above all a form of Judaeophobia within the European space linked to the view of the (Catholic) Church" over the centuries. "In Arab countries, religious differences can create tensions but nobody accuses the Jews of having killed the son of God," he said, while pointing out that Jews in Morocco and other Muslim countries benefit from the status of "People of the Book" and the protection it grants. In Morocco, the preamble of its constitution pays tribute to Hebrew roots and Jews have held ministerial posts and served as royal advisors.

In an initiative by the palace, projects have been launched to renovate Jewish cemeteries and urban districts that used to be home to a community of between 200,000 and 300,000 Jews that shrank amid waves of emigration linked to the 1948 creation of Israel and Morocco's independence from France in 1956. Sion Assidon hails from a trading family who decided to stay on in the land of their birth. He may be an atheist, but he is still subject to "the law of the rabbis" which for the Jews of Morocco takes the place of the family code linked to sharia Islamic laws.

Although Moroccan Jews now number less than 3,000, the community is still the largest in the Arab world. And despite the absence of diplomatic relations, Israeli tourists are welcome to travel to Morocco and visit the region's only Hebrew art and history museum, founded in 1998 in Casablanca. "Coexistence between communities has worked quite well, but today there's a dangerous slide: the Jews, far fewer in number, are becoming an abstraction and their image, in the minds of the young, tends to be reduced to the one who is imposing the brutal occupation of Palestine," said Assidon.

As a result, according to Assidon, anti-Semitism in Morocco and other Arab countries is fed in part by the resurgence of conspiracy theories born in 19th century Europe and reinforced by "the total impunity granted to Israel" despite its policies of "bloody repression" censored on numerous occasions by the United Nations. —AFP

'Mega-cultural shift'

Jump has leapt into 16 US cities, and planned to expand internationally this year beginning in Europe, according to founder and chief executive Ryan Rzepecki. "I think we are in year zero of a 10-year, mega-cultural shift," Rzepecki said. E-scooters and dockless bikes arriving on streets of US cities have caused complaints, safety concerns, and the need for laws to reign in reckless riding. "For as

much cultural change we have been seeing in cities, I think the pushback has been incredibly low," Rzepecki said, however.

He was excited to get Jump into Europe, where he felt cities were more inclined to be designed with bicycling in mind. Uber is also taking to the sky with an Elevate project to have electric aircraft carry people between "skyports", taking off and landing vertically. Director of vehicle systems engineering Mark Moore, who spent decades at NASA, joined Uber a little more than two years ago.

"We are one of the very big, bold bets that is coming up with a whole new choice of transportation in cities faced with gridlock really grinding them to a halt," Moore said of Elevate. He expected experimental flights next year, with Uber putting Elevate aircraft into service in Dallas, Los Angeles, and a soon-to-be revealed third US city by 2023, pledging to make this an affordable travel option. "We have zero interest in doing this for the elites," Moore said. "This is all about designing a nodal transport system that meets the needs of cities."

Uber's platform moves cargo as well as people, with a "Freight" service that connects truckers with shippers in a way similar to how drivers connect with people seeking rides. Uber is also seeing growing success with an "Eats" service that lets drivers make money delivering meals ordered from restaurants. Uber is the largest and most prominent of the "sharing economy" startups that are on the cusp of transforming several industries, and its IPO could be a milestone for the trend. "When Uber goes public it will be a vote of confidence on the sharing economy but also a vote confidence on the company," said New York University professor Arun Sundararajan. —AFP

Rising star palladium shines brightly

Palladium is blazing a record-breaking trail on supply deficit fears, fuelled by strong demand from carmakers as more and more consumers switch from high-polluting diesel to cleaner vehicles, experts say. The precious metal, which is used in the manufacture of catalytic converters for petrol engines, scored a record pinnacle on Tuesday at \$1,568 per ounce. The commodity, which is mostly mined in Russia and South Africa, was also buoyed by supply-side woes and solid demand from China - despite a recent economic slowdown in the Asian powerhouse.

Palladium has rebounded sharply since striking a one-year low of \$836 per ounce in August, when it was rocked by a strong dollar. "Demand for palladium in gasoline autocatalysts has seen strong growth over the last few years, driven by Chinese growth and a declining diesel market share following the Volkswagen scandal," said Renaissance Capital commodities analyst Steven Friedman.

Volkswagen's pollution-cheating "dieseldiegate" scandal has also loomed large since 2015 because it hurt demand for diesel-powered vehicles in the longer term. Germany's biggest carmaker lurched into crisis after admitting that it had fitted as many as 11 million of its diesel cars with software capable of fooling official pollution tests.

Golden palladium

In December meanwhile, palladium eclipsed gold in dollar terms for the first time in 16 years, and it has so far traded above gold for most of 2019. It has benefited from weakening demand for high-polluting diesel cars that face tighter regulation worldwide. In stark contrast, sister metal platinum - a key component in converters for diesel engines - languishes not too far from a 10-year low that was struck last August.

Diesel accounted for 36 percent of new car registrations worldwide in

2018, according to data from automotive research consultancy Jato Dynamics. That was sharply down from 44 percent in 2017, while the figure had stood at a record high 55 percent in 2011. As a result, automotive demand for palladium jumped to a record high of 8.66 million ounces in 2018, up three percent from 2017, according to the world's largest palladium refiner Johnson Matthey. Both platinum and palladium remain supported, to varying degrees, by tight global supply.

Tight supplies

"In 2018, the (palladium) market was in a structural deficit for the ninth consecutive year in a row," noted Russia's Norilsk Nickel, which is the world's biggest palladium producer. And thanks to runaway prices, Norilsk Nickel enjoyed a 44-percent boom in net profit in 2018 to \$3.1 billion (2.7 billion euros) from 2017. The palladium deficit shrank slightly last year, with global demand outstripping supply by 29,000 ounces in 2018, according to Johnson Matthey.

However, the situation appears set to worsen significantly this year thanks to tighter emissions regulation. Johnson Matthey forecasts the deficit in 2019 to hit 1.0 million ounces. "The deficit in the palladium market looks set to widen dramatically in 2019, with stricter emissions legislation forecast to stimulate double-digit rises in palladium demand from European and Chinese automakers," warned Johnson Matthey in its February market outlook.

The threat of strikes at South African mines - which together account for some 40 percent of global production - could worsen the situation. But some analysts argue that a correction in the volatile palladium market is now overdue. "The palladium market is probably one of the smallest commodity markets," Natixis analyst Bernard Dahdah told AFP. "More likely one market player, someone is speculating by buying so much," he said, adding some commentators indicate Russia could be behind such a move. By Friday on the London Platinum and Palladium Market, the price of palladium rose to \$1,540.93 per ounce from \$1,490.57 a week earlier. Platinum meanwhile increased to \$863.14 an ounce from \$832.14. —AFP

Business

MONDAY, MARCH 4, 2019

12 Sterling rallies amid Brexit hopes of a deadline change**13** Taxing the rich, an idea gaining ground in the United States**14** Microsoft unveils 3 new devices of Surface family for Kuwait market

GENEVA: This file photo shows a general view of the Geneva International Motor Show in Geneva. The 2019 edition of the Geneva International Motor Show will be held from March 7 to March 17, 2019. — AFP

Trade wars and Brexit uncertainty cloud horizon

Automakers seek to electrify Geneva car show

PARIS: The Geneva Motor Show kicks off this week with automakers eager to show off new electric models, even as they nervously eye a horizon colored by trade wars and Brexit uncertainty.

After years of growth and record profits, the sector took a sharp U-turn in mid-2018 amid an unexpected slowdown in China, which is by far the world's biggest market, counting one out of three registered cars on the planet. And with just three weeks to go before Britain is to leave the European Union on March 29, carmakers are bracing for the very likely possibility of a "no-deal Brexit", which is expected to spell cataclysm for the industry. The automakers heading for Europe's biggest annual car show, which opens on March 7, are already suffering from the ongoing trade war between Washington and Beijing, and are wary about increased tariffs the US might slap on European imports.

On top of such tensions, carmakers have also been pushed to pump huge investments into electrifying their fleets in order to respect strict CO2 emissions standards that will take effect in the EU next year and be further tightened in the coming decade.

Slim profits

Following the tough conditions of 2018, manufacturers of cars and auto equipment "will see slim profits in 2019," said Ferdinand Dudenhofer, who heads the Center for Automotive Research (CAR) in Germany. "We can already expect profit warnings, production reductions and job cuts," he told AFP.

"This is not a good climate for a show filled with glitz and glamour."

After a one-percent drop last year, he predicted the global car market would slip two percent in 2019 to 81.9 million individual cars sold-or three million fewer than in 2017. As a result, factories were struggling, with overcapacity estimated at "well above five million units." "The good times that we have known for the past decade are behind us," agreed Flavien Neuvy, head of the Observatoire Cetelem, which conducts economic surveys in the global automotive industry.

Automakers, he said, are at high risk of being hit with heavy fines in Europe as of next year, when strict emissions limits that require a company's entire fleet to emit no more than 95 grams (3.4 ounces) of CO2 on

average per vehicle, kick in. These targets, he said, are "almost impossible to keep."

A recent study by the BCG consultancy estimated that each car maker stands to be hit with between 500 million and one billion euros (\$570 million to \$1.1 billion) in fines.

Limit the damage

"They will really need to sell a lot of electric vehicles to limit the damage," Neuvy said, pointing out sales of diesel-fuelled cars are sliding quickly as sales of petrol-fuelled vehicles, which emit more CO2, rise. At the same time, people are still drawn to gas-guzzling SUVs, which currently account for one in three vehicles sold.

The models going on show in Geneva reflect industry concerns, with a wide range of concept electric vehicles on display from middle-class carmakers like Citroen and Honda, which will present their visions of a far more battery-powered future. At the same time, high-end brands like Aston Martin, Audi and Mercedes will be showing off concept electric SUVs.

They are scrambling to catch up with Californian

electric carmaker Tesla, which won't be present at the show, but will weigh heavily on everyone's mind at a time when its Model 3 sedan—already a best-seller in the United States—is revving up in Europe.

And French automakers Renault and Peugeot will present the latest reincarnations of popular city cars like the Clio and the Peugeot 208, with the latter available for the first time in an electric version.

World's fastest SUV

Despite the constraints, the Geneva show remains a draw for luxury automobile enthusiasts and is unlikely to disappoint in terms of glitz and glamour. Bentley will present its new Bentayga Speed, which has been categorized as the fastest SUV in the world, capable of reaching 306 kilometers per hour (190 mph). Lamborghini's new sleek Huracan Evo Spyder and Porsche's 911 are also expected to turn heads, as is Ferrari's F8 Tributo, with its powerful 720-horsepower engine. More than 660,000 visitors are expected to descend on Geneva's Palexpo from March 7 through 17 to cast their eyes over some 900 vehicles. — AFP

Amid bountiful jobs, US layoffs creep higher

WASHINGTON: The US jobs engine has continued to deliver for nearly a decade, putting more Americans back to work and sending unemployment to a historic low. But, just over a year after Congress enacted sweeping corporate tax cuts meant to jolt the economy, a shadow has crept into the picture: Layoffs are also on the rise. While claims for unemployment benefits remain low, major companies have begun to swing the axe even as many enjoy the tax windfall and solid profits, and are spending record amounts of cash to buy back their own stock from investors.

In February alone, layoffs were announced by PepsiCo, the video-gaming giant Activision Blizzard and the cosmetics marketer Avon. General Motors enraged President Donald Trump in November by announcing a 15 percent cut to its workforce

while shuttering auto plants in the political battleground states of Ohio and Michigan.

Economists say tax cuts often fuel investments like mergers and acquisitions, which frequently result in job cuts—at least initially—as some workers become redundant. Automakers, toy manufacturers, banks, tech firms and telecommunications giants are trimming their workforces.

Job cuts jumped 29 percent last year in the wake of the tax reform to about 540,000, the highest in three years, according to Challenger, Gray & Christmas, an outplacement firm that tracks staff reductions.

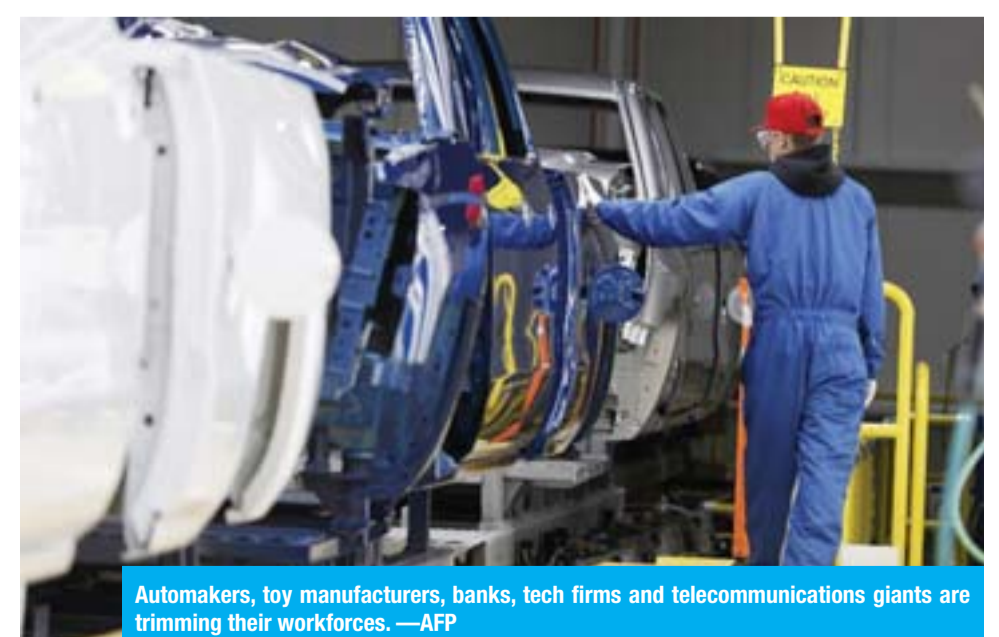
And job cuts in January hit 44,653, higher than 20 of the prior 24 months, the firm reported. Despite the increase in layoffs, first-time claims for jobless benefits have risen only slightly in recent months—suggesting the current US jobs market is so hot many laid-off workers find new jobs even before they need to claim unemployment insurance.

The economy created over 220,000 new jobs each month on average in 2018, up from about 180,000 in the prior year. The reasons driving layoffs vary. Banking giant Wells Fargo announced in September it was cutting five to 10 percent of its workforce as it focused more on internet banking. And some

firms shed workers because they worry the economy could hit a rough patch in the near future or are seeing rising raw material costs. John Challenger, the employment firm's CEO, told AFP. But as more companies merge, more employees become redundant: combined firms no longer need two departments to handle accounts payable, human resources or IT. "You see layoffs occur that aren't really about the slackening of business conditions," Challenger said.

Rhetoric and results

"You don't need full-scale vertical operations in as many locations as banks get bigger and core functions get moved to headquarters." The value of mergers and acquisitions in the United States jumped 17 percent last year to \$1.94 trillion, the second highest since 2000, according to financial data firm FactSet. Edward Rice, a professor of finance at the University of Washington who has studied the effect of tax cuts on corporate behavior, told AFP his research shows tax cuts tend to produce mergers and acquisitions that were more profitable. He acknowledged those corporate combinations could cut jobs initially, but argued that over time healthier companies could hire more. "The



Automakers, toy manufacturers, banks, tech firms and telecommunications giants are trimming their workforces. — AFP

idea of the merger is that somehow the firm's going to get more efficient and grow faster. So there may be a saving in employees now but a gain in employees later," he said.

However, Rebecca Lester, professor of accounting at Stanford University, said tax cuts sometimes have failed to produce the desired outcome.—AFP

Business

Taxing the rich, an idea gaining ground in the United States

Gillibrand for a levy on financial deals, Sanders for taxing inheritances up to 77%

NEW YORK: Long out of favor in the United States, the idea of taxing rich individuals and corporations to pay for healthcare or to combat inequality is gaining ground among Democratic politicians. While the United States reveres free enterprise and is home to the world's largest number of billionaires, such tax proposals have been gaining traction in political circles in recent weeks.

More than one Democratic contender in next year's presidential elections are campaigning on some plan to tax the wealthy. And they have been encouraged by famous billionaires such as Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, the world's second and third wealthiest people, who worry about America's severe wealth inequality.

Vermont's left-leaning Senator Bernie Sanders was among the first in the recent wave. During his 2016 presidential campaign he called for higher federal income taxes to pay for free college tuition and universal healthcare. Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren has proposed a two-percent wealth tax starting at \$50 million in earnings. New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand is calling for a levy on financial transactions, and Sanders says inheritances should be taxed up to 77 percent.

With the Democrats now in control of the House of Representatives, the undisputed media star of the freshman class, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, is leading the charge: she has proposed a tax of 70 percent on any income over \$10 million to help pay for a proposed "Green New Deal" to decarbonize the US economy and help prevent catastrophic climate change, while offering universal healthcare and guaranteed employment.

This so-called marginal rate of 70 percent is not unprecedented in the United States, but was last at that level 1981. The current top marginal tax rate is 37 percent. Raising corporate taxes is another Democratic priority, a subject inflamed by the recent controversy over Amazon, which has reported no federal income tax expenses for the past two years. That has stoked debate over highly profitable companies that do not pay into government coffers.

Some Republicans have pushed back, with outspoken

and media savvy Ocasio-Cortez drawing the most fire. Grover Norquist, an anti-tax activist who has long pushed Republican lawmakers to pledge never to raise taxes, warned in January against soaking the rich, saying such taxes "always slip down to hit the rest of us."

But Joseph Thorndike, a historian specializing in US tax policy, said a reversal of the post-war trend of cutting taxes is within sight.

'Social tensions'

"Something is happening here," he said. "We are beginning to have a discussion about that that we haven't had since the 1960s or even the 50s." Top marginal tax rates in the United States were very high following World War II, maxing out at 94 percent. They began to fall in the 1960s and were slashed again under President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.

In late 2017, Donald Trump and the Republican majority in Congress cut corporate and personal income tax rates, despite unanimous Democratic opposition which denounced the tax overhaul as a giveaway to the rich. Trump, himself a billionaire, has attracted widespread scorn for refusing to disclose his own income tax returns, and accusations that his family maintained its wealth by evading taxes, an accusation he denies.

Why has the debate changed?

Yawning income gaps are one reason, Thorndike said. "People are willing to tolerate rich people getting richer as long as middle class people are also doing better," he said. "When the middle and laboring class is stagnating, that creates social tensions."

Trump himself may have been catalyst. While most major changes in US tax policy came in times of crisis—wars or deep recessions—Trump's unconventional presidency could mark "a sharp enough break" to bring about change, Thorndike said.

A Morning Consult poll conducted late last month for Politico found 74 percent of voters were generally in favor



WASHINGTON: In this file photo, US Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) addresses a rally against the Republican tax plan outside the US Capitol in Washington, DC. Long out of favor in the United States, the idea of taxing rich individuals and corporations to pay for healthcare or to combat inequality is gaining ground among Democratic politicians. —AFP

of higher taxes for the rich, while 73 percent favored this for corporations.

Furthermore, 90 percent believed such tax revenues should go to pay for healthcare or infrastructure.

But this apparent consensus masks significant divergences between Democrats and Republicans, and the tax issue remains very sensitive, analysts say. The modest changes are sometimes a hard sell for the public while the

"anti-rich" rhetoric of some Democrats could alienate certain voters, Thorndike said. But Kenneth Scheve, professor of political science at Stanford University, said "there is a set of voters and politicians who are trying to innovate and respond in ways the country has not traditionally responded to."

"For the Democratic primaries in 2020, this is going to be a key feature of the debate," he said. —AFP

KFH survey shows 93% of customers interested in saving

KUWAIT: In keeping with its leading role in offering unique solutions and innovative products, Kuwait Finance House "KFH" is continuously seeking to consider the investment needs for its various customer segments and meet their aspirations in accordance with the highest international standards of quality and distinction.

In its bid to meet its customers' needs, KFH conducted a survey of over 600 participants which showed that 93 percent of them were interested in saving, reflecting society's way of life.

Also, the survey showed that the main goal of saving is to cover emergency and family expenses, respectively. Participants savings priorities mainly focused on providing for their children's future university education, followed by building or buying a house, and finally the family health priority.

Executive Manager for Banking and Investment Products at KFH, Nehal Al-Musallam, said: "KFH is greatly concerned with providing plans which maximize benefit and are especially designed to meet the needs of every customer. The survey findings, revealing the customer's great interest in saving for their future, are in line with the bank's long-term investment plans, such

as "Jameati", "Injaz", "Rafaa", "Thimar", "Shifaa". These products offer innovative solutions, designed to suit the customer's investment plans, whether it is an own business, retirement, marriage, education or health plans."

"All long-term investment plans offered by KFH contribute positively to encouraging and motivating customer to enhance planning and savings culture, identifying the priorities of household expenditure, as well as increasing the income. This can be achieved by innovative and flexible solutions with good returns on investments. KFH is a leader in offering such solutions and plans to meet the needs of various customer segments, such as "Shifaa". This private health care investment plan enables the customer to set the total targeted amount and KFH will prepare the most suitable plan," she explained.

Al-Musallam added that "Shifaa" provides "Takaful" insurance protection against chronic diseases, death and permanent full disability. The customer can get the saved amount in emergencies, with the possibility of modifying the target or monthly saving amounts at any time, in addition to withdrawing up to 40 percent of the saving amount at the end of the first year.

As for higher education, Al-Musallam explained that KFH offers the "Jameati" plan which secures the children's university education when they reach 18 years old. The customer can set a target amount for investment, with the profits added annually to the accumulated profits by the time children start university.

In addition, KFH offers "Rafaa" plan which covers marriage expenses. It helps customers to early planning and supporting their children's marriage in the

future by specifying an amount to be paid at the end of the plan.

Al-Musallam stressed the keenness to realize young people's ambitions with the multi-purpose "Injaz" plan. Through investing their savings, this product provides them with the opportunity to pre-plan and realize their future dreams, such as setting up an own business, buying a suitable house, etc.

Concerning the post-retirement stage, she said that KFH offers "Thimar" plan which helps customers enjoy a comfortable retirement after long years of hard work. This product enables the customer to set an amount with the payment being invested. When retired, the expected amount will be available to cover the expenses.

Long-term investment plans enjoy high investment returns which reached 2.125 percent in 2018. They offer customers the opportunity to target a specified amount they wish to receive in the future ranging from KD 4,000 to KD 12,000. Through structured plan, the customer saves the amount by monthly payments for a pre-set period ranging from 3-39 years according to the terms of each plan. At the same time, the accumulated amounts are invested with profits calculated at an annual basis.



Nehal Al-Musallam

AUB congratulates another winner of Al-Hassad monthly draw for KD 100,000

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank announced on the 27th of February 2019 the KD 100,000 winner of its monthly draw of Al-Hassad Islamic account as Amira Issa Mohamad.

Al-Hassad Islamic account which has over 850 prizes, over a 12 month period and is the very first draw account in Islamic banking in Kuwait that has reshaped the lives of thousands lucky winners.

Al-Hassad Islamic Account presents 21 weekly prizes comprised a grand prize of KD 10,000, 20 prizes of KD 1,000 each in addition the monthly draw to win a prize of KD 100,000

In addition, Al-Hassad Islamic Account presents also 4 quarterly mega prizes of KD 250,000 that will help the lucky winners achieve their dreams and aspirations. One powerful new aspect of the Al-Hassad Islamic Account is the prize draws on the holy occasion of both Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, when the winning customers will receive the eid prizes of KD 100,000 each. May the Eid always bring prosperity and blessings to the Islamic nation.

Burgan Bank announces winners of Yawmi account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

The lucky winners are:

1. Adnan Mousa Mohammad Shahin
2. Ali Othman Ali Alhuwail

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.

China's currency becomes key issue in US trade talks

PARIS: US officials have said any trade deal with China will include a provision to prevent manipulation of the exchange rate to help exporters but Beijing's currency regime reflects a complex reality.

US President Donald Trump, who has accused the Asian giant of artificially undervaluing its currency for competitive purposes, last week said "we have a deal" with China on the currency. And White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow on Thursday said the draft documents would prohibit currency manipulation and oblige authorities in Beijing "to report any interventions in the market."

But at the center of the issue is a paradox: China does not necessarily want a weak currency, and the downward pressure on the yuan is in large part caused by US economic conditions, like rising interest rates.

Is the yuan undervalued?

The yuan or renminbi (RMB) is not freely convertible and the government limits its movement against the US dollar to a two percent range on either side of a central parity rate which the People's Bank of China sets each day to reflect market trends.

That managed float system limits volatility: the currency has remained confined in the last five years between 6.2 and 6.8 yuan to the dollar, a historically high level, compared to 8.28 fixed rate in the 2000s. While the RMB strengthened 6.3 percent in 2017, it

depreciated by 5.7 percent last year, falling to its lowest level in a decade, which was enough to spur speculation Beijing was putting its foot on the currency scale again.

But the International Monetary Fund has said the RMB is not undervalued, and in a July report said it was "broadly stable against the basket of currencies ... and broadly in line with fundamentals."

Even the US Treasury has regularly acknowledged in a semi-annual report, most recently in October, that Beijing is not manipulating its currency.

Beijing, however, shook the markets in August 2015 with a one-time devaluation that weakened the yuan by about five percent in a week. The decision led to massive capital flight out of China, which exacerbated the currency's decline. Outflows amounted to nearly \$650 billion in 2016.

Can Beijing control the currency?

The PBOC actively intervened in currency markets in 2015-2016 to counteract this depreciation, using its massive foreign reserves to buy yuan. Capital flight slowed as the RMB stabilized.

Analysts say more recent weakening of RMB is not due to manipulation but is the result of China's economic slowdown, the trade war, and rising US interest rates that push up the value of the dollar against all currencies as investors search for higher yields. But amid renewed optimism on the progress of trade negotiations with Washington, the yuan has rebounded by almost three percent since early January.

China certainly can use its colossal foreign reserves — \$3.1 trillion at the end of January—to intervene if it chooses to prop up the RMB. And after the experience in 2015 and 2016, anxious to halt



the yuan's plummet, the PBOC had drastically tightened capital controls to keep funds from flooding out of the country.

Does China want a weak yuan?

A weakened yuan makes Chinese exports cheaper and more competitive and can therefore partly offset the impact of US tariffs. But economists dispute the Trump administration's claim that Beijing has been keeping the currency artificially weak and in fact say it has been making an effort to keep it from falling too much.

And since August, the PBOC said it would use a "counter-cyclical factor" to calculate the daily exchange rate range, a move said to keep the RMB relatively stable. That makes economists question the Trump administration's demands, even though they acknowledge that China's intervention from 2002-2010

helped to drive up the US trade deficit. Adam Posen, head of the Washington-based Peterson Institute for International Economics, cautioned the Trump team against using 1950s era strategies to solve modern trade issues, which tariffs and exchange rates are less able to deal with.

Insisting on "a market-determined exchange rate for China ... sounds nice but is nuts," Posen said.

"If you start doing what the Trump team is doing and say the currency can't ever go down, you're just going to cause a mess." But Mark Sobel, a former US Treasury official, said if the US and Beijing focus on currency stability, conditions "are ripe" to achieve that: the US Federal Reserve has paused interest rate increases, and China's stimulus efforts are showing signs of stabilizing a slowing economy. —AFP

Business

Microsoft unveils 3 new devices of Surface family for Kuwait market

3 exciting products to cover the widest array of use cases yet

KUWAIT: Microsoft yesterday introduced the raw power and versatility of the next generation of Surface devices to the Kuwait market, launching three exciting products to cover the widest array of use cases yet. The creative powerhouse of the Surface Studio 2, and the ultralight productivity accelerators of the Surface Pro 6 and Surface Laptop 2.

"Kuwait, in recent times, has launched strategic initiatives to boost technological investments across the country. Individuals, businesses and tech enthusiasts are leading the country's vision to infuse technology across sectors and making them future ready," said Anca Ventura, Senior Product Marketing Manager for Surface, Microsoft Gulf. We build each Surface with that in mind - to allow creativity and innovation to flow uninterrupted by the technology that facilitates it. A lot of passion goes into the design and engineering of our award-winning Surface family, and not just from our own teams - we listen to our users and incorporate their feedback into each device, so we can make products that empower people to dream big and achieve more."

Surface Pro 6

For that extra little punch in a fast-paced work environment, the ultralight, adaptable Surface Pro 6 will come through for you. It has been meticulously engineered for mobile salesforces, entrepreneurs, educators and those working in the FSI and government sectors. Surface Pro 6 is a cauldron of power, running on Windows 10 and the latest 8th-generation Intel Quad



Surface Laptop 2

Core processor. It is more than 67 percent faster than the Surface Pro 5, but the portability, versatility and all-day battery running Office 365 apps have made this member of the Surface family so popular remain.

Surface Laptop 2

The country's mobile professionals, students, and educators need a next-generation laptop for work and play, and that is exactly what the Surface Laptop 2 delivers. Building on the positive feedback from users of its predecessor, this device continues to outpace expectations in a bold mixture of portability and power. Enhanced performance from the new Quad Core 8th-generation Intel processor means the Surface Laptop 2 is a dizzying 85 percent faster than the original Surface Laptop.



Surface Studio 2

Surface Studio 2

Crafted for creative professionals, the new Surface Studio is an ideal companion: faster, more agile and with more exquisite graphics. Aimed at graphic designers, architects, animators, filmmakers, editors, and photographers, Surface Studio 2 is the most powerful Surface ever. It brings next-generation Pascal graphics and a 50 percent faster GPU. It has been lovingly



The Surface Pro 6

designed for vibrant, high-performance graphics and low-latency processing, delivering an immersive experience where tech fades into the background and innovation breathes.

Warba Bank announces 5 winners of Al-Sunbula draw

KUWAIT: Warba Bank, "the Best investment Bank" and "Best Corporate Bank" in Kuwait, held its weekly Sunbula draw number 9. The draw announced the 5 lucky winners in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and bank officials.

The bank proudly announced the lucky 5 winners of the KD 1000 prize: Adnan Ahmad Zattam, Naser F Sh Al-Subaiei, Rawan Khaled Mohammad Al-Buloushi, Hamad Habes Mohammad Al-Saeed and Saad Fahad Shujaa Al-Sabouq Al-Ajmi.

Al-Sunbula both account and fixed deposits are the perfect choices for customers who wish to save money and achieve steady returns while at the same time have the opportunity to win cash prizes throughout the year. In line with the bank's mission to develop and differentiate its offerings, Warba Bank has enhanced its Sunbula campaign for 2019 with more cash and prizes reaching more than KD 1 million.

Warba Bank will continue its weekly draws for 5 winners of KD 1,000 each. What's new in 2019 are the "Mega Draws" which will be held every quarter to reveal five winners, the 1st winner will get KD 100,000! The four winners thereafter will each get the latest Land Cruiser VXR. Furthermore, the final Mega draw held in January 2020 will feature 2 more Land Cruiser VXRs!

As for the chances for winning, each customer is eligible to enter the draw against each KD 10 in the Sunbula Account. Nevertheless, Sunbula Fixed Deposit investors also get chances in the Sunbula draws along with high expected returns that reach up to 3.5 percent distributed either monthly or at maturity upon the customer's preference.

Ooredoo the first to launch all-new Samsung S10 devices today



tion with Al-Babtain Turnkey Solutions for the second consecutive year, the official distributor of Samsung in Kuwait, will take place today, (March 4) from 4 p.m. to midnight at Ooredoo's Headquarters on Soor Street in Kuwait City.

The new devices boast a number of key specifications, such as the Infinity-O Display, multi-camera with ultra wide camera, ultrasonic fingerprint scanner, wireless power share, 24-hour intelligent battery, and game optimization. The Galaxy S10 screen sizes range from 6.4" on the Galaxy S10+, 6.1" on the Galaxy S10, and 5.8" on the Galaxy S10e with external memory of up to 512GB.



Turkish Airlines redesigns the travel comfort with 'Flow Sleeping Set'

KUWAIT: Bringing various innovations to the sky in order to ensure a perfect travel experience for its guests, Turkish Airlines now offers the new "Flow Sleeping Set" to the passengers with a wondrous design. Starting from Feb 19, the new collection offered in Business Class promises a sleep as comfortable as your home, only above the clouds.

Produced with the successful collaboration of Turkish Airlines and Zorlu Tekstil while carrying the signature of expert designers, this collection aims to offer a healthier and higher quality sleep environment. Combining elegant lines with comfort, all pieces of the new set are

developed with the expectations of the passengers to enjoy a relaxing sleep in order to finish their flights in a happy and fit state. The design of the collection reflects Turkish Airlines' "Flow" philosophy that represents the airline's dynamic brand identity and continuous service concept. Opting for contemporary and minimalist designs, the materials of the collection were all chosen for their comfort and ability to help sleep. The patterns of the collection are also visually compatible with the designs of the new cabin uniforms and cabin interiors.

Chief aspects of the "Flow Sleeping Set" are its blanket, sleeping pad and pillow. The "blanket" of the collection possesses a two-sided design along with a soft texture. Thanks to its ability to support air flow, the product also helps maintaining the ideal temperature during all four seasons. In addition to this, the "sleeping pad" provides an orthopedic surface for sleep and with its dense interior filling, it offers extra comfort and ease. The "pillow", which can be used during both sitting and sleeping, is designed with an ideal size, classical



form, and very comfortable materials.

Sharing his views on this new sleeping set, Turkish Airlines Catering and Inflight Products SVP, Zeki «ukur stated: "With Istanbul Airport, our new home, we continue to add new innovations to the change we are going through. Our passengers will now experience the quality improvement, brought by these

innovations, in their sleep with our 'Flow Sleeping Set'. We prepared our new products after a lengthy R&D and design period as they offer a unique experience with their design and comfort. We are happy to host our Business Class passengers with the comfort of their homes during their intercontinental travels."

Al-Tijari announces winners of Al-Najma weekly, monthly draws

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank conducted the weekly and monthly draws on Al-Najma Account and the draw on the "Salary and Cash on Top" campaign. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Abdulaziz Ashkanani.

The results of the draw were as follows:

- 1- Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5000 and was for the share Khaled Ghareeb Johar Abdullah
- 2- Al Najma monthly account - the prize of KD 20,000 and was for the share Sheikh Rakan Abdullah Al-Sabah
- 2- The campaign "Salary & Cash on Top" the prize KD 1000 and was for the share Duaa Ali Al-Azmi

The bank stated that the account prizes this year is featured by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that Al-Najma Account will offer weekly prize of KD 5000, monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000. Al-Najma Account can be opened by depositing KD 100, and customer should maintain a mini-

imum amount of KD 500 to be eligible to enter all draws on Al-Najma Account prizes. As for the chances of winning, the more balance a customer maintains in Al Najma Account, the more chances the account holder will get to win, where each KD 25 will give the customer one chance to win, the account also offers additional benefits like the ATM card, a credit card against customer's account and all CBK banking services that customer can enjoy.

As regarding "Salary & Cash on Top" campaign designated for Kuwaiti and expatriate employees as well as the retirees and which is valid until 31 December 2019 and the mechanism of joining this campaign for availing its benefits, the Bank explained that Kuwaiti employees with a salary of KD 500 and above whether newly recruited or in service can transfer their salary to the Bank and avail the benefits of this campaign by getting instant cash gift of KD 250 or an interest free loan 5 times the salary up to KD 10,000, add to this they will automatically enter the weekly draw on KD 1,000.

As for the expatriate customers categorized under Premier Banking Account with a salary of KD 1,700 and above, they will get instant cash gift. The retirees with pension KD 1,000 and above will also get an instant cash gift of KD 150 when transferring their pension to the Bank and automatically enter the weekly draw on a prize of KD 1,000 and avail the benefits of this campaign designated for Kuwaiti and expatriate employees working in private and public sector as well as the retirees.

Further, the campaign provides customers with the opportunity to get additional benefits and take advantage of the advanced and unrivalled services and products the Bank provides to its customers to meet their needs and expectations.

Nissan Al-Babtain unveils special offers at Nissan body shop centers

KUWAIT: Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Co, the sole authorized dealer of Nissan in the State of Kuwait, announces special discounts and offers on purchased vehicles prior to 2016 at Nissan Body shop centers. Nissan car owners can utilize the

exclusive benefits until the end of March 2019. Nissan Al-Babtain invites everyone to visit its Nissan Body shop centers in Al-Rai and Ahmadi to explore the new advantages.

The exciting offer includes a 35 percent discount on genuine parts and 15 percent discount on labor when they drive into Nissan body shop centers. The package is applicable on cash repairs excluding insurance packages.

Nissan Genuine Parts provides you safety and demonstrate long term reliability, safety and quality configured for each model to provide complete reliability and assurance to its passengers.

In order to meet the highest international standards, Nissan owners can visit Nissan Al-Babtain body shop centers to repair their cars by accredited technicians and drive off with good-as-new cars.

What's On



KFH celebrates national anniversaries and various social responsibility roles



Yousif Al-Rowayyeh

Kuwait Finance House (KFH) recently concluded its integrated program especially designed to celebrate the 58 National Day and the 28th Liberation Day anniversaries, which was highly applauded by both the public and officials. In this regard, KFH's PR and media executive manager, Yousif Abdullah Al-Rowayyeh said that this great success reflects KFH's commitment to taking part in various patriotic and social responsibility roles.

Al-Rowayyeh added that the program included over 20 activities and initiatives during the national anniversaries starting with Kuwait Flag hoisting at Nayef Palace, recording videos about graduates from Ali Al-Sabah Military and Saad Al-Abdullah Security Sciences academies to be gifted to graduates after posting them on various social media networks, taking part in the Firemen Day, producing awareness boosting videos in collaboration with MOI's PR and security media department concerning conduct during

the celebrations, organizing a visit to MOI's operations center to highlight security forces efforts, visiting MOI and defense ministries joint operations center, KFSD, MOH's ambulance and medical emergencies center, distributing Kuwaiti flags to passengers arriving at Kuwait airport, taking part in the Truck Pro festivity, providing enough Mobi Baitak ATM trucks to various locations, taking part in an activity organized by Mathallah Group at the Safat Square, taking part in the medical sciences college celebrations, visiting KFH employees on duty during the festivities and taking the lead in launching a special service on Snapchat application allowing clients to post their own snaps and express their joy on the occasion. "Over 90,000 users used this service", Al-Rowayyeh concluded adding that KFH also decorated its headquarters with illuminated Kuwaiti flags and distributed flag to pedestrians along the Gulf road.



FFC receives special Qatari delegates

The Fresh Fruits Company (FFC), a part of Yali Group of Companies, recently received a special delegation from Qatar's ministry of commerce at its headquarters in Shuwaikh. The reception was also attended by representatives from the fruits and vegetables sectors in

Kuwait. The visit came in response to an invitation by Yali's board chairman, Anwar Jawad Yali.

Both sides discussed the latest in the local fruit and vegetable market, the latest developments and obstacles, how to pass on Kuwaiti experiences to the Qatari market and the possibility of cooperating with Kuwaiti experts in the field. Notably, FFC has a long experience in providing Kuwaiti markets with fresh fruits and vegetables with a large number of points of sale around Kuwait and three major showrooms for its products in Shuwaikh and Midan Hawalli.



flydubai recently honored the Kuwaiti creative child Sarah Mohammed Al Rabah, who was the brains behind the story which inspired the icon of flydubai Maya. On this occasion the flydubai crew of pilots, hosts and officials of the company praised the story presented by Sarah and gave her remarkable attention throughout her trip.

NIARC Kuwait Chapter celebrates 5th anniversary

Prof Gopinath Muthukad enthralled the audience with his scintillating, motivational session in front of the packed audience at Indian Central School auditorium in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. Audience's participation and lively interaction made the program very attractive and unique. The parents and children who were present were able to understand the power of communication and

understanding among family members. He focused on building the confidence to live a meaningful life serving others and less fortunate.

He was performing his inspiring, thought provoking motivational presentation on the occasion of fifth anniversary of Nest International Academy and Research Foundation (NIARC). NIARC is an NGO working for improvement of children with challenges by providing them treatment and training since many years in Kerala. A full-fledged setup with international standards and facilities is under construction, which is intended for further enhancing the quality of training which will in turn help groom these children better with correct assessment of their challenges.

The official program was inaugurated by Muzammil

Malik at the function presided over by NIARC Kuwait Chairman Abdul Khalik. General Secretary Saleh Batha briefed Niarc Kuwait Activities. Ashraf KP, NIARC Global Chairman presented Niarc Vision and Mission and its global activities. Speakers congratulated Kuwait on the very auspicious occasion of its National and Liberation Day celebrations. They highly appreciated the support Kuwait extended to expatriates living in Kuwait.

A souvenir in connection with the event was released by Prof Muthukad, handing over is to KG Abraham. Dr Ameer Ahmed presented a memento to Muthukad. Kareem Irfan was also present at the function. The well-known Indian powerlifter who have won national and international acclaims in armwrestling and powerlifting, Majjiya Bhanu was honored at the function.



Rafique Sheikh participated in the National and Liberation Day celebrations with his decorated jeep. He is seen here with the governor of Ahmadi Sheikh Fawaz Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah during the celebrations.



Health

As measles spreads, Ukraine turns to priests and vaccination teams

'Imagine the shock of parishioners if a priest died of measles'

LVIV: At a recent meeting with priests in the western city of Lviv, paediatrician Kateryna Bulavinova pleaded with the clergy to help halt a worsening measles crisis in Ukraine. Addressing a dozen priests at a Lviv seminary, Bulavinova urged them to lead by example by getting themselves and their children vaccinated.

"Imagine the shock of parishioners if a priest died of measles," said Bulavinova, a consultant with UN children's agency UNICEF. It's a message officials are hoping will have an impact in the deeply religious region, the hardest hit in a measles outbreak that saw Ukraine record the world's highest increase in cases last year.

The ex-Soviet country of 45 million recorded more than 35,000 measles cases in 2018 and another 24,000 people were infected in the first two months of 2019, UNICEF said in a report on Friday. At least 30 people have died since 2017, it said. Authorities blame a combination of factors including shortages of vaccine supplies and cuts to health services amid an economic slowdown exacerbated by a five-year conflict with Moscow-backed separatists.

But especially worrying is an anti-vaccination sentiment that has grown up in Ukraine, often driven by online campaigns spreading false information about the risks of being vaccinated. In Lviv, a picture postcard city of 720,000 people on the border with European Union member Poland, local authorities have joined forces with international organisations to launch a series of vaccination efforts.

'Extraordinary measures'

As well as meeting with clergy, officials are promoting the importance of vaccination at parent-teacher conferences and doctors' offices and sending mobile vaccination teams to rural schools. "The measles outbreak is all over the world, but Ukraine is sadly the leader among European countries," Deputy Health Minister Olga Stefanyshyna said on a recent visit to Lviv. "That is why we are taking extraordinary measures."

During a previous outbreak in 2017 authorities had discovered that some 800,000 children had not been vaccinated, Stefanyshyna said. "These children can get measles at any moment now," Lviv paediatrician Volodymyr Rak said he had not seen a single case of measles until recently, only reading about the disease in textbooks. "I thought I would never see a case of measles," he said as he prepared to vaccinate children at a clinic in the city centre. "Now there are hundreds of them in Lviv."

Last year, nearly 11,500 measles cases were recorded in the Lviv region, a 125-fold increase from only 92 cases in 2017. As of late February, authorities had recorded more 3,700 cases. Measles is a highly contagious virus that spreads through the air and infects the respiratory tract. It is also highly resilient and can be contracted up to two hours after an infected person has left a room.

Once someone is infected, there is no specific treat-

ment, but measles is easily preventable with a vaccination. In the Lviv region, anti-vaccination sentiment was strong. "I had refused the measles vaccination before. I thought it would be better that way," said Ulyana Dzyuba, a mother of two. But the growing outbreak changed her mind. She recently brought her nine-year-old daughter Maryana and six-year-old son Volodymyr to a mobile medical team at a school in the village of Lapaivka outside Lviv, where they were vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella.

'I worry so much'

The 36-year-old said that while her daughter contracted measles when she was three and developed immunity, her son was not protected. "I worry about my son so much," she said. "This will be their first vaccination." Of more than 630 children at the Lapaivka school only 13 remained unvaccinated, said principal Tetyana Maleryk, chalking up the result to efforts by teachers and doctors to promote awareness. "The number of vaccine refusals has gone down," said Maleryk.

UNICEF praised the campaign launched in western Ukraine and said efforts to fight "vaccine hesitancy" were crucial. "Almost all of these cases are preventable, and yet children are getting infected even in places where there is simply no excuse," UNICEF executive director Henrietta Fore said in the statement. "Measles may be the disease, but, all too often, the real infection is misinformation, mistrust and complacency." —AFP

Martha Stewart teams up with cannabis firm

NEW YORK: Lifestyle expert Martha Stewart said she's taking her brand to new heights — partnering with one of the world's largest marijuana producers to develop a line of CBD products for humans and their pets. In announcing the new collaboration, Canada's Canopy Growth Corporation chairman and co-CEO Bruce Linton hailed Stewart as "one of a kind."

"As soon as you hear the name Martha, you know exactly who we're talking about," Linton said. "I am so excited to be able to work alongside this icon to sharpen our CBD product offerings across categories from human to animal." CBD — or cannabidiol, the non-psychoactive bit of the marijuana plant — has become a much-touted silver bul-

let among alternative medicine seekers to treat conditions including anxiety, pain, depression and insomnia.

Some also sing its praises as an aphrodisiac, a skin disorder treatment, and aid for more serious ailments including multiple sclerosis and diabetes. "I am delighted to establish this partnership with Canopy Growth and share with them the knowledge I have gained after years of experience in the subject of living," Stewart, 77, said in a statement. "I'm especially looking forward to our first collaboration together, which will offer sensible products for people's beloved pets."

The homemaking guru has said in the past she is not a marijuana smoker herself, though her unlikely but close friendship with weed aficionado and rapper Snoop Dogg is well known. The pair's Emmy-nominated variety show "Martha & Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party" includes regular references to pot, with Snoop explaining that "the king of cush and the queen of cuisine are throwing a little dinner party." —AFP

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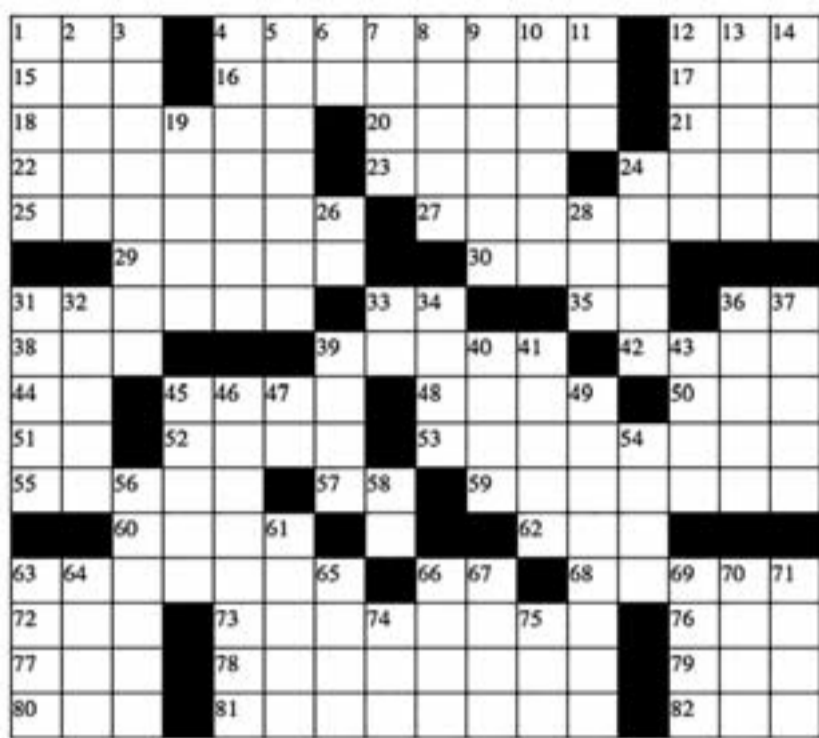
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ACROSS

1. An acute inflammatory disease occurring in the intestines of premature infants.
4. Of a vivid red to reddish-orange color.
12. Cooking utensil consisting of a wide metal vessel.
15. North American republic containing 50 states - 48 conterminous states in North America plus Alaska in northwest North America and the Hawaiian Islands in the Pacific Ocean.
16. A mining town in southern Wales.
17. One or some or every or all without specification.
18. A step in walking or running.
20. Bordered by a line of things.
21. A vinyl polymer used especially in paints or adhesives.
22. United States lecturer and writer who was blind and deaf from the age of 19 months.
23. A man who is a stupid fool.
25. Any of various plants of the genus *Ursinia* grown for their yellow- or orange- or white-rayed flowers.
27. Tropical vine having umbels of small purple flowers and edible roots sometimes boiled as a potato substitute.
29. A street of small shops (especially in Orient).
30. The United Nations agency concerned with atomic energy.
31. A port city in southwestern Iran.
35. Half the width of an cm.
38. A unit of absorbed ionizing radiation equal to 100 ergs per gram of irradiated material.
42. Advanced in years.
44. An international organization of European countries formed after World War II to reduce trade barriers and increase cooperation among its members.
48. A collection of objects laid on top of each other.
50. An ugly evil-looking old woman.
51. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
52. A fine grained mineral having a soft soapy feel and consisting of hydrated magnesium silicate.
53. A native or inhabitant of Vietnam.
55. A clear oily brown solution of cresols in soap.
57. A metallic element having four allotropic forms.
59. Any of numerous New World woodland birds having brightly colored males.
60. Scottish sea captain who was hired to protect British shipping in the Indian Ocean and then was accused of piracy and hanged (1645-1701).
62. At a great distance in time or space or degree.
63. A region in central Italy.
68. Genus of tropical plants with creeping rootstocks and small umbellate flowers.
72. Fermented alcoholic beverage similar to but heavier than beer.
73. Genus of powdery mildews.
76. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
77. One of the most common of the five major classes of immunoglobulins.
78. Relating to or associated with an empire.
79. A nucleic acid that transmits genetic information from DNA to the cytoplasm.
80. East Indian tree bearing a profusion of intense vermilion velvet-textured blooms and yielding a yellow dye.
81. A great raja.
82. A young woman making her debut into society.

DOWN

1. (Assyrian) God of fire and light.
2. Formed by reaction between an acid and an alcohol with elimination of water.
3. A town in southeastern New Mexico on the Pecos River near the Mexican border.
4. A brilliant solo passage occurring near the end of a piece of music.
5. Of or relating to the Iberian peninsula or its inhabitants.
6. A colorless odorless gaseous element that give a red glow in a vacuum tube.
7. Agency of the United States government charged with mediating disputes between management and labor.
8. A farewell remark.
9. A Japanese cheer of enthusiasm or triumph.
10. Small space in a tissue or part such as the area between veins on a leaf or an insect's wing.
11. Having any of numerous bright or strong colors reminiscent of the color of blood or cherries or tomatoes or rubies.
12. Proceeding from or ordered by or subject to a pope or the papacy regarded as the successor of the Apostles.
13. A heavy block of iron or steel on which hot metals are shaped by hammering.
14. City in Sudan.
19. A Greek epic poem (attributed to Homer) describing the siege of Troy.
24. English aristocrat who was the first wife of Prince Charles.
26. A colorless and odorless inert gas.
28. The seat within a bishop's diocese where his cathedral is located.
32. Leaves of the tobacco plant dried and prepared for smoking or ingestion.
33. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
34. A member of the Siouan people formerly living in the Missouri river valley in NE Nebraska.
36. ('cease' is a noun only in the phrase 'without cease') End v 1.
37. A person who puts finishing edges on a garment.
39. The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
40. A fractional monetary unit of several countries.
41. Valuable fiber plant of East Indies now widespread in cultivation.
43. The dialect of Albanian spoken in northern Albania and Yugoslavia.
45. Seeming unaffected by pleasure or pain.
46. Austrian diplomat who was Secretary General of the United Nations from 1972 to 1981.
47. A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
49. A long slender cigar.
54. God of death.
56. Make a high-pitched, screeching noise, as of a door.
58. A small pellet fired from an air rifle or BB gun.
61. The deep vascular inner layer of the skin.
64. Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
65. A common venereal disease caused by the *Treponema pallidum* spirochete.
66. The basic unit of money in Ethiopia.
67. The capital of Western Samoa.
69. One of a set of small pieces of stiff paper marked in various ways and used for playing games or for telling fortunes.
70. A stick that people can lean on to help them walk.
71. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
74. Relating to or characteristic of or occurring on the sea or ships.
75. A pilgrimage to Mecca.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

This is the time you're more conventional in your thinking than ever which is saying something. You're most always the adventurer in every part of your life, always trying to find new ways to scale that mountain. But not today. Today you want to be respected by your peers including family and friends. If you're at work today, you'll get the accolades and that plays right into your feelings now Aries. You want order. Hopefully, you're getting that at home as well. You'll find yourself needing to clean house, get the yard in gear for spring and basically get ready to make more of your future. Procrastination is not part of your psyche today. Happy Day Aries!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Family, friends and the one you love has special meaning for you right now. You feel the urge to be close to them all. Moreover, you want to have a little more physical recreation with your life's partner today than you did yesterday. There's a need to show your lover just how much you really do care for him or her. Reaching out and touching someone is what you truly desire now along with processing your ideas as to how you can make life better on top of it all. Giving advice on what not to do in life might be something you share with someone today needing some good down-home counseling. Enjoy your day.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Though you want your family and especially your lover to understand you and you attempt to make sure they do, it might not be the best time to try to communicate openly with them. Perhaps they're not in the same type mood to listen to your reasoning behind taking something from them or not doing what they want. All you want, Gemini, is to be loved. The dog or cat is the only one in the household who loves you unconditionally now. Find something to do with your time that doesn't involve speaking with others. You'll be misunderstood today. Try to enjoy your day.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Someone, perhaps a loved one, brings an issue to your attention that you didn't think was there. You spend your day trying to work out this issue with the best possible outcome for all concerned. What's worse is that after looking at the problem you can sympathize with the person who brought it to your attention. Helping others, not just someone you love, is high on your list of to do's today. Your sensitive nature gives you the added impetus to help this person especially since it touches on a problem you've had in the past. Cancer. Feeling their pain is more a part of your nature now.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Enjoy more time today dreaming of your desires. What you can complete now is great but what you need to create should be in your thoughts today. Without creative visualization nothing is ever completed. Look at Einstein with the formula E=MC squared. He dreamed it and then put it into existence. Everything is possible for you if you put your mind to it. Leo. Rest, relax and dream of all the possibilities in your future. Later spend time with your family after your much-needed day's vacation. Laugh and enjoy.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You want to create a more beautiful environment at home. But before you go shopping though take a fiscal look at your expenditures. This isn't the time to spend large amounts of money. You could find you have problems with your credit. Just look. Don't buy now. You may want too much before you have what it takes to purchase items safely. Virgo. Think carefully before you overextend yourself. You may be blunter than you generally are today and this could hurt another's feelings. That could cost you in your love life. Be thoughtful.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Today could be a day of wishing you hadn't said that but you can't take it back kind of day if you don't keep your mind adequately on your subject matter. Feeling energetic in your mental capacity so that words come too easily, that kind of mistake may cause problems for you with someone who is feeling down. That person may be waiting for an opportunity for argument. Keep your head up and a smile on your face if this happens. Let them know you meant to be nicer in tone and words. There is no sense in promoting hard feelings with anyone and especially one you don't consider a friend at all. The old saying, "Don't burn bridges," could be true here.



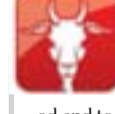
Scorpio (October 23-November 19)

A younger relative whom you trust as an advisor gives you an answer to a question without realizing you hadn't made the request. That person seems to have innate knowledge of what's concerning you and gives good practical advice you generally take. This is a day to be with friends and enjoy after spending time alone and making the most of that. Thinking about your situation and how to cure what ails you in more than the physical way, gives you much needed time just for you. Try not to be bull headed when you're with others tonight. Scorpio. Quietly watch your friends and measure which one you can include in your assistance project in making your life better.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

If you're at work today, good. Otherwise, stay out of others way. Try to do things that involve you're being alone. There could be an argument you don't want to share if you participate with others at home. With friends you can openly communicate your thoughts about spirituality and it won't offend them nor others who aren't family. Perhaps you should meet friends for brunch or lunch just to have a little comradery without feeling you've done something wrong by getting up this morning. Only family can make you feel this way. Sagittarius. You got to love them.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You want more in life, to know more, to have more love, to be appreciated and to appreciate. You've got that now but it's not enough. A need to expand your consciousness is more on your mind now than has been. Perhaps it's time to take a class on something you've wanted to learn and never taken the time. Living life is part of expanding your awareness. That means every part of life, even love and sex. This could be a time you experiment. That's okay, Capricorn, if you don't already have a lover. If you do have a romantic other, then you may express your desires and see what happens. Remember, your desires count too.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You're feeling good about yourself now and it's warranted. New ideas from yesterday put you in a great mood because you know they'll work when you implement them. Today is a day to spend with those you love. Family and friends help you celebrate just being alive. Take today to enjoy because you realize tomorrow is definitely a day for work. You're motivated to be on go now because you want to see the progress your ideas bring. Moreover, you want the best for those you love and your workmates, too. A sense of overwhelming good nature hits you now because you're planning for your future.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

This isn't the best time for making friends and increasing your social structure. You're taking the time to look yourself over and get away from everyone else to do it. It's good. You need the time alone to think. Examine your finances, homelife and career while you're at it. It's not that you want to make a change now but that you want to be sure of what you have, how to keep it and how to make it better. Pisces. You feel alone which isn't good anytime but during your birth month it seems to be even lonelier. Take heart. It'll be better soon and you'll have all this pondering behind you too.

Wordsearch Puzzle

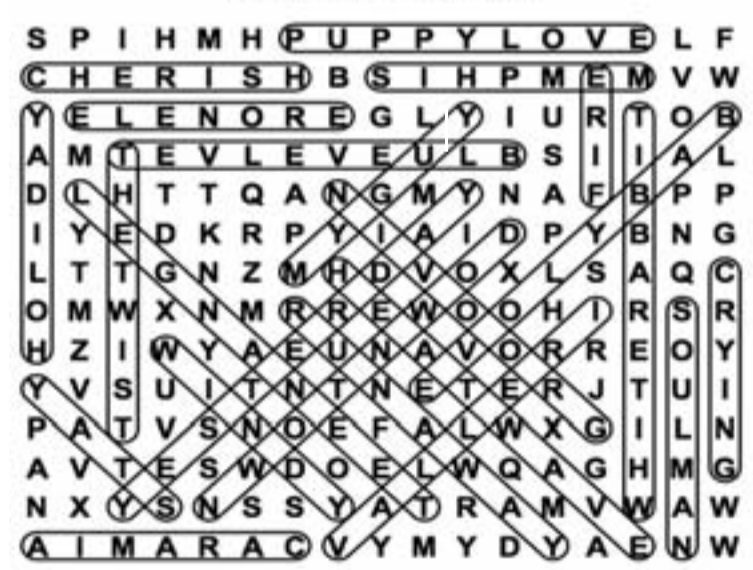
60's Songs 2 - Word Search



- | | | |
|------------|-----------|------------|
| BLUE MOON | HAIR | SURF CITY |
| BUS STOP | HEY JUDE | THE BOXER |
| CHAIN GANG | LAST KISS | THESE EYES |
| CRAZY | MY GIRL | VOLARE |
| DIZZY | PEOPLE | WILD THING |
| EL PASO | RESPECT | WIPEOUT |
| FINGERTIPS | SHERRY | WORDS |
| GALVESTON | SPOOKY | |

Yesterday's Solution

60's Songs 1 - Solution

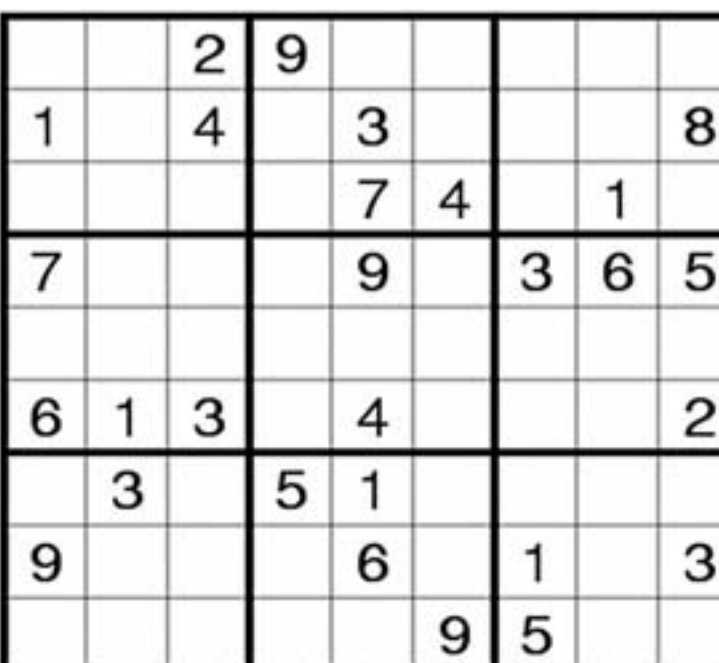


- | | | |
|-------------|------------|--------------|
| BABY LOVE | GROOVIN | STAY |
| BLUE VELVET | HEATWAVE | TEEN ANGEL |
| CARA MIA | HOLIDAY | THE TWIST |
| CHERISH | MEMPHIS | VALLERIE |
| CRYING | MY GUY | WHITE RABBIT |
| DOWNTOWN | PUPPY LOVE | WINDY |
| ELENORE | RUNAWAY | YESTERDAY |
| FIRE | SOUL MAN | |

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



Lifestyle

MONDAY, MARCH 4, 2019



A reveler of the "Mocidade Alegre" samba school performs during the second night of carnival in Sao Paulo, Brasil, at the city's Sambodrome early yesterday. — AFP

FULL STEAM AHEAD FOR AUSTRIA'S NIGHT TRAINS

It looks like a scene from the halcyon days of the railways: travellers finding their sleeper berth, turning on the reading light and stowing their cases under the bed. But it's still a common nightly ritual at Vienna's main station, where overnight train routes have endured in the age of low-cost flights—and are even expanding. From early evening onwards, the departures board at Vienna's "Hauptbahnhof" station becomes a roll call of destinations to whet the appetite of any globetrotter: Venice, Rome, Zurich, Berlin, Warsaw...

It's an unusual sight in a continent where budget airlines and faster trains have become the norm and led to the closure of many slower overnight routes. But Austria's state railway company OeBB is looking to expand its network. It already runs 26 such routes, either on its own or in partnerships with other operators. In late 2016, OeBB bought the night train operation of its German counterpart Deutsche Bahn, which was looking to offload a department it judged insufficiently lucrative.

Around 60 percent of DB's overnight routes were preserved, including a revamped Vienna-Berlin service which

started a few months ago. Pointing to the "moderate growth" in passenger numbers—more than 1.4 million used the services in 2018 — OeBB has ordered 13 new trains equipped with state-of-the-art sleeper carriages.

Eco-friendly

It's no surprise then that Austria has become the poster child for rail enthusiasts, who say it provides an example of how overnight train travel can provide an alternative to air travel and even help in the fight against climate change. "With regard to the target of becoming carbon-neutral by 2050, night trains which run on renewable energy are an attractive alternative," according to Thomas Sauter-Servaes, transport expert at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences.

But as with all those who have researched the sector, he admits that cross-border overnight rail travel can represent a logistical and financial challenge. The profits per passenger take a hit from the extra space that sleeper compartments require, on top of the higher labor costs for those who have to work on the trains overnight and money spent on laundry. And that's before you take into account the hefty fees sometimes charged by other network owners for use of the rails, the technical difficulty of decoupling and then re-attaching carriages, and navigating the myriad of different rules a train has to adhere to over a long journey.

Sauter-Servaes points out that international air transport has a big commercial advantage in being exempt from VAT and fuel taxes. Among those preparing to board at Vienna station to spend a night on the rails on a recent evening, some told AFP they had chosen a night train with the environment in mind. "It's a small gesture, and it won't stop me taking the plane for my holiday in Madagascar this autumn, but it's better than nothing," said Austrian traveller Yvonne Kemper. David, a 42-year-old from Germany, said he was using the Hamburg service because he needed to get to Goettingen in Germany for a business trip—a medium-sized town which, typically, is served by night trains but has no airport.

An Austrian tradition

OeBB spokesman Bernhard Rieder explained that Austria's attachment to night trains is down to "a tradition stemming from Austria's mountainous terrain, which limited the development of high-speed lines". He added that "the night train sector is distinct in that it can't function without strong cross-border cooperation." "Night trains are and will continue to be a niche market, but that doesn't mean a niche market can't be profitable."

But Poul Kattler, from the pan-European "Back on Track" group which campaigns for more cross-border night trains, says the sector should be more ambitious. "If national railway companies were more aggressive in the market and the EU built a truly common rail policy, we could offer a real transport alternative and a very popular European project," he says. — AFP



Night train conductor Helmut Artner is at the door before the departure of the Nightjet train from Vienna (Austria) to Berlin (Germany) of the Austrian Federal Railways (OeBB) at Vienna Main Station. — AFP photos



Night train conductor Helmut Artner prepares a sleeping compartment in the sleeping car of the Nightjet train from Vienna (Austria) to Berlin (Germany) of the Austrian Federal Railways.

Easter Islanders seek outside help for iconic statues 'leprosy'

In just 100 years, the emblematic stone sculptures that guard the coastline of Easter Island could be little more than simple rectangular blocks, conservation experts are warning. The giant heads, carved centuries ago by the island's inhabitants, represent the living ancestors of Easter Island's Polynesian people - the Rapa Nui - and have brought it UNESCO World Heritage Site status. Dozens of giant "Moai" statues dominate the hillsides surrounding the island's Rano Raraku wetland, but they are facing the threat of what locals describe as a kind of leprosy, white spots that are appearing on their iconic facades.

Caused by lichens, a marriage of fungi and algae, the patches eat away at the sculptures, softening them to a clay-like consistency and deforming their features. The statues must also contend with coastal erosion, rising sea levels, high winds and damage from freely roaming livestock. "I imagine that in a century more these Moai will basically be rectangular figures," Tahira Edmunds, adviser to Chile's National Forestry Corporation (CONAF) who has worked on cleaning the sculptures to remove the lichen, told Reuters during a visit to the island last month.

Sonia Haoa, an archaeologist and Easter Island native, is compiling an inventory of its heritage, including the Moai. She estimates that about 70 percent of the more than 1,000 statues are affected by lichens. While the deterioration can appear shocking to visitors who flock to the remote volcanic island, located some 3,500 kilometers (2,200 miles) from mainland Chile, Haoa said it was still possible to save them, through laborious cleaning and coating with sealant chemicals to curb moisture and prevent the porous volcanic rock from collapsing.

The most famous Moai groupings, such as the Ahu Tongariki, 15 statues arranged along a platform by the sea, and those scattered around the Ranu Raraku quarry, the source of the stone, are already being cared for by heritage experts and the indigenous community's administrators of the Rapa Nui National Park. But the island has at least 30,000 archaeological sites spread across its 166 square kilometers (64.1 square miles), most of which are exposed to the environment. To protect all the statues could cost as much as \$500 million, and international help will be needed, according to local authorities and experts. "You will never be able to entirely prevent the impact of time or the weather,

but you can hold it back, so that more people can see them first," Haoa told Reuters.

A British solution?

With no government fund specifically dedicated to preserving the island's heritage, the community allocates a large part of its income from tourism to repair and protection measures. Nonetheless, they say, resources are scarce. The mayor of Easter Island has come up with an innovative solution: seeking royalty payments from nations whose explorers took some of Easter Island's statues into their possession centuries ago. Among them is the Hoa Hakananai'a, a seven-foot (2.13 m) tall basalt statue that has become one of the British Museum's most popular exhibits since it was removed from the island by British sailors more than 150 years ago. The Easter Island authorities and the Chilean government sent a delegation to London in November to request the return of the four-ton statue. The museum responded that it was happy to consider a long-term loan of the Moai.



Mayor Pedro Edmunds Paoa instead suggested the Hoa Hakananai'a could act as an "ambassador" for Easter Island, and Britain could keep it in return for regular payments to ensure the upkeep of its Easter Island counterparts. "We would win much more," he said. Sonia Paoa agreed, saying that while Easter Island's heritage was more than just statues, their celebrity could be the key to sustaining it all. "What do you leave to a 10-year-old boy, what will there be in Easter Island for the European or Chilean tourist to come see if we don't save them?" He asks. "It's the only oil well we have." The British Museum said it was looking forward to continuing the "warm, friendly and open" conversation begun in London with a potential visit to Easter Island. "The museum is keen to work collaboratively with partners and communities across the globe and welcomes these proposed discussions around future joint projects with Rapa Nui," it said in a statement sent to Reuters. — Reuters





People ski on a slope of the Rosa Khutor mountain resort outside Sochi.

—AFP photos



A boy passes the Olympic rings at the Rosa Khutor mountain resort outside Sochi.



Holiday-makers rest on the main square of the Rosa Khutor mountain resort outside Sochi.

Sochi resort offers a homegrown alternative for Russian skiers

When Russia spent billions to host the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, many predicted that its flashy facilities would be left to rot. But five years later the Rosa Khutor resort in the Caucasus mountains is becoming a favorite of Russian skiers, and an alternative to ski trips to Europe. The resort, which hosted alpine events for the Olympics, was packed on a recent February day, with skiers racing down the slopes as low clouds hung over the mountains. Dressed in a blue ski outfit with matching goggles, Yaroslava Serdzhuk said that for Muscovites like her, travelling to the resort was an easy holiday. "Coming here doesn't take a lot of time, money or effort. It's at the same level as what you can find in Europe, except it's local," she said.

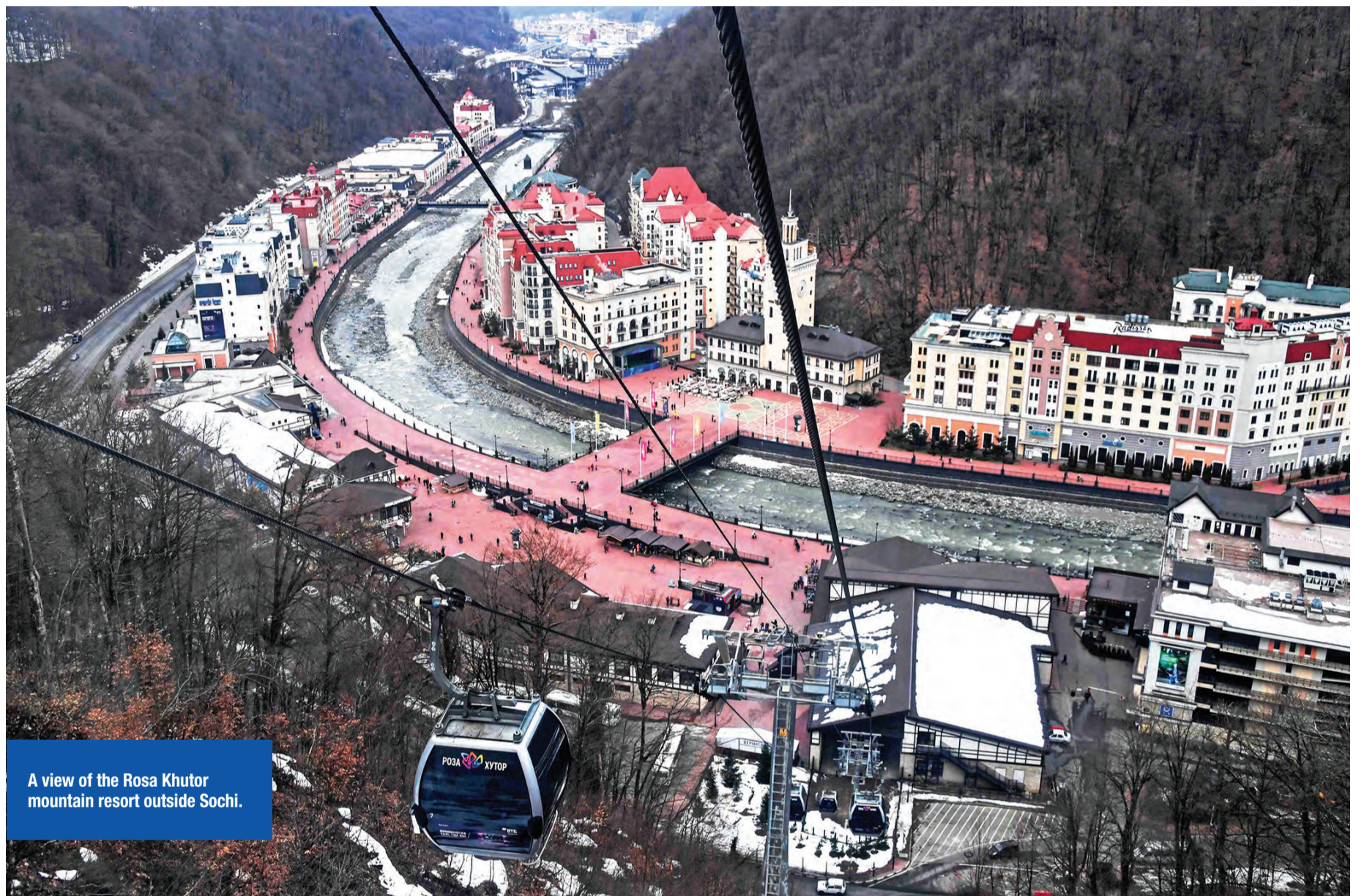
Evgeny Anichkin, a salesman from Moscow at the resort for a ski trip with friends, spends two or three winter weekends a year at Rosa Khutor. He flies two and a half hours from the Russian capital to Sochi on the Black Sea, before taking a 45-minute bus or taxi up a brand new road to the resort. "This station is simply wonderful," the 40-year-old said, his skis resting on his shoulders after a run down the hill. "There are easy, difficult, wide, narrow trails. People are happy, staff are attentive. It's very cool." Russia poured a record \$41 billion (36 billion euros) into the Sochi Olympics, a showcase event for President Vladimir Putin's government.

Rosa Khutor has continued as a venue for professional competitions and is hosting events in the Women's Alpine Ski World Cup this weekend. The huge spending was criticised in a country where many still live in poverty and environmental groups accused infrastructure projects for Sochi of encroaching on natural habitats.

'Crazy rise'

Those concerns still exist, especially over plans to expand the Rosa Khutor resort. "Not only did they destroy a lot of ecosystems already, but they are planning to expand onto national park territory," Greenpeace Russia campaigner Mikhail Kreindlin said. But that hasn't put off Russian tourists. Rosa Khutor's deputy chief Alexander Belokobylsky said there was a "crazy rise" in visits in the first two years after the Olympics. Numbers have still been rising, by five to seven percent per year, he said, with some 920,000 skiers visiting Rosa Khutor during last year's season. "As you can see, doubts over what would happen to Olympic infrastructure were pointless," Belokobylsky said.

The resort's main village is in a valley 500 metres (1,640 feet) above sea level. Cable cars take skiers to the top of the slopes at an altitude of 2,320 metres (7,600 feet), with impressive views of the Caucasus and-in good weather-the Black Sea. Belokobylsky said the resort's target audience is Russians who usually ski in Europe. The ruble has lost almost half of its value against the euro since



A view of the Rosa Khutor mountain resort outside Sochi.

2014, making skiing holidays in western Europe expensive for Russians. "By comparing what they see here to what they see abroad, they are impressed. For many it's unexpected," he said.

Inspired by Rosa Khutor's success, Russian authorities are trying to take this model to other Caucasus resorts. The government has announced plans to invest 41 billion rubles (\$626 million/547 million euros) to modernise three other ski resorts in the region, including at Mount Elbruz,

Europe's highest peak. Similarly to Europe, alpine skiing remains a luxury many in Russia cannot afford and accommodation in Rosa Khutor is scarce.

According to independent research firm TourStat, only four million Russians—less than three percent of the population—practise the sport. On the slopes of Rosa Khutor, Anton Kravchuk—who worked in Andorra for two years before returning to Russia to teach skiing—said his countrymen are getting better at the sport. "Four years ago, we

mainly taught beginners," he said. "The level has improved greatly, now we mostly teach in the highest part of the resort." —AFP



Holiday-makers rest in a cafe decorated with a portrait of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin at the Rosa Khutor mountain resort outside Sochi.



People ski on a slope of the Rosa Khutor mountain resort outside Sochi.



A cafe decorated with a portrait of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin at the Rosa Khutor mountain resort outside Sochi.



People ski on a slope of the Rosa Khutor mountain resort outside Sochi.



People ski on a slope of the Rosa Khutor mountain resort outside Sochi.



Skiers ride a cable car at the Rosa Khutor mountain resort outside Sochi.



Skiers get down from a cable car at the Rosa Khutor mountain resort outside Sochi.



Skiers ride a chairlift at the Rosa Khutor mountain resort outside Sochi.

Lifestyle | Feature

War horses: Syria's Arabian beauties plod way to recovery



Syrian equestrians ride their horses at a track in the town of Dimas, west of the capital Damascus.



A Syrian equestrian rides a horse at a track in the town of Dimas.



Horse trainer Jihad Ghazal (right) holds the harness of a horse named Nejm (star, in Arabic) at a track in the town of Dimas, west of the Syrian capital Damascus.



A Syrian man prepares to ride a horse at a track in the town of Dimas, west of the Syrian capital Damascus.

A shadow of her former self after years of war, 11-year-old Arabian mare Karen stands quietly as a Syrian vet gently pushes a syringe into her pale grey neck. "Karen used to be the beauty queen of all horses," says the vet, Ahmad Sharida. But inside her stable near Damascus today, her hips jut out viciously from her overgrown speckled coat. Weak and withdrawn, Karen is unable to even whinny. After almost eight years of war, she is one of dozens of Arabian horses from all over Syria recovering from the physical and psychological trauma of the fighting.

Prized for their beauty, endurance and speed, Arabian purebreds are one of the oldest horse breeds in the world. In Syria, Bedouins have bred them in the north of the country for centuries, seeking to maintain the purity of the local bloodlines. Before the conflict, Sharida had proudly watched Karen grow from a long-legged foal into a graceful equine beauty. "I know her very well. I was the one who brought her out of her mother's belly," says the vet, a stethoscope hanging around his neck.

But he lost sight of Karen after she was stolen from her stable in Eastern Ghouta in 2012, the same year rebels overran the region northeast of Damascus. The area suffered five years of regime bombardment, as well as food and medicine shortages under a crippling siege, before Russia-backed government forces took it back last year. Sharida had long fled his home region but returned to search for missing Arabian horses and immediately recognized Karen when he found her in October. "I was so shocked," says the 51-year-old vet. "She was all skin and bones, and could barely stand up."

'Kidnapped and killed'

Like all other horses he found, she was frail and sick after years of being surrounded by fighting, not enough food, and no medical attention. Syria's war has killed more than 360,000 people and displaced millions since it started in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests. And it has taken a toll on the country's equine population too. "Horses have greatly suffered, just like us all," says Mohammed Ghaith al-Shaib, head of the state's Arabian Horse Office. "They've also been displaced, kidnapped and killed."

Of the 8,500 horses that Syria registered with the World Arabian Horse Organization (WAHO) in 2011, it has lost 3,000 in the war, he says. But the conflict in Syria has turned around in recent years, and after a series of victories against rebels and jihadists, President Bashar al-Assad's regime is now in control of almost two-thirds of the country.

Having returned to one region after another, the Damascus authorities are now trying to protect the country's Arabian purebreds. Since 2014, WAHO has recognized 2,400 new Syrian foals as Arabian, after samples from their manes were sent off for DNA testing in Germany, Shaib says. Horses rescued from retaken areas are being looked after at a state-run stables west of the capital, Damascus.

A daughter?

At the stables in Dimas, staff are paying special attention to Karen's recovery. She hails from the Hadbaa strain of Arabian purebreds, so called after their long eyelashes and mane. But after years of war, she is the only known female survivor of a rare Syrian branch of that family. "The Hadbaa Enzahe Fawaeira were already at risk of dying out before the war," says Shaib. But "today, it's only Karen". Arabian mares are often seen as more precious than their

male counterparts, as they carry the bloodline from one generation to the next.

Once Karen has regained her health, her carers hope to artificially inseminate her so that she can give birth to a daughter. To maintain her bloodline, a Syrian purebred should father that female foal-but he does not need to come from the same strain. Karen is just one of many Arabian horses all over Syria recovering from conflict.



Syrian mare Karen (left), which hails from the Hadbaa Enzahe strain of Arabian purebreds, stands at a stable in the town of Dimas, west of the capital Damascus. — AFP photos

'Horses have greatly suffered, just like us all'

'Greatly affected'

In the adjacent hippodrome, trainer Jihad Ghazal watches a student trot around the red-earth arena on a horse with a shiny brown coat. Nejm—"star" in Arabic—spent the war in Damascus, a city which has remained relatively sheltered from the conflict. But the mare was one of the luckier ones, says Ghazal, who is full of anecdotes about the suffering of her kind. "Horses are very sensitive, and the sounds they hear greatly affect them," says the 40 year-old, wearing jeans and trainers. During the war, an alleged Israeli strike hit Dimas, traumatizing pregnant mares, for example. "For a year afterwards, foals were born paralyzed or dead because their mother had been so terrified," he says. In 2016, a horse was so shocked by a blast that, within hours, he had killed himself. "He banged his head against metal until he died." — AFP



Syrian mare Karen (center) stands at a stable in the town of Dimas.



Syrian mare Karen (right), which hails from the Hadbaa Enzahe strain of Arabian purebreds, stands at a stable in the town of Dimas.



A Syrian man rides a horse at a track in the town of Dimas.



Syrian mare Karen stands at a stable in the town of Dimas.



A man checks Syrian mare Karen, which hails from the Hadbaa Enzahe strain of Arabian purebreds, at a stable in the town of Dimas, west of the capital Damascus.



Members of The Soweto Gospel Choir dance during a rehearsal at the Scout's Hall in Rosebank, Johannesburg. — AFP photos



Mazwe Mhlongo, a member of The Soweto Gospel Choir, dances during a rehearsal at the Scout's Hall in Rosebank.



Mulalo Mulovhedzi (left), Mary Mulovhedzi (center) and Shimmy Jiyane from The Soweto Gospel choir pose for a portrait.

Soweto Gospel Choir riding high after Grammy win

When the Soweto Gospel Choir was named as winner of the Grammy for Best World Music Album, it earned the ensemble a place in the music history books. Announced by Questlove, drummer from the US hip hop band The Roots, the award sparked an explosion of excitement among the South African singers. "He was almost stuttering, like: 'And the winner is Fr- Fr- Freedom, Sss- Soweto Gospel Choir,' then we jumped up! Like he took long, man," chuckled choirmaster Shimmy Jiyane. "I screamed my lungs out," admits choir member Mary Mulovhedzi. "Then the ululating came, the Sowetans (in us) just came out-we couldn't hold back." What earned them the award was their album "Freedom"—a 12-track tribute to Nelson Mandela released to mark the 100th year of his birth.

It was the choir's third Grammy in its 17-year existence, adding to accolades which include an Emmy and a debut album called "Voices From Heaven" which reached No. 1 on Billboard's World Music Chart. "Freedom" gives a modern twist to so-called struggle songs—campaigning music rooted in South Africa's apartheid past, when the black majority were subjugated by the white minority. "It's a story in a way of what happened during those days," bass singer Mulalo Mulovhedzi told AFP. The album draws inspiration "from the freedom fighters of 1976," he said, referring to a linchpin year in the fight against apartheid—the Soweto uprising. "The whole idea (was) that we have to go back to Soweto, where freedom started."

'Food for the soul'

Soweto—a shortened form referring to the South West Townships on the edge of Johannesburg—became a worldwide symbol of resistance. And it is where the group has been based since it was founded in 2002. Much of the choir's captivating sound is composed and arranged in indigenous South African languages including Zulu, Xhosa and even Afrikaans. Yet some of their biggest audiences are in Europe and America. "When we sing, it's as if people understand us, so that's music—it's universal and it's spiritual and has the power to restore," explains musical director Diniloxolo Ndlakuse, dressed in bright traditional costume.

Songs in local dialects transcend the language barrier and touch audiences, choir members say. "When we do 'Jikijela ngamatje', when we cry and show emotions, the audience is crying," Jiyane says. "You must remember that music is food for the soul. 'It heals you, even if you don't understand what I say... you get to be there with me.'" The ensemble, which counts 52 members, has graced prestigious foreign venues including Carnegie Hall, the Sydney Opera House and the Royal Festival Hall in London.

Raw and proud

Back in Johannesburg, the rhythmic sound of feet and hands tapping in unison fills the hall where the choir members practice their routines. Two rows of about 20 men and women between the ages of 24 and 50 harmonize backed by a djembe, a skin-covered drum.



Members of The Soweto Gospel Choir perform during a rehearsal.

Because of its surging popularity, the group has split into three identical units to meet the insatiable global demand for its performances. "Some of our singers are not musically trained. So what we do is we learn by ear," Jiyane says. "That's the rawness of it and that's the simplicity." The brightly-dressed singers have collaborated with several international acts including Celine Dion and Chance The Rapper, and also worked with Peter Gabriel on the song "Down To Earth" from the 2008 sci-fi blockbuster "Wall-E".

The track went on to win a Grammy in the Best Movie

Song category. Mulovhedzi, whose late father David co-founded the group, says the group's sound has evolved "because of the experience... of the collaborations with other artists". But choirmaster Jiyane insists their signature sounds are "simple" and unchanged. "It's something that is raw, it's something that is proudly South African and it's something that comes from the streets of Soweto." — AFP

Rwandan film picks up top honors at Africa film festival



Rwandese film Director Joel Karekezi holds up the Yennenga Stallion trophy as he celebrates after winning the 26th Pan-African Film and Television Festival (FESPACO) at the Sports Palace in Ouagadougou.

Rwandan director Joel Karekezi's "The Mercy of the Jungle" on Saturday scooped best film at Africa's top film festival, following a fierce debate about gender equality and sexual aggression in the continent's movie industry. The film was among 20 vying for the top Golden Stallion of Yennenga award at the Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (Fespaco). A road movie focusing on the wars in Democratic Republic of Congo through the eyes of two soldiers lost in the jungle, it also picked up the best actor award for Belgian Marc Zinga.

Egyptian director Khaled Youssef won second prize for his drama "Karma", while third prize went to Tunisia's Ben Hohmound for "Fatwa" about a father who discovers that his dead son had been a jihadist. In the half century since it was established, Fespaco has never awarded its top prize to a female director—a fact that faced uncomfortable scrutiny during the week-long event. Only four of the films in competition at the festival were directed by women.

"Where are the women?" asked South African actress Xolile Tshabalala, who

starred in "Miraculous Weapons" made by Cameroonian director Jean-Pierre Bekolo. "Can it be that in 50 years, there hasn't been a single woman capable of telling a great story to win the Fespaco?" Burkinabe director Apolline Traore whose film "Desrances" won a special prize on Friday said recognition had to be on merit, not a token gesture in the fight against discrimination.

But she added: "Of course there's a problem" in gender equality for directors. "There's no equality for the craft of a woman director, not just in Africa, but in the world," she said. Encouraged by the #MeToo movement, some took the opportunity to use the festival to also highlight alleged sexual abuse within the African film industry. "It's time to speak out," said French actress Nadege Beausson-Diagne, who told AFP that she was setting up the movement called #Memepaspeur ("Not even scared") to help women speak out in Africa. Violence "is everywhere—against actresses but also directors, scriptwriters and technicians, who live with harassment, sexual aggression and rape," she said, adding that she had twice been assaulted during film shoots in Africa. An online petition was launched urging Fespaco to exclude a TV series from the competition after an actress accused its director of assault. The director, reached by AFP, refused to comment. — AFP

Venezuela ska band reprises protest songs for new age

When he was 14, Horacio Blanco wrote an angry song: "Paralytic Politicians." Now, aged 50, audiences still yell for him to sing it—an anthem of protest for Venezuela. Inspired by British bands like The Specials, but with a dash of Venezuelan "fiesta and rage," Blanco and his band Desorden Publico are Venezuela's best-known ska-punk act. Now, still dressed in ska style with quiffed hair, jacket and skinny black trousers, he is perhaps one of the few big-name Venezuelan rockers not to have left the country due to its economic and political crisis.

"So many music bands have broken up in this country. That is one of the painful things about what is happening," he told AFP inside an old wood-paneled studio in central Caracas. "The musical world has been emptied of talent. The technical side has emptied out too, all the sound engineers and everything. Many have left and many have sold their equipment." Battling bureaucratic delays to get passports, and scraping together foreign currency to buy equipment, Desorden Publico keep on touring and recording as best they can.

"We agreed we would put no expiration date on our project, whatever we had to go through. And we have developed thick skin and been through a lot," he says. "In 2017 and 2018 I had a great deal of work touring abroad... but the truth is I am Venezuelan and I love this place. I want to be involved, as a musician, in the changes that will have to come. So we always come home."

The Song Remains the Same

In the mixing room, Blanco dances and nods along while in a glassed-off compartment percussionist Oscar Alcaino, 60, rattles a sand shaker in front of the microphone. Dressed in a pork-pie hat and earrings, Oscarello has laid out all manner of instruments: conga drums, maracas and tribal rattles made from big dried seeds that look like pasta shells. With this multi-percussion section he will give a special Venezuelan flavor to Desorden Publico's ska sound.

Joined by several younger musicians, these two

founding members are recording new versions of Desorden Publico's 1994 album "People's Song of Life and Death," for a 25th-anniversary tour of North and South America. Desorden Publico formed while Blanco was still at school in the 1980s and recorded throughout the 1990s—a decade of political instability that ended with military commander Hugo Chavez coming to power. Chavez died in 2013; under his protegee and successor Nicolas Maduro, Venezuela has descended into a deadly economic and political crisis in recent years.

"A lot of the things we were singing about 25 years ago are absolutely relevant to what is happening today," Blanco says. "A lot of the vices of society and the mistakes by those in power end up repeating themselves cyclically, so the songs have new-found relevance."



Venezuelan singer Horacio Blanco, leader of ska music group "Desorden Publico", gestures as he speaks during an interview at a recording studio in Caracas. — AFP

The old songs are the best

A close cousin of reggae, ska originated in Jamaica in the 1950s and later spawned the politically-charged ska scene of Margaret Thatcher's Britain in the 1980s. The tension of its syncopated beats fused with the anger of punk. Latin America, Blanco says, was fertile ground for the rebellious spirit of ska. "I wish those in politics were really paralytic!" he sang in his early teenage song. "Then they couldn't rob us and run away." Now, he says, "it is one of the songs that the audience most often requests at our concerts."

Another old favorite is "Tetero de Petroleo" ("Petrol Baby-Bottle") — a take on Venezuela's overreliance on oil dollars which is partly blamed for today's crisis. In Venezuela, with what Blanco calls its mix of "fiesta and rage," ska was a way for Desorden Publico to denounce corruption and abuse of power. "Desorden is a small sample of Venezuela's idiosyncrasy," Blanco says. "We are a country of fiestas... but that does not mean we are cut off from the harsher things that we have to face. That is where the rage comes in." — AFP



Rwanda's film Director Joel Karekezi (right), winner of the 26th Pan-African Film and Television Festival (FESPACO) for "The mercy of the jungle", his producer Aurelien Bodinaux (left) and actress Nirere Shanel (center) hold the Yennenga Stallion trophy at the Sports Palace in Ouagadougou. — AFP photos

800 Palestinians allowed to leave Gaza for pilgrimage

GAZA CITY: Some 800 Palestinians crossed yesterday from the Gaza Strip into Egypt on their initial stage of a pilgrimage to Makkah, the first time since 2014 Egyptian authorities have granted visas for such a trip. The pilgrims left at around dawn and were to be met by buses on the Egyptian side to bring them to Cairo's airport, from where they would fly to Makkah in Saudi Arabia, said a Palestinian official at the Rafah crossing in the Gaza Strip. Fifteen Gazans among the 800 were not authorized to cross, according to a Palestinian security official at Rafah, without providing the reasons.

Security sources on the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing confirmed it was the first such permission for the umrah pilgrimage since the start of Egyptian military operations in northern Sinai in 2014. Umrah is the lesser pilgrimage to Makkah that can be completed throughout the year, as opposed to the annual hajj pilgrimage. Around 2,500 pilgrims

are authorized annually to leave Gaza via Egypt for the hajj, one of the five pillars of Islam that Muslims must undertake at least once in their lifetime.

Since the overthrow of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013, Egypt has faced an insurgency in North Sinai. Last year, Egypt's military launched a major offensive against the Sinai militants, though Cairo has for years considered the entire area a security priority. Gaza, run by Islamist movement Hamas, has been under an Israeli blockade for more than a decade. Gaza militants and Israel have fought three wars since 2008.

The Rafah crossing with Egypt is the only one out of Gaza not controlled by Israel. It had been largely closed in recent years, but was reopened some 10 months ago. Around 300 travellers use it daily in either direction, according to figures dating to December provided by the Gisha NGO, which monitors the blockade on Gaza. — AFP



GAZA: Palestinian pilgrims wave to their relatives as they sit in a bus at the Rafah border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt yesterday before crossing to depart for Makkah to perform umrah. — AFP

Egypt rescues catacombs from rising water

ALEXANDRIA, Egypt: Egypt yesterday announced the completion of a project to save famed 2,000-year-old catacombs in the coastal city of Alexandria from rising waters. The Kom Al-Shoqafa location, considered by archaeologists to be the largest Greco-Roman burial site in Egypt, has been threatened by water since its discovery in 1900. The catacombs, which were in use

from the first to the fourth century AD, are renowned for funerary architecture blending ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman art.

The rising water prompted Egypt to launch a massive drainage project supported by the United States Agency for International (USAID) in 2017. Antiquities Minister Khaled Al-Anani told reporters at the site that the program had helped "end a problem threatening the area for more than 100 years". Thomas Nichols, an engineer involved in the project, called it "a unique program where we blended archaeology and civil engineering together". Egypt has in recent years sought to promote archaeological discoveries across the country in a bid to revive tourism hit by the turmoil that followed its 2011 uprising. — AFP



ALEXANDRIA: Visitors tour the catacombs of Kom Al-Shoqafa yesterday during the inauguration of a project to drain groundwater from the archaeological site. — AFP

IS teen's husband seeks return to Netherlands

LONDON: The Dutch husband of Shamima Begum, a British-born teenager who fled to join Islamic State, wants to live with her in the Netherlands, he said in an interview yesterday from detention in Syria. Yago Riedijk, who is being held in a Kurdish-run detention center in northeast Syria, married Begum days after she arrived in territory held by IS when he was 23 and she was 15, he told BBC television.

Begum, 19, from east London and now in a refugee camp, has said she would like to return to Britain but has been stripped of her British citizenship by the government which deems her a security threat. Riedijk, 27, says he now rejects IS after having fought for the jihadist group. Instead, he wants to return home to the Netherlands with his wife and their newborn son. Their first two children died.

"I would love to go back to my own country... I now

understand the privileges I lived with. The privilege of living there as a citizen," he said. "I understand that many people have a problem with what I did... I have to take responsibility for what I did. Serve my sentence." Asked if he thought marrying a girl of that age was acceptable, he acknowledged that she had been "very young".

"When my friend came and said there was a girl who was interested in marriage, I wasn't that interested because of her age, but I accepted the offer anyway," he replied. "We sat down and she seemed in a good state of mind. It was her own choice, she was the one who asked to look for a partner for her. Then I was invited and yeah, she was very young and it might have been better for her to wait a bit. But she didn't, she chose to get married and I chose to marry her."

Riedijk, from Arnhem, told the BBC that he had been imprisoned and tortured after IS suspected him of being a Dutch spy. He surrendered to Syrian fighters. "I lived a miserable life. I was imprisoned. I was tortured. I lived in fear," he said. "It was my own fault for going, yes, but I didn't come out of it as a winner, in any way." He said he did not see how Begum could be deemed a threat by the British authorities. "I don't understand how she would, in any form, be a danger. — AFP

Israel and Russia to cooperate on foreign troop exit from Syria

JERUSALEM: Israel and Russia will work together on securing an exit of foreign forces from Syria, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday after visiting Moscow to advocate against the Iranian presence in the country. As Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad beats back an eight-year-old insurgency, Israel worries that his reinforcements from Iran and the Tehran-backed Lebanese militia Hezbollah will stay on to form a new front against it.

Israel has carried out hundreds of strikes against suspected Iranian and Hezbollah targets in Syria. These operations have been largely ignored by Russia, which intervened militarily on Assad's behalf in 2015, turning the tide of the war. Netanyahu said that, hosted by Russian

President Vladimir Putin last week, he had made it "unequivocally clear" that such strikes would continue, with an Israeli-Russian military hotline continuing to prevent accidental clashes between the countries.

"President Putin and I also agreed on a shared goal - the removal of Syria of the foreign forces that came in after the civil war erupted," Netanyahu told the Israeli cabinet in broadcast remarks. "We agreed to set up a joint task force which, together with others, will work to advance toward this goal." He did not elaborate. Moscow had no immediate comment. In the past, Russia has spoken in favor of other forces leaving Syria, though it plans to keep a long-term garrison there.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in an interview with Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) published yesterday, said the situation in Syria had visibly stabilized after operations by Syrian government forces with Russian aerial support. But Lavrov said it was too early to declare the "terrorist threat" in Syria - a reference to Islamist-led rebels - eliminated. The United States has been drawing down its own forces in Syria as Islamic State insurgents near defeat. — Reuters

Dragon capsule successfully...

Continued from Page 1

The launch is a key step towards resuming manned space flights from US soil after an eight-year break. SpaceX, founded by billionaire Elon Musk, has made the trip to the ISS a dozen times before since 2012, but only to refuel the station. Transporting people is a more complex task, requiring seats, a pressurized cabin with breathable air, temperature regulation and emergency infrastructure.

After its shuttle program was shut down in July 2011 following a 30-year run, NASA began outsourcing the logistics of its space missions. It pays Russia to get its people up to the ISS orbiting research facility at a cost of \$82 million per head for a round trip. In 2014, the US space agency awarded contracts to SpaceX and Boeing for them to take over this task. In SpaceX's case, NASA has agreed to pay \$2.6 billion for six round trips to the ISS.

The switch from NASA owning spacecraft to paying private firms for a service was initiated under former

president Barack Obama - but due to development delays, has come to fruition under US President Donald Trump. "We've got NASA 'rocking' again. Great activity and success. Congrats to SPACEX and all!" Trump tweeted Saturday evening.

Since 2017, NASA's official mission has been to return to the Moon - a project awarded \$21.5 billion by Congress in the 2019 budget. Jim Bridenstine, head of the US space agency, has explained NASA wants to reduce costs in low orbit to devote resources to getting back to the Moon and constructing a small space station in lunar orbit in the 2020s. "As a country, we're looking forward to being one customer of many customers, in a robust commercial marketplace in low Earth orbit, so that we can drive down costs and increase access in ways that historically have not been possible," he said Saturday following Dragon's launch.

But Musk has admitted that marketing travel in the Dragon capsule is not a priority - and he is more interested in distant exploration of the solar system. At the post-launch press conference on Saturday, he reiterated his dream for a permanent Moon base - and sending people to Mars. Musk has already locked in his first private customer to fly to the Moon: Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa. But it won't happen before 2023 - with the rocket, far more powerful than that used for the Dragon mission, still in development. — AFP

Protests swell as Bouteflika files...

Continued from Page 1

Opponents of Bouteflika say is no longer fit to lead, citing his poor health and what they call chronic corruption and a lack of economic reforms to tackle high unemployment that exceeds 25 percent among people under the age of 30. Analysts say the protesters, who began hitting the streets 10 days ago, lack leadership and organization in a country still dominated by veterans, like Bouteflika, of the 1954-62 independence war against France.

But traditionally weak and divided opposition and civic groups have called for protests to go on should Bouteflika, in power for 20 years, continue pursuit of re-election. The government has played on fears among many Algerians of a return of bloodshed seen in the 1990s when an estimated 200,000 people were killed after Islamists took up arms when the military cancelled elections they were poised to win. But the new series of protests have been generally peaceful, apart from Friday when scuffles with police left 183 injured.

Thousands of students gathered yesterday at university faculties, one of them near the Constitutional Council where presidential candidates filed their papers, chanting: "No to a fifth term!" or "A free and democratic Algeria!" There was heavy security around the Constitutional Council, and police prevented restive students from leaving the campus nearby, keeping the main gates shut. But thousands were later marching through the center like on Friday. A diplomatic source estimated as many as 70,000 people had

massed in Algiers, including a rally at Bab Ezzouar University, the country's biggest. "We will not stop until we get rid of this system," said Aicha, a 23-year-old student.

According to witnesses and local television footage, protesters also turned out in their thousands in other cities around the North African country, such as Oran, Constantine, Annaba, Batna, Blida, Skikda and Bouira. In France, Algeria's former colonial power, at least 2,000 people joined anti-Bouteflika rallies in Paris and other cities. "Out out," shouted crowds in central Paris, where protesters waved placards and some wrapped themselves in Algerian flags.

The first candidate to submit his papers was Ali Ghediri, a retired general who is taking on the elite of military, ruling FLN party and business leaders. "I tell the people a new dawn has started," he told reporters. Another candidate, Rachid Nakkaz, a businessman and activist, arrived in a taxi and said: "We should remain peaceful to give a good image of our democracy." By afternoon, seven candidates had registered.

Opposition groups failed to agree on one candidate, making any campaign a tough uphill challenge in a country dominated by one party - the FLN - since independence. Bouteflika changed his campaign manager on Saturday, state media said. He has not addressed the protests against him - the largest since 2011, when popular revolts ousted long entrenched elites in a number of Arab countries.

Many Algerians eschewed public political activity for years, for fear of trouble from the pervasive security apparatus or out of disillusionment with the lack of change in the leadership. After the decade-long Islamist insurgency that Bouteflika crushed early in his rule, Algerians generally tolerated a political system leaving little room for dissent as a price to pay for relative peace and stability. — Agencies

Trump warns of 'socialist...'

Continued from Page 1

automotive industries. He said progressive health-care policies would "lead to colossal tax increases" - and accused the Democrats of having "totally abandoned the American mainstream" on issue such as immigration and abortion.

With the federal investigation into possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia reportedly approaching its conclusion, Trump again berated Special Counsel Robert Mueller's team as partisan hacks out to get him, adding that "these people are sick". His voice dripping with sarcasm, he suggested that his call in summer of 2016 for Russia to find and release Hillary Clinton's emails was a joke that had been obtusely taken at face value by the media.

On the foreign front, Trump repeated his claim that the last Islamic State group fighters in Syria would be captured or killed imminently - "as of tomorrow" - after on Thursday telling US troops "we just took over" 100 percent of the caliphate. Two weeks earlier Trump had declared the fall of the so-called caliphate would be announced "over the next 24 hours".

He railed against Chinese tariffs on American goods and said the US loses \$500 billion a year to the world's second biggest economy - "such a disaster". Trump regularly ignores the dominant US services sector to focus only on goods, when in 2017 the US trade deficit with China was actually \$337 billion - not \$500 billion. Trump last year initiated a tariff war with Beijing, which has taken a nasty bite

out of US growth. Although both sides say they are now close to resolving the dispute Trump insisted he's "fine with it" and told his supporters: "The beauty is this. I have \$250 billion more to put tariffs on."

The word "socialism" has been in heavy rotation since some Democratic candidates began openly embracing liberal platforms including the Green New Deal and a Medicare for All. On Friday, Vice President Mike Pence spoke at the four-day conference in National Harbor, Maryland, to warn that Democrats are taking a "hard left turn" ahead of 2020. "Under the guise of Medicare for All and a Green New Deal, Democrats are embracing the same tired economic theories that have impoverished nations and stifled the liberties of millions over the last century. That system is socialism," he said.

Trump's speech came at the same time Senator Bernie Sanders, who has embraced the label of "democratic socialist", spoke at a rally in New York, assailing Trump as "the most dangerous president in modern American history". It was Sanders' first major speech since announcing he will again seek the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020.

Republicans hoped Trump's address would serve as a diversion from the Mueller investigation and to the testimony this week on Capitol Hill by the president's former personal attorney Michael Cohen implicating him in crimes. In December a court sentenced Cohen to three years in prison for hush-money payments to two women and for lies to Congress - both of which he said were to protect Trump - and tax evasion. During Cohen's testimony the president was in Vietnam where a high-stakes second summit between Trump and Kim broke up in disarray Thursday, without even a joint statement. The pair failed to reach an agreement on curbing Pyongyang's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. — AFP

Sports

Jamie Benn posts hat trick to lead Stars past Blues, 4-1

Aho's OT winner gives Carolina fifth straight victory over Panthers

ST LOUIS: Jamie Benn returned from a brief injury absence to record a hat trick and help the visiting Dallas Stars beat the St. Louis Blues for the second time in 10 days, 4-1 on Saturday night. Defenseman John Klingberg had a goal with two assists, and Ben Bishop stopped 29 shots for the Stars, who continued their push toward the Western Conference playoffs by completing a 3-1-0 road trip. Dallas, which ended the Blues' team-record 11-game winning streak with a 5-2 victory on Feb. 21, snapped their seven-game home winning stretch Saturday. Though third in the Central Division and three points better than Dallas, St. Louis has managed just nine non-shootout goals while going 2-3-1 since the 11-game run. Blues rookie Jordan Binnington made 17 saves during his first loss in eight starts at home.

WILD 4, FLAMES 2

Matt Read scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period as visiting Minnesota spoiled a festive night in Calgary with a victory. Prior to the contest, the Flames honored former captain Jarome Iginla and sent his signature No. 12 to the rafters at Scotiabank Saddledome. Iginla, who spent 16 seasons with the Flames, is the club's all-time leader in goals (525), points (1,095) and regular-season games played (1,219). Defenseman Ryan Suter collected a goal and an assist, and Eric Staal and Ryan Donato also tallied for the Wild, who have won five in a row to remain one point behind Dallas for the top wild-card spot in the Western Conference. Devan Dubnyk turned aside 35 shots.

LIGHTNING 5, SENATORS 1

Four different defensemen scored for host Tampa Bay, which beat lowly Ottawa to match the NHL mark for fewest games to 50 wins. Blue-liners Victor Hedman, Ryan McDonagh, Erik Cernak and Mikhail Sergachev all had goals, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 36 saves in his ninth straight victory for the NHL-leading Lightning, who rebounded after their club-record 10-game winning streak and 14-game point stretch ended at Boston on Thursday. Tampa Bay, which has won seven straight at home and earned a point in 10 consecutive there, equaled Detroit's record of 50 wins in 66 games from the 1995-96 season.

MAPLE LEAFS 5, SABRES 2

John Tavares and Mitch Marner each had a goal and

two assists, and Toronto defeated visiting Buffalo. Morgan Rielly, Nic Petan and Nikita Zaitsev also scored a goal for the Maple Leafs, who have two home wins over the Sabres in the past six days. Frederik Andersen made 35 saves for Toronto. Jason Pominville and Conor Sheary scored for the Sabres. Linus Ullmark started in goal for Buffalo for the second game in a row and made 27 saves.

PENGUINS 5, CANADIENS 1

Sidney Crosby had a goal and three assists, and Jake Guentzel had two goals and two assists as visiting Pittsburgh jumped on Montreal early for the win. It was the 32nd time in his career Crosby has amassed four or more points in a game, and he made it 10 career seasons with at least 80 points. He has 83. Evgeni Malkin also scored, and Jared McCann had a goal and an assist for Pittsburgh, which has won two of its past three games and pulled even with the Canadiens and into a wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference at 77 points.

HURRICANES 4, PANTHERS 3 (OT)

Carolina's Sebastian Aho scored the game-winning goal 1:46 into overtime to lift the surging club to a win over Florida in Sunrise, Fla. Hurricanes goalie Petr Mrazek made three saves on breakaways in a hectic 3-on-3 overtime, setting the stage for Aho to score his 27th goal on a clever dish from Nino Niederreiter on a 2-on-1 rush. Brock McGinn, Greg McKeeg and Brett Pesce scored in regulation for the Hurricanes, and Mrazek made 31 saves to win his fourth straight for Carolina, which has used a 13-3-0 run to earn third place in the Metropolitan Division. Carolina won its fifth in a row.

BRUINS 1, DEVILS 0

Brad Marchand scored the game's only goal fewer than three minutes into the first period, and Tuukka Rask stopped all 20 shots he faced as host Boston remained red-hot by edging New Jersey. The Bruins won their third straight game and for the 10th time in 11 tries (10-0-1) while extending their point streak to 16 games (12-0-4). The shutout was the third of the season for Rask. Mackenzie Blackwood made 29 saves in taking the hard-luck loss for the Devils, who have dropped three straight, all in regulation, and five of seven (2-5-0).

COYOTES 3, RED WINGS 1

Oliver Ekman-Larsson and Vinnie Hinostroza each



CALGARY: Kevin Fiala #22 of the Minnesota Wild carries the puck against Oscar Fantenberg #3 of the Calgary Flames during an NHL game at Scotiabank Saddledome on Saturday in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. — AFP

collected a goal and an assist as Arizona won six straight games for the first time since 2012 with a victory over Detroit in Glendale, Ariz. Josh Archibald also scored for the Coyotes, who have won nine of their last 11 overall and avenged a 6-1 loss in Detroit on Nov. 13. Richard Panik notched a pair of assists, and Darcy Kuemper finished with 22 saves to win his seventh consecutive start and improve to 15-3-3 since Jan. 4.

KINGS 6, BLACKHAWKS 3

Dustin Brown scored a pair of goals, Adrian Kempe, Brendan Leipsic and Ilya Kovalchuk each finished with a goal and an assist and Los Angeles pulled away for a win over visiting Chicago. Sean Walker also scored for Los Angeles, which snapped a 10-game winless streak. The Kings narrowly avoided

tying their franchise record of 11 consecutive losses. Brendan Perlini had two goals, and Connor Murphy had one for the Blackhawks. Chicago has lost three of its past four games.

OILERS 4, BLUE JACKETS 0

Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid each had three points, and Mikko Koskinen made 30 saves as visiting Edmonton earned a shutout over Columbus. Draisaitl recorded two assists and scored his 40th goal of the season, combining with McDavid on a give-and-go 8:53 into the second period. Draisaitl joined Alex Ovechkin and Patrick Kane as the only players to reach the 40-goal plateau in the NHL this season. Draisaitl extended his points streak to 10 games and has 25 points (16 goals, nine assists) over his last 17 games. — Reuters

Jones retains UFC light heavyweight title

LAS VEGAS: UFC light heavyweight champion Jon Jones cruised to an easy victory over Anthony Smith and Kamaru Usman became the first African-born champion as he defeated Tyrone Woodley for the welterweight title at the T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas.

Smith lived up to his "Lionheart" nickname, surviving five gruelling five-minute rounds against one of the most dominant fighters of all time, but the judges gave the reigning champion a comprehensive victory at UFC 235.

The 31-year-old New Yorker controlled the fight from start to finish, using a dizzying array of kicks to control the distance and out-wrestling Smith against the fence. The only risk to Jones came in the closing seconds of the fourth round

when he landed an illegal left knee to the head of Smith, who had one hand on the ground.

The challenger would have been awarded a win by disqualification if he told the referee he was unable to continue, but he fought on before ultimately dropping the decision. "I wanted to win it, I didn't want to steal it," Smith said in the cage.

Nigerian-born Kamaru Usman dominated the co-main event, backing Woodley up against the fence and ripping dozens of thunderous shots to the body, and then taking his opponent to the mat at will. Known for his tactical acumen in the cage, Woodley never had the time or space to use it as Usman swarmed all over him from the opening bell. Despite Usman's dominance and a late fourth-round flurry that rocked Woodley badly, the fight was decided on the judges' scorecards 50-44, 50-44 and 50-45 to crown the first African-born UFC champion.

The much-anticipated UFC debut of former Bellator and ONE FC welterweight champ Ben Askren ended in con-



LAS VEGAS: Jon Jones (R) and Anthony Smith trade punches during their light heavyweight title bout during UFC 235 at T-Mobile Arena on Saturday in Las Vegas, Nevada. Jones won by unanimous decision. — AFP

trovery when referee Herb Dean stopped the fight in the first round, judging Robbie Lawler to have lost consciousness in a bulldog choke. Lawler,

himself a former UFC welterweight champion, immediately protested but to no avail, allowing Askren to maintain his unbeaten MMA record. — Reuters

Korea's Park storms past field to win World Championship

SINGAPORE: South Korea's Park Sung-hyun produced a sizzling final round of eight-under par 64 in windy conditions to clinch a two-stroke victory over Australia's Minjee Lee in the LPGA Women's World Championship in Singapore yesterday.

The 25-year-old from Seoul opened her final round with three successive birdies and made two more at six and seven but a bogey on the par-five eighth made her turn at four-under for the round.

She made a further four birdies on the back nine and tapped in for par from less than three feet to sign for a total of 15-under 273 on the Tanjong Course at Sentosa Golf Club. "I'm really happy with my play today. I am really happy because I used to have rough starts to my year and I think that I will now feel really comfortable for the rest of the season," Park said through an interpreter.

Lee, who was also the runner-up in Thailand last week, shot 69 to finish on 13-under 275 as she was overtaken by Park, who started the final round in eighth place. Spain's Azahara Munoz and Korea's Ko Jin-young both shot closing scores of 69 to finish tied for third two strokes further back, with Kim Hyo-joo (70) and American Amy Olson (70) tied for fifth on 10-under 278. Lee, who had started in second place on Sunday behind Thailand's world number one Ariya Jutanugarn, had taken a two-stroke lead when she made her third birdie of the round at the par-five eighth.

The 22-year-old made another birdie on the par-four 12th but Park was continuing her charge and took



SINGAPORE: Park Sung-hyun of South Korea poses with the winner's trophy after the final round of the HSBC Women's World Championship at the Sentosa Golf Club in Singapore yesterday. — AFP

a share of the lead with her seventh birdie of the round on 13th and then took a two-stroke lead on 16 with her final birdie while Lee made a bogey on 14.

Lee needed to make an eagle on the final hole to force an unlikely playoff but her second shot landed about 30 feet from the pin. World number one Jutanugarn had a one-shot lead heading into the final round but a double bogey at the par-three fourth dropped her down the leaderboard and she was unable to recover.

She made a double-bogey seven on 13 and another bogey on 14 ended her hopes of winning her first event in Asia as she closed with a 75 to finish in a tie for eighth with eight-under 280. — Reuters

Carter barred from Racing 92 return on medical grounds

PARIS: Double World Cup winner Dan Carter will not rejoin French club Racing 92 due to medical reasons, the club announced on Saturday. Carter, 36, who starred for the French giants between 2015-2018, has been deemed ineligible to play in France by the French National League (LNR) after his former outfit referred his medical results to the organisation which runs the Top 14 competition.

His health dossier was passed to the LNR as part of his registration as a Racing92 squad member-as is the case with every new player in the league. "Racing 92 handed over certain elements of his medical dossier to the experts designated by the French National League. Their opinion was unanimous: Dan Carter can't play rugby in France," said a statement.

"We are very disappointed of course but... the law is harsh but it is the law and we don't compromise players' health. "We wish Dan the best for the future, a future at the same level of his immense career." The former Top 14 champions said last month Carter would return on a short-term deal from Japanese side Kobelco Steelers as cover for ex-South Africa fly-half Pat Lambie who announced his immediate retirement in January due to numerous concussions.

Other options at fly-half for the millionaire-backed outfit are Scotland's Finn Russell, second-choice Ben Volavola and journeyman Raphael Lagarde. Carter was expected to supplement the options at stand-off as Racing 92 eye a place in the end of season play-offs and a first European Champions Cup with a quarter-final tie against Toulouse on March 31.

During his previous three-year stint in the French capital, Carter won the league title but failed to lift the European Cup, losing in two finals. He scored 445 points in 58 games. Before that, he won New Zealand's provincial competition with Canterbury and Super Rugby with the Crusaders.

On the international front he twice lifted the World Cup, the Tri Nations and The Rugby Championship as well as a British and Irish Lions Test series with the All Blacks. Carter's last spell in France was tarnished on two occasions.

He tested positive for anti-inflammatory drug corticosteroid in 2016 but was eventually cleared of any wrongdoing in April 2017.

In the same year, he was caught driving while two-times over the legal alcohol limit by French police and subsequently fined 1,000 euros (\$1,137). Carter was set for his third contract in the Top 14 having made only five appearances for Perpignan in 2009 because of an Achilles injury. When it was announced that he was due to return to Racing, club owner Jacky Lorenzetti insisted it was with one mission in mind—to win the European Cup. "It's the only title he's missing, he added to his collection with Japan's Top League in December so why not become a European champion with us," Lorenzetti said.—AFP

Ethiopian Legese wins rain-sodden Tokyo marathon

TOKYO: Ethiopian Birhanu Legese cruised to victory at the Tokyo marathon yesterday, winning in a time of two hours, four minutes and 48 seconds in miserable conditions to claim his first major title.

The 24-year-old was part of a small leading group for the first 30 kilometres before pulling away easily from runnerup Kenyan Bedan Karoki (2:06:48) and strolling to victory. Karoki's compatriot Dickson Chumba, twice a winner in Tokyo, was third.

With rain lashing down for much of a frigid morning, it was never likely to be a fast race. Japan fancied their chances of a homegrown male victory for the first time since 2010 but Suguru Osako, who set a new Japanese national record in October, struggled to stay with the leading group and pulled out with an injury 30 kilometres in.

The 27-year-old, touted as Japan's best hope of delivering Olympic marathon gold when Tokyo hosts the Games in 2020, was distraught as he limped from the route. Ethiopian Ruti Aga won the women's race in a time of 2:20:40, edging out compatriot Helen Tola by 21 seconds. Ethiopians have now won the women's marathon in Tokyo in six of the last eight editions. — Reuters

Sports

New Zealand crush Bangladesh by innings after Boult bags five

Defiant centuries from Soumya and Mahmudullah in vain

SCOREBOARD

Completed scoreboard in the first Test between New Zealand and Bangladesh in Hamilton yesterday.

Bangladesh first innings 234 (Tamim Iqbal 126; Wagner 5-47, Southee 3-76)

New Zealand first innings 715-6 dec (K. Williamson 200 not out, T. Latham 161, J. Raval 132, C. de Grandhomme 76 not out; Soumya Sarkar 2-68)

Bangladesh second innings (overnight 174-4)

Tamim Iqbal c Watling b Southee	74
Shadman Islam c Boult b Wagner	37
Mominul Haque c Taylor b Boult	8
M. Mithun c Williamson b Boult	0
Soumya Sarkar b Boult	149
Mahmudullah c Boult b Southee	146
Liton Das b Boult	1
Mehidy Hasan c Raval b Wagner	1
Abu Jayed b Boult	3
Khaled Ahmed not out	4
Ebadat Hossain c Boult b Southee	0
Extras (w6)	6
Total: (all out; 103 overs)	429

Fall of wickets: 1-88 (Shadman), 2-100 (Mominul), 3-110 (Mithun), 4-126 (Tamim), 5-361 (Soumya), 6-379 (Das), 7-380 (Mehidy), 8-413 (Jayed), 9-429 (Mahmudullah), 10-429 (Ebadat)

Bowling: Boult 28-3-123-5 (4w), Southee 24-4-98-3, de Grandhomme 10-1-33-0, Wagner 24-4-104-2 (2w), Astle 15-3-58-0, Williamson 2-0-13-0.

Result: New Zealand won by an innings and 52 runs

HAMILTON: Defiant centuries from Soumya Sarkar and Mahmudullah were in vain as Trent Boult's five-wicket haul gave New Zealand a crushing victory over Bangladesh in the first Test by an innings and 52 runs in Hamilton yesterday.

After the stubborn double-century partnership took Bangladesh to 361 for four in their second innings, Boult opened the final chapter of the Test when he bowled Soumya for 149. The crucial wicket ended a 235-run stand with Mahmudullah (146) for the fifth wicket and saw Bangladesh cave in with the Test all over 68 runs later, just after tea on day four.

"The fight today was as tough as Test cricket does get," New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said after Boult's lethal spell with the second new ball trumped the 54-over battle by Soumya and Mahmudullah.

It was Soumya's maiden hundred and the fifth and highest century for Mahmudullah as they pounded the boundaries and took control of the short-ball barrage that decimated their first innings.

"That plan didn't work very well for us today and we had to go back to trying to stop some scoring for a period of time, because they were scoring quickly," Williamson said. "There was some fantastic batting."

"When the breakthrough came with the second new ball, which was obviously a fairly long time coming, it was great that we were able to open up an end from that point on." The match had belonged to New Zealand long before they declared their first innings at a colossal 715 for six-a first innings lead of 481 — but Soumya and Mahmudullah were determined to make crossing the finish line as difficult as possible for the hosts.

Mahmudullah called it a "gutsy innings" as they batted together for nearly three sessions and produced the sixth best partnership by a Bangladesh pair. When Boult finally bowled Soumya, the 26-year-old



HAMILTON: Mohammad Mahmudullah of Bangladesh plays a shot during day four of the first cricket Test match between New Zealand and Bangladesh at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday. — AFP

left-hander stood motionless for several seconds as he realised the significance of his wicket before departing the ground.

The remaining five wickets lasted only 18 overs. When Bangladesh resumed Sunday on 174 for four they faced a Herculean task to score a further 307 just to make New Zealand bat again. Sri Lanka's Angelo Mathews and Kusal Mendis proved with their (rain-

assisted) match-saving 274-run stand in Wellington before Christmas it is possible to defy the odds in New Zealand.

But, Soumya could not hold out that long and when the new ball was taken he lasted 14 more deliveries before Boult ended his resistance and the tenacity left the innings. Boult finished with five for 123 and Tim Southee took three for 98. — AFP

Gayle blasts Windies to victory after England collapse

ST LUCIA: England's batting line-up imploded in familiar fashion before Chris Gayle inspired the West Indies to a seven-wicket triumph in the fifth and final ODI international in St Lucia on Saturday to ensure the series ended drawn at 2-2.

The 39-year-old Gayle, playing in what may be his final home ODI, smashed 77 off just 27 balls after England had been skittled out for 113 in 28.1 overs, with Oshane Thomas doing most damage with five wickets.

Just three days after the visitors had posted 418 against the same attack, the West Indies, who won the test series between the two sides 2-1, this time needed just 12.1 overs to race to their target at 115-3.

"I thought about it walking round after the game, 'will this be my last innings in the Caribbean?' We'll have to wait and see for now," Gayle told Sky Sports after being named player of the series for his 424-run haul from the four completed matches.

"This will give us a big boost. It's been a great series and I'm happy we tied the series. Being in such terrific form is fantastic for me; I think it's my best ODI series stats-wise." Eoin Morgan's side had started favourites to equal Australia's record of winning a 10th successive ODI series but subsided limply amid a series of ill-judged shots on a pitch that offered help to the pacemen. Eight of England's batsmen fell to short-pitched deliveries, with Thomas cashing in to take 5-21 from 5.1 overs. When West Indies batted it looked a completely different game, with Gayle giving another explosive display of hitting to add to his 162 from the previous game and his 135 from the opening match.

His nine sixes took his total to 39 across the four



SAINT LUCIA: Chris Gayle of West Indies hits 6 during the 5th and final ODI between West Indies and England at Darren Sammy Cricket Ground, Gros Islet, Saint Lucia, on Saturday. — AFP

games, a record in a bilateral series. Morgan had been keen to secure the win ahead of this summer's World Cup and will be particularly disappointed in his batsmen, who never came to terms with conditions which were radically different from Grenada.

But from the moment Sheldon Cottrell bowled Jonny Bairstow for 11, England never looked comfortable with only Alex Hales and Jos Buttler, who both scored 23, looking capable of putting any sort of innings together.

England's final five wickets went down for just two

runs, and the last three wickets without scoring, as batsmen formed a regular procession to the pavilion en route to England's 14th lowest ODI total.

Gayle won a personal battle with Mark Wood after the paceman removed fellow opener John Campbell for a single. That proved a mere inconvenience for the self-styled 'Universe Boss', who struck a series of towering blows before he was finally bowled by Wood with West Indies in touching distance of victory. The two sides now play three T20 games. — Reuters

Mitchell pours in 46 as Jazz halt Bucks' streak

SALT LAKE CITY: Donovan Mitchell scored a career-best 46 points, and the Utah Jazz rallied from a 17-point, fourth-quarter deficit to end the Milwaukee Bucks' seven-game winning streak 115-111 on Saturday night in Salt Lake City. Derrick Favors scored 23 points and matched his career high of 18 rebounds as Utah won its fourth straight game and 18th in the past 24. Joe Ingles added 14 points and eight assists. Giannis Antetokounmpo recorded 43 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists for the Bucks, who lost for just the third time in the past 22 games. Chris Middleton added 29 points, nine rebounds and six assists for Milwaukee, which had a 10-game road winning streak snapped. Brook Lopez matched his career high of seven blocked shots and also contributed 16 points and eight rebounds.

WARRIORS 120, 76ERS 117

Stephen Curry broke a late tie with a jumper and later added two free throws and a layup, allowing Golden State to finish off host Philadelphia. Kevin Durant poured in a game-high 34 points, Curry added 28 and DeMarcus Cousins produced his highest-scoring game for Golden State with 25 as the Warriors snapped a two-game losing streak. The Warriors were without high-scoring guard Klay Thompson because of soreness in his right knee. Ben Simmons recorded a 25-point, 15-rebound, 11-assist triple-double for the 76ers, who lost for the 11th time in

their last 12 meetings against Golden State. The 76ers didn't have star Joel Embiid, who missed his fifth straight game with tendinitis in his left knee.

SUNS 118, LAKERS 109

Deandre Ayton had 26 points and 10 rebounds, and host Phoenix avoided its first season sweep in 19 years against Los Angeles. Devin Booker scored 16 of his 25 points in the second half, and Josh Jackson scored 16 off the bench for Phoenix, which has won two of three after losing 17 straight. The Suns came into the contest 0-3 against the Lakers on the season, having lost every game by at least 14 points. The Lakers have lost four of five to drop 4 1/2 games back of the final playoff spot in the Western Conference. LeBron James had 27 points, nine rebounds and 16 assists for the Lakers. Brandon Ingram scored 25 points, and JaVale McGee went 10 of 10 from the field in adding 21 points off the bench for Los Angeles.

PELICANS 120, NUGGETS 112

Julius Randle had 28 points and 10 rebounds, Jrue Holiday scored 29 points and New Orleans, playing without Anthony Davis (flu) and E'Twaun Moore (rest), beat host Denver. Frank Jackson scored 16 off the bench for New Orleans, which won road games on consecutive nights, having won in Phoenix on Friday night. Nikola Jokic had 20 points and nine rebounds while battling foul trouble, and Jamal Murray also scored 20 for Denver. The Nuggets have lost two straight at home after winning 20 of 21 in Denver.

SPURS 116, THUNDER 102

LaMarcus Aldridge scored 27 points, 23 of them in a torrid first half, and took 10 rebounds as host San Antonio cruised past Oklahoma City. San Antonio won its second consecutive game after a three-game losing streak and

has three victories in its last 10 outings. The Thunder, led by Russell Westbrook's 19 points and Dennis Schroder's 18, lost their fourth straight. Rudy Gay added 22 points for San Antonio while DeMar DeRozan hit for 18, Bryn Forbes scored 16 and Derrick White tallied 14.

GRIZZLIES 111, MAVERICKS 81

Memphis went into Dallas and mixed clamp-down defense with an atypical showing of long-range firepower in an easy win. The Grizzlies, playing without injured rookie Jaren Jackson Jr., got balanced scoring, including solid bench contributions with 15 points from Jevon Carter. 12 points from Joakim Noah on 4-of-7 shooting to go with eight boards and five assists and 12 points from CJ Miles, who hit three 3-pointers. Jonas Valanciunas led the team with 20 points. Rookie Luka Doncic scored a game-high 22 points for the Mavericks, and he shot 7 of 14 from the floor. He couldn't find the range from beyond the arc, however, missing seven of his eight attempts. Dwight Powell contributed 13 points, and Tim Hardaway Jr. finished with 10, shooting 2 of 7 from long range.

HEAT 117, NETS 88

Kelly Olynyk scored 25 points as host Miami dominated the third quarter and never trailed in handing Brooklyn its third straight loss and its 10th loss in 15 games. Olynyk was questionable for the game with a sprained right ankle but scored at least 20 points for the third time in four games. Miami won for the fourth time in its last 14 games and remained one game behind Orlando and Charlotte, which are tied for eighth in the Eastern Conference. The Heat also moved within 2 1/2 games of Brooklyn. Joe Harris led the Nets with 15 points, but D'Angelo Russell was held to 10 points. Brooklyn's other three starters-Trevelin Graham, Jarrett Allen and Caris LeVert-combined for 22 points.—Reuters

Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah tourney to start

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Tournament of Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Cup will be launched Thursday and will continue for three days at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex. The tournament will include the 10 meters air pistol and rifle and Olympic archery for both men and women with club, National Guard and Bahrain shooters participating.

Secretary General of Arab and Kuwait Shooting Federations Obaid Al-Osaimi said this tournament has a special status with Kuwait shooting community, as we remember the support Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdallah presented to shooters and to the club since its establishment.

Registration for the tournament will be closed on Tuesday 5/3 at 6:00 pm. Al-Osaimi wished participants all success.

ICC assures members of robust security at World Cup

MUMBAI: The International Cricket Council has assured its members of a tight security plan for this year's World Cup in England after the Indian cricket board sought guarantees from the governing body following a suicide-bomb attack in Kashmir last month.

The BCCI had expressed concern about security during the World Cup in a letter to the ICC after last month's attack in the disputed region that killed 40 Indian paramilitary troops.

"As you would expect for a global sporting event, the ICC, in partnership with the ECB (England and Wales Cricket Board) has a robust security plan in place for the men's Cricket World Cup," ICC Chief Executive David Richardson said following board meetings in Dubai.

"We work closely with the authorities in our host countries to ensure that the safety of players, officials and fans is a priority. Should those authorities raise the threat level of the event based on intelligence, we will of course uplift our security commitment as appropriate."

"We will continue to work with the ECB and our members throughout the build up to and during the tournament to keep everyone abreast of the situation." The attack, the worst in the troubled area, was claimed by Pakistan-based militants and further soured relations between the bitter nuclear-armed rivals, prompting calls within India for the country to sever all sporting ties with Pakistan.

The BCCI had urged the cricket community to ostracise Pakistan in their letter to the ICC. India are scheduled to play their World Cup match against Pakistan in Manchester on June 16.

The governing body was also apprised of concerns from the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) regarding the BCCI's reluctance to come under the ambit of India's national anti-doping body.

"The Board unanimously acknowledged its desire to remain WADA compliant and committed to working in partnership with the BCCI, WADA and the India NADA to resolve the outstanding issues as a matter of urgency," the ICC statement said.— Reuters

Sports

Barcelona beat Real Madrid to edge closer to La Liga title

Barca's victory eliminates their greatest rivals from the title race

MADRID: Barcelona won their second Clasico in four days on Saturday and Real Madrid might have to win the Champions League if Santiago Solari is to be in charge for the next one. After knocking them out of the Copa del Rey on Wednesday, Barca returned to the Santiago Bernabeu for a 1-0 victory that surely eliminates their greatest rivals from the title race too.

Lionel Messi and Sergio Ramos locked heads after Ramos flung an arm into Messi's face but, despite the scoreline and a few half-chances, that was about the most trouble Madrid caused. Messi would have been proud of Ivan Rakitic's delightful chip, a rare moment of precision that in the end settled another Clasico high on vigour but lacking in either real quality or rhythm.

"What we wanted was to deliver our best and to inflict damage on our rival," Barca coach Ernesto Valverde said. "We have done that." The onus was on Madrid, not only to make amends for their defeat in midweek but to reduce the nine-point gap between them and La Liga's leaders.

Instead, Barcelona extended it to 12 and the way their players jumped up and down in front of the away fans after the final whistle suggested they felt this was a major hurdle overcome. Barcelona also now own 96 victories in this fixture to Real Madrid's 95, the first time they have been in front in 87 years.

When Solari took over in November, his team were seven points adrift of the Catalans and the fact the deficit has almost doubled since might not reflect the improvement in performances. But this was the first time Madrid have lost three in a row at home in 15 years and these are surely the matches president Florentino Perez will remember when he considers his coach's future next summer.

"You go through spells, sometimes everything goes for you and sometimes it doesn't," said Solari. "In these two games it hasn't." All that realistically remains now is the Champions League, in which Madrid will carry a 2-1 lead into Tuesday's second leg at home to Ajax.

Europe has rescued them before and it also revived Gareth Bale, who endured another frustrating night on only his third start in 10 games. Bale was largely anonymous again and when substituted in the second half, he departed not just to a scattering of whistles from the home crowd but a chorus. "He tried, like the rest of the players," said Solari. It took Busquets 89 seconds to be booked and only a few more for Bale to send the free-kick over the bar but Madrid started with purpose, like a team determined to right the wrongs of before.

Their early impetus faded though as Barca, driven on by Messi, took control. Messi skipped through three players in midfield and was furious with Ousmane Dembele when he missed his late run into the box.

He then weaved in behind with the help of a Luis Suarez touch but, to everyone's surprise, the trademark lifted finish floated wide. Rakitic showed him how to do it. He played the ball wide to Sergi Roberto, continued his run behind Ramos and received it back, before feathering a delightful chip over Thibaut Courtois. Barca were comfortable but the game erupted on the stroke of half-time. Ramos won the ball from Messi but, with his arm outstretched, left it long enough to catch his opponent in the face. Messi pointed to his lip and then butted heads with Ramos but referee Alberto Malenco saw nothing worthy of punishment. Madrid pushed for an equaliser but their desperation showed. Benzema failed to connect while



MADRID: Real Madrid's Spanish midfielder Marco Asensio (R) challenges Barcelona's Croatian midfielder Ivan Rakitic during the Spanish league football match between Real Madrid CF and FC Barcelona at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on Saturday. — AFP

Vinicius Juniors' rushed shot was blocked. Bale was hauled off just after the hour, replaced by Marco Asensio, and even Isco came on in the 76th minute, for his longest

appearance since the end of January. Raphael Varane might have snatched a late equaliser but his header was weak. Barcelona were left celebrating again. — AFP

Caicedo, Immobile goals help Lazio win Rome derby

MILAN: Felipe Caicedo and Ciro Immobile scored as Lazio beat Roma 3-0 in the capital-city derby on Saturday to revive their hopes of Champions League qualification from Serie A. Simone Inzaghi's men ended their bitter rivals' eight-match unbeaten run in the league to move only three points behind Eusebio Di Francesco's fifth-placed team in the race for a top-four spot, with a game in hand.

Victory at the Stadio Olimpico for Lazio also pulled them within six points of fourth-placed Inter, with AC Milan one point further ahead in third after beating Sassuolo earlier on Saturday. Lazio coach Simone Inzaghi's decision to leave Immobile on the bench took less than 12 minutes to pay dividends as Joaquin Correa played in Caicedo, and the former Manchester

City striker rounded visiting goalkeeper Robin Olsen before tapping in his fourth league goal of the season.

Roma were much improved after the interval, with Stephan El Shaarawy and Nicolò Zaniolo both bringing saves from Thomas Strakosha. Alessandro Florenzi was the next to go close, as his long-range strike was tipped over by Strakosha, before Javier Pastore wastefully fired wide.

Lazio made their rivals pay 18 minutes from time, as Immobile scored his 16th goal of the campaign only eight minutes after coming on as a substitute. The 29-year-old striker sent Correa running through on goal, with Federico Fazio outpaced and resorting to bringing down the forward, and Immobile squeezed the resulting penalty underneath Olsen.

There was further pain for Roma late on, as a wonderful team move from Lazio ended with midfielder Danilo Cataldi curling home an 89th-minute third goal, before Aleksandar Kolarov was dismissed after picking up two yellow cards in a matter of seconds.

Earlier on Saturday, AC Milan took third place in Serie A from city rivals Inter as Gennaro Gattuso's men continued their fine run of form with a narrow 1-0 win over Sassuolo. The seven-time European champions' only defeat of 2019 so far was a 1-0 Super Cup loss to

Juventus in Saudi Arabia, and they are unbeaten in their last nine league matches.

But Gattuso was disappointed with his side's laboured performance at the San Siro, saying it felt like "a step back". "I take the positive results against Empoli, Lazio and Sassuolo, but we have got to do better," the former Milan midfielder told Sky Sport Italia.

"I don't want to talk about fatigue, I want to understand why we aren't sharp enough lately. We struggled against well-organised opponents."

Milan struggled for long periods to break down a stubborn Sassuolo outfit, with Spanish full-back Pol Lirola bundling the ball into his own net for the only goal 10 minutes before half-time.

Sassuolo saw goalkeeper Andrea Consigli sent off in the 64th minute for bringing down Krzysztof Piatek when the Polish striker was about to tap into an empty net, although Milan failed to find a second.

But it was enough to see them move one point clear of Inter, who were beaten 2-1 at Cagliari on Friday. Runaway league leaders Juventus can all but secure an eighth successive title on Sunday when they visit second-placed Napoli looking to open up a 16-point lead at the top of the table. — AFP

Galaxy honour Beckham on MLS opening day

LOS ANGELES: Major League Soccer kicked off a new season on Saturday with 10 games and a tribute to football great David Beckham whose arrival in 2007 helped usher in a new era for the then upstart league.

A statue of the former England captain was unveiled by the LA Galaxy outside their stadium in an emotional ceremony prior to their 2-1 victory over the Chicago Fire. Beckham's former Galaxy coach Bruce Arena and teammate Robbie Keane, as well as Beckham's wife, Victoria, attended the ceremony.

"From day one when myself, Victoria, and the kids arrived in this city we felt at home and for that we will be forever grateful," said Beckham, who is set to become an MLS club owner when expansion side Inter Miami joins the league.

"This city has always felt like home for me. My wife, my kids, my parents, and my friends, I couldn't have had the career I had without the support from you guys," Beckham made headlines around the world when he moved to the United States in 2007 after an illustrious career at Manchester United and Real Madrid.

His Galaxy deal was widely reported to be for US\$250 million over five years, but in reality the \$250 million figure was his potential earnings from salary, endorsements and club revenue. His base salary was \$6.5 million a year but he was promised a percentage of Galaxy revenues.

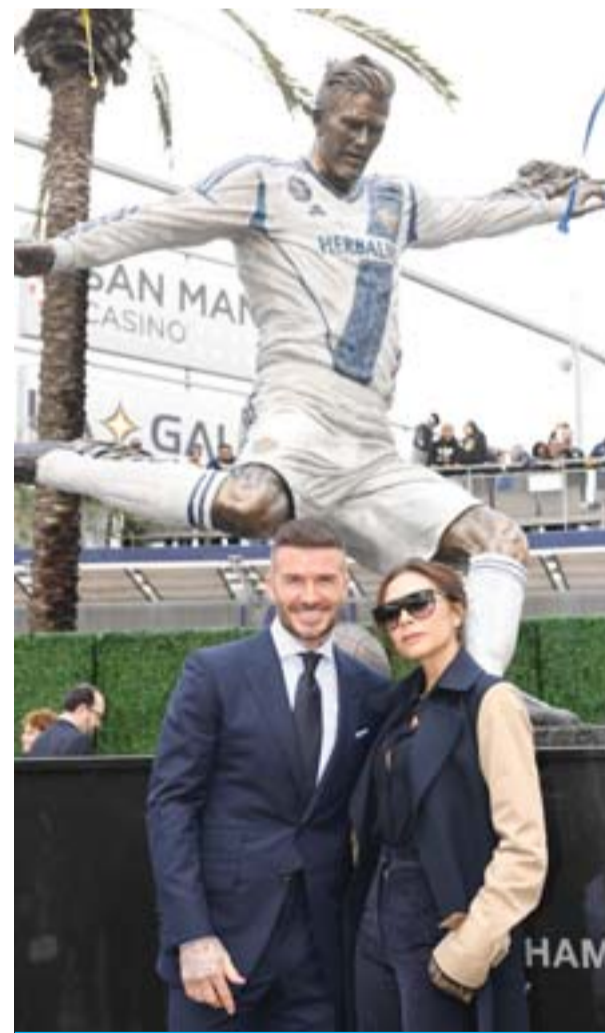
Beckham played for the Galaxy until 2012, taking league titles in his final two campaigns, during a career that also featured a stop with England's national team. "He wasn't one of the fastest players on the field, nor did he score many goals," Arena said. "He was an outstanding passer and a great free-kick specialist."

"He was an intelligent and skillful player. He was simply a great leader and a winner." Said former Los Angeles Lakers star Kobe Bryant, "the impact he had on the sport here in America can't be overstated. He was the first true big name to come to the States."

Beckham helped pave the way for European star players to follow and so it was fitting that Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored on a late header Saturday to lift the Galaxy to a season-opening win over the Fire.

Ibrahimovic, who was second in MLS last season with 22 goals in his debut campaign, rushed in to put his header past Fire goalkeeper David Ousted in the 80th minute. "We are not 100 percent but worked to get our first three points," said Ibrahimovic.

Elsewhere, Toronto FC captain Michael Bradley's brace lifted the Canadian side to a 3-1 victory at Philadelphia in the opening game of the season. The 31-



CARSON: Former Los Angeles Galaxy midfielder David Beckham (L) and his wife Victoria Beckham pose beside his newly unveiled statue at the Legends Plaza in Carson, California on Saturday. Beckham played for the Los Angeles Galaxy from 2007 until 2012. — AFP

year-old US midfielder found the goal three minutes into first half stoppage time and again in the 62nd to put Toronto on top.

Mexico's Marco Fabian answered for the Union in the 73rd minute but US midfielder Nick DeLeon sealed Toronto's victory three minutes into stoppage time.

Opening day also featured the debut of expansion squad FC Cincinnati, who opened late at Seattle. Three other early matches ended in draws with FC Dallas and the New England Revolution deadlocked 1-1, Orlando City and New York City level 2-2 and the New York Red Bulls finishing 1-1 with the Columbus Crew.

MLS Cup champions Atlanta, with a new manager and without star Miguel Almiron who decamped to Newcastle United in January, open their campaign today against Wayne Rooney and D.C. United. — AFP



Matches on TV (Local Timings)

SPANISH LEAGUE

CD Leganes v Levante
beIN SPORTS HD 3

23:00

Big-spending Qataris eye more Asian glory

HONG KONG: With the Asian Cup recently added to their trophy cabinet, Qatari soccer is preparing for an all-out assault on the Asian Champions League. The continental club championship launches today with Doha-based Al Duhail looking to become the first club from west Asia to claim the title since fellow Qataris Al Sadd in 2011.

Al Duhail have already made waves before a ball has been kicked. Coached by Jose Mourinho's long-time assistant Rui Faria, Al Duhail have been flaunting their wealth. Just days after signing Morocco international defender Mehdi Benatia from Juventus, Al Duhail splashed a record \$40 million to capture highly-rated Japan international winger Shoya Nakajima from Portugal's Portimonense.

The fee paid for the 24-year-old eclipsed the \$29 million paid by Parma to Roma for two-time Asian Player of the Year Hidetoshi Nakata in 2001, making Nakajima Japan's most expensive player.

A record-equalling nine wins in a row took Al Duhail to the verge of the 2018 semi-finals. The squad featured five of the side that would go on to win the Asian Cup for Qatar in the United Arab Emirates, including top scorer Almoez Ali and influential midfielder Assim Madibo.

Al Duhail are joined by fellow Qataris Al Sadd, semi-finalists last year, and Al Rayyan. Al Rayyan take on two-time winners Al Ittihad from Saudi Arabia on Monday in group A while Al Sadd, impressive last season with Xavi Hernandez at the heart of midfield, face another Saudi side, Al Ahli, in group D tomorrow.

Al Duhail, meanwhile, begin their campaign against Iran's Esteghlal on Tuesday in group C, which also features former winners Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal.

Japan's reigning champions Kashima Antlers, who won last year's two-legged decider against Iranian side Persepolis 2-0, begin their defence against Malaysian debutants Johor Darul Ta'zim on Tuesday.

Urawa Red Diamonds, who won the title in 2017, return after missing the 2018 edition and take on Thailand's Buriram United in group G, which also includes two-time winners Jeonbuk Motors from South Korea and China's resurgent Beijing Guoan.

Roger Schmidt's Beijing will be one of four teams looking to take the title back to China for the first time since the second of Guangzhou Evergrande's two triumphs in 2015.

Evergrande are also represented, along with big-spending domestic league winners Shanghai SIPG and Shandong Luneng in the 32-team tournament, which runs until mid-November. — Reuters

Mbappe gives PSG narrow win before Man Utd return leg

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain had Kylian Mbappe to thank as his brace saw the runaway Ligue 1 leaders come from behind to win 2-1 at struggling Caen on Saturday in their final outing before their Champions League last 16, second leg against Manchester United.

A week after reaching a half-century of goals in France's top flight at the age of 20, Mbappe netted a penalty for the first time in his Ligue 1 career just before the hour mark. That cancelled out Chadian forward Casimir Ninga's opener for Caen, and Mbappe then grabbed the winner in the 87th minute for his 29th goal in all competitions this season. Of those, 24 have come in the league, including six in the last four games. This was an eighth successive win for PSG in all competitions, and their enormous lead at the top of Ligue 1 is now 20 points before second-placed Lille play Dijon on Sunday.

"The coach said before the game that to prepare for the big matches we need to win the game before it," Mbappe told Canal+. "We had a three-hour bus journey to get here and we didn't do that to come and see the tourist sights—we wanted the victory, and now we are going to go home and focus on what is a very important match."

Coach Thomas Tuchel rested a host of players who are likely to start against United at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday, when Paris will look to follow through on their 2-0 win in the first leg last month. Gianluigi Buffon, Thiago Silva, Presnel Kimpembe, Juan Bernat, Marco Verratti and Julian Draxler were all either left on the bench or absent altogether. Neymar and Edinson Cavani are still sidelined, although the latter is now close to a comeback after a hip injury.

"The team worked hard for 90 minutes and to score such a late goal tells you something about our mentality," Tuchel told Canal+. "Now we must analyse Manchester United again. They have some players missing and now they are doing things a bit differently so we need to look at what team we will put out."

United's 3-2 win over Southampton on Saturday continued their fine run under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, with the first leg against PSG remaining the Norwegian's only defeat in charge.

PSG's humiliating collapse against Barcelona two years ago after they won the first leg 4-0 ensures they are not getting carried away. "It's not good to play with fear, but it's not good to play with too much confidence either," added Tuchel. "We have guys who played in Barcelona, who have that experience." — AFP

25 Korea's Park storms past field to win World Championship

26 Gayle blasts Windies to victory after England collapse

27 Barcelona beat Real Madrid to edge closer to La Liga title



Liverpool held in goalless derby

Watford's Gray strikes late to spoil Rodgers' Leicester debut



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's German-born Cameroonian defender Joel Matip (C) heads the ball away during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Liverpool at Goodison Park in Liverpool, north west England yesterday. — AFP

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool were left a point behind Premier League leaders Manchester City after they were held to a 0-0 draw by Everton in yesterday's Merseyside derby. City, who beat Bournemouth 1-0 on Saturday, have 71 points while Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool have 70 after their fourth draw in their last six games. Both sides have nine matches left.

Mohamed Salah had the two best openings for Liverpool before the break but his soft 15th minute shot barely troubled Jordan Pickford and then the Everton keeper was swift off his line to foil the Egyptian as he raced goalwards.

Everton's approach was to harry and disrupt Liverpool and they did that task well but struggled to create opportunities with Theo Walcott unable to capitalise on a rare opening, screwing his shot wide.

Salah threatened again in the 57th minute as he bore down on Pickford but Everton defender Michael Keane stopped a near certain goal with a perfectly timed last-

ditch sliding tackle. Klopp threw on Roberto Firmino in the 63rd but the striker was unable to open up an Everton defence that raised their game to deal a blow to their local rivals' title hopes.

Earlier, Watford's Andre Gray scored a stoppage-time winner as Leicester City began life under new boss Brendan Rodgers in underwhelming fashion, suffering a 2-1 defeat at his former club in the Premier League yesterday.

Watford clinched victory in the second minute of added time as Troy Deeney received the ball following a poor goal kick by Leicester keeper Kasper Schmeichel and fed substitute Gray who held his nerve to slide his finish into the net.

Eighth-placed Watford had taken the lead through Deeney in the fifth minute as the striker got his body across Wes Morgan and rose well to head home Gerard Deulofeu's whipped ball from a free kick for his first goal in 10 matches at Vicarage Road.

Leicester responded after the break as Jamie Vardy ran onto a fine through ball from midfielder Youri Tielemans and dinked his finish over Watford goalkeeper Ben Foster in the 75th minute for his 10th league goal of the season. Watford manager Javi Gracia hailed captain Deeney's impact as they moved to 43 points from 29 games, behind seventh-placed Wolverhampton Wanderers on goal difference. "Everybody knows how important he is for us because of his professionalism, personality, ambition and character on and off the pitch," Gracia told Sky Sports.

"There are nine games left and we have 43 points... I can feel the ambition of the group and they want more. I prefer to enjoy every game and do my best, it's the best way to enjoy something special at the end."

Despite conceding early, Leicester looked lively as the first half wore on but were unable to convert their good build-up play into clear chances, as Watford comfortably maintained their defensive discipline.

Watford began the second half on the front foot as Deulofeu combined well with Roberto Pereyra to tee up Abdoulaye Doucoure whose curling shot from distance was swatted away by Schmeichel.

Vardy, who endured a heavy collision with Foster earlier in the match, was substituted minutes after scoring as he appeared to suffer a delayed reaction to the knock. Rodgers was happy with Leicester's display despite the loss.

"The players were excellent in the second half and it looked like there was only one team that was going to win the game," Rodgers told the BBC. "We passed the ball well and opened up the game... you felt Watford were getting deeper and opportunities were coming and then the goal at the end, it's a case of managing the game. "That's something we'll get the more we work together. There were a lot of good signs." Leicester are 11th in the table after their seventh defeat in 10 games. —Reuters

Jorginho fires Chelsea as Kepa shines

LONDON: Jorginho fired Chelsea to a 2-1 win at struggling Fulham yesterday as Blues keeper Kepa Arrizabalaga began to make amends for his Wembley mutiny with an impressive display. Maurizio Sarri's side took the lead through Gonzalo Higuain before Calum Chambers equalised at Craven Cottage.

In an incident-packed first half, the much-maligned Jorginho restored Chelsea's lead with his first goal since the opening weekend of the season. Chelsea were also indebted to Kepa for a series of superb saves that preserved their lead after the break, lifting the sixth placed Blues within two points of fourth placed Manchester United.

Sarri had dropped Kepa for Chelsea's 2-0 win over Tottenham on Wednesday as punishment for the Spaniard's refusal to be substituted

during last weekend's League Cup final defeat against Manchester City.

But Sarri had insisted Kepa remained his "first choice" and the world's most expensive keeper returned in place of Willy Caballero after his one-game demotion. Despite an improved display in caretaker manager Scott Parker's first game following the midweek sacking of Claudio Ranieri, second bottom Fulham have lost eight of their past nine league games and sit 10 points from safety. Sarri's decision to restore Kepa to the team was a gamble that could have backfired as Chelsea made a nervous start. After Ryan Babel's cross opened up the Chelsea defence, Cesar Azpilicueta threw himself in the path of Tom Cairney's goal-bound shot, with the rebound falling to Joe Bryan, who curled wide from the edge of the area.

Kepa's return almost started in embarrassing fashion when he made a complete hash of catching Kevin McDonald's cross in a swirling wind, the ball slipping through his grasp as he was challenged by Babel.

It would have been an open goal for Babel, but the Fulham winger was slow to react and Kepa scrambled back to dive on the ball. Chelsea made the most of their escape to take the lead in the 20th minute. Willian's pass picked

out Azpilicueta's run down the right and Chelsea's captain whipped over a cross that Higuain met with an instinctive volleyed finish.

It was Higuain's third goal in eight games since the Argentine striker joined on loan from Juventus in January. Kepa redeemed himself with an acrobatic save to keep out Aleksandar Mitrovic's volley from Ryan Sessegnon's cross. From the resulting corner, Chelsea were punished for an awful piece of defending as Fulham grabbed a 28th minute equaliser.

Chambers was left totally unmarked when Fulham took the corner quickly, Babel picking out his team-mate at the far post for a well-taken finish. That blow was a test of Chelsea's fragile morale, but to their credit they produced an immediate response three minutes later. Eden Hazard was the catalyst with an incisive run into the Fulham area, the Belgian laying the ball back to the Jorginho, who guided a superb strike into the top corner from 18 yards. Higuain should have increased Chelsea's lead when he ran onto Jorginho's long pass, but his shot was woefully off the mark. Fulham were finding it impossible to stifle Willian and Azpilicueta down the right and the pair combined to tee up Higuain, whose powerful strike drew a brilliant one-handed save from Rico. — AFP



LONDON: Fulham's English defender Joe Bryan (L) vies with Chelsea's Italian midfielder Jorginho (R) during the English Premier League football match between Fulham and Chelsea at Craven Cottage in London yesterday. — AFP