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# Panel approves raising annual leave before Assembly voting

## Govt meets budgets committee over violations

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The National Assembly's health and labor committee yesterday approved amendments to the labor law to increase annual leave to 35 days in its final form and sent its report to the Assembly. The Assembly last Wednesday approved the amendment to raise the annual leave from the current 30 days to 35 days overwhelmingly in the first round of voting. The second voting is expected to take place on March 19.

The committee said in its report that the amendment will help more Kuwaitis join the private sector and

replace expatriates, eventually leading to reducing the number of expatriates. The amendment however applies to both Kuwaitis and expatriates. Another amendment calls on companies to pay indemnity from the first year of employment and not after three years if the employee resigns. The committee has expressed fears that the government may back down from its initial support to the amendments. Ministers present in the Assembly last week voted for the amendments. Head of the committee MP Humoud Al-Khudhair said the panel included all remarks made by MPs during the debate last week.

The Assembly's budget affairs committee yesterday held an expanded meeting with the government headed by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and attended by seven ministers to discuss tackling financial and administrative reports made by supervisory bodies, especially the Audit Bureau.

Head of the panel MP Adnan Abdulsamad said there were remarks regarding the budget and that it was necessary for the prime minister to be aware of them. He said the meeting was fruitful and it was decided that a small ministerial committee will be formed to discuss the remarks with the budgets committee. The

prime minister said after the meeting that the committee submitted proposals that are worth studying.

MP Riyadh Al-Adasani said the meeting focused on financial and administrative violations, and it was noticed there has been a drop in such violations. He said the committee called on the government to utilize some KD 20 billion in profits that have been kept by some state agencies without sending them to the finance ministry. He said that by utilizing those funds, there will be no need for the government to borrow to meet the deficit in the budget resulting from the fall in oil revenues.

## Israel shuts Aqsa mosque compound

**JERUSALEM:** Unrest at a highly sensitive Jerusalem holy site led Israeli police to shut off access to it yesterday after several weeks of tension at the location. Police said they evacuated the Al-Aqsa mosque compound after a Molotov cocktail damaged a police post. Video spread online of scuffles between police and Palestinians before the site was cleared. More than 10 people were arrested, police said, while the Palestinian Red Crescent reported two people hurt. A police officer suffered from smoke inhalation, police said. Police said they found a number of firecrackers and Molotov cocktails in searches of the site.

Residents said police were also restricting Palestinian access to Jerusalem's Old City, where the site is located. Worshippers later prayed outside the locked gates of the site in protest. Jordan, the custodian of the site, condemned its closure as "unacceptable". Abdul Nasser Abul Basal, Jordanian minister of Islamic affairs, told state-run Al-Mamlaka TV that the closure was an "attack on religious freedom".

The compound is the third-holiest site in Islam and a focus of Palestinian aspirations for statehood. It is also the location of Judaism's most sacred spot, revered as the site of the two biblical-era Jewish temples. Jews are allowed to visit but cannot pray there and it is a frequent scene of tension. It is located in east Jerusalem, occupied by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed in a move never recognized by the international community.

Recent weeks have seen scuffles over a side building at the site known as the Golden Gate. Palestinian worshippers have been entering the site despite an Israeli order that it should stay closed. Access to the Golden Gate was closed in 2003 during the second Palestinian intifada over alleged militant activity there, police say. Palestinian officials argue that the organization that prompted the ban no longer exists and there is no reason for it to remain closed.

Israel and Jordan are believed to be holding discussions to resolve the issue. Police have filed a request with Israeli courts for an order to re-close the building, but the court has reportedly delayed any decision to allow for more negotiations. There are concerns in Israel that tensions at the site could boil over and become a political issue ahead of April 9 Israeli elections. — AFP



**JERUSALEM:** Israeli policemen detain a Palestinian man in the Old City after Israeli forces closed the entrance to Al-Aqsa mosque compound yesterday. — AFP

## News in brief

### New cadets hospitalized

**KUWAIT:** Responding to social media reports about a number of cadets at Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences being admitted to Sabah Hospital, the interior ministry's PR and security media department explained that the cadets belong to a newly-recruited batch comprising of 700 cadets and that a limited number of them suffered from general fatigue resulting from routine daily physical exercises and transitioning from civilian to military life. It added the hospitalized cadets are receiving full attention and medical care and strongly denied they were subjected to abusive or severe exercises. The ministry strongly denied social media allegations that some of the cadets suffered severe injuries, adding that a committee had been formed to investigate the matter. — MoI

### Man throws baby son into sea

**BANGKOK:** Thai police arrested a Jordanian man who confessed to murdering his one-year-old son by strapping the child into a stroller and pushing him into the Gulf of Thailand, the country's immigration head said yesterday. The alleged infanticide occurred in the seaside town of Pattaya, where 52-year-old Wael Nabil Salman Zureikat was holidaying with his wife and one-year-old son. His arrest follows the discovery of the toddler's body on Monday by fishermen off Pattaya's main pier. His wife filed a complaint to the authorities, which led to the man's arrest. — AFP

### Turkey slams Bibi's 'blatant racism'

**ISTANBUL:** Turkey yesterday denounced Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's "blatant racism" after he called Israel the nation-state of "the Jewish people" only, not all its citizens. "I strongly condemn this blatant racism and discrimination," presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin wrote on his official Twitter account both in Turkish and English. "1.6 million Arabs/Muslims live in Israel. Will the Western governments react or keep silent under pressure again?" he asked. Netanyahu has been accused by critics of demonizing Israeli Arabs in a bid to boost rightwing turnout for the April polls. — AFP

## Bouteflika drops bid; protesters denounce 'tricks'

**ALGIERS:** Thousands of protesters returned to Algeria's streets yesterday after jubilation over President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's vow not to seek re-election gave way to fears of a plot to prolong his two-decade rule. In a surprise announcement Monday, the ailing 82-year-old said he would not stand for a fifth term - but also cancelled next month's presidential election. After initial celebration, thousands of students along with some lecturers held a new protest in the capital yesterday, accusing Bouteflika of "tricks".

"The students are resisting the extension of the fourth mandate," they chanted in an Algiers square that has been the epicenter of protests demanding Bouteflika resign. "It's a ploy to win time... in order to put in place another puppet like the (current) president," said a student who gave her name as Amel. Ghania Bellal, a journalism student, said Bouteflika "is mocking us". "Right from the start he wanted to extend his term," she said. "He got what he wanted... illegally." Protesters held up signs saying: "No extra time. This is not a football match".

Students also took to the streets of major cities Oran and Constantine, where they were joined by professors, local journalists said. The president announced on Monday that a "national conference" would set a new date for

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**ALGIERS:** Algerian students demonstrate in the center of the capital yesterday. — AFP

## Footballer granted Aussie citizenship after Thai ordeal

**SYDNEY:** A refugee footballer who fled Bahrain and was held in a Thai prison for months during a tense extradition stand-off between Australia and the Gulf state was granted Australian citizenship yesterday. Hakeem Al-Araibi, 25, left Bahrain in 2014 after he was accused of crimes committed during the Arab Spring protests of 2011, which he denied. He was granted refugee status in Australia but after an Interpol notice requesting his arrest was made by Bahrain, he was apprehended by Thai authorities in November when he flew to Bangkok for a honeymoon.

"I'm an Aussie now," he told reporters in Melbourne after a citizenship ceremony on the banks of the Yarra River that flows through the city. "I'm very happy to be safe." Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who lobbied for his release from detention in Thailand, met Araibi after the citizenship ceremony and handed him the Australian flag lapel pin from his jacket. "I had a little badge I was going to give you today, but I'm going to give you mine," Morrison said. "I think this is a tremendous day that we welcome you,



**MELBOURNE:** Refugee footballer Hakeem Al-Araibi poses with his citizenship certificate after a ceremony yesterday. — AFP

absolutely, into the Australian family."

Araibi also met Foreign Minister Marise Payne. "I am very grateful to you, now I feel safe. No one can follow me now," Araibi wrote on Twitter yesterday. "It's a wonderful and awesome feeling to gain all this respect in my citizenship ceremony, I'm really proud to see Marise Payne... and other government representatives participating in my ceremony it make me feel secure." Payne told the ceremony the massive outpouring of support for the footballer "played an enormous part in ensuring he was returned to Australia".

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## 2,000 surrender as IS releases defiant video

**BAGHOUZ, Syria:** Kurdish-led forces said around 2,000 people, mostly militants, surrendered from the Islamic State group's last scrap of territory in Syria yesterday, as air raids and shelling resumed after a brief lull. A ragged tent encampment in the eastern Syrian village of Baghouz is all that remains of a once-sprawling IS "caliphate" declared in 2014 across large swathes of Syria and neighboring Iraq.

The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces has been trying to crush holdout IS fighters for weeks but the mass outpouring of men, women and children from the riverside hamlet has bogged down its advance. Backed by the US-led coalition, the SDF renewed its assault Sunday after warning remaining IS fighters their time was up.

The group released a video late Monday allegedly showing militants in Baghouz, quietly defiant in the face of the advancing SDF. "If we had thousands of kilometers and now we only have some kilometers left, it is said we have lost - but

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## Local

# Kuwait Yacht Show returns for its 7th edition with an international touch

Nouf Al-Hajeri becomes first Arab member on Executive Committee of IFBSO



KUWAIT: (From left) Essam Al-Gharabally, Hashem Abul, Nouf Al-Hajeri, Aziz Al-Nasser, Ali Jaragh and Hamad Al-Matar attend the press conference. —Photo by Joseph Shagra

KUWAIT: The seventh edition of the Kuwait Yacht Show (KYS), Kuwait's most awaited nautical event, will return to the Marina Crescent from March 26 to March 30, to further raise awareness on marine brands and open a new window for dealers to the ever-expanding public of Kuwait and its vibrant maritime market.

Having six successful editions under its belt, Kuwait's 2019 KYS promises to be more spectacular than ever. Every year, KYS makes sure to upgrade its dealerships and outgrow its previous records of brand collaborations, with each successive show meeting clients' requests for larger showcasing spaces. When KYS was first launched, you would expect to find boats of 50 feet moored on display. Today, with an ever-growing need for bigger yachts, the show hosts a wide variety of 70 - 90 feet yachts.

This year's list of key marine brands is quite mouth-watering, comprising from amongst leading global names including Sunseeker, Azimut, Princess, Ferretti, and GulfCraft, being joined for the first time by brands including De Antonio from Italy, Suprema Marine from Bahrain, plus Al-Shaali Marine and Riviera from the UAE. For this edition, KYS has added a further berth, delivering its largest in-water presentation to date.

Aside from its renowned impact on the growth of the booming marine sector in Kuwait, KYS is always keeping an eye on under-acknowledged local start-ups, granting them commercial access to showcase

their products. To further add to its social responsibility concerns, KYS is launching an environment-friendly initiative with the aim of propagating its vision for a sustainable and green world.

New activities featured for the first time will range from daily marine-themed talks, debates, a live simulation by an expert kayaker, and many fish-casting competitions. Additionally, attendees will have the chance to savor the sailing experience on two sailboats offered by our special collaboration with the Kuwait Sailing Association. KYS will also give the stage to a special appearance of a spokesperson from the Environment and Public Authority, a sure sign of the value Kuwait places on the marine economy.

During this 7th edition, Zain, our Platinum Sponsor, will introduce its ZainLife range of products for smart home functionality, and KYS will launch its own official perfume Acqua dell'Elba, with Italian fragrances inspired by the saltiness of the sea and the exotic Tuscan islands. Aston Martin is the events exclusive, and luxurious, automotive sponsor, while Al-Batel Brothers are 2019's official timekeepers. All these, besides our highlight opening night, the perpetual favorite diving school, and our expanded F&B area.

A highlight for visiting public is the exclusive KYS 2019 raffle draw where one lucky registered visitor will win a Kuwait-made fishing boat from Gulf Master. Fully accessorized by Al-Sabeeh marine and Iboat, with a navigation system by Seas and



Hashem Abul, MD of Sea Pros Kuwait, the official representatives of Ferretti group.

Deserts, it is powered by a Mercury Engine courtesy of Al-Boom. The five-day-event will be held in the Marina Crescent in Salmiya, the KYS well established go-to venue for years, and the regular host for Kuwait's success in recapturing the attention of the region's marine world. Ideally located at the heart of a top retail commercial area, this three-kilometer tourist coast lane is panoramically placed within many international cafes and restaurants. Not to forget the Marina Yacht Club - an exclusive, state-of-art marina and yacht club that sits

right next door to the five-star full-fledged Marina Hotel.

We are also particularly delighted to announce that KYS has recently garnered the IFBSO's Silver Membership, whose Executive Committee also welcomed KYS' Managing Director Nouf Al-Hajeri as its first Arab member; an official acknowledgment of the value this now well-established yacht show has imbued on the international image of the nation and the region as well. Now sitting alongside many of the world's greatest established boat show members

such as Dusseldorf and Miami, Kuwait Yacht Show never fails to be a fixture under the region's calendar and the fair where yachting aficionados, life-style seekers, and families meet.

"We are proud to mark our seventh edition with so much exciting news! The largest in-water presentation, the largest number of regional and international exhibitors to date, a locally manufactured boat that we are giving for one lucky winner and much more. This edition is the fabulous culmination of 7 years of hard work," said Nouf Al-Hajeri - PH7.

"We have been supporters of the Kuwait Yacht Show from its very inception. Today, 7 years later, our relationship has been strengthened to a point where we feel we are true partners. We are proud of the successes of the past editions and are very excited to be having the 7th Edition here. It promises to be its best yet," said Ahmad Al-Kandari - Marina World.

"When, seven years ago we were asked to participate in the 1st Edition of KYS, we joined full of faith that together we will be able to create a national event awaited by all. Today we can say this vision is getting closer and closer to our aspiration. But, still, more needs to be done. However, PH7 - the organizers of KYS - and we the exhibitors, are sparing no effort and we are full of hope, that together, we shall keep raising the bar year after year," said Hashem Abul, Adel Al-Sumait, Fahed Al-Ghareeb and Ahmad Al-Ameeri.

## Zain concludes community partnership of sixth Qout Market

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, successfully concluded its Community Partnership of the sixth season of Qout Market; Kuwait's largest artisanal farmers gathering. This year, the event took place in Safat Square.

Zain is eager to play a vital role by partnering with Qout Market as part of its ongoing efforts of empowering local talents who contribute to shouldering the national economy. The company's solid and well-focused Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy continuously works towards identifying initiatives like Qout Market that carry a clear objective of developing local talents.

Zain took part in the event through its own dedicated booth, where it took the opportunity to promote its exclusive Amazon Prime Video offer, through which the company provides its customers with award-winning and popular movies, TV shows, and Prime Originals on its most advanced network.

Qout, the community-based farmers market, helps and supports local farmers and artisans to exchange



thoughts and ideas while offering the opportunity for visitors to express their opinions towards the products available. Qout Market has a proven record of success, having attracted over 15,000 visitors in previous seasons. The market's selection of vendors includes a combination of fresh produced items as well as handmade items where people can stop by to enjoy on the spot.

Zain expressed its ongoing keenness in supporting events that uplift local talents to higher levels, by encouraging outstanding projects and ideas. Zain's support is aimed at investing in the creative abilities of Kuwaiti entrepreneurs, preparing them to engage in the business world by encouraging them further and nurturing innovation within their businesses.



## AUB sponsors Mentor Arabia foundation

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) has announced its sponsorship of Mentor Arabia foundation for short awareness films for the young competition which was held on March 9th 2019 in the auditorium of the Kuwait National Library under the patronage of His Highness the Minister of Information and Minister of State for Kuwait Youth Affairs, Mohammed Al-Jabri. The mission of the regional Mentor initiative, which organizes this completion is to increase the awareness of young people of the risks of dangerous behavior and drug addiction, encouraging young talents to follow the path of artistic creativity and innovation, while highlighting the issues that are of particular importance to this segment of society.

Speaking on this occasion, Sahar Dashti, General Manager for Customer Protection and Responsible for the Social responsibility Program at Ahli United Bank, said: "Caring for youth and providing all the means appropriate to releasing their energy, supporting and motivating talented individuals among them and encouraging them to launch social, humanitarian and economic social initiatives is a top priority in the Bank's strategy for social work. We deeply believe that the younger generation are the core of our wealth and our dearest hope to achieve development and constructive change. Indeed, with the hands and minds of our young people we will succeed to realize the vision of His Highness the Amir of the State of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the New Kuwait 2035 Vision.

Dashti lauded the competition organized by Mentor

Arabia foundation for enabling Kuwaiti and Arab youth to create a space of free communication with their peers through short film works that treat the various negative phenomena and the drug problem in an innovative way that uses their own, special language, from their own perception of the problem. This competition encourages the sponsorship of young Arab innovators and achievers, adopting their energies and creating an appropriate environment for benefiting from their capabilities and talents.

Dashti thanked Mentor Arabia foundation for its insightful role in protecting the young from the risk of drugs and harmful conduct that threatens their future and undermines their ability to contribute to the development of their countries. She emphasized that Ahli United Bank is making every possible effort to support these far-sighted initiatives.

Dashti requested the representative of Mentor Arabia Foundation to look into the possibility of measuring the success of these films in conveying the message to the young people and how far they have influenced them toward achieving the key objective of this initiative.

It is worth mentioning that Mentor Arabia foundation Competition for short awareness films for the young is a regional initiative launched in 2017 in order to encourage youth around the world to develop short movies about the important of social and developmental work to protect young people and children against dangerous conduct and increase social awareness of the issues associated with protection against drugs.



KUWAIT: Sahar Dashti with the team of Mentor Arabia competition for short awareness films for the youth.

Local

# Amir commends charities: Humanitarian initiatives synonymous with Kuwaitis

Amir attends, patronizes 'Kuwait is Proud' project ceremony



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with the Kuwait Lawyers Association's Board of Trustees. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with International Islamic Charity Organization's Samia Al-Meimni.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with president of Kuwait's Eldercare Society Ibrahim Al-Baghli.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Kuwait Forum Charity Organization representative Abdurrahman Al-Asfour.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with director general of Kuwait's Humanitarian Relief Society Khaled Al-Shammeri.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace the Deputy Chief of Kuwait's National Guard Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also met with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Minister of Social Affairs Saad Al-Kharaz, along with representatives of Kuwait Forum Charity Organization and the winners of a local humanitarian award. His Highness the Amir commended Kuwaiti charities for their altruistic endeavors, saying such humanitarian initiatives have become synonymous with the Kuwaiti people.

His Highness the Amir's unwavering support is an incentive to pile up benevolent deeds, said a number of Kuwaiti philanthropists and hands-on volunteers. Shortly after their encounter with His Highness the Amir, representatives of Kuwait Forum Charity Organization and the winners of a local humanitarian award expressed their

gratitude for His Highness the Amir's backing in separate statements to the press. "We are deeply honored to have met His Highness the Amir," said the president of Kuwait's Eldercare Society Ibrahim Al-Baghli, thanking His Highness the Amir for his unyielding support. Mohammad Al-Hajeri, the head of a Kuwaiti rescue team, described His Highness the Amir's support as "motivational," saying it would encourage Kuwaiti philanthropists to further pursue charity work.

Similarly, the director general of Kuwait's Humanitarian Relief Society Khaled Al-Shammeri was equally grateful as well, saying His Highness the Amir's infinite wisdom and sage advice have been

instrumental in the growth of charity work in the country. One of the recipients of the humanitarian award, the International Islamic Charity Organization's Samia Al-Meimni, said the joy she felt as she met His Highness the Amir actually eclipsed the experience of winning the award. She added that His Highness the Amir is a true 'Humanitarian leader,' and an 'inspiration to all Kuwaitis.'

"Kuwait will always be known as a bastion of humanity and peace," the president of Kuwait Center for Documentation of Humanitarian Action Dr Khaled Al-Shatti emphasized. He went on to say that the Gulf state will remain a 'humanitarian center' given its people's pen-

chant for philanthropy.

His Highness the Amir's meeting spree, with Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah in attendance, included encounters with the Kuwait Lawyers Association's Board of Trustees. Also yesterday, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Sheikh Meshaal Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad.

Separately, His Highness the Amir yesterday addressed a cable to Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro expressing whole-hearted condolences for the victims of floods in Sao Paulo. His Highness the Amir wished the injured quick recovery. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables to the Brazilian President. In other news, His Highness the Amir is set to attend and patronize today the closing ceremony of the 'Kuwait is Proud' youth project. The ceremony will be held in Bayan Palace's Liberation Hall at 10:30 am. —KUNA



## Altruists find motivation in Amir's backing



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Chinese ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang. —KUNA photos

## Crown Prince hosts new envoys

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yester-

day at Bayan Palace the new Chinese ambassador to Kuwait Li Minggang. His Highness the Crown Prince also received Sierra Leone's new ambassador to Kuwait Haja Ishata Thomas and Ethiopia's newly named ambassador Abdel Fattah Abdullah Hassan. The meetings were attended by His Highness the Crown Prince's Diwan Chief Sheikh Mubarak Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah. —KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Sierra Leone's new ambassador to Kuwait Haja Ishata Thomas.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Ethiopia's newly named ambassador to Kuwait Abdel Fattah Abdullah Hassan.

## Foreign Minister receives letter from Qatari counterpart

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday received a letter from his Qatari counterpart Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. Delivered by Qatari Ambassador to Kuwait Bander Al-Attiyah, the letter has something to do with bilateral relations, ways of bolstering and cementing them in all realms as well as issues of mutual interest. The encounter was attended by Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah, Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister's Office Affairs Ambassador Saleh Alughani, Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for GCC Affairs Minister Plenipotentiary Abdullah Al-Mawid and several other senior officials of the Foreign Ministry. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled also met with the visiting GCC Secretary-General Abdul-Latif Al-Zayani. They addressed the forthcoming GCC activities, how to prop up Gulf cooperation and the latest regional and international developments. Senior Foreign Ministry officials were present at the meeting.

Earlier yesterday, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled met with South Africa's outgoing Ambassador to Kuwait M P Bona. During the encounter, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled applauded the South African diplomat's efforts and contributions to the promotion and consolidation of relations between both friendly countries in all areas. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled also received the outgoing Italian ambassador to Kuwait Giuseppe Scognamiglio. During the meeting, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled applauded the Italian diplomat's efforts and contributions to the promotion and consolidation of relations between both friendly countries in all areas. Several other senior officials of the Foreign Ministry attended the meetings. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Qatari Ambassador to Kuwait Bander Al-Attiyah. —KUNA photos



Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with GCC Secretary-General Abdul-Latif Al-Zayani.



Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with the outgoing Italian ambassador to Kuwait Giuseppe Scognamiglio.



Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with South Africa's outgoing Ambassador to Kuwait M P Bona.

## Local

# Kuwait backs efforts to stabilize oil market: Oil Ministry official

## Environment-friendly projects 'third renaissance in Kuwait's refining industry'

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait supports international efforts aimed at restoring balance and stability to the global oil market in a manner that serves common interests of crude exporting and importing countries, a senior official has affirmed. It devotes great concern to petroleum industries, in general, and downstream sector in particular, said the Kuwait Oil Ministry's Acting Undersecretary, Sheikh Talal Nasser Al-Adhabi Al-Sabah, addressing a conference, themed 'Performance Improvement of Petroleum Downstream Industry' that kicked off yesterday. He was speaking on Behalf of Minister of Oil, Electricity and Water Dr Khaled Al-Fadhel.

### Strategic enterprises

Currently, Kuwait is executing a number of strategic enterprises, namely the environmentally friendly crude complex and Al-Zour refinery, Sheikh Talal said at the convention, organized by the Organization of Arab Exporting Countries (OAPEC), in coordination with Japan Cooperation Centre Petroleum (JCCP). The efforts designed to stabilize the market, along with sincere adherence on part of oil producing countries in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), have led to noticeable improvement in the international crude market, he continues.

This congress is being held amid rapid developments in the global oil market. As for the State of Kuwait, it played a positive role, over the past two years, with

respect of cutting the crude output by OPEC and non-OPEC countries, in line with the key accord, worked out in end of 2016, when the stakeholders agreed to cut the production by 1.8 million barrels per day.

Turning to the vital environmentally friendly fuel and refinery projects, Sheikh Talal dubbed them "the third renaissance in the refining industry in the State of Kuwait," following the major ones in the 60s and 80s of the past century. Elaborating, he has affirmed the state's



### Oil ministry hosts downstream conference

approach to harness natural gas at power stations, as well as in the renewable energy sector, noting that the first phase of Al-Shagaya complex was recently inaugurated. This venture is projected to put out 70 megawatts, including 10 MW from solar panels, 10 MW from wind turbines and 50 MW from thermal solar energy. Shagaya venture has been launched in line with the Vision of His

Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to secure 15 percent of the country's energy needs from renewable and clean sources by 2030, he said.

### Various challenges

Meanwhile, Abbas Al-Naqi, OAPEC's Secretary General, has addressed the conference, saying that the congress is held at a time when the petroleum industry is facing various challenges and hurdles, on top of which volatility of crude oil prices globally, in spite of their relative stability around fixed rates, in addition to increasing burdens resulting from meeting international environmental legislations, and other factors that affect the global petroleum markets. In order to face these challenges, OAPEC member countries have been working on developing the petroleum industry in general, with a particular focus on refining and petrochemicals. This is done through developing existing facilities in these countries and building new ones equipped with the latest technologies to contribute to the development of the industry and boost its competitiveness so that they become one of the most important hubs for exporting high quality petroleum and petrochemical products to international markets.

Simultaneously with establishing new refineries, OAPEC members are executing many developmental projects to upgrade the performance of existing oil refineries, including Bahrain's Sitra Refinery. As for the



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Oil Ministry Acting Undersecretary Sheikh Talal Nasser Al-Sabah addresses the 'Performance Improvement of Petroleum Downstream Industry' conference yesterday. —KUNA

petrochemicals industry, Arab countries managed to have an important status in the global markets since the mid-1990s until now. Arab countries' total design capacity to produce ethylene in 2018 reached about 27 million tons/annum, while it was about 186 million tons worldwide in 2018 compared to 177 million tons in 2017. —KUNA

## Kuwaiti pilgrims advised to travel to hajj using civil IDs

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti pilgrims are advised to travel to hajj using their civil IDs instead of passports for easier and faster procedures. "Using the civil ID saves time, as they only have to swipe it and passenger is on the way, which is easier than stamping. Also, it allows the pilgrim to leave from another gate if the hajj campaign arranges for it," said Meshaal Al-Dalk, Kuwait Airways' Regional Director for Gulf, during a honoring ceremony held yesterday at the Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) headquarters.

According to Saudi regulations, pilgrims should enter and leave from the special gate for hajj. "If they enter with their passports and get a stamp, they should also leave from the same gate. The Kuwaiti hajj campaigns have succeeded to get exceptions when leaving Saudi Arabia to use a different gate. We have faced problems with those using their passport, as the procedure was complicated due to the stamp," Dalk added.

Kuwait Airways has 25 flights to three destinations in Saudi Arabia during the hajj season. "We offer additional flights during hajj on board of our 10 Boeing B777-300 ER aircraft with 290 seats in economy. We have added nine flights for departures and eight for arrivals. KAC flies to Jeddah, Madinah and Taif. Prices of tickets to Saudi Arabia for hajj will remain the same as last year," Dalk pointed out. "We have a special team of employees in Kuwait and in Saudi Arabia to help passengers during hajj. All flights will depart from Terminal



**KUWAIT:** Meshaal Al-Dalk, Kuwait Airways' Regional Director for Gulf (left), speaks during a press conference yesterday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

4 of Kuwait International Airport," he concluded.

During the event, representatives of hajj campaigns and travel agencies that dealt with KAC last year during the Hajj season were feted. The media were also awarded for supporting KAC in that period. "We held this ceremony to express our appreciation to travel agencies and hajj campaigns for choosing Kuwait Airways as their carrier for hajj. We would also like to thank the media for their coverage. This ceremony is part of our preparations for the coming hajj period," stressed Ahmad Al-Ajmi, Head of the Hajj and Umrah

Committee at KAC.

KAC is providing many facilities for pilgrims. "We provide check-in procedures for pilgrims 72 hours prior to their flights. We also allow them to check in their luggage 24 hours before the flight. In addition, passengers are allowed to choose their seats 72 hours prior to their flight," he explained. "We have two offices in Saudi Arabia to finalize travel procedures of pilgrims a day in advance. The pilgrims will also receive their luggage easily at Kuwait Airport after returning," Ajmi said.

## Natural gas production up to 3.5bn SCFD

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Oil and Minister of Electricity and Water Khaled Al-Fadhel said yesterday that Kuwait will reach its highest rate of natural gas production in 2031/2032, estimated at 3.5 billion Standard Cubic Feet/Day. The remarks were made by CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) Hashem Al-Hashem, on behalf of minister Fadhel, during the 27th Annual Conference of the Gas Processing Association-GCC Chapter held in Kuwait. He added that the future outlook for the rich gas development will be exposed to a great expansion in the near future when north Kuwait Jurassic fields will be fully operational by the year of 2023/2024, bringing Kuwait's rich gas production up to three billion Standard Cubic Feet/Day (SCFD).

Meanwhile, KPC executed measures to facilitate expansion in production and achieving sustainable developments, including launching its promising 2040 strategy for the upstream exploration and downstream refining sector, Al-Hashem said. He noted that natural gas has always been a major factor of Kuwait's economy as Kuwait has a long history of natural gas exploration and processing that goes back to the year of 1979 where Kuwait's first gas processing complex was commissioned at Mina Al-Ahmadi refinery-KNPC. In line with KPC strategic plan to meet the long-term fuel requirements for Kuwait's Growing Energy demand, Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) import will predominantly be the major source of fuel in Kuwait where Kuwait's giant LNG terminal project is coming in the year of 2022 at Al-Zour, he said. The \$2.9 billion project will consist of eight full containment tanks with a net capacity of 225,000 m<sup>3</sup> and a max send out rate of 3,000 BBTU/Day, he added. LNG is "energy and environment in harmony," and for that reason, it was chosen to be Kuwait's major domestic fuel source for its economic feasibility as well as environmental friendly impact, said the CEO.

### Fifth Gas train

Kuwait National Petroleum Company's (KNPC) CEO Waleed Al-Bader said that the fifth Gas train is expected to be commissioned at the end of 2019 that will boost KNPC's gas processing nameplate capacity to 3.1 billion standard cubic feet per day (BSCFD). At his speech during the opening of the conference, Bader said that the aim of Ethane Recovery plant in 2008 is to supply the downstream petrochemical industry with the required ethane feed. KNPC has commissioned its fourth top of the art Cryogenic gas processing complex in 2015 with a capacity of 805 MMSCFD of gas, he added.

KNPC has a bright long history in the development of Gas industry in Kuwait, which started in 1979. KNPC has been and continues to be the sole Gas Processing sector in the nation of Kuwait under the umbrella of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), Bader indicated. "Development of Kuwait Gas processing industry has continued in KNPC over the years by synchronization with the upstream gas exploration works, to bring to light many significant and strategic gas treatment and processing facilities such as Acid Gas removal unit in the year of 2000 to treat Kuwait sour Gas. Our outlook for rich gas processing based on KPC 2040 strategy where KNPC plays a significant role in its development representing the downstream sector," he confirmed.

KNPC's vision through the downstream 2040 strategy is to be a world-class refiner through superior operating performance by adding value to Kuwait's hydrocarbon and meeting domestic as well as international market demand with the highest products quality possible. The domestic refining 2040 strategy objectives are to enable higher gas production. KNPC is continuously developing and investing in its gas processing complex to meet the expected increase in Kuwait Gas production till 2040, which will require additional gas processing and treatment facilities to be built in the future such as a new LPG train and AGRP revamp project and operating KNPC Facilities to the highest operational standards.

Meanwhile, Gas Processors Association-GCC Chapter Wadhwa Al-Khateeb said, GCC Chapter is hosting for the first time this conference, which will be an opportunity of fruitful discussions and share of knowledge. Khateeb said that Gas Processors Association has expanded through the years since its establishment in the nineties of the last century, where the number of its members reached 29 companies including gas manufacturers, suppliers and contractors. The number of work papers submitted to this year's conference reached a high record of 209 papers, submitted by specialists from around the world, 54 papers selected and will be presented in two sessions. The conference program this year started two days ago with six technical workshops for the first time in the history of GCC chapter, she added.



**KUWAIT:** The Ambassador of Ghana to Kuwait Alhaji Rufal Yahaya Iddi hosted a reception on the occasion of his country's 62nd Independence Day at Crowne Plaza Hotel. Higher officials, diplomats, members of the Ghanaian community and media persons attended the event. —Photos by Joseph Shagra

Local

# Man charged with first degree murder after killing illegitimate newborn

## Suspect arrested after attempting to kidnap his girlfriend

By A Saleh and Hanan Al-Saadoun

**KUWAIT:** Police yesterday arrested an Egyptian man for attempting to kidnap his Filipina girlfriend and arranging with a compatriot of his to get rid of a newborn baby resulting from an affair with her, said security sources. Both suspects face first degree murder charges after they confessed that they arranged to get rid of the baby in a deserted area, the sources said. The case started when a Filipina woman had called police to report that her Egyptian boyfriend was trying to kidnap her. Rushing to the scene, policemen arrested the suspect, who later on led cops to the friend who helped him kill and get rid of the baby.

### String of fires

Firefighters battled a blaze reported in a Mubarak Al-Kabeer house yesterday. The house was evacuated and the fire contained without injuries. Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFS) said in a statement. Meanwhile, Wafra fire station men responded to a fire in a tent near an

electric transformer. Gas cylinders and jerry cans of gasoline and diesel were also in the vicinity. The fire was isolated and put out. In the meantime, firemen fought a fire in a vehicle on Fahaheel Road near Sabahiya. A team from Mangaf fire station led by Lt Col Faisal Al-Arbeed responded to the call. No injuries were reported.

### Joint exercises

US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman and assistant undersecretary for operations and training at the National Guard Maj Gen Faleh Shujaa inspected joint exercises between the National Guard and US Marines in urban combat at HH Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Camp and American Embassy compound that will continue until March 15. They inspected the locations and listened to a briefing about the training stages.

### New roundabout

A new roundabout across Razi Hospital on Jamal Abdunnasser Road was opened yesterday that connects with the roundabout and Saad Al-Abdullah Security

Sciences Academy on Jahra Road with three lanes. A side bridge from Jamal Abdunnasser Bridge to Ghazali Bridge towards the airport's Terminal 4 was also opened.

### Power outage

A thief failed in his attempt to steal cables from a main transformer in Saad Al-Abdullah as he cut a wrong cable that caused a power outage in houses fed by the transformer, Al-Rai daily reported yesterday. Informed sources at the ministry of electricity said emergency teams in Jahra received a call about a power cut, and discovered a cable was cut. Sources said the suspect escaped after realizing he will be discovered after cutting the wrong cable. Investigations are underway.

### Officers fight

A special forces soldier quarreled with an investigator at a Farwaniya police station when he went there to lodge a complaint against a car rental office, reported Al-Rai. The soldier was referred to the investigations office where a dispute took

place between the investigator and her partner on one side and the soldier on the other. The enraged soldier called general security and threatened to harm workers at the station. Investigations are underway to make sure investigations are done in a correct manner, the reasons of the verbal exchange and find the guilty party.

### Jewelry theft

A police officer accused his driver of stealing jewelry and other valuable belongings worth KD 35,000 after breaking into the house. The officer lodged a complaint against the driver, citing his disappearance. Detectives are working on the case.

### Counterfeits

Hawally police arrested an Egyptian man carrying a bag containing counterfeit aphrodisiacs and suspicious pills, and was sent to concerned authorities. The suspect fled when he saw the police, so he was chased and caught. The materials were found in the bag, so he was arrested and sent to concerned authorities.

## Medical panel suspended over 'leaves' scandal

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

**KUWAIT:** Ministry of Health (MOH) undersecretary Dr Mustafa Redha yesterday suspended the medical committee operating at the general medical council until further notice. Redha also instructed medical committees in various hospitals to double check sick leave recommendations made by the general medical council and related complaints. Earlier, Health Minister Sheikh Dr Bassel Al-Sabah had issued immediate instructions to Redha to form a special committee to investigate a letter trending on social media about the medical council's performance and alleged violations the council's committee might have committed.

## 365 expat teachers to lose their jobs at school year's end

By A Saleh

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Education's (MOE) public education sector yesterday made lists include the names of 365 expat teachers to be terminated by the end of this school year (2018-2019) upon CSC's request to replace them with Kuwaiti teachers. Educational sources said the list was submitted to the minister for approval, adding that the terminated teachers include those for Islamic studies, social studies, electricity, psychology, biology,

history and computers. The sources also expected that once approved, the list will be passed on to relevant educational areas to notify the concerned teachers.

In another educational concern, Education Minister Hamed Al-Azmi ordered an immediate investigation in an assault committed by a primary schoolboy on one of his classmates. A statement issued by MoE stressed that the ministry will never tolerate violation of its regulations and that it managed to identify those involved in the assault and those who videotaped it, noting that very strict penal measures would be taken after Jahra educational area's legal affairs department finishes investigating the matter.

### Health insurance

The State Audit Bureau agreed to extend the contract of the company providing health insurance registration and health insurance cards for a further six months (January 29-July 27, 2019) without any cost to the Ministry of Health (MoH). In another health issue, Dr

Salem Ali Al-Kandari announced the 5th Kuwait Conference for Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation will be held in the period of March 15 to 17, 2019 at Salwa Sabah Al-Ahmed Hall under the motto 'Together for Better Rehabilitation'. Kandari added that Kuwaiti, regional and international specialized doctors will take part in the conference, which is scheduled to include nine seminars, 26 lectures and four workshops discussing the latest in physiotherapy and rehabilitation.

### Mother's custody

In a most humane incident, two Kuwaiti brothers recently resorted to a court when they failed to agree on who deserves more to take custody of their 89-year-old mother and take care of her at his house. Speaking to the judge, the younger brother demanded taking care of his mother, while the elder brother insisted that being the eldest makes him more responsible for doing so, which brought tears to the eyes of all those present in the courthouse.

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PROUDLY MOVING FORWARD





Global Boeing fears grow; more nations suspend 737 MAX

## India engineers struggle for work as jobs crisis worsens



GURGAON: Indian people walk amid heavy smog in Gurgaon. India dominated a list of the world's most polluted cities in 2018, taking 22 of the top 30 spots, according to a Greenpeace report, with Gurgaon-which has changed its official name to Gurugram-topping the list. — AFP

# Pollution killing more people than smoking

## Air pollution causes 8.8 million premature deaths worldwide

PARIS: Air pollution causes 790,000 premature deaths every year in Europe and 8.8 million worldwide, doubling recent assessments, according to a study released yesterday. Between 40 and 80 percent of those excess deaths are caused by heart attacks, strokes and other types of cardiovascular disease underestimated up to now as a driver of smog-related mortality, researchers reported. On average, a toxic cocktail of pollutants from vehicles, industry and agriculture shortens the lives of those who die prematurely by 2.2 years, they calculated.

"This means that air pollution causes more extra deaths a year than tobacco smoking, which the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates was responsible for an extra 7.2 million deaths in 2015," said senior author Thomas Munzel, a professor at the University Medical Centre Mainz in Germany. "Smoking is avoidable, but air pollution is not." Small and larger particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and ozone (O<sub>3</sub>) have likewise been linked to drops in cognitive performance, labor productivity and educational outcomes.

The new study, published in the European Heart Journal, focused on Europe, but the updated statistical methods were also applied to the rest of the world. "The

revised number for China is 2.8 million deaths per year," more than two-and-a-half times current estimates, lead author Jos Lelieveld, a researcher at the Max-Planck Institute for Chemistry in Germany, told AFP by email. Findings for non-European countries will be published separately, he said.

The scientists applied the new Global Exposure Mortality Model to a much-expanded epidemiological database-with updated figures for population density, age, disease risk factors, causes of death-to simulate the way in which natural and man-made chemicals interacts with the atmosphere, itself composed of gases. By far, most deaths were attributed to microscopic particles less than 2.5 microns in diameter, known as PM<sub>2.5</sub>. By comparison, the average human hair is 60-to-90 microns thick. "New data has become available for fine particulate matter indicating that the hazardous health impact of PM<sub>2.5</sub> are much larger than assumed previously," said Lelieveld.



### Toxic cocktail of pollutants shortens lives

**Burning fossil fuels**  
The WHO has recommended that the density in the air of these dangerous microscopic particles should not exceed, on average, 10 micrograms per cubic metre (35 mcg/m<sup>3</sup>) per year. European Union standards are far more lax: 25 mcg/m<sup>3</sup>. But even at this level, several European countries regularly exceed this limit. "The WHO standards over the last decades have become stricter," said European Environment Agency executive director Hans Bruyninckx, who was not involved in the study.

"We used to speak primarily about carcinogenic effects, or immediate impacts on the respiratory system," he told AFP. "But now we understand the link with cardio issues, brain related issues, and some reproductive issues." Worldwide, the study found that air pollution causes an extra 120 deaths per year per 100,000 people. In Europe, despite more stringent pollution controls than in most other regions, the figure is higher - 133 deaths per 100,000 people.

"This is explained by the combination of poor air quality and dense population, which leads to exposure that is among the highest in the world," said lead author Jos Lelieveld, a researcher at the Max-Planck Institute for Chemistry, also in Mainz. Even steeper rates of excess death in eastern Europe-over 200 per year per 100,000 people, for example, in Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania-were attributed to less advanced health care. "Since most particulate matter and other air pollutants in Europe come from the burning of fossil fuels, we need to urgently switch to other sources for generating energy," said Lelieveld.

The 2017 Global Burden of Diseases study found that PM<sub>2.5</sub> and ozone pollution caused some 4.5 million deaths in 2015, while European Environment Agency estimates, also based on 2015 data, calculated 480,000 premature deaths-due to the three most toxic forms of air pollution-in the European Union. The new study "suggests earlier models underestimated the cardiovascular risk associated with air pollution, and we tend to agree," said Holly Shiels, a researcher in the Division of Cardiovascular Sciences at the University of Manchester. "The call for reassessment of current UK and EU air quality regulations seem highly warranted." — AFP

## Indian opposition pivots back to jobs after Modi gets boost on security

GANDHINAGAR, India/NEW DELHI: India's main opposition Congress party switched its campaign focus back to economic and social issues such as jobs yesterday as pollsters said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's re-election bid has been boosted by hostilities with neighboring Pakistan. "How will the youth get jobs? How will women feel safer, and move forward? What will be done for farmers?," Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said in her first speech since joining the party as a general secretary earlier this year. "These are the election issues."

Her brother, Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, called unemployment the most important issue in the general election, which starts on April 11. Thousands of party supporters clapped and cheered as the siblings spoke at a rally in Gandhinagar, the capital of Modi's home state, Gujarat. Pollsters have said Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has an early advantage after India's armed forces clashed with those of arch-rival Pakistan last month.

Before then, the prime minister had been under pressure over unemployment and rising problems for farmers. India's unemployment rate shot up to 7.2 percent in February, the highest since September 2016, according to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy. The BJP lost power in three states late last year. The jobs numbers took a back seat after a Feb 14 suicide car bomb that killed 40 Indian security personnel in the disputed region of Kashmir and that was claimed by a



ADALAJ, India: Indian Congress President Rahul Gandhi (center) waves to attendees next to All India Congress Committee general secretary for eastern Uttar Pradesh Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during a rally yesterday. — AFP

Pakistan-based Islamist militant group. In response, India said its warplanes bombed a militant camp inside Pakistan, which responded the next day with an aerial attack of its own.

Amid doubts about the success of the Indian strike, opposition parties including Congress said earlier this month they would launch a united attack on Modi for what they called his politicization of the armed forces since the confrontation with Pakistan. Pollsters had said questioning Modi on national security rather than focusing on everyday issues could backfire on the prime minister's opponents. BJP leaders have said the government's

economic record and the tough stance on Pakistan will help it retain power.

Zakir Hussain, who travelled about 85 km to attend the Gandhinagar rally, said he voted for the BJP in the last general election in 2014 but was now impressed by Congress. "Congress has fulfilled the promises it made before the elections," Hussain said, referring to the waiving of farm loans in three states where the party won back power from the BJP. "So I will vote for Congress and they will form the government this time." Results from the election in the world's second most populous country are due on May 23. — Reuters

## Afford me not: Soaring bride prices in China

BEIJING: Runaway "bride prices" are making marriage unaffordable in rural China and need to be capped, and professional matchmakers should be stopped from overcharging, says a village delegate to China's parliament. China's rapid economic growth in the past decade has sharply raised parental expectations, pushing up the cost of pre-wedding gifts that now commonly include a brand new home.

In the past, a suitor would offer the parents of his bride about 11,000 yuan (\$1,639). Now, future in-laws demand at least three "jin" (1.5 kg) of hundred yuan bills, a car and a house, said Zhang Qingbin, a delegate to the annual National People's Congress from Hebei province. "In the south of northern China, a young man looking to get married would need to spend around 700,000 yuan (\$104,275)," Zhang wrote in a proposal to NPC. "This is a huge financial burden, with steep bride prices becoming a key reason behind rural poverty," he added.

In rural areas, where annual per capita incomes of about 15,000 yuan (\$2,234) are just a third of earnings in cities, a groom's need for cash is relatively acute. With the economy facing a further slowdown this year, the chances of finding a bride are more remote, aggravating a rural phenomenon known as "leftover men" who cannot afford marriage. Zhang blamed the parents of prospective brides who want to elevate their standard of living by demanding a high price from suitors.

Marriage subsidies could be one way to wedded bliss, he said, pointing to a pilot subsidy program in Taiyuan city in neighboring Shanxi province. Taiyuan set up a Marriage Consumption Subsidy Fund in 2017 which offers newlyweds rebates on wedding pictures, the banquet, honeymoon travel and even white goods to furnish a new home. Unaffordable marriages are also a factor in China's bigger demographic problem - falling birth rates. Many NPC delegates called for improved maternity benefits to encourage couples to have more babies as the country faces an ageing population and shrinking workforce. — Reuters

## International

# Iraqi faces German court in 'Susanna' rape-murder case

## Rape and murder of a girl inflamed anti-immigrant tensions

**WIESBADEN:** An Iraqi man went on trial in Germany yesterday accused of the rape and murder of a teenage girl that inflamed anti-immigrant tensions amid a mass influx of asylum seekers. The accused, Ali Bashar, 22, left Germany for northern Iraq shortly after the May 2018 crime but was arrested and brought back in a mission joined personally by Germany's federal police chief. Bashar's trial for the rape and murder of 14-year-old schoolgirl Susanna Maria Feldman started under tight security in Wiesbaden, the city where the killing took place. Around a dozen people held a vigil for the victim outside the courthouse.

Bashar has admitted the killing to police interrogators but denied the rape, meaning he already faces a likely life prison term, which in Germany usually translates to 15 years behind bars. To Germany's far right, Bashar, who is also accused of raping an 11-year-old girl in a separate case, has become a symbol of the threat allegedly posed by the wave of mostly Middle Eastern newcomers. Before the trial, the anti-Islam Alternative for Germany (AfD) party again blamed Chancellor Angela Merkel and her grand coalition or "GroKo" government for Susanna's death.

"The problem isn't 'the right' but the knife-man immigration caused by the GroKo that has caused ever more bloody crimes," the party wrote in a Facebook post. The AfD became the biggest opposition party when it entered parliament in late 2017, riding a wave

of public anger over sexual assaults and other violent crimes committed by some recent migrants. In another case last year, the fatal stabbing of a German man in the eastern city of Chemnitz, allegedly by immigrants, sparked outbursts of mob violence in which far-right



**Bashar admits the killing but denied the rape**

extremists hunted people of foreign appearance through the streets.

### Shallow grave

Bashar, along with his parents and five siblings, first arrived in Germany in 2015, the year that saw the peak of the migrant influx which would bring more than one million people to Europe's biggest economy. His request for asylum was rejected in December 2016, but-in a case critics label as symptomatic of an over-

whelmed and dysfunctional system-he obtained a temporary residence permit pending his appeal.

Merkel later conceded in a TV interview that "the case shows how important it is that people who don't have residency rights quickly face a court and can be speedily sent back home". In May last year, Bashar allegedly beat, raped and strangled Susanna to death in a wooded area near his refugee shelter in Wiesbaden. Her body was then buried in a shallow grave covered with leaves, twigs and soil, near railway tracks. When her remains were found two weeks later, Bashar and his family had left Germany for Arbil, northern Iraq.

However, he was arrested by Kurdish security forces and, despite the absence of a formal extradition treaty between Iraq and Germany, taken back to Germany. In a controversial operation personally joined by federal police chief Dieter Romann, Bashar was put on a flight back to Germany, with pictures of him disembarking under heavy police guard making front pages. Bashar also faces charges for a park robbery in which he allegedly beat, strangled and threatened a man with a knife to steal his watch, bag, phone and bank card.

He faces a separate trial from March 19, accused of having twice raped an 11-year-old girl - once in April 2018 after locking her in his room, and again near a supermarket carpark the following month. Prosecutors have also laid charges against an Afghan youth who was living in the same refugee shelter, Mansoor Q, who



**WIESBADEN:** Defendant Ali B hides his face as he waits for the opening of his trial yesterday at a court in Wiesbaden, western Germany. The Iraqi man is accused of the rape and murder of teenage girl Susanna that inflamed anti-immigrant tensions amid a mass influx of asylum seekers. —AFP

was believed to be aged at least 14 at the time, also for the rape of the 11-year-old girl. Prosecutors have said Bashar's younger brother - who is believed to be in Iraq, according to media reports - also took part in a sexual assault against the younger girl. — AFP

## Nigeria governorship vote 'inconclusive' in 6 states, sparking fury

**ABUJA:** Nigeria's electoral board said yesterday the outcome of governorship polls in six states was inconclusive, sparking opposition fury and raising the prospect of re-runs and legal action. It said violence and other irregularities had prompted voting Saturday to be cancelled in some areas of Kano and Sokoto, in the northwest, Bauchi and Adamawa in the northwest, and the central states of Benue and Plateau. "We have concluded elections in 22 states. We have six states inconclusive and one suspended, that is Rivers," said Festus Okoye, from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

In areas where the poll was cancelled, the total vote exceeded the margin between the top two candidates, which prompted returning officers to declare the outcome for that state to be inconclusive, he said. "They did not satisfy the margin of lead principal as stated in our regulations and guidelines," he said. The development comes after election observers criticized the organization and running of Saturday's vote, as well as presidential and parliamentary polls on February 23.

The European Union said on Monday there were "systemic failings and electoral security problems" in both that indicated a "real need for serious reform". President Muhammadu Buhari's beaten rival, Atiku Abubakar, of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), called the vote a "sham" and is challenging the result in court. The PDP said it was "clearly leading the (governorship) race" in the affected states and accused INEC of collusion with Buhari's ruling All Progressives Congress (APC).



**PORT HARCOURT:** Protesters hold banners during a demonstration against the suspension of governorship elections in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. — AFP

INEC was "seeking ways to use the situation to aid the APC to alter the results and announce APC candidates as winners", it said in a statement on Monday evening. Sokoto governor Aminu Tambuwal said he would challenge the decision in court. The situation comes after INEC suspended the count in the southern state of Rivers for 48 hours on Sunday after violence and the invasion of a collation centre by men in uniform. The PDP called the suspension "a barefaced assault... akin to a coup d'etat". The military has blamed political thugs dressed in army fatigues.

Local elections are fiercely contested in Nigeria, as powerful governors generally have more impact on ordinary people's day-to-day lives than presidential and parliamentary votes. Governors control huge budgets and are responsible for areas such as infrastructure, and the provision of health and education. Nigeria is split into 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja. Going into the election, the APC held 22 states and the PDP 13. According to results declared yesterday, the APC was ahead by 11 states to nine. —AFP

## Runaway IS teen's mother begs for 'mercy' from UK

**LONDON:** The mother of a London girl who ran away to join the Islamic State group in Syria urged the UK government on Monday to reinstate the teenager's British citizenship after she lost her third child. A lawyer representing Shamima Begum's family wrote to interior minister Sajid Javid, pleading with him to reverse his February 19 decision to strip her of her British citizenship "as an act of mercy". Begum, now 19, had asked to return home after giving birth to a son last month in a refugee camp in north-eastern Syria, but London refused. The three-week-old baby, Jarrah, has since died from pneumonia.

She has told British media that her two other children died in infancy in Syria. Begum's fate has sparked heated debate in Britain, which like other countries is facing a dilemma over whether to allow jihadists and IS sympathizers home to face prosecution, or stop them from returning at all. She was 15 when she left east London for Syria with two other schoolgirls in 2015. She was found by journalists in a refugee camp after fleeing fighting between the jihadist group and US-backed forces. She is married to Dutch IS fighter Yago Riedijk, 27, who is now being held in a Kurdish-run detention centre in northeast Syria.

### Call for mercy

Urging Javid to reverse his decision, Begum's mother "requests this reconsideration, as an act of mercy", following Jarrah's death, said the letter from law firm Farooq Bajwa and Co. "It is extremely unlikely that Shamima will be in a fit state to make any



**Shamima Begum**

rational decisions." The letter said the family have not been able to contact Begum directly and their request for help from the British government to contact her was refused in writing by the Home Office on March 5. "There are immediate fears for Shamima's health and safety, and the matter is urgent," the letter said, asking for a response within 24 hours. The letter was posted on Twitter by lawyer Tasnime Akunjee.

In the wake of the baby's death, Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt said officials were working on how to rescue British children born to IS runaways. Hunt said the death of Begum's third child was "an incredibly distressing and sad situation" but that it was too dangerous to dispatch officials to the war zone. "Shamima knew when she made the decision to join Daesh (IS) she was going to a country where there's no embassy, where there's no consular assistance," he told BBC television on Sunday. "And I'm afraid those decisions, awful though it is, they do have consequences." —AFP

## Dope-dealing ring on messaging app busted in Israel

**JERUSALEM:** Israeli police said yesterday that undercover officers had broken up a drug-dealing network that used a popular messaging app and had connections in the United States, Ukraine and Germany. "After several months of covert investigation 42 suspects were this morning detained in Israel and abroad for questioning under caution on suspicions of trafficking various types of drugs," a police statement said.

It said the transactions amounted to "hundreds of millions" of Israeli shekels (tens of millions of dollars/euros). The suspects, the statement added, traded through the encrypted messaging app Telegram. Police designated the ring "Crime Organization 420" and published its organizational chart, with one person at its head and a hierarchy of executives for finance, infrastructure, security and development, among others.

The statement did not give any names and did not link the suspects to the Israeli drug marketplace Telegrass, which uses Telegram. Israeli public radio, however, said that Telegrass founder Amos Dov Silver was among those arrested. The radio said that the suspects allegedly dealt not only in marijuana but also ecstasy and cocaine. It said that Silver, a dual Israel-US citizen resident in the United States, was arrested in Ukraine and Israel would request his extradition.

The Telegrass website carried a message in Hebrew on Tuesday describing it as a "black day". "Hope you never know

how much it hurts to get up in the morning to find out that your friends have been arrested," it said. "That their homes were turned upside down, that they were treated worse than animals, that their little children were frightened in the middle of the night with dogs and violent shouts."

A police spokesman could not immediately be reached for comment. "Wages for staff and managers of the organization were transferred in cash, in bitcoins, or drugs, while concealing the source of the funds," the police statement said. Officers of the Israeli police cyber-crime unit worked with Ukrainian, US and German law enforcement, it added.

### 100,000 clients

Telegrass has let sellers list their wares and prices, exchanging self-deleting messages with buyers to set up deliveries. "We don't know exactly how many people are using the platform, however we have over 100,000 registered users," Silver told AFP in an online chat in 2017.

Silver described himself as a marijuana legalization activist who was not in it for financial gain. Some politicians have taken up the issue of marijuana legalization ahead of Israel's April 9 polls, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Monday night that he might consider it. "I have led some changes in this area," he said on his Likud party's YouTube video channel. "We have increased the use of medical cannabis, bringing Israel to one of the highest levels in the world."

Asked about legalization in general, he replied: "I'm checking your question. I'll give you an answer soon." The government in January gave the final go-ahead for the export of medical cannabis, a move expected to generate significant revenues for the state. In 2017 the public security ministry partially decriminalized recreational marijuana use, setting fines and treatment for initial offenders instead of criminal procedures. — AFP

## News in brief

### Woman cuts off her hand

**LJUBLJANA:** A Slovenian woman and her relative have been detained for allegedly cutting off her hand with a circular saw to get nearly 400,000 euros (\$450,000) in insurance compensation, police said yesterday. The 21-year-old and her relative, 29, face up to eight years in prison on charges of attempted fraud. "With one of her accomplices, she intentionally amputated her hand at the wrist with a circular saw, hoping to stage it as an accident," police spokesman Valter Zrinski told a news conference. The woman is thought to have staged the incident, together with three relatives, earlier this year shortly after the group signed life and injury insurance contracts with five different insurance companies. All four were arrested initially, but two were released. The woman was hoping to get around 380,000 euros of compensation and a life-long monthly payout of some 3,000 euros, police said. — AFP

### Brazil floods leave 12 dead

**SAO PAULO:** Floods caused by torrential rain in and around Brazil's financial hub Sao Paulo killed 12 people and hurt six others overnight, firefighters said yesterday. In the town of Ribeira Pires on the periphery of the country's most populated city, four members of one family died and another two were injured when a house collapsed around midnight. Another landslide killed one person in Embu das Artes, while three neighbors drowned in Sao Caetano do Sul, one in Sao Paulo, two in nearby Santo Andre and one more in the industrial city of Sao Bernardo do Campo, authorities said as they provided an updated toll. Firefighters had to rescue several people stranded by the water and mud in Sao Paulo, Brazil's biggest city and financial capital, with more than 20 million people. — AFP

### Killing of black activist

**RIO DE JANEIRO:** Two policemen were arrested yesterday in the killing of Brazilian black activist Marielle Franco, news reports said. These are the first arrests in a case that shocked Brazil. Franco was a left-leaning Rio city councilor who grew up in a slum and went on to become a respected defender of blacks, the poor and the LGBT community. She was killed a year ago in a drive-by shooting, along with her driver, Anderson Gomes. Franco was also an outspoken critic of police violence against poor people. News website G1 reported the arrests, quoting homicide police. A sergeant in the military police, Roni Lessa, 48, was arrested on suspicion of being the shooter, G1 said. And Elcio Vieira de Queiroz, 46, who was reportedly expelled from the military police, is suspected of having driven the car from which Franco was gunned down on March 14 of last year in downtown Rio. — AFP

### US seizes metric tons of cocaine

**NEW YORK:** US authorities on Monday announced the seizure of nearly 1.5 metric tons of cocaine with a street value of \$77 million, the biggest drug haul in nearly 25 years at the port of New York/Newark. Sixty bundles of the white powder weighing 3,200 pounds were found in a container at the port on February 28, the Drug Enforcement Administration said. No arrests have been made in the case, which remains under investigation. "Cocaine, New York's nemesis of the 90s, is back," DEA special agent in charge Ray Donovan said. Donovan said the size of the seizure - the second largest in the port's history and the largest there since May 1994 - reflected a push by traffickers to build a market for a mixture of cocaine with fentanyl. The United States, the world's largest consumer of illegal drugs, is currently experiencing a deadly epidemic of opioid use. — AFP

## International

## Global Boeing fears grow as more nations suspend Boeing 737 MAX

## UK joins wave of nations suspending Boeing 737 MAX

**ADDIS ABABA:** Britain joined a growing wave of suspensions of Boeing 737 MAX aircraft around the world yesterday, escalating the global alarm after a crash in Ethiopia that killed 157 people in the second such disaster for the model in the past few months. The decision by one of the industry's most established regulators was the most serious setback yet for Boeing in the wake of Sunday's crash and put pressure on regulators in the rest of Europe and the United States to follow suit.

At the same time as London's announcement, Norwegian Air said it too would temporarily ground its MAX 8 passenger jets on the advice of European regulators. Earlier, Singapore, Australia, Malaysia and Oman had also temporarily suspended the aircraft, following China, Indonesia and others the day before.

"The UK, Singapore and Australia are independent professionals," said Teal Group analyst Richard Aboulafia. "I am sure the (US) Federal Aviation Administration will take their judgment into account." Sunday's disaster - after the fatal crash of a 737 MAX jet in Indonesia in October - has wiped billions of dollars off the market value of the world's biggest planemaker. But experts say it is too early to speculate on the reason for the crash or whether the two are linked. Most crashes are caused by a unique chain of human and technical factors.

Given problems of identification at the charred disaster site, Ethiopian Airlines said it would take at least five days to start handing remains to families. The victims came from more than 30 different nations, and included nearly two dozen UN staff. "We are Muslim and have to bury our deceased immediately," Noordin Mohamed, a 27-year-old Kenyan businessman whose brother and mother died said. "Losing a brother and mother in the same day and not having their bodies to bury is very painful," he said in the Kenyan capital Nairobi where the plane had been due.



## Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 black boxes found

**Fireball**  
Flight ET 302 came down in a field soon after take-off from Addis Ababa on Sunday, creating a fireball in a crater. It may take weeks or months to identify all the victims, who include a prize-winning author, a soccer official and a team of humanitarian workers. The United States has said it remained safe to fly the planes, and Boeing has said there is no need to issue new guidance to operators based on the information it has so far.

**Better software**  
Boeing said it had been working with the FAA following the Lion Air crash to enhance flight control software that would be deployed across the 737 MAX fleet in the coming weeks. The MAX 8 has new software that automatically pushes the plane's nose down if a stall is detected. There is no evidence so far whether the system was involved in the Ethiopia crash, though experts

## Fireball

Ethiopian Airlines has grounded its four other 737 MAX 8 jets as a precaution. Anxiety was also evident among some travelers, who rushed to find out from social media and travel agents whether they were booked to fly on 737 MAX planes - the same model in the Lion Air crash off Indonesia that killed 189 people in October. If the black box recordings found at the Ethiopian crash site are undamaged, the cause of the crash could be identified quickly, although it typically takes a year for a full probe.

Nearly 40 percent of the in-service fleet of 371 Boeing 737 MAX jets globally is grounded, according to industry publication Flightglobal. That includes 97 jets in biggest market China. Boeing shares fell another 4.8 percent yesterday after having lost 5 percent on Monday. The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued a "continued airworthiness notification" for the 737 MAX on Monday to assure operators, and detailed a series of design changes mandated by Boeing after the Indonesia crash.

## Better software

Timmermans said in a statement. The agreement must still undergo legal review before being approved by the European Parliament and the European Council, which groups the member countries. The Commission introduced the proposed legislation in April last year.

## EU moves to protect whistle blowers from reprisal attacks

**STRASBOURG:** European Union negotiators said yesterday they had struck a first bloc-wide provisional agreement aimed at protecting whistle blowers from reprisals following corporate scandals such as Dieselgate and Cambridge Analytica. Negotiators from the European Parliament, European Commission and the European Council said the deal would boost the fight against fraud, corruption, corporate tax avoidance and damage to people's health and the environment.

"We should protect whistleblowers from being punished, sacked, demoted or sued in court for doing the right thing for society," said Frans Timmermans, first vice president of the Commission, the 28-nation EU's executive arm. "These new, EU-wide whistleblowers' protection rules do exactly that and will make sure they can report in a safe way on breaches of EU law in many areas,"

## Brexit 'orphan' finds home in EU a la carte champion Denmark

**HERNING:** Briton Andrew Tristram has been left an "orphan" by Brexit, but he's found another welcoming home in Europe and will soon become a citizen in Denmark, champion of a European Union a la carte. Before June 23, 2016, the thought of obtaining Danish citizenship had never occurred to him. But after Britain's referendum result in favor of Brexit, the 47-year-old can't wait to get his hands on his new European passport.

"I haven't had a Danish passport before because it feels a bit like treason, like I'm giving up on Britain. But they gave up on me," Tristram says, sitting in the foyer of the theatre in Herning, western Denmark, where he works in production. In November 1992, he moved to the europhile Scandinavian country after falling in love with a Danish woman he met in London. He has lived here since then, while maintaining close ties with his native Wales. He now speaks Danish fluently. Like all Britons living outside the United Kingdom for more than 15 years, he was not entitled to vote in the Brexit referendum. "All these people decided what happens in my life and I don't get a say," he fumes.

**'Disappointed' by Brexit**  
"I thought it meant something to have a



**WASHINGTON:** A pair of Boeing 737 MAX airplanes sit outside the company's factory yesterday in Renton, Washington. Boeing's stock dropped today after an Ethiopian Airlines flight was the second deadly crash in six months involving the Boeing 737 Max 8, the newest version of its most popular jetliner. —AFP

said this would be a focus of the investigation. The new variant of the 737, the world's best-selling modern passenger aircraft, could become the workhorse for airlines around the globe for decades and another 4,661 are on order. In Latin America, Gol in Brazil temporarily suspended MAX 8 flights, as did Argentina's state airline Aerolineas Argentinas and Mexico's Aeromexico.

In Asia, South Korean budget carrier Eastar Jet said it would temporarily ground its two 737 MAX 8s from Wednesday, while India ordered additional checks. Vietnam state media reported the aviation regulator would not issue licenses to local airlines to operate the 737 MAX until the cause of the Ethiopian crash was known. Still, major airlines from North America to the Middle East kept flying the 737 MAX. Southwest

Airlines Co, which operates the largest fleet of 737 MAX 8s, said it remained confident in the safety of all its Boeing planes.

Former FAA accident investigator Mike Daniel said the decision by regulators to ground the planes was premature. "To me it's almost surreal how quickly some of the regulators are just grounding the aircraft without any factual information yet as a result of the investigation," he said. In Nairobi, the UN Environment Program set up a small memorial for Victor Tsang, a staff member who lost his life. "Travel well my friend, see you on the other side," said one entry in a condolence book beside a framed photograph, bouquet of flowers and candle. By mid-afternoon, 23 pages of the condolence book had been filled with over 250 names. —Reuters

## News in brief

## 'Will call you when I land'

**NEW DELHI:** An Indian newly-wed who died in the Nairobi-bound Ethiopian Airlines plane crash had texted her husband she would call him on landing, local media reported yesterday. Shikha Garg, who was travelling to attend the annual assembly of the UN Environment Program, had got married less than three months ago to Soumya Bhattacharya after dating for three years. Bhattacharya was also supposed to fly with her to Nairobi but a last-minute change in plans meant he stayed back in New Delhi, the mass-circulation Times of India reported. "I have boarded the flight and will call you once I land," Garg texted. But before the husband could type a reply, his phone buzzed and a caller informed him about the plane crash, the newspaper said. Bhattacharya had also bought a flight ticket for Nairobi but cancelled it because of an urgent meeting. —AFP

## 22 killed in Yemen strikes

**SANAA:** Twelve children and 10 women have been killed by strikes in Yemen's northern province of Hajjah in the past 48 hours, the United Nations said yesterday. Up to 30 people were reported wounded, including 14 children, several of whom "require possible evacuation to survive," the UN's humanitarian coordination office OCHA said in a statement. The UN did not say who was responsible, but Houthi rebel media outlets accused the Saudi-led coalition that is fighting on the side of the Yemeni government of being behind the bombardment. Some areas of Hajjah province are controlled by government forces, while others such as Kushar district which was hit by the strikes are in the hands of the Iran-aligned Houthi rebels. Houthi official Deifallah Al-Shami accused the coalition of "deliberately committing... this massacre," in a statement carried by the rebels' Saba news agency. —AFP

## Policewoman shot dead

**PARIS:** A French policeman who shot and killed a fellow officer at police headquarters in Paris was fooling around with his service weapon when it went off, a police source said yesterday. The accident took place on Sunday at the new headquarters of the criminal police in the northwest of the capital. The police source said the officer who fired the shot was playing with his gun near the entrance to the building when it went off, hitting his colleague in the head. He has been suspended and taken into custody, judicial and police sources said. A spokesman for the SCPN police union, Jean-Paul Megret, told France Info radio that the two officers had been practicing drawing their weapons, "either playfully or out of stupidity." Noting that such exercises were strictly restricted to the shooting range, he said it was "all the more tragic given that they were just beginning their careers." —AFP

## Fighter jet crashes; 2 die

**BEIJING:** A Chinese navy fighter jet crashed during training on the southern island province of Hainan yesterday, killing two pilots, the defense ministry said. There were "no casualties on the ground," the ministry said in a statement, adding that the cause of the accident was under investigation. China's military, which is undergoing a well-funded modernization drive, has had other accidents in recent years. An air force plane crashed in Guizhou province during a training exercise in January 2018, killing crew members onboard, the air force said, without revealing the number. State media reported the crash of an aircraft carrier-based J-15 fighter in April 2018 during training, resulting in the death of the pilot. —AFP



**VOSGES:** Whistle-blower at the origin of the LuxLeaks affair Antoine Deltour, poses in Epinal, eastern France. The European Union announced yesterday that it would commit to protecting whistleblowers by using 'safe channels' which will prevent them from being targeted. —AFP

breaches and pursue their cases while providing them with legal, financial and psychological support.

Protection for whistle blowers is patchy across the bloc with only ten countries providing comprehensive legal protection: France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Slovakia, Sweden and Britain. The Commission said whistle blowers have

already played an important role in the Dieselgate scandal, where Volkswagen was discovered to have used devices to hide diesel emissions. They also recalled how they helped expose the scandal at Cambridge Analytica, the now defunct British data consultancy accused of having harvested the data of millions of Facebook users without their permission. —AFP



**LONDON:** Anti-Brexit activists demonstrate outside the Houses of Parliament yesterday, ahead of the second meaningful vote on the government's Brexit deal. —AFP

45 minutes allotted. "You get a booklet and everything apart from the last five questions ... is in the booklet." Candidates need to correctly answer 32 of 40 questions to pass. Almost half of those who take the test fail.

## Slow process

Andrew has been waiting for more than a year for his citizenship application to be processed. "If I'm exceptionally lucky then I'll be on the list (of people naturalized) in autumn this year," he says. There's no chance he'll get his citizenship before Britain's scheduled exit from the EU on

March 29. "I'm not expecting to be thrown out of Denmark, but I can see that the summer holiday can very well be a problem."

He and his family usually drive to Britain, passing through a number of European countries on the way. "If I'm going to have to apply for a visa to every single country, it's going to be an expensive holiday," he moans. But the real problem is the uncertainty about what Brexit will entail. "None of us knows what's going to happen," he says, more fed up with the British political delays than the slow Danish naturalization process. —AFP



International

# India engineers struggle for work as jobs crisis worsens

## Jobless engineers an example of skills gap among India's youth

**CHINCHWAD:** Santosh Gurav gained a bachelor's degree in technology from a mid-tier college in western India last year, specializing in electrical engineering and hoping to land a job in industrial automation. Six months on, the 27-year-old repairs mixer-grinders, table fans and other household appliances at a cramped shop in the western city of Pune.

On better days, he picks up broken LED lights from scrap dealers, fixes them, then sells them. He earns about \$50 a month, just enough to cover the rent for the room he shares with two others as his home. "I haven't even started repaying my education loan," said Gurav, referring to the nearly \$4,000 he'd borrowed for his undergraduate study.

He is one of hundreds of thousands of engineers - studying everything from computer code to civil engineering - that India's education system churns out each year, many with large loans and little prospect of finding a job in their field. They highlight Prime Minister Narendra Modi's difficulty in fulfilling a promise he made weeks after coming to power in 2014: creating millions of jobs by boosting manufacturing under a flagship 'Make in India' project launched with much fanfare. "Come, Make in India, we will say to the world, from electrical to electronics," Modi said in his maiden Independence Day speech as prime minister, pledging to create up to 100 million new jobs by 2022.

### No echoes of China boom

Four years on, the program's impact on job creation is unclear and growth in the manufacturing sector has been sluggish, partly due to a lack of land and

labor reform. India's unemployment rate rose to 7.2 percent last month, up from 5.9 percent in February 2018, according to data compiled by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) think tank. The figures are more recent than government data and many economists regard them as more credible. The data, which is an estimate based on household surveys, shows 31.2 million people were actively looking for jobs in February this year, said Mahesh Vyas, the CMIE managing director. It did not have a breakup for engineering or technology graduates.

With more than half of India's population under 25 years of age, critics say the votes of jobless youth could hurt Modi's chances of securing a second term in the upcoming general election to be held in April-May. The increasing use of automation in industry, the massive number of young Indians coming onto the job market, and the regulatory hurdles that companies still face if they want to set up shop in India, are all big issues for those without work.

The manufacturing boom that helped China in the past 40 years will not wash up on India's shores. Companies can no longer afford to just rely on cheap labor: they need skilled labor and better infrastructure to drive technological innovations and increase productivity. Employers often complain about the lack of

skilled engineering and technology graduates, said Varun Aggarwal, an electrical engineer and co-founder of the skills assessment firm Aspiring Minds. Its surveys show over 80 percent of the engineers India produces are not employable. The employability has not improved in seven years, Aggarwal said.

"The numbers have just not budged," he said. "Many can't even write basic code." "We need to start there, at the beginning of the education system," said Aggarwal.

The IT industry had long been seen as a gateway to the middle class in India, but a move to robotics and artificial intelligence has replaced some positions. The business process outsourcing industry - seen as a stable provider of "offshore" jobs - added the least number of employees in seven years in 2017-18 (April-March), according to the trade body Nasscom.

### Lack English skills

At a recent job fair organized by a college in the town of Chinchwad in western India, Gurav was among hundreds queued up to apply, including dozens of engineers, even though most companies were hiring for marketing and finance positions. Many came from rural areas where they studied in regional languages, and lacked strong English skills - another gap that recruiters say India's education system needs to address.



Over 80 percent engineers in India not employable



JAKARTA: A Jakarta's Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) waits for passengers after it opened for the first time to the public yesterday. — AFP

## Indonesians get first chance to ride subway

**JAKARTA:** Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, held yesterday the first public trial run of its \$3 billion mass rapid transit (MRT) system aimed at improving transport conditions in a city suffering some of the worst traffic jams in the world. The MRT, which is officially due to open on March 26, was developed with Japanese expertise and funding, and is a centre-piece of an infrastructure boom under President Joko Widodo, who is seeking re-election in April. Dozens of excited residents, many of them students, rode in the shiny, air-conditioned carriages, tested the ticketing machines, and wandered through the stations.

"I'm impressed that it's like any foreign country, like Singapore!" said Mika, a 23-year-old student, who registered weeks ago for the trial run. But some passengers complained that facilities in some stations and feeder lines had not been finished. "Some of the supporting infrastructure ... for pedestrians and passengers is very incomplete," said Irfan, 40, who had brought his son along for the subway ride. Construction workers in hard hats were racing to finish up walkways and other facilities in some stations.

The first phase is a 16-km stretch that runs

partially underground from south to central Jakarta along one of the city's main thoroughfares. The train takes about 30 minutes, compared with more than an hour by car in regular traffic. Construction of the second line - an 8-km stretch that ends in north Jakarta - is underway and it should be operational by 2025. Ticket prices have been set at an initial 10,000 rupiah (70 cents) and the trains can carry more than 28,000 passengers a day. Delayed for more than 20 years, the project was finally launched in 2013, with the first line originally

scheduled to open in 2018.

As well as its awful traffic jams, Jakarta regularly suffers from floods and earthquakes and the MRT was built to withstand such disasters, said Silvia Halim, construction director of PT MRT, the Indonesian-Japanese consortium that is developing the network. "We have used the reference of standards from Japan," Halim said. "The structure of the tunnel and the viaduct can hold up against a magnitude of 8 or equivalent." Flood barriers have been installed to protect the underground stations from inundation, she said. — Reuters

## Protest in south India over alleged assaults on women

**NEW DELHI:** Reports of sexual assault on women in southern India have sparked outrage, with opposition politicians yesterday protesting against what they called a lack of progress in the investigation. The case has received widespread media coverage in Tamil Nadu state weeks before a general election, with opposition parties accusing the state government of "shielding" the perpetrators.

A state minister who often speaks on behalf of the government did not respond to calls and messages seeking comment. Police in Tamil Nadu said they had arrested four men based on a complaint by an alleged victim, and were investigating if the accused were serial offenders. The victim, a 19-year-old woman, said in a complaint filed with the police that she was travelling with the four men, two of whom she knew, in a car last month when she was forcibly disrobed and videotaped.

She alleged the men then threatened to upload the video online if she did not meet them whenever summoned. Senior police official R Pandiarajan said late on Monday that police had recovered four videos from the arrested men, involving other victims. He said numerous women could have been targeted by them, but declined to give specifics.

Police appealed to victims to come forward. The main opposition party in one of India's biggest and most developed states, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, held a protest on Tuesday to demand faster action on the case, police said. The #MeToo movement in India gathered momentum last year with numerous complaints of sexual harassment and other sexual misconduct leveled against prominent journalists, actors, movie directors, comedians and other public figures. — Reuters

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## Pakistan military eyes key role in developing mine

Pakistan's military is taking a key role in the development of one of the world's biggest untapped copper and gold deposits, which is currently stalled by a multibillion-dollar legal wrangle with foreign mining firms, multiple sources familiar with the situation said. The Reko Diq mine has become a test case for Prime Minister Imran Khan's ability to attract serious foreign investment to Pakistan as it struggles to stave off an economic crisis that has forced it to seek an International Monetary Fund bailout.

Ten current and former provincial and federal government officials and mining sources familiar with the project in the Baluchistan region say the military has become the most important voice on the future of Reko Diq, which it sees as a strategic national asset. The military will not only be in a position to decide which investors develop the deposit, but an army-controlled engineering firm, Frontier Works Organization (FWO), is positioning itself to be a member of any consortium involved, these people said. "This has been taken over by GHQ," said a senior Baluchistan government official, referring to the Pakistan army's General Headquarters in the garrison city of Rawalpindi.

In a statement in response to Reuters' questions about its role in Reko Diq, the military spokesman's office said: "(The military) may only participate in government's plan of development of Reko Diq, as per national requirements." But it acknowledged that FWO, best known for building roads throughout Pakistan's rugged and lawless border regions, has developed "substantial" mining capability in recent years and would be interested in taking a role in the project.

"If an opportunity arises of participating in developing Reko Diq, FWO may work at par with other competitors (or) companies provided the project is financially viable (or) suitable," the statement said. When asked, a spokesman declined to elaborate on the statement. Pakistan's Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said civilian authorities in the insurgency-hit southwestern province of Baluchistan were in charge of Reko Diq and, along with Khan, would take a decision, but added that the military "and all other stakeholders are obviously important players".

FWO referred questions to the military spokesman's office. Khan's spokesman Iftikhar Durrani said Baluchistan province was in charge of Reko Diq, and referred questions to the provincial government and the military spokesman's office. The manoeuvring behind the project shows how the military, which has historically dictated Pakistan's security and foreign policy, is leveraging its sway over the civilian government at federal and provincial level to carve a growing role in the nation's business affairs. The army has ruled the nuclear-armed nation for nearly half its history and is considered to have a major influence over Khan's recently elected government. A military spokesman declined to comment. "The military has taken a front seat," said Ayesha Siddiqui, author of the book "Military Inc," which analyses the army's business interests and influence in Pakistan. "They've understood that the economy is important for having a strong military," she said. "Control of the economy also gives the military a handle over expanding their business interests."

### Talks

Buried at the foot of an extinct volcano near the frontier with Iran and Afghanistan, the mine's development has long been delayed by a dispute with previous investors in the project, Canada's Barrick Gold and Chile's Antofagasta. The government is urgently trying to settle the dispute as a World Bank arbitration tribunal, which ruled against Pakistan in 2017, is in the next few months expected to announce how much in damages the country must pay to the foreign firms, who are claiming more than \$11 billion. The dispute relates to the withholding of a mining lease.

Islamabad is also trying to find new partners to invest in the project. But any new investors will need the blessing of Pakistan's military, according to government officials and mining sources. State-run companies from resource-hungry China have long coveted Reko Diq and more recently Saudi Arabia has shown interest, according to Pakistani officials. Some Western diplomats say the Reko Diq dispute has been a significant foreign investment deterrent, with international businesses unnerved at how Pakistan dealt with the companies that had pledged to invest \$3.3 billion to develop the country's then-biggest mining project.

Barrick Gold and Antofagasta, whose joint venture Tethyan Copper Company (TCC) discovered vast mineral wealth in Reko Diq, say they had invested more than \$220 million by the time the Baluchistan government, in 2011, unexpectedly refused to grant them the critical mining lease needed to keep operating. Pakistan argued its move was legitimate because TCC's feasibility study was incomplete and the country's Supreme Court voided the deal in 2013. But in 2017 the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) ruled against Pakistan.

### Foreign investors

The last serious attempt at settling the Reko Diq case was scuppered in 2016 by the military, which vetoed paying hundreds of millions of dollars to TCC, according to a senior Baluchistan official and two former senior officials in Islamabad. But the military has since changed its stance and is more open to a settlement with TCC, according to a lawmaker close to the military and a source close to Prime Minister Khan. The military was also involved in appointing Pakistan's current legal team. In response to a Reuters question about blocking the previous settlement effort, the military said: "Let's see how the case progresses." It did not elaborate or comment on whether it was playing any role in the latest negotiations. —Reuters



Relatives push a man on a wheelchair as he leaves after receiving treatment for kidney failure at a state-run clinic in Caracas on March 10, 2019. —AFP

## Lights go out on Venezuela kidney patients

Alfredo Quintero's kidneys failed five years ago, so he needs dialysis three times a week just to stay alive. But Venezuela's massive power outage that caused chaos in the South American country left Quintero in a panic, with dry mouth and nausea. He was actually connected to a hemodialysis machine when the lights went out. Luckily, though, Quintero managed to take advantage of a brief resumption of electricity in parts of Caracas on Sunday to get the desperately needed blood purification treatment. "I came to try my luck and thank God there was light," said the 23-year-old.

The hemodialysis process involves the pumping of a patient's blood through an external filter that replaces the defective kidneys. The blackout is into its fifth day and while electricity supply has been intermittent in the capital, several states have been totally cut off since Thursday. At least 15 people died between Saturday and Sunday due to a lack of dialysis treatment, the non-governmental organization Codevida told AFP. President Nicolas Maduro's government, widely blamed for Venezuela's economic meltdown, claimed on Sunday there were no deaths in public hospitals, adding that dialysis machines had been supplied by generator power.

## Ticking clock may save Trump from impeachment

A momentous question hanging over Washington is whether investigations into President Donald Trump will prompt the US Congress to try to remove him from office through the impeachment process set out in the US Constitution. The answer could be significantly influenced by the clock. With the 2020 presidential and congressional election campaigns already gearing up, the political calendar could dictate whether initiating the time-consuming impeachment process is even plausible, Democratic and Republican lawmakers said.

An emerging sentiment among some lawmakers is that by the time a president is nearing or in the last year of a four-year term, voters in the next election, not Congress, should determine whether he stays or goes, even amid allegations of wrongdoing. The House of Representatives, which would initiate any impeachment bid against the Republican Trump, is controlled by Democrats. Republicans control the Senate, which would conduct a trial and then vote on whether to remove Trump if the House impeaches him for any "high crimes and misdemeanors," as the Constitution specifies.

A Republican-led House voted to impeach Democratic President Bill Clinton in 1998, midway through his second term in office, and the Senate voted not to remove him in 1999. Under the Constitution, presidents are barred from seeking a third term. Asked whether Congress should begin impeachment actions against Trump if it means doing so late this year or into 2020, Senator Dianne Feinstein, the Senate Judiciary Committee's top Democrat, told Reuters, "Well, the (presidential) race is next year, so I would think it would not make sense perhaps to do it in an election year."

"But the year before, I think is fair game," added Feinstein, who like all Senate Democrats at the time voted to acquit Clinton of the perjury and obstruction of justice counts approved by the House. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Trump is unfit to be president but she is "not for impeachment". "Impeachment is so divisive to the country that unless there's something so compelling and overwhelming and bipartisan, I don't think we should go down that path, because it divides the country," Pelosi said in a Washington Post interview published on Monday. "And he's just not worth it."

Representative Steve Chabot, one of 13 House Republicans who prosecuted Clinton's impeachment charges before the Senate, said in an interview, "The closer one gets to an election, I think the bar goes up as to what one considers to be impeachable." As an election nears, "I think there is an inherent consideration that perhaps the voters should decide this," added Chabot, a House Judiciary Committee member. Special Counsel Robert Mueller is preparing to submit to US Attorney General William Barr a report on his investigation into whether Trump's 2016 campaign conspired with Russia and whether Trump unlawfully sought to obstruct the probe. Several congressional committees have launched their own investigations. Trump has denied obstruction of justice and collusion with Moscow.

### Presidential race takes shape

The Clinton impeachment process ran five months from the release of the independent counsel report that prompted the House to act until his Senate acquittal. Even though the Nov 3, 2020, election is roughly 20 months away, numerous Democrats have kicked off campaigns to win the right to challenge Trump, who is seeking re-election. The state-by-state contests to decide the Republican and Democratic presidential nominees begin Feb 3, with the Iowa caucuses.

George Washington University law professor Jonathan Turley, who testified before the House Judiciary Committee during Clinton's impeachment process, said of the current Congress: "They've basically got a sweet spot of a year" to impeach and hold a Senate trial, if lawmakers deem those actions necessary. Turley told an American Bar Association conference in New Orleans, "No one is going to tolerate an impeachment months before an election, when the president is on the campaign trail."

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler, whose panel would be instrumental in drafting any articles of impeachment, has said he believes Trump has committed obstruction of justice, but that it is too soon to decide on impeachment. "We do not now have the evidence all sorted out," Nadler told ABC's "This Week" program on March 3. "Before you impeach somebody, you have to persuade the American public that it ought to happen," Nadler added.

Only two presidents, Clinton and Andrew Johnson, have been impeached by the House. Neither was removed. In the aftermath of the US Civil War, Johnson was impeached in 1868 after firing his secretary of war, only to be acquitted by the Senate. President Richard Nixon resigned amid the Watergate scandal in 1974 after the House Judiciary Committee approved articles of impeachment but before the full House had a chance to vote. —Reuters

### 'Swollen'

Of the 10,200 Venezuelans with kidney problems, 3,000 depend on dialysis, according to Codevida. Quintero had to suspend his treatment on Friday after barely half an hour hooked up to a dialysis machine as the power cut out. Another 39 patients at the Romulo Gallegos dialysis center in Caracas also had to leave without completing their treatment. "Many of us were left swollen, full of liquid, it was awful," said Quintero. His grandmother, Delma Vargas, with whom Quintero lives, said: "I was really worried for him because he wasn't urinating at all."

Alex Arellano was not so lucky, he was connected to a dialysis machine for only 10 minutes before the power went out. His mother Ninoska pushed him around in a wheelchair for several days as he suffered from an inflamed abdomen due to the lack of dialysis. "It's worrying, we know nothing," she told AFP following the aborted treatment. There were 40 patients alongside Alex being treated in the same room.

At the Romulo Gallegos center, 115 patients are normally treated each week. The blackout, blamed by Maduro's regime on cyber and electromagnetic attacks by the United States and opposition on the central hydroelectric complex in Guri, has affected all 139 dialysis centers in the country and the majority of hospitals, Codevida said.

### 'Worse than war'

Jose Manuel Rodriguez, who took his 87-year-old father-in-law for dialysis treatment, said that "blackouts are a regular occurrence in Venezuela," but previously Caracas had mostly been spared. "This is worse than a country at war," said Harlen Pereira, a 51-year-old bank employee whose brother Harold was waiting for treatment. Maria Godoy, a nurse who connects patients to dialysis machines, said these have been "stressful days".

The blackouts meant she had to reinject unpurified blood into patients. Visual artist Frank Pacheco, 57, died at the Caracas University hospital on Sunday after eight days without dialysis - and other complications. "There was an exam he couldn't do, a treatment he couldn't have, there were no elevators, and no nephrology specialist at the weekend. It was a tumultuous week," Pacheco's goddaughter Gabriela told AFP. He had started suffering from kidney problems at 16 and underwent a transplant. But "things got worse and a year ago he lost the kidney due to a lack of" medication, she added.

Venezuela is suffering from shortages of basic necessities such as food and medicine. Supplies of the medication chronic patients like Pacheco depend upon are seriously lacking, with non-governmental organizations saying there's a shortage of at least 75 percent of what's needed. —AFP

## Businesses 'doing good'? Prove it

Social businesses trying to solve a diverse range of problems, from homelessness to gender inequality, the refugee crisis to plastic pollution often share the same conundrum - how to measure success. In an era of greater transparency, consumers and investors increasingly expect companies to look beyond profits and report their environmental and social impact. For social enterprises, which are businesses that aim to do good as well as make profit, measuring impact is often a non-negotiable requirement from their funders.

Unlike reporting financial results, there is no universal standard for impact. The outcomes for a business that tackles food waste, for example, will look very different to those for a business working to reduce knife crime. "It is a bit of a dark art, measuring impact," Jessi Baker, founder and chief executive of Provenance, a British social enterprise that uses blockchain technology to make supply chains more transparent, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Large companies like Unilever and smaller social enterprises such as Canada-based African food brand Farafena are among businesses using Provenance's software to show consumers how, when and where their products were made. As a social enterprise itself, Provenance is also required to report impact to investors. Its software helps other companies measure their impact, but its own is harder to quantify. "Our work spans lots of different types of impact, which can be quite difficult to benchmark and quote - it is something we work on very hard," said Baker. "We can help a shopper pick a product that is having a more positive impact but only if the positive impact is generated by the brands and products we work with," she said.

### Data rich, time poor

A common complaint from social entrepreneurs is reporting impact can be very time consuming, taking them away from the already challenging job of running a sustainable business at the same time as achieving their mission. More than three quarters of British social enterprises measured their impact in 2017, according to a survey conducted by Social Enterprise UK, the body that represents the sector. It found 37 percent of these businesses measured impact to a "large extent", 40 percent measured it to "some extent", while nine percent took no steps to measure it.

Measuring impact can be particularly onerous for social enterprises with multiple

investors who may have different reporting requirements. "There is a big danger that impact becomes about reporting to the investors, rather than what it is meant to be, which is working out how you can do things better," said Jeremy Rogers, chief investment officer of Big Society Capital, a social investment wholesaler.

Big Society Capital, which invests in funds that support social enterprises and charities, keeps impact reporting requirements "as light as possible", using a single metric. For example, a social enterprise that is trying to reduce unemployment might be required to report the number of people it got into employment. Rogers explained social enterprises' impact might also be qualitative, such as a human-centered story about the difference the business has made.

"Impact measurement can get quite stuck in data sometimes and you can lose track of what the goal here is. The goal is really understanding if the social enterprise's mission is working," he said. Understanding impact can provide social enterprises with useful insights that help them grow, but not all of these businesses are interested in doing so, he explained. "There are lots of really good social enterprises that have no interest in scaling. That group often sees impact as a bit of a distraction," he said.

### Data as an enabler

But not all social enterprises view this process as burdensome. Britain's Giki is a mobile app that allows consumers to find out about the environmental and social credentials of the products they buy. Giki's co-founder Jo Hand said impact measurement is a really useful management tool for the business. "Maybe 10, 20, 30 years ago, data wasn't so important but it is so integral now and can be such an enabler," said Hand.

By analyzing how its customers interact with the app, Giki has been able to understand what they are interested in and build the business accordingly. "If you use your data right, it can really give you helpful insights into what you should be doing," she said. Giki, like Provenance, is a data business, so measuring impact more naturally chimes with the founders' skill sets. Rogers said social entrepreneurs with less experience in this field should not be intimidated by the idea of measuring impact. "What we find again and again is they know much more than they think they do," he said.

Baker's advice to social entrepreneurs is to build an impact measurement plan into the business from the start, rather than treating it as an afterthought. She suggested making an "impact model", detailing how the business will measure impact to its benefit. "It doesn't have to be as detailed as your financial model, but it makes you question the impact before you start," she said. —Reuters

## Business

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LONDON: An anti-Brexit activist holds a placard as he demonstrates outside the Houses of Parliament in London yesterday ahead of the debate leading to the second meaningful vote on the government's Brexit deal. — AFP

# UK budget plans clouded by Brexit

## Hammond's spring statement comes within 24 hours of Brexit vote

LONDON: British finance minister Philip Hammond yesterday updated the government's spending and tax plans that depend heavily on the nature of Brexit. The Spring Statement, an update on the main annual budget announcement last October, comes less than 24 hours after British MPs vote on whether to back Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit deal or risk a 'no deal' departure on March 29.

May has secured last-minute changes to the deal from the European Union, hoping they will be sufficient to win parliament's backing. But in a blow to her amendments, the UK government's chief legal advisor said the legal risk of Britain being stuck in EU trade arrangements after Brexit fundamentally "remains unchanged".

Now parliament must vote on whether it is a risk worth taking to allow for an orderly exit from the EU.

In a weekend interview with the Financial Times,

Chancellor of the Exchequer Hammond argued that a smooth departure from the European Union could see a bounce in Britain's economy, that risks falling into recession should 'no deal' occur according to some analysts.

Hammond has hinted that an orderly exit would enable him to release vast sums set aside in case of a chaotic departure. The Financial Times said that Brexit contingency of about £15.4 billion (\$20 billion, 17.8 billion euros) could be further boosted by better-than-expected tax receipts for the government.

Spending the money on improving public services such as education and health could help reverse years of state austerity that followed the global financial crisis.

### Growth data

Alongside the budget update, Hammond will give the government's latest forecasts for British economic growth.

These are set to be downwardly revised from the outlook given in October after the Bank of England (BoE) recently slashed its own forecasts for UK output this year, even taking into account an orderly Brexit.

Official data yesterday showed that British gross domestic product growth rebounded 0.5 percent in January after GDP contracted 0.4 percent in December. The data "is a reassuring sign that, up until January at least, the UK economy was weathering the political crisis at home and slowdown overseas pretty well", said economist Andrew Wishart at Capital Economics research group.

"While the rolling three-month growth rate remained at 0.2 percent, that is no worse than the figure the eurozone posted" in the fourth quarter, he added.

Analysis of the UK's economic outlook, including from the BoE, suggests that not everything can be blamed on Brexit. "Rather than Brexit uncertainty, we should be talk-

ing about eurozone uncertainty given that Germany is flirting with recession and Italy is in recession," VTB Capital economist Neil MacKinnon told AFP.

Global economic sentiment has taken a knock also from China's slowdown and trade war tensions between Washington and Beijing. "A disorderly Brexit would likely lead to lower economic growth forecasts and leave less available for" British state expenditure, said analysts at Barclays, adding that the bank expects the UK economy to "likely fall into recession in case of a no deal".

Barclays added in a client note: "The Spring Statement would normally have been a good opportunity to... present longer-term plans of the spending review which will allocate departmental funding for the 2020/21 and possibly beyond. "However, this may be delayed given Brexit uncertainty" and likely instead presented ahead of the next annual budget in late 2019. — AFP

## EU expands tax blacklist to 15 countries, including UAE

BRUSSELS: The European Union expanded its tax haven blacklist to 15 countries yesterday, adding the United Arab Emirates and Bermuda over the objections of powerful member states such as Italy.

The list was first drawn up in 2017 in the wake of several scandals, including the Panama Papers and LuxLeaks, that pushed the EU into doing more to fight tax evasion by multinationals and the rich. Seven countries are to be moved back from a grey list because reform commitments had not been met. These are Aruba, Belize, Bermuda, Fiji, Oman, Vanuatu and Dominica, an EU statement said.

They are joined by three other countries whose tax policies have grown more aggressive in the past months. They are Barbados, the United Arab Emirates and the Marshall Islands. Italy long resisted the addition of the UAE. The Middle East powerhouse has recently

made significant investments in the economically troubled European country. Rome had wanted to keep the Emirates on the so-called grey list of countries that have made pledges to get their tax laws in order with a standard set by Brussels.

"Everything will be solved" when new legislation is passed in the UAE, Italian Finance Minister Giovanni Tria said. "The Emirates will come out immediately afterwards." Britain, just weeks before its planned divorce from the EU on March 29, resisted the addition of its overseas territory Bermuda but relented last week.

Five countries remain blacklisted because they did nothing to justify moving them off the original list of tax havens: American Samoa, Guam, Samoa, Trinidad and Tobago, and the US Virgin Islands.

This "naming and shaming" of countries into better tax policies comes only days after a money-laundering blacklist by the EU was torpedoed by the bloc's own member governments, after a draft included Saudi Arabia. Romanian Finance Minister Eugen Teodorovici, whose country holds the EU's six-month rotating presidency, earlier told reporters that last minute promises by countries to fix their tax policies would delay the list until May. However French counterpart Bruno Le Maire, France's finance minister said he wanted no delays. "France wants the list to be adopted today," he said. — AFP

## Nissan says to stop producing Infiniti cars in UK

LONDON: Nissan will stop production of Infiniti cars at its factory in Sunderland, northeast England, the Japanese carmaker said yesterday, one month after cancelling the plant's plans for the X-Trail SUV.

Infiniti Motor Company, a division of Nissan, said in a statement that it would stop production of Q30 and QX30 crossover models in Sunderland by mid-2019 as part of a global restructuring, amid sector-wide turbulence partially attributed to Brexit. "Plant management will discuss any impact on the plant with employees and their representatives," the statement said.

It said Infiniti cars would be electrified from 2021, while high-polluting diesel-powered models will be discontinued in response to strong consumer and regulatory demand for cleaner transport.

The group will place more emphasis on growing market share in the United States and China, whilst also pooling resources more with parent group Nissan. "The company will place more focus on its SUV lineup in North America, bring five new vehicles to China over the next five years, work to improve quality of sales and residual value, and realize more synergies with Nissan Motor Company," the

statement said. The Nissan division added that it aimed to transform Infiniti into a "top challenger brand" in the premium sector of the world car marketplace. The restructuring plan "will focus the brand on its largest growth markets, specifically North America and China, while withdrawing from Western Europe," the statement said.

"This restructuring plan will have no impact on Infiniti's ongoing operations in Eastern Europe, Middle East and Asia, which continue to grow," it added. Infiniti aims to withdraw from Western Europe by early 2020. Carmakers are facing fallout from Britain's decision to leave the European Union, a Chinese economic slowdown and from Beijing's ongoing trade row with the United States. — AFP



In this file photo, workers leave the Nissan car plant after finishing their shift in Sunderland, north east England. — AFP

Business

# Oil market balances between supply and demand mid-years: NBK Capital

## NBK Capital to issue World Energy Outlook 2019

**KUWAIT:** International oil prices held stable from beginning January to beginning February 2019, affected by concerns regarding a slowing global economy, reports the NBK Capital World Energy Outlook 2019. Doubts regarding the ongoing US-China trade dispute, in addition to the possible return of Libyan supplies to world markets are also impacting price.

Oil prices were buoyed by news that OPEC and its allies have achieved significant progress in reducing production by 1.2 million barrels per day, reducing global oversupply. Saudi Arabia has cut production by 350,000 bpd to 10.213 million barrels; Kuwait and the UAE have also significantly reduced production.

The oil market is heading towards a rapid depletion of abundant supply due to several factors including: sanctions on Iran and Venezuela and disruption of production and force majeure in Libya's spark field. At the same time, OPEC+ producers continue efforts to control supplies by reducing production. These cuts by member states exceed pre-commitments due to additional voluntary Saudi-led reductions and other involuntary reductions as a result of geopolitical factors including sanctions on producers Iran and Venezuela.

**Venezuela sanctions**  
US sanctions against Venezuela are the biggest challenge facing the oil market now, especially in light of the International Energy Agency's warnings of a problem with the quality of crude, where there is an abundance of US light oil supplies but a scarcity of heavy crude. Venezuela's sanc-

tions will not only affect US refineries in the US Gulf coast but will also spill over into European markets, which depend on imports of heavy Venezuelan crude.

**China-US trade war**  
The 90-day truce in the China-US trade war agreed last December, which ends on March 1, has paved the way for boosting world oil prices to levels that are acceptable so far. The current improvement in China's trade data is one of the key indicators supporting global oil demand. This could help push prices further towards recovery, although this depends entirely on the success of China-US trade talks, which in the end is in the interest of supporting economic growth. Although US crude oil production has risen to 11.9 million barrels per day, cutting OPEC output as demand grows will push the oil market back to balance by mid-year.

The market is looking forward to the return of US energy officials to China for the last round of trade talks, which include prospects for trade in crude oil and LNG between the two countries this year, and the possibility of normalization of relations.

The NBK Capital World Energy Outlook 2019 also noted that US oil exports to China fell in August and grew in November. According to the latest data from the US Energy Information Administration, oil trade between the two countries was a victim of the trade war, although China has not imposed a new tariff on crude.

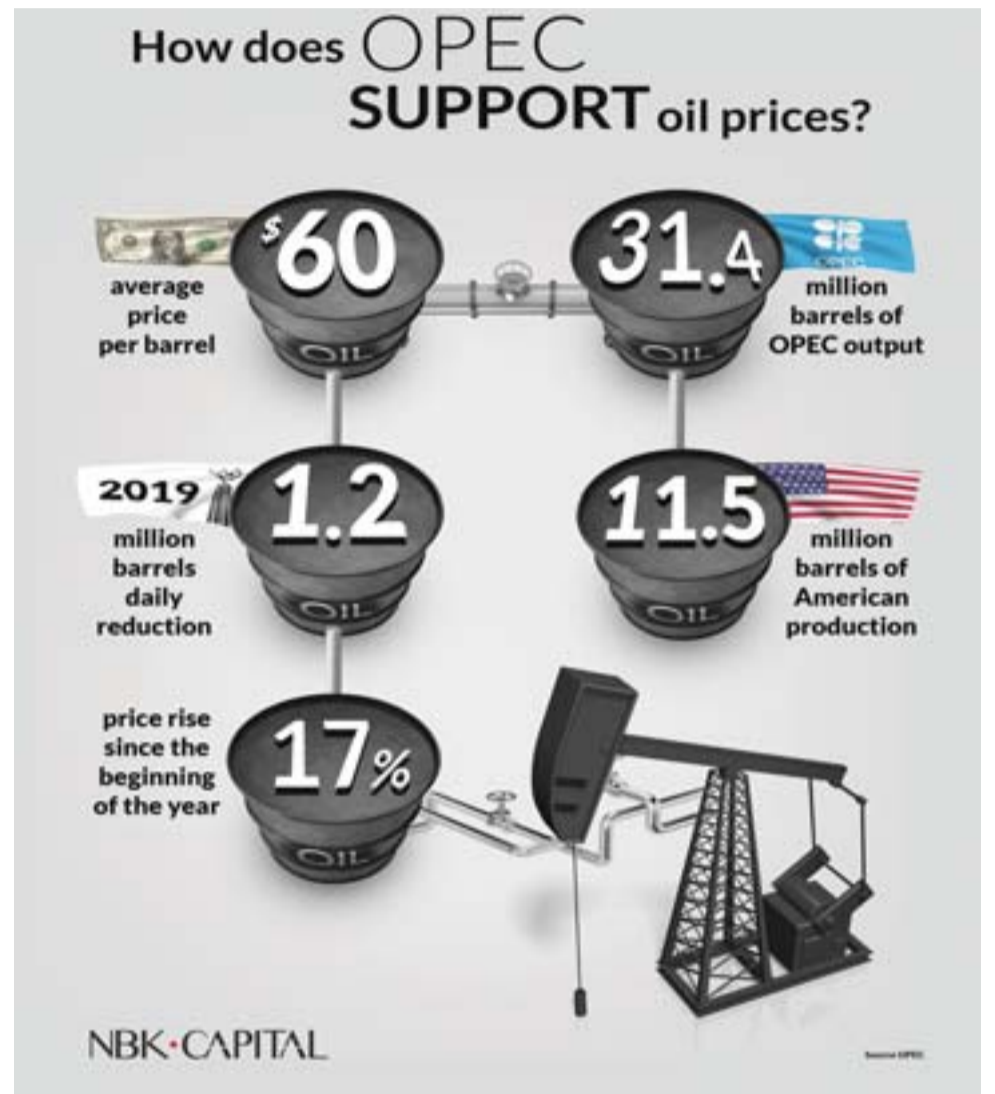
**US production**  
US Energy Information Administration



data showed US crude inventories rose 1.3 million barrels in the week ending Feb. 1 to 447.21 million barrels. In the meantime, the average weekly production of US crude hit a record level of 11.9 million barrels per day, reached in late 2018.

In the United States, the number of rigs looking for new oil production, dropped from a peak of 888 in 2018 to 873 earlier this year, bringing US crude production to a record low of 11.7 million barrels per day. At the latest OPEC meeting in Vienna, OPEC and its Russian-led allies said they would meet again in April, without giving a specific date, to decide on extending the oil production reduction agreement, which came into force on Jan. 1. The recovery in oil prices this year would boost hopes among producers that the supply cut agreement is bearing fruit.

Oil prices in January rose 15 percent on a monthly basis, and Brent crude rose 22.6 percent to \$61.9 per barrel after reaching a bottom on December 24 until the end of January, and WTI increased by 26.47 percent to \$53.8 per barrel during the same period. Oil markets have been boosted by Saudi Arabia's announcement that it expects to cut its oil production in February to levels far below the levels set by the OPEC+ agreement.



## Regulators overstepped in tweet contempt quest, says Musk

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Lawyers for Tesla chief Elon Musk on Monday argued that US regulators overstepped their bounds by calling for him to be held in contempt for a tweet.

Musk had until the end of the day Monday to respond to an accusation by the Securities and Exchange Commission that he violated terms of a court-endorsed deal between him and the regulatory agency stating that he should avoid sending any tweet that could affect the price of Tesla shares.

His attorneys contended in a court filing that Musk did not violate the court's order and that there is no basis to issue contempt sanctions against him.

The SEC request that Musk be held in civil contempt "for a single, immaterial tweet that dutifully complied with the Order" is incorrect on the facts and on the law, the filing argued.

Musk merely put his "shorthand gloss" on Tesla production numbers consistent with information already public and in a manner that was "celebratory and forward-looking," according to his attorneys.

The legal response noted that the SEC quest for Musk to be held in contempt followed the entrepreneur's "sincerely-held criticism of the SEC on 60 Minutes," a television news program, and "reflects concerning and unprecedented overreach on the part of the SEC."

Once-prolific Twitter user Musk has dramatically reduced his volume of tweets, according to the filing, which argued that stopping him from mentioning Tesla even in insignificant tweets would risk trampling on his free speech rights.

Musk, 47, is a visionary and inventive boss but is also highly unpredictable, especially on social network Twitter, where he has often communicated in defiance of rules



In this file photo, SpaceX chief Elon Musk speaks during a press conference after the launch of SpaceX Crew Dragon Demo mission at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. —AFP

imposed on executives of publicly-traded companies.

On February 19, he tweeted that Tesla would make 500,000 cars in 2019 — up from the 400,000 that the company had estimated until then, as it grapples with production problems with the Model 3.

Musk corrected himself four hours later, saying that Tesla would indeed produce about 400,000 cars this year: "Meant to say annualized production rate at end of 2019 probably around 500k."

But that correction was not enough for a federal judge, who gave Musk two weeks to explain why he should be spared from being held in contempt for violating the agreement with the SEC.

Last year, the SEC opened an investigation into Tesla and Musk after he tweeted that he planned to take Tesla private and already had the financing to do it — an assertion that proved false but nonetheless made investors who bet against the company lose millions. To settle fraud charges stemming from the tweet, Musk had to resign as Tesla chairman, both he and the company had to pay \$20 million fines, and the SEC demanded oversight of his social media use. — AFP

## AMLO: Mexican economy strong, dismisses doubters

**MEXICO CITY:** President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador insisted yesterday the Mexican economy is strong as he completed 100 days in office, dismissing critics who warn a climate of uncertainty could weigh on growth. "Fortunately, our economy is on the march. It's still growing slowly, but there's not the slightest sign of a recession, as our conservative opponents wish and as their economic analysts forecast, in bad faith," the president said in a speech.

The anti-establishment leftist won a landslide victory in Mexico's elections last year, and remains widely popular. But he has caused jitters in the business world with his vows to overhaul the country's "neoliberal" economic model.

The central bank slashed its economic growth forecast for 2019 last month by 0.6 percentage points, to between 1.1 and 2.1 percent, amid uncertainty over the new government's policies.

Lopez Obrador has notably caused investor concern by canceling a new \$13-billion Mexico City airport backed by billionaire Carlos Slim and railing against the privatization of the energy sector undertaken by the previous administration. The president, widely known as "AMLO," reiterated his promise to deliver an average of four-percent annual economic growth during his six-year term.

"We're aware that this objective has caused natural skepticism," he told a crowd of officials and invitees at the presidential palace in Mexico City.

"I accept the challenge, because both foreign and domestic investors are confident" in the



MEXICO CITY: Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador delivers his report on the first 100 days of government, at the National Palace in Mexico City on Monday. —AFP

Mexican economy, he said. The "essence" of his economic plan, he said, is austerity and fighting corruption, which he estimated could lead to savings of \$36.1 billion this year in the government budget.

"That means we will not need to change-nor would we ever do so-macroeconomic equilibrium," he said, indirectly referring to critics who have questioned where he will come up with the funds to pay for his expanded social spending.

Lopez Obrador remains hugely popular in a country fed up with corruption, inequality and violent crime. Nearly eight in 10 voters support him, according to one recent poll. But critics accuse him of autocratic tendencies and a messianic vision of himself and the "transformation" he is promising for Mexico, Latin America's second-largest economy after Brazil. — AFP

### EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.		
<b>EUROPEAN &amp; AMERICAN COUNTRIES</b>		
US Dollar/Transfer	304.600	
Euro	344.650	
Sterling Pound	404.360	
Canadian dollar	228.160	
Turkish lira	57.040	
Swiss Franc	303.080	
US Dollar Buying	303.400	
<b>ASIAN COUNTRIES</b>		
Japanese Yen	2.736	
Indian Rupees	4.375	
Pakistani Rupees	2.223	
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.701	
Nepali Rupees	2.730	
Singapore Dollar	225.550	
Hongkong Dollar	38.804	
Bangladesh Taka	3.610	
Philippine Peso	5.789	
Thai Baht	9.634	
Malaysian ringgit	77.928	
<b>GCC COUNTRIES</b>		
Saudi Riyal	81.281	
Qatari Riyal	81.716	
Omani Riyal	791.683	
Bahraini Dinar	809.350	
UAE Dirham	82.986	
<b>ARAB COUNTRIES</b>		
Egyptian Pound - Cash	19.700	
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	17.438	
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.223	
Tunisian Dinar	102.910	
Jordanian Dinar	430.230	
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.031	
Syrian Lira	0.000	
Morocco Dirham	32.370	
<b>DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD</b>		
<b>Rate for Transfer</b>	<b>Selling Rate</b>	
US Dollar	304.340	
Canadian Dollar	227.535	
Sterling Pound	398.595	
Euro	344.495	
Swiss Frank	309.360	
Bahraini Dinar	809.355	
UAE Dirhams	83.265	
Qatari Riyals	84.500	
Saudi Riyals	82.055	
Jordanian Dinar	430.540	
Egyptian Pound	17.378	
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.706	
Indian Rupees	4.343	
Pakistani Rupees	2.194	
Bangladesh Taka	3.617	
Philippines Peso	5.827	
Cyprus pound	18.105	
Japanese Yen	3.735	
Syrian Pound	1.590	
Nepalese Rupees	2.722	
Malaysian Ringgit	75.315	
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	45.730	
<b>BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL</b>		
<b>CURRENCY</b>	<b>BUY</b>	<b>SELL</b>
British Pound	0.395043	0.408943
Czech Korune	0.005333	0.014633
Danish Krone	0.041849	0.046849
Euro	0.335070	0.348770
Georgian Lari	0.112472	0.112472
Hungarian 0.000994	0.001184	
Norwegian Krone	0.031101	0.036301
Romanian Leu	0.055169	0.072019
Russian ruble	0.004618	0.004618
Slovakia	0.009109	0.019109
Swedish Krona	0.028423	0.033423
Swiss Franc	0.294623	0.0305623
Australian Dollar	0.206857	0.218857
New Zealand Dollar	0.201959	0.211459
America		
Canadaian Dollar	0.221698	0.230698
US Dollars	0.300500	0.305800
US Dollars Mint	0.301000	0.305800
<b>Asia</b>		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003055	0.003856
Chinese Yuan	0.043858	0.047358
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036715	0.039465
Indian Rupee	0.003655	0.004427
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002649	0.002829
Korean Won	0.000259	0.000274
Malaysian Ringgit	0.070668	0.076668
Nepalese Rupee	0.002611	0.002951
Pakistan Rupee	0.001539	0.002309
Philippine Peso	0.005802	0.006102
Singapore Dollar	0.219132	0.229132
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001364	0.001944
Taiwan	0.009737	0.009917
Thai Baht	0.009272	0.009822
Vietnamese Dong	0.00013	0.00013
<b>Arab</b>		
Bahraini Dinar	0.793387	0.809887
Egyptian Pound	0.017206	0.019806
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000211	0.000271
Jordanian Dinar	0.424715	0.433715
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000152	0.000252
Moroccan Dirhams	0.022148	0.046146
Omani Riyal	0.784851	0.790531
Qatar Riyal	0.079376	0.084316
audi Riyal	0.080140	0.081440
Syrian Pound	0.001291	0.001511
Tunisian Dinar	0.095963	0.103963
Turkish Lira	0.049592	0.061092
UAE Dirhams	0.081507	0.083207
Yemeni Riyal	0.000990	0.001070

Business

# Renault, Nissan, Mitsubishi unveil new joint board post-Ghosn

## Carmakers seeking a 'new start' after Ghosn arrest

**TOKYO:** Carmakers Renault, Nissan and Mitsubishi Motors unveiled the creation of a joint board yesterday, seeking a "new start" for their alliance after the arrest of former boss Carlos Ghosn.

The new board structure will be headed by Renault Chairman Jean-Dominique Senard and replaces two previous bodies based in the Netherlands—one joining Renault and Nissan, the other combining Nissan and Mitsubishi Motors.

"We have decided to join our forces again, to enhance the strength of our collaboration," Senard told reporters. This is a "new start" for the alliance, insisted the Frenchman. Senard also announced he would "not be seeking" to replace Ghosn as head of Nissan but would be a "clear candidate" to be vice-president of the Japanese auto giant.

For his part, current Nissan boss Hiroto Saikawa said the new board represented "a true partnership on equal footing". Both executives sidestepped questions about Ghosn, recently released on bail in Japan ahead of a trial over alleged financial misconduct.

Asked about Ghosn, Senard said: "I have two or three major principles in my life. One of them is the respect of people. The second is respect of facts. And the third... is to respect people and consider them innocent as long as it has not been proven differently."

### 'Opposition and anxiety'

Ghosn is widely credited with creating the three-way alliance, which now outsells all other rival groups. As boss of Renault, he took what many observers at the time thought was a gamble by saving Nissan from the brink of bankruptcy and tying it to the French firm.

In a complicated management structure, Renault—itsself 15-percent held by the French state—owns a 43-percent stake in Nissan. However, the Japanese firm has

outperformed Renault recently and many Nissan executives were unhappy with the French company's dominance within the alliance.

In an interview with AFP in January from inside his Tokyo detention center, Ghosn himself said his arrest it was a "story of betrayal" based on resentment in the Japanese automaker. His downfall was plotted due to "opposition and anxiety" over the plan to bring Nissan and Renault closer together, Ghosn alleged.

The 65-year-old tycoon wanted to attend yesterday's board meeting in Tokyo but was barred by the court. Although he was almost immediately fired as the head of the company when the allegations surfaced, he is still a board member until April 8, when an extraordinary meeting of shareholders is likely to remove him.

But his bail conditions prevent him from contact with anyone else involved in his case—including Saikawa, who also attended yesterday's meeting. Ghosn, who strenuously denies all charges against him, was said to be "disappointed" not to be able to attend the meeting.

He believes that the accusations against him, which he has frequently described as "meritless and unsubstantiated", should not prevent him from giving his input into a company he saved from the brink.

### 'He thought it was free'

Ghosn faces three charges of financial misconduct. The first two charges relate to the alleged under-reporting of his salary in documents to shareholders to the tune of nine billion yen (\$81 million) over a period of eight years. The other charge relates to an alleged attempt to pass off personal investment losses onto Nissan's books and then paying from company funds a Saudi contact who had previously stumped up collateral for him.

Ghosn found himself embroiled in another legal bat-



**TOKYO:** (Left to right) Renault CEO Thierry Bollere, Renault chairman Jean-Dominique Senard, Nissan Motors president and CEO Hiroto Saikawa and Mitsubishi Motors chairman and CEO Osamu Masuko join hands at the end of a joint press conference at the Nissan headquarters in Yokohama, Kanagawa prefecture yesterday. — AFP

tle on Monday when French prosecutors opened an inquiry into a party he threw at the sumptuous Palace of Versailles outside Paris in 2016.

Renault disclosed last month that the chateau had waived the usual 50,000 euro (\$56,000) rental fee for the October 2016 Marie Antoinette-themed party under a sponsorship deal signed a few months earlier.

The waived bill could amount to the misuse of company resources, as well as tax evasion, if the benefit-in-kind was not declared to French authorities. Ghosn's lawyer in France, Jean-Yves Le Borgne, told AFP that the executive "stands ready" to repay the money, saying his client was "not aware he owed it because he had not been billed." "He thought it was free," Le Borgne said. — AFP

## India Feb inflation picks up slightly, but April rate cut still seen

**NEW DELHI:** India's consumer prices rose at a faster pace than anticipated in February, and remained below the central bank's target for a seventh straight month, lending weight to expectations that the bank could again cut the key interest rate in April.

India's annual retail inflation picked up in February to 2.57 percent, after easing to a downwardly revised 19-month low of 1.97 percent in January, government data showed yesterday. Analysts polled by Reuters had forecast February's annual increase in the consumer price index at 2.43 percent.

February's marginal increase in inflation stemmed from higher costs of housing, health, education services and fuel. Health and education costs rose more than 8 percent in February from a year earlier, the data showed. Economists say inflation remains subdued because of high unemployment and declines in rural incomes following a fall in food prices and in demand for exports.

The unemployment rate rose to 7.2 percent in February, the highest since September 2016, and up from 5.9 percent in February 2018, according to data compiled by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy.

Rupa Rege Nitsure, chief economist at L&T Finance Holding in Mumbai, said weak food inflation would keep rural demand subdued and would gradually bring down core inflation. "This strengthens the case for



**SILIGURI:** Indian laborers work in a construction site at the New Chumta Tea estate on the outskirts of Siliguri yesterday. — AFP

another rate cut in April with a strong commentary on transmission," she said.

Figures released separately yesterday showed annual industrial output growth rose 1.7 percent in January compared with an upwardly revised 2.6 percent the previous month.

Economic growth slowed to a five-quarter low of 6.6 percent in October-December, and the government estimate for the financial year ending this month has been revised down to a five-year low of 7 percent from 7.2 percent. On April 4, the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is widely expected to cut the benchmark repo rate for the second straight meeting.

Its shock 25 basis point cut to 6.25 percent in February - at Governor Shaktikanta Das' inaugural meeting - was the first in 18

months. Declining inflation had cleared the path for the MPC to cut again as a widening gap between inflation and borrowing costs was hurting companies' balance sheets as they are unable to pass on the interest costs to consumers amid low inflation, business leaders said.

Core consumer inflation, which strips out food and fuel prices, was estimated at 5.3-5.4 percent in February, slightly higher than January's downwardly revised 5.2-5.3 percent, according to three analysts after seeing inflation figures released yesterday. Retail food prices fell for the fifth straight month, by 0.66 percent in February from a year earlier, compared with a drop of 2.24 percent a month earlier. The figures show rural incomes remain under pressure while consumers benefit from easing inflation. — Reuters

## South Africa considers financial options to help Zimbabwe revive economy

**HARARE:** South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said yesterday his country was ready to help Zimbabwe revive its economy, but within its means, while the two neighbors consider options that could see Harare receiving some financial assistance. A dearth of US dollars in Zimbabwe has fanned shortages of fuel, drugs and food, choking an economy yet to recover from the disastrous rule of Robert Mugabe, who was removed in a coup in 2017.

South Africa said in January that it had turned down a request in December from its southern African neighbor for a \$1.2 billion loan. But in a joint communique issued after a meeting between Ramaphosa and Zimbabwe's president Emmerson Mnangagwa and officials, the two countries said they were looking at increasing a standing credit facility between central banks of the two nations.

Under the facility, Zimbabwe can access 100 million rand (\$7 million) from South Africa's central bank. "Other financing options beyond this are also being explored, for example a facility from South African private banks to the Zimbabwean private sector and guaranteed by the South African government with an appropriate counter-guarantee from the Zimbabwean government," the communique read. Ramaphosa had ear-

lier told the meeting that Zimbabwe, which also faces a severe drought this year, deserved support from the rest of the world to help reboot its economy.

He repeated his previous call for sanctions against Zimbabwe to be lifted. Zimbabwe says US sanctions, which were extended by another year by President Donald Trump last week, throttle its ability to access funding from lenders like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank and raise its political risk profile.

"South Africa, Mr President, stands ready to render support to Zimbabwe within our means in your quest for economic renewal," Ramaphosa said, without giving details on whether this would entail financial help.

"We want to see meaningful support being given by international development partners to Zimbabwe because Zimbabwe does deserve the support that the world can give."

South Africa is Zimbabwe's largest trading partner and home to millions of Zimbabweans who flocked to the country amid an economic meltdown during Mugabe's rule. Mnangagwa pledged to protect South African businesses operating in Zimbabwe, which range from mining to manufacturing to construction. — Reuters

## US consumer prices rise; underlying inflation slowing

**WASHINGTON:** US consumer prices rose for the first time in four months in February, but the pace of the increase was modest, resulting in the smallest annual gain in nearly 2-1/2 years.

The report from the Labor Department yesterday also showed benign underlying inflation last month, which together with slowing economic growth, support the Federal Reserve's "patient" approach towards further interest rate increases this year. The Consumer Price Index increased 0.2 percent, lifted by gains in the costs of food, gasoline and rents. The CPI had been unchanged for three straight months.

In the 12 months through February, the CPI rose 1.5 percent, the smallest gain since September 2016. The CPI increased 1.6 percent on a year-on-year basis in January. Excluding the volatile food and energy components, the CPI edged up 0.1 percent, the smallest increase since August 2018. The so-called core CPI had increased by 0.2 percent for five straight months.

In the 12 months through February, the

core CPI rose 2.1 percent. The core CPI had increased by 2.2 percent for three consecutive months on an annual basis. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the CPI and the core CPI edging up 0.2 percent in February. The Fed, which has a 2 percent inflation target, tracks a different measure, the core personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, for monetary policy.

The core PCE price index increased 1.9 percent on a year-on-year basis in December after a similar gain in November. It hit the US central bank's 2 percent inflation target in March last year for the first time since April 2012. Slowing domestic and global growth are keeping inflation in check even as a tight labor market is driving up wages. Annual wage growth jumped 3.4 percent in February, the biggest increase since April 2009, from 3.1 percent in January.

US stock index futures rose while US Treasury yields edged lower after the release of yesterday's data. The dollar pared gains against the yen and extended losses against the euro.

### Declining inflation expectations

A New York Fed survey of consumer expectations published on Monday showed a drop in inflation expectations in February. In a wide-ranging interview with CBS's 60 Minutes television news program, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell on Sunday reiterated the central bank's wait-and-see approach to further mone-



**WASHINGTON:** Declining energy prices masked other increases to drive annual US inflation to its lowest rate in two years. — AFP

etary policy tightening this year. Powell said the Fed did "not feel any hurry" to change the level of interest rates again. The Fed hiked rates four times in 2018.

The January PCE price data will be released on March 19. It was delayed by a 35-day partial shutdown of the federal government that ended on Jan 25. In February, gasoline prices rose 1.5 percent after falling 5.5 percent in January. Food prices increased 0.4 percent, the biggest rise since May 2014, after gaining 0.2 percent in January. Food consumed at home rose 0.4 percent last month, boosted by more expensive dairy products, fresh vegetables, cereals and meat.

Owners' equivalent rent of primary

residence, which is what a homeowner would pay to rent or receive from renting a home, increased 0.3 percent in February, as it did in January.

Healthcare costs fell 0.2 percent after five straight monthly increases. They were held down by a 1.0 percent decline in the price of prescription medication and a 0.7 percent drop in the cost of hospital services. The cost of doctor visits edged up 0.1 percent last month. Apparel prices rose 0.3 percent. That followed a 1.1 percent jump in January. There were increases in the prices of motor vehicle insurance, airline fares, household furnishings and personal care products. — Reuters

## IMF approves \$4.2bn loan for Ecuador

**WASHINGTON:** The International Monetary Fund yesterday approved a \$4.2 billion, three-year loan for Ecuador, part of a broader aid package to help support the government's economic reform program.

The Washington-based lender agreed to the terms of the financing late last month, and the final approval of the IMF board Monday releases the first installment of \$652 million.

IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde said the aid will support the government's efforts to shore up its finances, including a wage "realignment," gradual lowering of fuel subsidies, and reduction of public debt. "The savings generated by these measures will allow for an increase in social assistance spending over the course of the program," Lagarde said in a statement, stressing that "Protecting the poor and most vulnerable segments in society is a key objective" of the program.

Quito is expected to receive another \$6 billion from the Development Bank of Latin America, the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and the Latin American Reserve Fund. "The Ecuadorian authorities are implementing a comprehensive reform program aimed at modernizing the economy and paving the way for strong, sustained, and equitable growth," Lagarde said. — AFP

## Business

# Sheikh Duaij: Boursa Kuwait privatization will incentivize companies to list on market

## TBY interviews Commercial Bank chairman and CEO

**KUWAIT:** The Business Year (TBY), a global media group providing business and economic information on national economies through the eyes of the country's decision-makers, had the pleasure to meet with Sheikh Ahmad Duaij Al-Sabah, Chairman of Commercial Bank of Kuwait - Al-Tijari (CBK), as part of its upcoming edition on the country, The Business Year: Kuwait 2019, produced in partnership with Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) and the German Business Council Kuwait (GBCK). Commercial Bank CEO Elham Mahfouz was also present during the interview.

"In light of this year's focus, we thought it would be highly relevant to feature Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sabah's comments regarding CBK's experience with the tendering process of Boursa Kuwait," said Kevin Delaplace Haro, TBY's Country Editor for Kuwait. "We are very excited to welcome Sheikh Ahmad at our event in London. As one of the speakers, we are looking forward to listening to his analysis on Kuwait's privatization

process," added Ioana Popa, TBY's Country Director for Kuwait.

Al-Tijari Bank was one of the two qualified bidders in regard to the Kuwait Stock Exchange's (KSE) privatization. The initiative was "strongly supported by several governmental entities" and is marking a real "push for privatization," stated Sheikh Ahmad Al Sabah. "With the privatization of Boursa Kuwait, banks and the entire private sector will feel the benefits of having a much more efficient and leaner stock exchange," he added. In addition, the Chairman of Al-Tijari Bank highlighted that "many large Kuwaiti companies are still not listed on the stock exchange" and emphasized that the privatization of Boursa Kuwait will "incentivize more companies, including SMEs, to be listed, therefore opening the doors to new sources of financing."

### PPP projects

Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects were also discussed at length during the interview. "The government has to be

the key player in saying what services could possibly be shifted to PPPs while ensuring the enforceability of the legal framework. The private sector, on the other hand, has to show its willingness and competence in managing PPP projects since the government does not want the quality of the services to falter. PPPs would take a lot of weight off the government in terms of costs and resources, reducing the public deficit. However, stability and transparency will be key for PPPs to succeed," added Sheikh Ahmad.

The Business Year: Kuwait 2019 will feature views and insights from more than 100 senior executives and government officials across all sectors, obtained through face-to-face interviews in the country. The publication will also feature sector reviews, analyses, focus articles, and contributions from foreign guest speakers. It will be launched on June 17th at The Dorchester in London and will be widely distributed locally and internationally at major economic forums, investment forums, and conferences.



The Business Year team with Sheikh Ahmad Duaij Al-Sabah and Elham Mahfouz

## Gulf Bank announces winners of Al-Danah weekly draw

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank held its weekly draw on 10th March 2019 announcing the names of its winners for the week from the 3rd March till the 7th March 2019, in which five winners will receive KD 1,000 each, every week.

### The winners this week are:

- Amir Malak Karlos Falastin
- Laila Jassim Mohammad Bu Olayan
- Kholoud Bader Mutlaq Dhaher
- Ali Reda Fathallah Gholamy
- Khawlah Ahmed Hussain Alroomi

The first Gulf Bank Al-Danah's quarterly draw 2019 for the prize of KD 150,000 will be held on 27 March 2019, the second quarterly draw 2019 will be held on 26 June 2019, for the prize of KD 250,000, and the third quarterly draw for the prize of KD 500,000 on 25 September 2019. The final Al-Danah draw for KD 1,000,000, will be held on 16 January 2020, where the Al-Danah millionaire will be announced at a live event. Gulf Bank encourages customers to increase their chances of winning with Al-Danah by depositing more into their Gulf Bank accounts using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services.

Al-Danah offers a number of unique services to customers, including the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card, which allows account holders to deposit money into their accounts at their convenience. Account holders can also calculate their chances of winning the draws through the 'Al-Danah Chances' calculator available on the Gulf Bank website and app.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of KD 200 to open an account and the same amount should be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to their account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the weekly draw within two days. To take part in the Al-Danah 2019 upcoming quarterly and yearly draws, customers must meet the required hold period for each draw.

The Al-Danah draws are all approved by and held in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce. Furthermore, Gulf Bank have partnered with Ernst and Young Kuwait (EY) with reference to "Al-Danah Prize Draw" system in order to assist in assessing processes, technical controls considering relevant parameters and provide recommendations in-line with industry leading practices. The study was conducted in line with industry standards and control requirements relevant to similar prize draw schemes wherein, a detailed review of prize draw management system along with draw scheme parameters, data extraction for draw, filtration of customers as per defined business criteria and necessary system interactions was conducted to advise on any potential areas of improvements.

## Burgan Bank announces winner of Al-Thuraya Salary Account draw

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank, announced yesterday Salman Saud Bader Al-Dhafeeri as the lucky winner of the Al-Thuraya Salary Account monthly draw. The draw rewards new and existing customers who transfer their salary to Burgan Bank by offering them a chance to win a Nissan Patrol SUV every month. With every KD 10 available in the account, the customer receives one chance to enter the draw.

The Al-Thuraya account holders have the option to hold money in Kuwaiti Dinar and other major currencies and can access account-related services such as standing orders, loans and credit cards, and benefit from the discounts and offers throughout the year.

## NREC reports a net profit of KD 10.8m for 2018

**KUWAIT:** National Real Estate Company (NREC), which is presently developing properties valued at over USD 2 billion in the Middle East and North Africa region, today announced its financial and operational earnings for the year ending December 31, 2018, recording an operating revenue of KD 21.6 million, and an EBITDA of KD 25 million, up 22 percent from the previous year. The net profit stood at KD 10.8 million for the year while its EPS was 7.71 fils. The total assets reached KD 478 million by year-end and shareholder's equity attributable to the Parent Company stood at KD 258 million.

NREC Vice Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Faisal Jamil Sultan Al-Essa, said: "NREC focused in 2018 on the development of its two landmark projects, Reem Mall in Abu Dhabi and Grand Heights in Egypt.

## Japan firms wary of wage hike as economy wobbles amid slowdown

**TOKYO:** Big Japanese firms are set to offer smaller pay increases this year at annual wage talks yesterday as the economy sputters, tempering hopes that domestic consumption will offset external risks to growth. Over the past five years, major firms raised wages above 2 percent each spring as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe kept up the pressure on businesses to boost pay in an effort to beat deflation that has dogged Japan for nearly two decades.

But as economic growth slows, firms have become wary about wage hikes because that commits them to higher fixed costs at a time of uncertainty as company profits are levelling off.

"I worry the momentum towards wage hikes may weaken as underlying inflation remains weak and there is a strong sense of uncertainty," said Hisashi Yamada, senior economist at Japan Research Institute. "Uncertainty is high on the external outlook such as the US-China trade war and Europe's unstable politics. On top of that, a national sales tax is scheduled to increase in October."

A slowdown in the global economy, the Sino-US trade war and trepidation over the final shape of a deal to seal Britain's exit from the European Union have sharply

increased strains on businesses worldwide. Faced with the heightened uncertainty about the growth outlook, cautious Japanese firms usually prefer to offer one-off bonuses and other benefits depending on annual profits.

They tend to focus more on the annual total sum payment than fixed base salaries, which will determine retirement payment and pension benefits.

Results of the "shunto" talks between management and unions - announced by blue chips in industries like cars and electronics - set the tone for wage hikes across the nation, which will affect strength of consumer spending and inflation.

A Reuters Corporate Survey last month found a slim majority - 51 percent of firms polled - saw wages rising around 1.5-2 percent average across all Japanese industries.

Some analysts expect wage growth to slow further from the 17-year peak of 2.38 seen in 2015 to around 2.15 percent this year, despite hefty cash piles at Japanese corporations.

The bulk of wage hikes - about 1.8 percent - comes automatically under Japan's seniority-based employment system. Anything beyond that is a hike in "base pay."

This year, bellwether Toyota Motor Corp is set to refrain from announcing a specific base pay hike, ditching its role as trend-setter in a sign of growing pressure on businesses.

### Pay hike

In the coming fiscal year from April 1, Abe's government will start to implement

parts of our government are studying whether that discriminatory impact would give us rights under trade agreements and WTO treaties."

The OECD is spearheading talks aimed at forging a new global agreement on taxing technology and digital giants who often declare their income in low-tax nations, depriving other countries of billions in revenue. But that overhaul is expected until next year at the earliest, prompting France, Britain, Spain, Austria and Italy to move ahead with their own versions of a so-called "digital services tax" as soon as this year.

Last week France unveiled draft legislation that would set a 3.0-percent levy on digital advertising, the sale of personal data and other revenue for tech groups with more than 750 million euros (\$844 million) in worldwide revenue. It would be applied retroactively from January 1, 2019, while the measures in the UK and other European countries might not come into effect until next year.

"We do understand there's political pressure around the world to tax various international businesses more heavily, and we actually agreed that

49.7 million through the sale of assets and the loan conversion to equity."

Established in 1973 and listed on Boursa Kuwait, National Real Estate Company (NREC) is a real estate investment, development and property manager based in the Middle East and North Africa, developing assets exceeding \$2 billion. The Company's portfolio comprises a mix of retail, commercial and residential properties in the region. In addition to its core real estate business, NREC is the largest shareholder with a 22.3 percent share in Agility Public Warehousing Company K.S.C.P. which is one of the top ten logistics companies in the world. Note: 2018 and 2017 earnings were subject to a restatement following the implementation of the IFRS 9 accounting standards, adjusting the 2017 net profit from KD 10.6 million to KD 11.9 million and the 2017 operating profit from KD 38.5 million to KD 40.4 million.



Faisal Jamil Sultan Al-Essa



TOKYO: Pedestrians walking at famous Shibuya Crossing, Tokyo.

work-style reform to curb Japan's notoriously long work hours. The reform also includes "equal pay for equal work" aimed at narrowing the pay gap between full-time employees and contract workers or part-timers, and raising the retirement age to cope with the ageing population.

The move has shifted focus away from pay hikes with both unions and management, dashing policymakers' hopes of stoking a virtuous cycle of a tight job market boosting wages to stimulate consumption and spur inflation to the BOJ's 2 percent target.

Japan's unions tend not to be so aggressive in pressing their demands as those in

the West because they attach greater importance to job security and retain a sense of company loyalty.

The dwindling union membership has deprived unionists of bargaining powers, with companies hiring more non-unionized part-timers and nonregular employees, who represent nearly 40 percent of workers. "At this year's shunto, both companies and unions don't seem to put greater emphasis on wage hikes than before," said Kiichi Murashima, economist at Citigroup Global Markets Japan. "Instead, they are considering a wider range of issues like pay disparity, labour productivity and work-life balance." — Reuters

## US warns of WTO action over 'discriminatory' new digital taxes

**PARIS:** The US is weighing a complaint at the World Trade Organization against "discriminatory" new taxes on digital giants such as a Facebook and Google which are being planned by France and other EU nations, a top US trade official said yesterday. "We think the whole theoretical basis of digital service taxes is ill-conceived and the effect is highly discriminatory against US-based multinationals," Chip Harter, a Treasury official and US delegate for global tax talks, said in Paris.

Speaking ahead of two days of talks at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Harter added that "various



PARIS: In this file photo, European Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmstrom speaks at conference entitled "A WTO fit for the 21st century" at the French economy ministry in Paris. —AFP

that is appropriate," Harter told journalists.

"But we think it should be done on a broader basis than just selecting a particular industry," he said. —AFP

What's On



# Nissan Al Babtain collaborates with KidZania to send winners to UEFA Champions League final

Driven by its goal to play a positive role in the community while offering access to enjoy the most valuable experiences, Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babtain Company's (AABC), the sole authorized dealer of Nissan vehicles in the State of Kuwait, recently partnered with KidZania Kuwait to highlight the 2019 UEFA Champions League Final.

On 1st March, children at KidZania Kuwait participated in a series of contests ranging from video games, Foosball and Football scoring competi-

tions, involving different rounds of games which entitled the winners to enter a draw on March 7th, 2019 at 7PM, for a chance to attend the UEFA Champions League Final in Madrid 2019.

As Europe's top football club competition, the UEFA Champions League is viewed as the most popular sports event in the world including the Middle East. This long-lasting strategic partnership with both UEFA coincides with Nissan's aim to accommodate the growth of Kuwait's strong

sports community and rise of soccer talents among the ambitious youth. Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babtain Co has been an avid supporter of the overall learning and development of children, evident through its many regional and local sponsorships and collaborations with KidZania Kuwait. It is worth mentioning that through our previous joint ventures with them, children were able to experience Nissan's all-encompassing automotive establishments and beneficial sound automotive, and traffic safety lessons.

## Ambassador Silverman hosts Diwaniya to highlight International Women's Day



The US Embassy in Kuwait organized a gathering Sunday at its diwaniya to highlight International Women's Day. Hosted by US Ambassador Lawrence R Silverman, the event was attended by a group of influential Kuwaiti women from different backgrounds and professions including academia, entrepreneurship, law, media, health and fitness, and more.

The event was an opportunity to shed light on the different professional backgrounds and achievements of the attendees, and the challenges they face. It was also a chance for the guests to exchange their views and experiences on a variety of professional matters with several female diplomats from the US Embassy who were also in attendance. Press Attache Heather Ward remarked, "Our guests brought perspectives from many different fields and it was especially interesting to hear about how they respond to some of the same challenges we have in the United States."

"It was a privilege to be able to celebrate International Women's Day with such an accomplished group of women in Kuwait," said Ambassador Silverman. "This diwaniya gives us greater insight into the professional strides women in Kuwait and the US have made as well as new opportunities they have discovered for growth."



## MMF Kuwait holds seminar on 'Media in Contemporary World'

The media is facing serious challenges in a largely corporatized world especially after the advent of the social media, said a renowned journalist from India. Delivering a keynote speech on "The Media in the contemporary world," during a seminar organized by Malayali Media Forum (MMF), Kuwait, Abdurahman, Group Editor, Madhyamam newspaper and Media One TV channel, said, "in the contemporary world, media freedom has become a matter of debate since journalists are forced to function within a very restricted environment." He cited a recent example of how noted Indian journalist Siddharth Varadarajan was fired from the English language newspaper the Hindu.

The entry of the social media was a turning point in the history of the media giving people the power of communication. "But this goes with a lot of caution and responsibility. The new media must be able to uphold the truth and journalists must discharge their duties with honesty and integrity. In Kerala, we have seen how the tools of the social media can effectively and positively be used in helping the people during the relief operations following the devastating flood in Kerala, he pointed out.



"In a shifting media landscape, the print media is facing serious crisis with the new generation shying away from newspapers. At the same time, debased TV debates are making a mockery of the entire media community," he said. Even in the troubled times today, the media plays a significant role in a society and the public depends on the media for genuine information and updates.

MMF General Convener Sajeev K Peter presided over the meeting and moderated the seminar. Convener Nixon George welcomed the gathering while convener Jalin Triprayar proposed a vote of thanks. Program convener Sathar Kunnil introduced the guest speaker Abdurahman.

A cross section of Malayali community representing various associations attended the seminar and actively engaged in a discussion that followed the keynote speech. Abdurahman summed up his topic after addressing the views expressed by the speakers who participated in the seminar. MMF, Kuwait presented a memento to Abdurahman to honor the visiting dignitary.



The South Korean artists performed at Hussain Abdul Ridha Theatre over the weekend. This is a part of event to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and Kuwait. — Photos by Joseph Shagra

Health

# In Canada, moms say cannabis makes them better parents

**MONTREAL:** Smoking cannabis has made me "a better mother," says Karine Cyr. The mother of two leads a group of like-minded Canadian women challenging norms and rejecting stigmas around parenting and pot since Ottawa legalized its recreational use last October. They are tired, she says, of having to hide their use of the mind-altering drug from family, neighbors and others, and have set out to educate their peers about its benefits.

"People are not informed. They still think that when we use cannabis, we sit in front of our television eating pizza like teenagers," Cyr says. "When I consume cannabis, I do housework, I play with my children. I am more patient with my children, more present. It helps me to be a better mother, a better person." Doctors disagree. But her message has resonated with hundreds of members of her *Des fleurs ma chere* (Flowers my dear) Facebook group, which she created to share experiences and thoughts about pot.

The group includes "entrepreneurs, psychologists, models, photographers ... they are women from all walks of life," said "ganja yoga" instructor Cynthia Petrin, herself a member. Another similar Facebook group, "Mother Mary," based in Montreal, has some 5,000 members. Sitting in her living room, the smell of marijuana lingering, Jordana Zabitsky, in her 30s, said she started "Mother Mary" in a bid to push back against "mommy shaming."

"I'm expected to work full time. I'm expected to be with my kids full time. I'm expected to have a clean house. I'm expected to have my bills paid on time. I'm expected to have my winter tires on on time," she says. "I have so much on my shoulders — I am only one person. The cannabis allows me to accomplish my daily tasks so much better!"

Canada's health ministry warns parents against consuming cannabis because of the risks of second-hand smoke, while warning it also "may reduce a person's ability to pay attention (to their child), make decisions

or react to emergencies." But Cyr argues that cannabis is a far better alternative than prescribed opioids or anti-depressants to treat anxiety or depression in new mothers. "Moms feel lonely and do not know where to turn. They feel ashamed and afraid," echoed fellow pot proponent Annie-Claude Bertrand.

### Smoking cannabis while pregnant

Cyr began using cannabidiol (CBD) oil, made from a non-psychoactive compound in cannabis plants, after her second pregnancy to relax. She refused to take opioids prescribed by her doctor that made her feel like a "zombie." "I wasn't sleeping, I had big sleep disorders, (but) the first time I took CBD oil, I slept through the night like I used to," she said.

According to the government statistical agency, 12 percent of Canadian women have used cannabis, compared to 19 percent of the total Canadian population. And several studies show that the drug's popularity among women in both Canada and the United States — where several states have legalized it — is growing fast. Marketers have even taken notice and started targeting their products specifically to women and young mothers.

For women, said Zabitsky, who admitted to consuming "micro-doses" during her first pregnancy and daily when she was pregnant with her second child, "the top question is, 'Can I use cannabis during pregnancy?'" "Right before I went into labor, I smoked a really big joint, and it was fantastic. All my doctors knew," she says, assuring that her three-year-old and one-year-old children are healthy and "too smart" for their respective ages. Doctor Antoine Kanamugire, however, says marijuana is not recommended during pregnancy because "THC, the psychoactive substance, will cross the placenta, so the baby will get 10 to 30 percent of the dose consumed by his mother."

"Cannabis can greatly influence the development of the central nerv-



OTTAWA: In this file photo taken on April 20, 2016 a flag with a marijuana leaf is held on Parliament Hill. —AFP

ous system and the immune system of the fetus," said the author of "The 21 Unspoken Truths About Marijuana." Cannabis also passes into breast milk. Those warnings, however, have not dissuaded Zabitsky and the other mothers in her group, who note that a century of prohibition has had the effect of throttling research into cannabis. In her living room, she unveils THC-infused butter, sweets, soaps and skin creams for her guests, while touting cannabis as good for women's libido. "It's like Viagra for women," she says with a smile. —AFP

CLINIC

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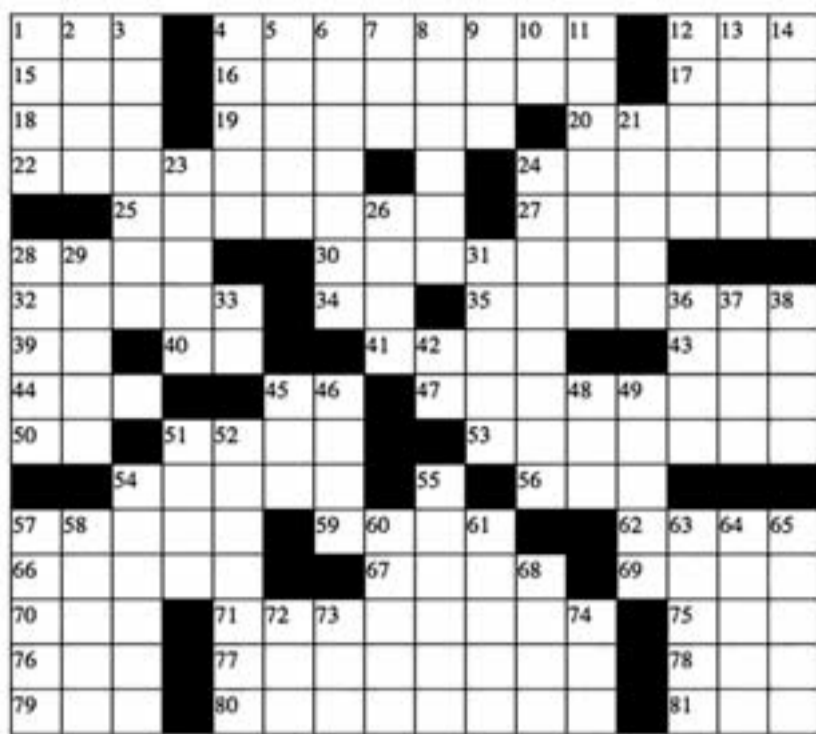
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Stars

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ACROSS

1. A local and habitual twitching especially in the face.
4. Formality in bearing and appearance.
12. Any of various units of capacity.
15. Hormone secreted by the posterior pituitary gland (trade name Pitressin) and also by nerve endings in the hypothalamus.
16. Genus of perennial wildflowers of North American plains and prairies.
17. An informal debt instrument.
18. A unit of length of thread or yarn.
19. A person who owns or operates oil wells.
20. A mental representation of some haunting experience.
22. A form of rummy using two decks and four jokers.
25. Any plant of the genus Gazania valued for their showy daisy flowers.
27. A republic on the Isthmus of Panama.
28. The sixth month of the civil year.
30. Large drinking vessel with one handle.
32. Small and light boat.
34. Before noon.
35. The act of arousing.
39. A state in southeastern United States.
40. A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
41. Something causes misery or death.
43. South American wood sorrel cultivated for its edible tubers.
44. (computer science) A coding system that incorporates extra parity bits in order to detect errors.
47. Music composed for dancing the sara-band.
50. An official prosecutor for a judicial district.
53. European weed naturalized in southwestern United States and Mexico having reddish decumbent stems with small fernlike leaves and small deep reddish-lavender flowers followed by slender fruits that stick straight up.
56. A decree that prohibits something.
57. The visual property of something that shines with reflected light.
59. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
62. A town and port in northwestern Israel in the eastern Mediterranean.
66. Tropical American tree producing cacao beans.
67. Showing characteristics of age, especially having gray or white hair.
69. United States physiologist (born in Germany) who did research on parthenogenesis (1859-1924).
70. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
71. (British) Property that provides tax income for local governments.
75. A run that is the result of the batter's performance.
76. A lipoprotein that transports cholesterol in the blood.
77. Youthful appearance in an old person.
78. A metric unit of volume or capacity equal to 10 liters.
79. Electronic warfare undertaken under direct control of an operational commander to locate sources of radiated electromagnetic energy for the purpose of immediate threat recognition.
80. A band worn around or over the head.
81. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

1. A fine grained mineral having a soft soapy feel and consisting of hydrated magnesium silicate.
2. The content of cognition.
3. A city of central China.
4. 100 groszy equal 1 zloty.
5. An Indian side dish of yogurt and chopped cucumbers and spices.
6. State capital and largest city of Georgia.
7. A healthy capacity for vigorous activity.
8. A large Yoruba city in southwestern Nigeria.
9. A silvery malleable metallic element that resists corrosion.
10. A public promotion of some product or service.
11. Extremely large tree-like cactus of desert regions of southwestern United States having a thick columnar sparsely branched trunk bearing white flowers and edible red pulpy fruit.
12. All the plant and animal life of a particular region.
13. Very close in friendship or affection.
14. In some classifications considered a genus of the subfamily Lutrinae.
21. Of or relating to or supporting Hinduism.
23. American professional baseball player who hit more home runs than Babe Ruth (born in 1934).
24. A cut of pork ribs with much of the meat trimmed off.
26. A metrical unit with unstressed-stressed syllables.
29. The capital and largest city of Bangladesh.
31. Valuable fiber plant of East Indies now widespread in cultivation.
33. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
36. The act of rising upward into the air.
37. An inflammatory disease involving the sebaceous glands of the skin.
38. Remove with or as if with a ladle.
42. A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
45. Someone who is morally reprehensible.
46. A Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Christ.
48. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
49. Obvious and dull.
51. The United Nations agency concerned with atomic energy.
52. (Judaism) A candelabrum with seven branches used in ceremonies to symbolize the seven days of creation.
54. Make steady.
55. African tree having an exceedingly thick trunk and fruit that resembles a gourd and has an edible pulp called monkey bread.
58. (with 'in') Guardianship over.
60. Beet lacking swollen root.
61. Strong lightweight wood of the balsa tree used especially for floats.
63. British filmmaker (born in Hungary) (1893-1956).
64. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
65. A promontory in northern Morocco opposite the Rock of Gibraltar.
68. One of a pair of long straps (usually connected to the bit or the headpiece) used to control a horse.
72. How long something has existed.
73. A beverage made by steeping tea leaves in water.
74. Experiencing or showing sorrow or unhappiness.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You've got a way with words that doesn't come easily for most. You can formulate ideas and put them into easy to understand words on a page. If you don't generally write, don't be surprised if you find yourself volunteering to create a work journal or some sort of how-to for work. You may even find that you're attending a class on writing in the workplace or writing for fun at a local college. It's an adventure too, Aries. Social get-togethers are part of your day now and you'll enjoy the company of friends and family tonight. Bask in the compliments you love to hear given by those who love you.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Emotional change has just added itself to your life's repertoire. With everything else changing in your life, what's one more thing? Oh, it could be, everything! It's not an easy task but you're up to it. You've been studying this part of your life along with other items as well for some time but now you're serious, Taurus. You're generally thoughtful about research prior to movement and this is no different. What do I really want in my life, is the question you've been investigating? About every four years love life questions seem to pop up for the general population. Is that one of yours now? About every twenty years you find major changes in your life. Could that be the issue? Enjoy learning.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You feel stagnated at work and at home when only a few days ago it was wonderful. That's not the case now. You're thinking of going back to school or changing your employment to something more interesting at this time because you feel this is your only recourse. You know time changes everything. Give yourself a moment, Gemini. A moment is not what you want and probably not what you'll take. You want change now. You think you're making the right decision. It may be something you cry over later. You think whatever decision you make will be okay. Again, take time to think.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

At work you're sought out to cut through the red tape and bring focus to the best manner in which to proceed. You like the feeling of being chosen for this process but it seems to get in your way too. You feel the need to connect with others about anything so that you may use any little morsel to help yourself when the time comes. Seeking out those you know can assist you ultimately is part of your communication skill set now. Cancer, you're considering changing your whole spiritual life structure and you're looking for what you think is best to adopt to make your life better. Happy hunting.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You may be thinking of selling real estate you own or going into that profession. You're unsatisfied with your life as it stands now and want new conditions but you don't want anything that seems out of this world. Logic dictates that you make your world one of physical material which will stand the winds of change. "Brick and mortar are much better than creative thought now," is your way of thinking. Career is very big to you, Leo. You're being noticed by some people in the right places who can help you easily. Invite the help and shine on.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Habits seem habitual and not in a good way now for you. You're feeling the need to change. You love being on the go and seeking new opportunities. Taking chances you feel may bring huge rewards and you're ready to do so. Family is part of your many faceted projects. Getting rewarded and being able to share that with family makes you feel good. Virgo. You need to be able to give to the ones you love. There's another thing you need right now and that is to be appreciated for all you do by your family. It's not that you really need accolades. You need your family to think you're doing great.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

This is a time of feeling left out. Thankfully, this will be of short duration. You're not the type person who can undergo a longer period of this type situation. Work isn't your thing right now but ease through it doing the minimum you can without making huge decisions. The only thing making you feel good about yourself is listening to new ideas from coworkers, friends and acquaintances. Though you're adding to the conversation you feel more a part of their lives. Read a good book tonight or watch a favorite television series. Make it all about you now.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Emotional change is but a step away. You're in the mood for experimentation. Be thoughtful before you make a move. This could be a very curious time for you because your thoughts run counter to what others may consider normal. Hot discussions may occur with you not backing down, Scorpio. That just isn't your way but you may have to take a back seat to the opinions of others especially if they're your boss. Communication and learning are at the top of your agenda now. Enjoy new thoughts and concepts. You know how to put them to use.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Emotional modification is happening. Try not to proceed on anything that you think you might want to change back later. This is a time that's moving quickly with added sensitive feelings to urge you on to do something that may have to be altered later. No redecorating or making major changes to your wardrobe should be considered. Give your job a few days before making a change even though you may be offered much more by someone who's seen your work and appreciates you. Later you may find that the state you were in now isn't the best for making life-changing decisions.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You're at your mental best. Sharp thinking coupled with the ability to move quickly allows you to get the best deals on your job now. Things fall into place easily for you, almost as if the universe ordained it. People listen to your ideas which you can logically tell will work effortlessly. You need to be moving, meaning you can't sit still for very long at all. This only assists you in getting what you desire, Capricorn. You've got coworkers watching and partnering in your efforts. Learning new items and communication make you feel better about you. A period of change is coming and you're ready for the emotional ride.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Your habits and work ethics along with your emotional attitudes are getting emphasis put on them to make the changes you've been feeling and thinking about for some time. Variety looks good to you now. Being more unconventional satisfies a deep emotional need. You want to learn from others, Aquarius, and you are. You may have or are thinking of joining a group such as a think tank. That's a great idea for staying on top of any situation in life and bringing your pleasure. You can discuss and communicate with others learning the whole time about how to make your life and theirs better.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You seem to be daydreaming to others today but you really aren't. You're in deep concentration about your life and that of those around you. Penetrating analysis and assessments made for your success makes you seem distant. This might even cause someone at work to agitate the situation a little. Perhaps he or she is not being heard at home and doesn't appreciate thinking you don't care. Hopefully, it's not the boss, Pisces. Bills might have you stirred up right now as you try to find ways to purchase something new. Try not to take on any additional responsibilities. Work on the ones you have. Take time to enjoy some time alone tonight.

Wordsearch Puzzle

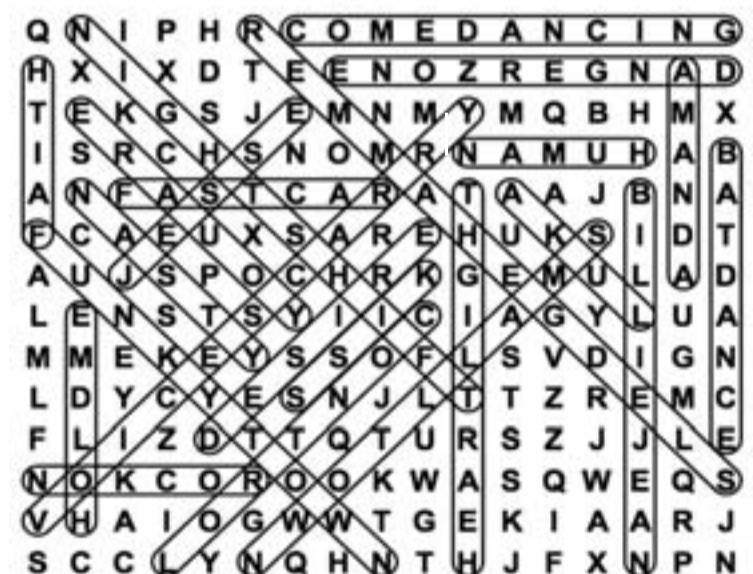
80's Songs 5 - Word Search



- |              |             |           |
|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| ALWAYS       | LA BAMBA    | SAILING   |
| BROKEN WINGS | LETS DANCE  | SATISFIED |
| CHERISH      | LONGER      | THE FLAME |
| CRUISIN      | MONY MONY   | TOO SHY   |
| FAITHFULLY   | MR ROBOTO   | URGENT    |
| GUILTY       | PASSION     | WE BELONG |
| HEARTBREAKER | PATIENCE    | YOUR LOVE |
| HUNGRY HEART | PURPLE RAIN |           |

Yesterday's Solution

80's Songs 4 - Solution



- |              |            |              |
|--------------|------------|--------------|
| BATDANCE     | FAST CAR   | NASTY        |
| AMANDA       | FUNKY TOWN | NIGHTSHIFT   |
| BILLIE JEAN  | HEARTLIGHT | ROCK ON      |
| COME DANCING | HOLD ME    | SLEDGEHAMMER |
| CONTROL      | HUMAN      | SMALL TOWN   |
| DANGER ZONE  | JESSE      | VOICES CARRY |
| DESIRE       | KISS       | YOU ARE      |
| FAITH        | LUKA       |              |

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



# Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2019



A reveler reacts amid a 'flour war' during the 'Ash Monday' celebrations, a traditional festivity marking the end of the carnival season and the start of the 40-day Lent period until the Orthodox Easter, in the port town of Galaxidi, Greece. — AFP

## Will artificial intelligence be the future of music?

They may never be able to fill a stadium for a rock concert, but computers are making inroads in the music industry, capable of producing songs—and convincingly so—as illustrated at the South by Southwest festival in Texas. Already, an album featuring eight tracks has been produced entirely with artificial intelligence, an unprecedented feat. "I Am AI" was released last fall by YouTube star Taryn Southern, who doesn't know how to play any instruments. "For my first music video in 2017, I had a lot of friction as a non-musician," the young artist told a panel discussion on Sunday at the festival running from March 8-17. "I wrote lyrics, I had a melodic line but it was difficult to compose and record the actual music."

The pop artist said she began experimenting with AI two years ago, working with Amper, an artificial intelligence music composition software. "In two days, I had composed a song that I could actually feel was mine," Southern said. "It means that I don't necessarily have to rely on other people." Founded in 2014 in New York by a group of engineers and musicians, Amper is part of about

a dozen start-ups using artificial intelligence to break with the traditional way of making music.

The company's co-founder and CEO, Drew Silverstein, said the aim is not to replace human composers but rather to work with them to reach their goal. He said the company relies on tons of source material—from dance hits to classical music—to produce custom songs. "The idea of Amper is to enable everyone to express themselves (through) music regardless of their background and skills," Silverstein said.

The Amper app allows a user to pick a genre of music (rap, folk, rock) and a mood (happy, sad, driving) before spitting out a song. The user can then change the tempo, add instruments or switch them out until the result is satisfactory. Two songs created by Amper at SXSW—using the public's choice of pop and hip hop as the genres and tender or sad for the mood—clearly aren't likely to top the charts. But the pieces were pleasant enough to the ear and perfectly usable as background music to illustrate a video or a computer game. Such songs are described by Amper as "functional music" as opposed to "artistic music."

### 'A creative tool'

Southern said she reworked the music in her own album dozens of times before she got the right tune. "For me, it's just a tool I can use in my creative process: I'm still the editor, I'm still in the driver's seat," she said. She acknowledged, however, being terrified her album would be panned when it came out, as was the case with other innovations in music, like synthesizers or software to help artists sing right. Jay Boisseau, a computing technologies leader and strategist, predicted that more and more music will be generated by computers in the future but the machine was unlikely to totally replace the human touch.

"We're going to hear a lot of music composed by computers and there's nothing wrong with that," he said. "But computers are not very good at creativity ... they are 0 and 1." "They can find patterns, but they're not, like humans, particularly good to go beyond what they've been trained for. They are tools." For Lance Weiler, an American filmmaker and writer who uses AI in his work, the collaboration between machine and artist should not be sneered at.

"It mainly enables you to improve the way you work, to

augment your skills in expressing creative thoughts," he told the panel discussion.

He added there was no question that AI had its limits and inevitably fails somewhere. "It's like interacting with a toddler," he joked. "It can be very temperamental. You need to put patterns so it doesn't hurt itself." Silverstein underlined that while AI was useful to experiment with an objective goal, "a yes or no answer," when it came to artistic experimentation, it was far from perfect.

For some, such arguments are not convincing, as attested by a British musician at SXSW who didn't appear happy with the competition and questioned whether the word creativity even applied when speaking about music generated by a computer. "It's still an algorithm," Boisseau conceded. "It doesn't mean people won't enjoy it, but it's not completely new." "With the current state of the art, it cannot be 'creative,'" he added. To which Silverstein quickly replied: "Not yet."—AFP

## The Skyrian Carnival



This combination of pictures shows (left above) a woman dressed in a "Koumiotisa" costume posing for a portrait during the Skyrian Carnival, (right above) a man dressed in a costume of "Frank", (left bottom) a man dressed in a costume of "Old Man" and (right bottom) a woman dressed in a costume of "Corela".



People wearing costumes take part in the Skyrian Carnival, on the island of Skyros, northeast of Athens.



Men dressed in costumes of "Old man" take part in the Skyrian Carnival, on the island of Skyros, northeast of Athens. In the celebrations of the Tridion, visitors can witness the custom of the "Old Man" and "Corela". As part of the annual Skyrian Carnival festivities, locals dress up as a figure known as the "Old Man," wearing hairy black capes, goat leather masks and belts with bells on them. The Old Man is accompanied by "Corela," a young man dressed in traditional female costume, and "Frank," a figure in a mask and a large bell. — AFP photos

## Lifestyle | Gossip



# Ball and Boe to headline Hampton Court Palace Festival

**M**ichael Ball & Alfie Boe will headline the final night of Hampton Court Palace Festival. The classical duo will round off an impressive month of music in June at the royal landmark in London, which sees the likes of Nile Rodgers & Chic, Kylie Minogue, The Jacksons and Tears For Fears perform, on June 22. The pair - who were named Best Group at the 2018 Classic BRIT Awards, and have had two number one albums to their name - last played the idyllic

Palace Gardens in 2017. The final headliner announcement comes after Nile Rodgers and his band added a second show at the extravaganza due to demand. The 'Le Freak' hitmakers - who released their first album in 25 years, 'It's About Time', in September - sold out their first date on June 14, and will now play a second concert at the 3,000 capacity Base Court - one of the Tudor courtyards in the stunning grounds of the historical landmark - on June 15. Caro Emerald will play the festival on June 12,

jazz star Jools Holland performs on June 6, new-wave pioneers Tears For Fears on June 18 and 19, and pop legends The Jacksons on June 7. Kylie will headline on June 20 and 21, for what will be the Australian pop princess' only London dates of the summer. The finale night will also see a fireworks spectacular over the palace. Tickets for June 22 go on general sale at 10am on Thursday.

## Red Hot Chili Peppers to live-stream Pyramids gig

**R**ed Hot Chili Peppers will live-stream their concert from the Pyramids in Egypt. The 'Give It Away' hitmakers are set to perform the special concert from the Pyramids of Giza - one of the seven wonders of the world - on March 15, with people all over the world able to tune via the band's website at 6pm BST (11am PT). Anthony Kiedis and co follow in the footsteps of music royalty, including the late great Frank Sinatra, Mariah Carey and Sting in performing at the Pyramids. Bass player Flea's "heart is abuzz" ahead of the once-in-a-life time concert. He said: "Before each new place my body tingled with excitement, a yearning for a new mystery to unfold, a fascination with a new culture, the possibility of new friends, tasting new food, smelling new tastes, absorbing new rhythms.



"Learning. Learning. Learning. It is happening again right now, my heart is abuzz with joy at the prospect of performing in Egypt. I'm so grateful and humbled for the impending experience." He continued: "The pyramids, it's unbelievable, we just jumped at the opportunity... I have always been fascinated by Egypt and that region of the world and I am so excited to go." The Grammy winners - completed by drummer Chad Smith and Josh Klinghoffer - haven't released an album since 2016's 'The Getaway', but they were in the studio working on a follow-up last year, until the California wildfires "halted" their progress. Chad said recently: "We started to work on [the new album], which, for us, is just getting in a room and making some noise and putting some notes together. "And then the fires came, and the house we were working in - there was no damage, it didn't burn down, but we couldn't get back in there. So that halted our [progress]."

## Madness 'talking' about reviving Our House musical

**M**adness are "talking" about bringing back their musical 'Our House' as part of their 40th anniversary. The iconic London ska band's Olivier Award-winning show, which was co-written by Tim Firth, had a 10-month run at the Cambridge Theatre in the British capital's theatre district between 2002 and 2003, and it could be returning for the band's milestone celebrations. Frontman Suggs - who had a brief stint playing Joe's dad in the show - told the Daily Star newspaper: "We are talking about reviving it a bit. "The problem was when we put it out the first time it was such an expensive production, as we wanted it to be the best it can be, and so the production itself was crippling the expenses." 'Our House' - which is also the title of the band's 1982 hit from the 'Rise & Fall' album - is also a touring show and Suggs says if it comes back, it will still be the same production but refreshed. He added: "Now it's the most popular amateur musical that has been performed. "There's probably 40 versions of that show on at any time in England so we are trying to work out a way, not losing the production, but revitalizing it." The 'Baggy Trousers' hitmakers have also announced two major outdoor London shows and a book for their big 40th. The band will bring their 'Madness XL' show to Kenwood House in North London on June 15, where they will be joined by a full orchestra as part of the Heritage Live concert series. They'll then play their very own House Of Common festival at Clapham Common in South London on August 26. Teasing their epic plans to celebrate the past four decades of the iconic group, the 58-year-old singer said: "40 years at the coal face of modern popular culture. Man and boy. "Dedicated to the pureness of popular music of quality and distinction to the people. "Dedicated in our selfless quest to have the nation singing, dancing and making merry through some of the darkest times of the last four decades. "There will be feasts, street parties extraordinary concerts of every shape and size up and down the nation." As well as the two shows, the band - who have released 12 albums since forming in Camden, London, in 1976 - are also set to release the new autobiography 'Before We Was We' on September 26, which "tells the story of how Madness became Madness". Madness are also in the studio working hard on new music, which is set to be released later this year. Their last full length effort was 2016's 'Can't Touch Us Now'.



## Take That's final show of Greatest Hits Live Tour to air in cinemas

**T**ake That's final show of their 'Greatest Hits Live Tour' will be screened live in cinemas nationwide. The Manchester pop group - comprised of Gary Barlow, Mark Owen and Howard Donald - have teamed up with CinemaLive to offer their fans the chance to witness their performance at the Principality Stadium, Cardiff, South Wales, from the comfort of one of over 600 cinemas in the UK and Ireland on June 8 from 8pm. According to a press release, there will also be "exclusive cinema content" aired for the big finale, which is part of the 'Back For Good' hitmakers' 30th anniversary celebrations. The band said: "We're so excited to be able to bring all our fans together for the last night of our UK tour - it's going to be a really special night for us. "To have cinema audiences all around the UK and Ireland joining us here in Cardiff will be incredible - we can't wait. See you all really soon!" In 2017, the trio broadcast their 'Wonderland Tour' show from The O2, which broke the record to become the highest-grossing live concert cinema screening of all time. The extensive run of dates in the UK and Ireland kick off on

April 12 at Sheffield's FlyDSA Arena and includes eight stops at London's The O2. The 'Shine' hitmakers released the album 'Odyssey' ahead of the tour, which saw them re-imagine their greatest hits and featured the lead single 'Pray', plus hits such as 'Rule the World', 'Relight My Fire' and 'Patience'. The Manchester boyband formed in 1989, along with part-timer Robbie Williams and former member Jason Orange. There had been talk of both of them rejoining the group for the special milestone. However, Robbie - who quit Take That in 1995, a year before they originally split, and rejoined from 2009 to 2012 - admitted though he'd love to mark 30 years of the band, he'd only be willing to do it if Jason came back after leaving in 2014. He said: "I'm up for it. But I don't know what their calendar says, what my calendar says. I don't know what their manager says. "We'd all love to do it. I'd love to get Jason back involved, realistically I don't think so. "If we could get Jay back it would be perfect."

## Rixton change name to Push Baby

**R**ixton are now known as Push Baby. Jake Roche and co were dropped by their label Interscope (Universal), who they'd been signed to since their debut album 'Let The Road' - which featured the number one single 'Me And My Broken Heart' - was released in 2015, last August. But the band - completed by Lewi Morgan, Danny Wilkin and Charley Bagnall - are now working with Justin Bieber and Ariana Grande's manager Scooter Braun under his SB Projects, and are starting afresh with the new name. The band will kickstart their new chapter with the release of their comeback single 'The Running Jump', with more material set to follow. A source told The Sun newspaper's Bizarre column: "Rixton only ever managed to get one album out and it peaked at just No19. "They still believe

they have huge potential though so they have decided to rebrand the band entirely. "Over the past four years they've created Push Baby and have started working on new material including a song called 'The Running Jump'. "They're really hoping this is going to be the start of something big." The band have also rebranded their YouTube and Jake - whose parents are soap star Shane Richie and 'Loose Women' panellist Coleen Nolan - quipped that he hoped news of their new name will bring up their details rather than childbirth. He wrote on their profile: "Hopefully by the time anybody is reading this, the search results of Push Baby will be more than just women giving birth." Rixton attempted a comeback in December 2016, with the release of 'I Swear She'll Be The Death Of Me', which they released on Soundcloud, and was believed to have been about Jake's split from Little Mix star Jesy Nelson. Scooter helped launch their career by adding them as the main support act for 'No Tears Left to Cry' singer Ariana in America in 2015.



## De La Soul and more announced for LIMF 2019

**D**e La Soul, Sigma, Ella Eyre, Maverick Sabre and Nao are set to play Liverpool's International Music Festival (LIMF). The New York hip-hop legends - who celebrate the 30th anniversary of their seminal LP '3 Feet High and Rising' on March 14 - will play the northern city's Sefton Park, along with the likes of the 'Coming Home' duo, 'Just Got Paid' hitmaker, English-Irish rapper and funk-and-soul star, this summer. The event, which takes place on July 20 and July 21, will also see Kenny Dope, Yxng Bane, MiC Lowry, Jazzie B of Soul II Soul, Norman Jay MBE, Grace Carter and a host of DJs perform. An exclusive '3Beat @ 30' 30th Anniversary live performance will also take place, featuring Sigma, M-22, Geko and Anton Powers. Yaw Owusu, LIMF's music curator said: "Amidst a stellar set of music events in Liverpool this year, I'm glad that again LIMF is able to do what it does best as it presents an accessible, inclusive and musically diverse line up that continues to be a platform for great performers and performances and truly reflects what's happening here in Liverpool. "Seven years in, it really feels like LIMF is hitting its stride and continually pushing the agenda. I look forward to seeing many people from across the city, the country and further afield, come together to enjoy great music in Sefton Park at LIMF 2019." 'Disco Classical' featuring Sister Sledge with Kathy Sledge was previously confirmed for the annual event. The 'We Are Family' hitmakers, sisters Kim and Debbie Sledge, will be joined by their sibling Kathy for the spectacular live show celebrating the music of the disco era. The iconic group will be joined by the Manchester Camerata Orchestra - who opened Glastonbury Festival



in 2017 - and special guests, including DJ Mark Armstrong, as they put on an unforgettable show playing reimagined renditions of their biggest hits and songs from the period which saw their collaborator Nile Rodgers and his band Chic, Diana Ross and more dominate the charts. The founder of Disco Classical, Denise Harris, commented: "Liverpool is world famous for its music scene and Disco Classical is extremely excited to be headlining in Sefton Park as part of LIMF. "Disco Classical will bring together an incredible soundtrack with very special guests Sister Sledge featuring Kathy Sledge, and accompanied live on stage by the full legendary, Manchester Camerata Orchestra, who know how to push the boundaries in classical music. "Added to this the combination of our phenomenal singers, a choir, a band and a renowned DJ - we know we'll have Sefton Park 'Lost in Music!'"

Lifestyle | Gossip

# Radcliffe sets deadline to make directorial debut



**D**aniel Radcliffe wants to have directed a film and become a father by the time he's 40. The 29-year-old actor - who is best known for portraying the titular wizard in the 'Harry Potter' franchise - is keen to make a move behind the camera and create his own stories for the big screen. And Radcliffe admits that "in a few years from now" he would like to have a baby with his girlfriend, actress Erin Darke, whom he has been dating since 2013. In an interview with StarLifestyle, he said: "I would like to start directing in my 30s and try to get at least one film made before I turn

40. And at some point, not immediately, but in a few years from now, I'll probably be thinking about starting a family. So to get to my 40s and be a dad and have directed one film, I think I'd be very happy." Radcliffe went on to explain that since making his name in the wizarding series has found that he has naturally moved away from making big Hollywood movies and instead been more attracted to independent movies and "challenging or weird" scripts such as 'Swiss Army Man' in which he played a talking corpse called Manny. He said: "It's not a deliberate decision. I go where the scripts are.

It's hard to get anyone to spend money on (scripts that are) too big of a risk. A lot of the big studios, I find the scripts are not as challenging or weird or interesting as the stuff they make in the indie world or even in the TV world. "So the things that I gravitate to, so far they just happen to be in the indie world. But if there's something happening in the studios and I love the script, I would love to be a part of some crazy big movie. It's just about waiting for the right script."

## Plans for Bohemian Rhapsody sequel underway



**A**'Bohemian Rhapsody' sequel could be in the works. Rudi Dolezal - who worked with Queen on their music videos for 'These Are the Days of Our Lives', 'The Show Must Go On' and 'The Invisible Man' - has spilled that a follow-up to the biopic has been "heavily discussed" with the band's manager Jim Beach after the first movie bagged four Academy Awards. Speaking to the New York Post's Page Six column about Jim's ideas, he said: "I'm sure he plans a sequel that starts with Live Aid." 'Bohemian Rhapsody' ends with the band's legendary performance at 1985 benefit concert Live Aid with singer Freddie Mercury reconciling with his bandmates and revealing the news to them that he has contracted HIV. At this year's Oscars, Rami Malek was named Best Actor for his portrayal of frontman Freddie - who died at the age of 45 in 1991 from AIDS-related pneumonia - whilst the movie also received golden

statuettes for Best Film Editing, Best Sound Editing and Best Sound Mixing. Meanwhile, Queen + Adam Lambert are set to star in a new documentary. The 'American Idol' star joined forces with the remaining touring members of the group - guitarist Brian May and drummer Roger Taylor - back in 2011 filling in for Freddie on vocals and they have continued to tour together to critical acclaim, selling out concerts all over the globe. Adam's story with the 'Radio Ga Ga' hitmakers will be told in new two-hour documentary entitled 'The Show Must Go On'. Previously taking to Twitter to share the news, Adam posted: "So excited about our documentary 'The Show Must Go On - The Queen + Adam Lambert Story' airing on @ABCNetwork on April 29th!! @QueenWillRock (sic)".



## Lupita Nyong'o learned ukulele for Little Monsters

**L**upita Nyong'o learned to play the ukulele for her role in 'Little Monsters'. The 36-year-old actress plays Miss Caroline in the upcoming horror-comedy, a preschool teacher who finds herself in the midst of a zombie outbreak and fights to keep her students alive and uses ukulele sing-alongs of hit songs such as Taylor Swift's 'Shake It Off' to keep their spirits up. The 'Black Panther' star loved the notion that her alter ego would sing to her students whilst tackling the undead but before making the effort to learn guitar-like instrument she did ask if she would be getting a "ukulele double" for the role. Speaking on stage at the SXSW Conference and Festival with the film's writer and director Abe Forsythe, she said: "I love Fraulein Maria in 'The Sound of Music' and she's [Miss Caroline is] my Fraulein. I even asked [Abe], 'Are you gonna have a ukulele double?' To which Forsythe replied: 'I told her, 'No, you can win an Oscar, you can learn to play the ukulele.'" The 'Us' star previously revealed that the song 'Shake It Off' had helped her through a "hard time professionally" when she was stuck in a "funk" over something in her professional life, but as soon as her friend played her the song, they started dancing and it acted as a release for her. She recalled: "I was going through a hard time professionally, and I was just in a funk. I was working abroad, and my best friend came to cheer me up. He played 'Shake It Off' on his phone, and we just had a dance party in my bedroom." The '12 Years a Slave' actress even managed to get Taylor, 29, to personally clear the track so it could be used in 'Little Monsters' after the team behind comedy-horror were struggling to get the rights. She added: "It meant a lot to me that this film had that [song]. And so when I heard that they were having a hard time [getting the rights] I wrote Taylor Swift myself and asked her, and told her that story. And she said yes!"

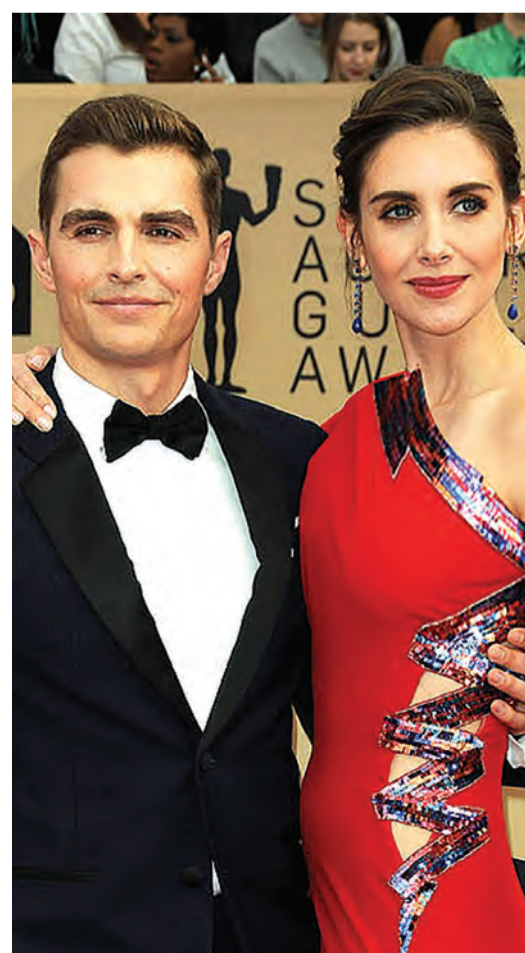
## Bollywood biopic on Mother Teresa being made



**B**ollywood is creating a biopic about the life of the late Mother Teresa. The film - which is thought to be named 'Mother Teresa The Saint' - will be written and directed by Indian politician, Seema Upadhyay, and will have a yet-to-be-announced cast of both Indian and international actors. The Bollywood project, which has a release date of 2020, will be produced by 'Paanchi' Pradeep Sharma. 'Ready' Nitin Manmohan, Girish Johar and Prachi Manmohan, and will follow the life of the famous Roman Catholic nun and missionary, who became renowned for her humanitarian work in India and was subsequently declared a saint by Pope Francis. Writing on Twitter, Girish confirmed the news saying: "Proud NEW journey ... Official biopic on nobel laureate #MotherTeresa launched, produced by Pradeep Sharma, Nitin Manmohan, Girish Johar & @Prachinn. Written-Directed by Seema Upadhyay. Cast-Crew comprises top talent pools of Bollywood & Hollywood. @OneUpEntertain @seems\_u (sic)" The filmmakers met with Sister Prema Mary Pierick, the current Superior General of the Missionaries of Charity - which was set up by Mother Teresa in 1948 - and Sister Lynne in Kolkata to seek their blessings for the movie. In a statement, Upadhyay said: "She is a global icon and we will ensure to leave no stone unturned to meet her international stature and pay our tribute to the noble soul. We hope we will do justice and will be able to spread the message for peace, love and humanity that Mother Teresa stood for." The Albanian nun - who later became an Indian citizen - has had many projects made about her incredible life and work with orphans and disadvantaged people throughout India. In 2003, there was a documentary named 'Mother Teresa of Calcutta' and in 2014 a film called 'The Letters' explored her life through letters she wrote to her long-time friend and spiritual adviser Father Celeste van Exem. — Bang Showbiz

## Brie and Franco to work on The Rental together

**A**lison Brie and Dave Franco are set to work on 'The Rental' together. The 33-year-old actor will make his directorial debut on the horror thriller movie and he has cast his wife in a key role, with the duo no doubt hopeful to emulate the success of husband and wife team Emily Blunt and John Krasinski in 'A Quiet Place'. Franco shared: "I couldn't be more excited about partnering with Black Bear and to be working with such an amazing group of actors for my directorial debut." Brie will star in the movie alongside Dan Stevens, Sheila Vand and Jeremy Allen White, with shooting starting in April in Oregon. Black Bear Pictures are financing the movie and will also be producing alongside Ramona Films, belonging to Franco. Vince Jolivette, Elizabeth Haggard Dave Franco himself with produce alongside Black Bear's Ben Stillman and Teddy Schwarzman. Joe Swanberg and Chris Storer complete the producing line up, with Black Bear's Michael Heimler and Sean Durkin executive producing. The 'Rental' follows the story of two couples who decide to rent a home for a short celebratory vacation away but things quickly start to go wrong. Deadline reports, Brie and Franco worked together on their new movie 'The Little Hours' in 2017 and she described it as a "blast" as she loved having her "person" with her. Alison said: "We knew so many people doing the movie. And Dave [Franco], it was nice to have my person with me! ... It was a blast, it was all a blast for me." Whilst Dave added in a Q&A about the movie in New York: "I enjoyed it."



## Holland to reunite with Russo brothers in Cherry



**T**om Holland is reuniting with the Russo brothers to star in 'Cherry'. The 'Spider-Man: Homecoming' actor is set to star in the adaptation of Nico Walker's 2018 based-on-truth novel, which 'Avengers: Infinity War' and 'Avengers: Endgame' directors Joe and Anthony Russo secured the rights to last year. The tome tells the true story of the author, a former army medic who returned from war in Iraq with un-diagnosed PTSD, fell into opioid addiction and began robbing banks. Walker was caught in 2011 and is scheduled to be released in 2020. Jessica Goldberg wrote the adaptation while Joe and Anthony will produce for their AGBO studio. Tom, 22, will return to the screen in the highly anticipated 'Avengers: Endgame' which will be released on April 26 and 'Spider-Man: Far From Home' due on July 3 and Marvel Studios previously announced that won't announce any upcoming films until both the movies have been released. Kevin Feige - President of Marvel Studios - has confirmed that although there is a "tremendous amount of potential" for characters and storylines in the MCU, fans will have to wait until after Tom's second standalone Spider-Man film hits cinemas. Feige previously said: "As we've been doing for years, we aren't going to announce anything post-'Avengers: Endgame' or 'Spider-Man' until post-'Endgame' and 'Spider-Man'. "As you know as a fan, there's a tremendous amount of potential and a tremendous amount of additional characters and storylines and groups of characters that we're going to keep playing with. "And again, that's a testament to Marvel and to the amount of storylines and characters and amazing, amazing runs that have been in the Marvel comics."

## Olivia Wilde: Directing takes a lot of courage

**O**livia Wilde says it took "a lot of courage" to direct her first film. The 35-year-old actress-and-filmmaker has admitted that despite having plenty of experience of helming music videos and short films, it was a while before she finally felt confident enough to step behind the camera for her big screen directorial debut 'Booksmart', which sees Will Ferrell and Adam McKay produce. According to The Hollywood Reporter, she said: "But it takes a lot of courage to do it. "I had to spend a lot of time paying attention and observing. It's a good way to get your feet wet." The 'Tron: Legacy' star was inspired by coming-of-age movies like 'The Breakfast Club' and 'Dazed and Confused' as a teenager and always dreamed of being a moviemaker. She said: "I just had a dream of making a film like the ones I loved and still love. "In my teenage years, it was the generational anthems that kept me going. "I thought, 'We need one of those for this generation. I want to help with that conversation.'" Wilde wouldn't be without her amazing casting director Allison Jones - who has worked across movies and TV - and was able to ensemble Wilde's "dream cast". She said: "She has



discovered generations of brilliant talent from 'Freaks and Greeks' to 'Superbad' to 'The Office' and now to 'Booksmart'. "It was incredible to discover so many of these people with her and to get my dream cast. "That's a filmmaker's absolutely fantasy. "I'm so so lucky because these people here are the future of the entertainment industry and we're so lucky." Kaitlyn Dever and Beanie Feldstein are set to star in 'Booksmart'. The movie tells the story of the pair's respective characters, Amy and Molly, who on the night before their high school graduation, decide they should have had more fun during their four years at school. They decide to try to fit four years' worth of fun into one epic night. Jason Sudeikis, Lisa Kudrow and Billie Lourd are also set to appear in the movie. Olivia has previously directed music videos for Red Hot Chili Peppers and Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros. She has also produced and executive produced a number of projects.

# Kochi Metro Short Film Fest forays into Kuwait

## New gen is reinventing cinema: Actor Raveendran

By Sajeev K Peter

The Indian film industry is in the cusp of an evolution. The young and new generation filmmakers are probably reinventing cinema and seeking a new idiom for the medium, said South Indian actor Raveendran in a recent interview.

"Today's cinema has largely become more realistic in which melodramatic acting or rhetoric find little room. In a way, you are holding 'a mirror up to the society'. Actors would be behaving rather than acting," he said explaining the emerging trends in the South Indian cinema. Raveendran, also known as Ravindher is a versatile actor and is popular in South Indian film industry.

Interestingly, these new gen films enjoy a better rapport among the audience than the big-budget film productions, he said citing the phenomenal successes of Malayalam movies like 'Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum,' 'Sudani from Nigeria' or 'Kumbalangi Nights.' "The story maybe something very common that could happen in your neighborhood and characters and actors you could meet up next door. Because, audiences are fed up with the melodrama flicks and larger-than-life-size characters in the films," he said.

Raveendran did some memorable roles along with leading film stars in South Indian film industry before he took a sabbatical from cinema. His debutante Tamil film Oru Thalai Ragam was a big hit confirming his stature as a promising actor in the Tamil film industry. He acted along with Tamil heroes like Kamal Hassan and Rajnikanth in several blockbusters like Sagalakala Vallavan, Per Sollum Pillai, Ram Lakshman, Ranga, Thankamagan and Pokkiri Raja.

Raveendran joined Malayalam film industry subsequently, acting predominantly in IV Sasi hits like Aswaratham, Ee Nadu, John Jaffer Janardhan, Innalengil Nale, Sindhoora Sandhyakku Mounam, Iniyengilum, Athiratham, Idanilangal, Karimbinpoovinakkare, Rangam and Abhayam Thedi etc.

"I left cinema at the peak of my acting career to focus on my family business and to learn architecture. But later, I realized a need to launch cinema literacy programs in Kerala," Raveendran recalled. He took some painstaking efforts to build a film appreciation culture in Kerala and organized several short film festivals to create awareness about good cinema. Raveendran is the founder and festival director of Kochi International Film Festival, Monsoon Cinefest and Peace International.

### Interactive platform

Kochi Metro Short Film Fest (KMSFF) Middle East is his brain child which he founded to create an interactive platform for directors, producers, debutante film makers, technicians and actors in the Middle East. It was formed in 2014 with renowned Indian actor Padmabhooshan Mohanlal as its chairman and Raveendran as its Festival Director and CEO. Its chapters have been formed in Bahrain, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman, he informed.

"Kochi Metro is expanding into Kuwait. And I have initiated talks with film enthusiasts in

Kuwait to explore the possibility of forming a chapter of KMSFF in Kuwait," he said. Raveendran held workshops for filmmakers from Kuwait who participated in the KMSFF short film festival that was held in Bahrain.

"At Kochi Metro, we are providing a creative platform for aspiring expat film-makers. Kochi Metro Short Film Fest (Middle East) is an innovative platform for creative minds. In addition to the film festivals we hold at regular intervals at different locations in the GCC, we nurture budding expat talents, train them both academically and technically in order to mold them into good film-makers," he explained. The festival will also provide emerging film professionals an opportunity to create a network for promoting friendship and cooperation among themselves from all around the GCC.

In Kuwait, Raveendran held film workshops for a group of film enthusiasts offering them hands-on experience in film-making and post-production works such as scripting, film-shooting and editing etc. Workshops were held in Salmiya and Kabd areas and the attendees were split into three different teams. Under his guidance, the teams shot four short films over a period of three days.



Raveendran

## Disabled animals given new lease of life at Israeli sanctuary



Miri, a three-legged donkey, Gary, a sheep with leg braces, and Omer, a blind goat, munch on some hay at Israel's only animal rescue and educational sanctuary. Founded by animal rights activists Adit Romano, a 52-year-old former business executive, and Meital Ben Ari, 38, who used to work in tech, Freedom Farm serves as a refuge for mostly disabled animals and as an educational centre for visitors. "If you want people to open their hearts towards these animals, we have to bring them close," said Romano, stroking two pigs named Yossi and Omri.

Most of the nearly 240 animals at the facility were raised for slaughter. Some were donated by farmers who chose to save them. Others, like Miri, who was found lying in a ditch with a broken leg, were abandoned. After Miri's rescue, her leg was amputated. Ben Ari said children with special needs particularly enjoy tours of the

farm and its 5 acres (2 hectares) of green pastures, stables and a barn in Moshav Olesh, an agricultural community in central Israel. On a visit with her 84-year-old father, Shira Breuer, 56, said: "I'm worried about the future of humanity and this place sounds like a place of hope."

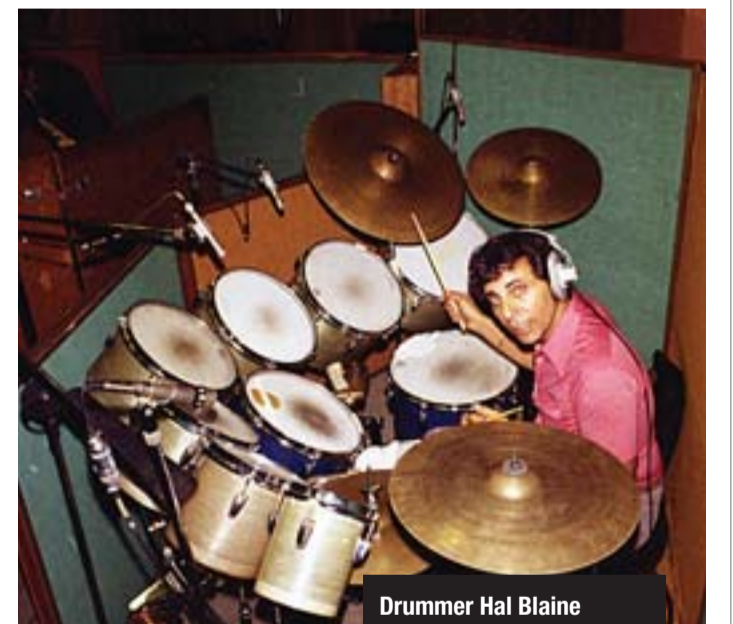
The farm's most recent addition is Nir, a five-month-old cow fitted with a prosthetic leg to replace one that was broken and then amputated. Freedom Farm raised money for the artificial limb and medical care through an internet crowd funding campaign. It costs about \$1 million a year to run the farm, which relies on contributions and volunteer workers from Israel and abroad, including musicians - who come and play for the animals. —Reuters



## Legendary drummer Hal Blaine dies at 90

Hal Blaine, the acclaimed drummer who played on dozens of chart-toppers for artists including Frank Sinatra and The Beach Boys, died Monday. He was 90 years old. "May he rest forever on 2 and 4," said a statement from the family of the prolific drummer, who played with "The Wrecking Crew" cohort of venerated session players in Los Angeles. Born Harold Simon Belsky in Holyoke, Massachusetts, Blaine gained fame in the sixties for his deft touch that easily maneuvered between genres from bubblegum pop to folk to R&B. His beats featured on hits including The Ronettes' "Be My Baby," Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water," Frank Sinatra's "Strangers In The Night" and Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Are Made For Walkin'".

"I'm so sad, I don't know what to say," tweeted Brian Wilson of The Beach Boys, the California rockers Blaine played with on a number of tracks including "Good Vibrations." "Hal taught me a lot, and he had so much to do with our success - he was the greatest drummer ever," Wilson said. "We also laughed an awful lot." Neil Portnow who heads the Recording Academy, the institution behind the Grammys-hailed Blaine as "legendary," noting the artist's 2018 Lifetime Achievement Award from the academy and his contributions to "tens of thousands of songs." "Godspeed, dear friend," wrote Nancy Sinatra in a statement. "You made the world a better place." —AFP



Drummer Hal Blaine

## 'Meatless Mondays' on horizon for New York City schools

Starting in September, New York city's 1.1 million school students will eat vegetarian meals on "Meatless Mondays," Mayor Bill de Blasio announced Monday. "Cutting back on meat a little will improve New Yorkers' health and reduce greenhouse gas emissions," Democrat de Blasio said. The program, which began in 15 Brooklyn schools almost a year ago with vegetarian breakfasts and lunches on Mondays, will be extended to the whole massive school system. "Reducing our appetite for meat is one of the single biggest ways individuals can reduce their environmental impact on our planet," said Mark Chambers, Director of the NYC Mayor's Office of Sustainability. Hundreds of public schools in

San Francisco and other California jurisdictions have already offered their students a "meatless Monday." A new Democratic bill in California even proposes offering state students a vegan choice. "For those who scoff at this notion, I have some simple advice: look at the science. Look at the data. Look at the childhood obesity. Look at pre-diabetes diagnoses. Look at the fact that 65 percent of American kids age 12-14 shows signs of early cholesterol disease," said Staten Island Borough President James Oddo. "Then, perhaps you will embrace the fact that we can't keep doing things the same way, including welcoming the idea of Meatless Mondays." Oddo said. —AFP



# China says Xinjiang has 'boarding schools', not 'concentration camps'

## West using Christianity to subvert Chinese state: Official

BEIJING: China is running boarding schools not concentration camps in the far western region of Xinjiang, its governor said yesterday, as the United States called conditions there "completely unacceptable". China has faced growing international opprobrium for what it says are vocational training centers in Xinjiang, a vast region bordering central Asia that is home to millions of Uighurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities. Activists say there is a network of mass detention camps there holding more than a million people, part of a crackdown that Beijing says is needed to stem the threat of Islamist extremism.

The US government has weighed sanctions against senior Chinese officials in Xinjiang, including on the Communist Party boss there, Chen Quanguo, who as a member of the powerful politburo is in the upper echelons of China's leadership. Xinjiang governor Shohrat Zakir, the region's most senior Uighur official who ranks below Chen, said that there had not been any violent attacks in more than two years and three months since the government adopted "a series of measures" to combat terror and extremism.

"Some international voices say Xinjiang has concentration camps and re-education camps," Shohrat Zakir told a briefing on the sidelines of China's annual largely rubberstamp parliament. "These kinds of statements are completely fabricated lies, and are extraordinarily absurd," he said. "They are the same as boarding schools," he said, adding that the personal freedoms of the "students" were guaranteed. Chen, who attended what was one of the most eagerly anticipated briefings of China's parliamentary session by foreign media, did not answer questions on the camps.

In an 18-minute-long reply to a journalist's question, Zakir defended the centers, saying that they taught Xinjiang residents Chinese, helped them gain awareness of the law, improved vocational skills, and were vital in the region's fight against extremism. "When (students) are able to distinguish between right and wrong and able to resist the infiltration of extreme thoughts... they have a strong desire to get rid of poverty and get rich, actively pursuing a better life," he added.

### Possible sanctions

Former detainees, however, have described to Reuters being tortured during interrogation at the

camps, living in crowded cells and being subjected to a brutal daily regimen of party indoctrination that drove some people to suicide. Some of the sprawling facilities in the region are ringed with razor wire and watch towers. US officials have said China has made criminal many aspects of religious practice and culture in Xinjiang, including punishment for teaching Muslim texts to children and bans on parents giving their children Uighur names.

Academics and journalists have documented grid-style police checkpoints across Xinjiang and mass DNA collection, and human rights advocates have decried martial law-type conditions there. Chen made his mark swiftly after taking the top post in Xinjiang in 2016, with mass "anti-terror" rallies conducted in the region's largest cities involving tens of thousands of paramilitary troops and police.

United Nations human rights chief Michelle Bachelet is seeking access to China to verify continuing reports of disappearances and arbitrary detentions, particularly of Muslims in Xinjiang. US ambassador for religious freedom Sam Brownback, speaking from Taipei on a teleconference call with reporters, said the situation in Xinjiang was "completely unacceptable" and that sanctions against Chinese officials under the Global Magnitsky Act remained a "possibility".

That act is a federal law that allows the US government to target human rights violators around the world with freezes on any US assets, US travel bans and prohibitions on Americans doing business with them. Brownback added that dialogue between Washington and Beijing on the issue had made little headway thus far, calling discussions "more of a dual monologue".

"The monologue back from China initially was that they denied the (detention camps) even existed and then the statement was that these are vocational training facilities which the people are appreciative of, which we just don't agree with," he said. China has warned that it would retaliate "in proportion" against any US sanctions.

### Subversion

Meanwhile, a Chinese official accused "anti-China forces" in the West of using Christianity to subvert the country's political power and said worshippers must follow a Chinese form of religion. China's officially



BEIJING: Xinjiang Party Secretary Chen Quanguo (left) and Chairman of Xinjiang's government Shohrat Zakir listen to a question during the Xinjiang delegation meeting at the ongoing National People's Congress at the Great Hall of the People yesterday. — AFP

atheist government, which oversees religious groups through state-sponsored institutions, has tightened its grip on all faiths in recent years.

"Anti-China forces in the West are attempting to continue to influence the social stability of our country through Christianity, and even subvert the political power of our country," Xu Xiaohong, chairman of the state-backed National Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee, which oversees the Protestant churches, said on Monday.

Speaking at the annual gathering of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a largely ceremonial advisory body, Xu described the introduction of Christianity in China as "accompanying the intense colonial aggression by the West". Only by incorporating Chinese culture into Christianity would the religion become something Chinese people could identify with, said Xu. For those who "subvert national security in the name of Christianity, we support the country in bringing them to justice," he added.

His remarks come days after Brownback said the Chinese government was "at war with faith", persecuting Muslim Uighurs, Tibetan Buddhists, Christians and Falungong practitioners. In China, Protestants are split between unofficial and state-sanctioned churches, where Communist Party songs also feature in the order of service. Over the past year, unofficial "house" or "underground" churches have faced increasing pressure, with some church members detained under subversion charges.

In December, the pastor of the Early Rain Covenant Church, a prominent unofficial Protestant congregation in southwest Sichuan province, was detained in a police raid under charges of "inciting subversion of state power," according to the church. In September, Beijing officials also shut down Zion Church, one of China's largest unofficial Protestant churches, for operating without a license in the capital - before ordering it to pay back 1.2 million yuan (\$170,000) in rent and removal costs. — Agencies

## Nike star slams French attitude to sports hijab

PARIS: American Olympic fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad and representatives of her sponsors, Nike, criticized French attitudes to the hijab on a promotional visit to the country. Muhammad was attending a long-planned event in Paris at which the US sportswear brand launched their strips for 14 nations, including the hosts, in the women's World Cup in France this summer. In February, the American sportswear company was embroiled in a controversy when retailer Decathlon withdrew sports Nike's hijab from its French stores after one day following threats.

"I'll be in my @Nike pro hijab every damn day," Muhammad, who in 2016 became the first American to compete in a hijab in the Games, tweeted before

travelling to France. "It's sad to me that France has not joined the global conversation around inclusively, around diversity. To prohibit a company from selling a sport hijab is shameful," the Olympic bronze medalist told AFP on Monday. "I think that it hurts much more than it helps your nation here."

Bert Hoyt, a Nike vice-president, said the company was looking forward to the women's World Cup in France. "Our goal is to provide the access for all women to have the opportunity to play sport and to play women's football," he said. "We believe that we are at the beginning of a journey and we believe that the World Cup in June will be a tipping point for the future of the women's game."

The Nike hijab provoked strong reactions in France. A spokeswoman for President Emmanuel Macron's centrist party, Aurore Berge, said the sports hijab goes against French "values". Lydia Guirous of the center-right Republicans said it went hand in hand with "the submission of women". Muhammad disagreed. "I think you're not a feminist if you believe that wearing a hijab is not a choice," she said.

"Anyone who believes in individual rights, freedom of choice, should support women who choose to wear it. It's not your choice. It should be our choice. And anyone who sees a problem with that does not belong in sport, because sport is a place that it supposed to be inclusive of everyone, not matter where you're from, your sexual orientation, your faith, your skin color, your gender, it doesn't matter," she said.

In the French government, only Sports Minister Roxana Maracineanu supported the sale of the hijab. "I want to go and get women, mothers, girls wherever they are and as they are, to encourage them to practice sport, because it is, I am convinced, a powerful lever of emancipation," Maracineanu said. Muhammad's hijab is not visible once she dons her fencing mask. "I do not necessarily need a sports hijab to practice the sport I'm doing, but I know it has made my life easier," she said. "I hope it will help women all over the world to be more integrated by being active. There are so many stereotypes and bad perceptions that exist about the Muslim community," she said. — AFP



PARIS: US fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad takes part in the Nike show to present feminine World Cup jerseys on Monday. — AFP

## Footballer granted Aussie citizenship...

Continued from Page 1

Hundreds of supporters cheered "Welcome home, Hakeem!" when he arrived at Melbourne's airport following his release from jail in Bangkok a month ago. He

## Bouteflika drops bid; protesters...

Continued from Page 1

polls that he would not contest. "There will not be a fifth term" and "there will be no presidential election on April 18", he said in a message reported by the official APS news agency.

The veteran leader, who uses a wheelchair and has rarely appeared in public since suffering a stroke in 2013, said he was responding to "a pressing demand that you have been numerous in making to me". National television broadcast footage on Monday night of Bouteflika in his trademark three-piece suit receiving several senior officials.

Students have been at the forefront of weeks of massive demonstrations demanding Bouteflika step down, in a country where half the population is under the age of 30. Messages posted overnight on social media urged students across the country to "end this system, end this mafia" with more protests planned on Friday. Louisa Dris-Ait Hamadouche, a professor of political science at Algiers University, told AFP that Bouteflika's announcement was not an admission of defeat. "The reason some people spoke of victory was the fact that he announced his withdrawal. But there was, in fact, no withdrawal since there will be no election," she said. "In the place of a fifth term, he is

was among more than 200 people from 44 countries who, having passed a citizenship exam, pledged loyalty to Australia and were granted citizenship at the ceremony, the Australian Associated Press reported. Pascoe Vale, the semi-professional team he plays for in Melbourne, congratulated Araibi. "A moment we all have been waiting for," the club said on Twitter. "Finally, no country can follow me now because I am Australian," Araibi told the Guardian newspaper. "Bahrain, please don't follow me. I am now 100 percent safe in this country." — Agencies

extending his fourth term."

Bouteflika has named interior minister Nouredine Bedoui as the new prime minister to replace the unpopular Ahmed Ouyahia. Several newspapers have also accused Bouteflika of deceiving the people. "He scraps the presidential election but stays in power: The latest ploy by Bouteflika," the influential El Watan newspaper said on its front page. The Liberté daily denounced a "sham" while El Khabar newspaper said Bouteflika wanted "to remain president without elections".

Former colonial power France cautiously "welcomed" Bouteflika's announcement but President Emmanuel Macron called for "a transition in a reasonable timeframe". Bouteflika's mandate officially ends on April 29. But his promise on Monday of a "national conference" to carry out reform and set a date for new elections "before the end of 2019" suggested he may stay in office for another year. "There is no legal basis to delay the elections," said Fatima Benabou, a professor at Algiers University and expert on constitutional matters.

Bouteflika's pledge, a day after he returned from Switzerland where he spent two weeks at a hospital for medical checks, failed to convince his key rival Ali Benflis. The former prime minister, who has joined the opposition, said in an online video that the president was "prolonging his fourth mandate", calling it "an act of aggression against the constitution". Former culture minister Abdelaziz Rahabi tweeted that Bouteflika was "ridiculing the people". "His determination to stay in power will push the country towards the unknown and is dangerous for the stability of the state and unity of the people," said Rahabi. — AFP

## 2,000 surrender as IS releases...

Continued from Page 1

God's judging standard is different," said a man named Abu Abdel Adheem in the video published via IS social media channels. "The battles are not over," said the jihadist, his head covered with a white and red scarf, sitting on the ground in a circle with two men and a young boy in a hooded jacket.

"Tomorrow, God willing, we will be in paradise and they will be burning in hell," said Adheem, his speech peppered with Quranic recitations. His companions repeatedly lifted cutlery to their blurred out faces, spooning clear liquid from a saucepan behind them. A figure draped in the all-covering black robes worn by women under the jihadists' rule watched them briefly then slowly ambled off. An explosion could be heard in the background.

"The infidels laughed at, humiliated us in this world, but war has its ups and downs and the battle is not over," Adheem said, adding that IS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi is the only Muslim leader on earth today. "What is our crime? We only wanted to implement the law of God," said the man. "Why have all the infidel countries of the world gathered to fight us? Why are we besieged and why are we being bombarded day and night?"

"Servants of God, keep reciting your prayers and ask for forgiveness," the loudspeaker of a beaten up van cries as it tours the ramshackle camp in the video. "Repent and ask God for forgiveness, oh servants of God, for perhaps the Almighty will find a way out for us." The video, dated by its publishers with the Islamic month of Rajab that started on Friday, showed dozens of men and boys on the edges of a busy road. By its side, blankets had been thrown over rudimentary frames to make makeshift tents amid a mass of canvas and vehicles, with palm trees jutting out in the distance. Drone footage showed shelters, a few buildings and a road filled with people.

Adheem implores watchers not to focus on worldly conditions, suggesting those still in Baghouz were martyrs as he referenced part of the Quran that describes how a group of people were burned in a ditch because of their strong belief in God. "Do not be afraid, brothers, be cheerful and have faith," said a man the video called Abu Abdullah. A black balaclava obscured all but his eyes, and he spoke with a North African accent.

Another man in the video named as Abu Abdel Aziz said pamphlets were falling on the redoubt. "The disbelievers are throwing pamphlets at us and mocking us," he said. "They tell us, 'You're hungry while your amirs live in comfort and eat,'" he said, referring to IS leaders. A fellow jihadist presented as Abu Abdel Rahman, wearing a black and white scarf over a white skull cap, asked what had warranted the fight against them. "What is this so-called terrorism they are accusing us of?" the bespectacled man asked. "Even in this narrow patch you find the law of God."

Air strikes and shelling have since pummeled Baghouz three nights in a row, killing scores of fighters and prompting hundreds of militants and their relatives to surrender. Thousands handed themselves over yesterday, after a deluge of fire hit the IS encampment the previous night. "Around 2,000 people, mostly fighters, have handed themselves over today," SDF spokesman Adnan Afrin told AFP, without adding how many remain inside.

The SDF and the US-led coalition resumed shelling and air strikes on the last IS bastion yesterday evening, interrupting a brief lull in fighting that had taken hold during the day to allow for people to surrender. An AFP correspondent near the frontline heard warplanes rumbling overhead, as the sound of mortar fire and explosions rang from the IS encampment.

Earlier yesterday, Ali Cheir, an SDF unit commander, said his force and the coalition were pummeling the IS enclave at night to flush out militants. "The objective of our advance is to terrorize IS fighters so they surrender, and for the civilians to come out," said the 27-year-old. Coalition warplanes Monday pounded the redoubt with 20 air strikes, destroying armored vehicles and arms caches. SDF spokesman Mustefa Bali said. He said US-backed forces clashed with militants on several fronts, killing nearly 40 IS fighters. — Agencies



## Sports

# Ailing Zverev toppled, Djokovic rained out at Indian Wells

## Osaka powers into fourth round at Indian Wells

**INDIAN WELLS:** Ailing world number three Alexander Zverev crashed out of the ATP Indian Wells Masters, where Novak Djokovic's third round match was suspended by rain with one game completed. Jan-Lennard Struff, ranked 55th in the world, notched his first victory over Zverev in five tries, breaking him once in the first set and three times in the second for a 6-3, 6-1 victory. "I've been sick for a week," said the 21-year-old Zverev, who lost the Acapulco final to Australian Nick Kyrgios the week before Indian Wells began. "That hasn't changed, unfortunately. I think I just got unlucky, I got a virus somewhere and that's how it is."

Zverev, the owner of three Masters 1000 titles who has never made it to the quarter-finals at Indian Wells, said he would now focus on recuperating and preparing for the Miami Masters, where he'll be hoping to improve on his runner-up finish to John Isner last year.

"Now it's about getting healthy and about recovering and preparing myself for Miami, because Miami is the tournament I do well in, history-wise," he said. "Here I have always struggled." Despite the circumstances, Struff was delighted to get a first win over Zverev.

"Yeah, 6-3, 6-1, it's amazing," he said. "Played a good match. He was missing some shots today, but at the end of the day I'm very happy with that." Struff next faces 13th-seeded Canadian Milos Raonic, who rallied from 4-1 down in the third set to beat US qualifier Marcos Giron 4-6, 6-4, 6-4.

Giron, 25, looked set to claim the biggest win of a career that has been hindered by two hip operations when he took a 4-1 lead in the third set. But Raonic, runner-up at Indian Wells in 2016, called on all of his experience to turn things around against the American, who had never won two ATP Tour matches in a row until this week.

"He came up with the goods and definitely pushed me sort of to the brink there where I was getting a little bit frustrated," Raonic said. "I just kept trying to plug away. There were two games that I had break chances to get back into the third, and I didn't make it count. Luckily I made the last two count."

"I'm proud of the way I competed today. That's what got me through," said Raonic, who fell to Struff in the

first round at Dubai last month. World number one Novak Djokovic, playing his first tournament since grabbing a record seventh Australian Open title in January, completed just one game against unseeded German Philipp Kohlschreiber before rain swept across the California desert.

The duo were sent to the locker room and with no break in the weather in sight organizers suspended play for the night, with the match to resume today. The winner will face in-form Frenchman Gael Monfils, who rolled past Albert Ramos Vinolas 6-0, 6-3.

Monfils won his eighth career title at Rotterdam in February, followed up that performance with a run to the semi-finals in Dubai. In other early matches, 40-year-old Ivo Karlovic defeated India's Prajnesh Gunneswaran 6-3, 7-6 (7/3).

The Croatian veteran will face Austrian seventh seed Dominic Thiem, who beat France's Gilles Simon 6-3, 6-1. Lucky loser Miomir Kecmanovic of Serbia continued to make the most of his unexpected opportunity, beating fellow Serbian Laslo Djere, the 30th seed, 6-2, 7-6 (7/3). The 19-year-old will take on Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka, who rallied from a set down to beat 18-year-old Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-7 (2/7), 6-4, 7-6 (7/5). Meanwhile, world number one Naomi Osaka powered into the fourth round at Indian Wells on Monday after a 6-4 6-2 victory over Danielle Collins. The 21-year-old Japanese had a shaky start when she was broken early in the first set but quickly found her groove and broke the American four times and struck 29 winners to advance.

The US and Australian Open champion, who is also defending the title at Indian Wells, will next face Switzerland's Belinda Bencic, who beat Ekaterina Alexandrova 6-4 6-2. The duo were joined in the fourth round by seven-times Grand Slam champion Venus Williams, who defeated qualifier Christina McHale 6-2 7-5. The 38-year-old Williams, who showed her mettle in the second round where she upset world number three Petra Kvitova, will meet unseeded German Mona Barthel in the fourth round. "I feel definitely more comfortable going into that match than, for example, today," Williams told reporters.

"I had never played (McHale) before, so you feel like



**INDIAN WELLS:** Alexander Zverev of Germany returns a shot to Jan-Lennard Struff of Germany during the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on Monday in Indian Wells, California.—AFP

you don't really know what's going to happen. Earlier, Latvian 11th seed Anastasija Sevastova became the latest player to be stuck down with a viral illness at the tournament.

Sevastova was down 5-0 in the first set of her third round match with Estonian 21st seed Anett Kontaveit when she retired. Her departure came less than 24 hours after Serena Williams was unable to continue her match on Sunday, also citing a viral illness.

Among those women still feeling healthy, three-times grand slam champion Angelique Kerber battled back to beat Russian qualifier Natalia Vikhlyantseva 3-6 6-1 6-

3. Kerber took a while to warm to her task on a cool morning in the California desert.

"She was playing really fast and flat, so that was something I was not really expecting," the German said of her opponent.

"I was trying to adjust, especially with my movement at the end of the first set and beginning of the second, and I think that was the key to coming back."

Fifth seed Karolina Pliskova was not at her very best but still prevailed 6-3 6-2 over Ysaline Bonaventure. "I felt somehow strange and the match was strange," said Pliskova.—Agencies



## Daeya Stable wins Amir's horse race

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The horse "Bakheet" owned by Daeya Stable, owned by Sheikh Abdallah Al-Salman won the Cup of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in the 2,400 meter race for horses aged 4 and 5 years. "Bakheet" needed 2.30.8 minutes to cover the distance in which 16 horses participated in the fifth run.

Representative of HH the Amir, Farwaniya Governor

Sheikh Faisal Al-Humoud Al-Malek Al-Sabah, in the presence of Public Authority for Sport (PAS) Dr Humoud Fulaiteh and his deputies handed the cup to Daeya Stable.

The horse "Taraheeb" also owned by Daeya stable won the first run for 1000 meter of mixed horses won the race by scoring 0.58.8 minute.

The dean of Daeya stable Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salman was very pleased with Bakheet's win and hope success will continue during the current season.

In the second run for third degree horses, the horse "Batel" won the 1800 meter race for the Hamad Nayef Al-Dabbous Cup by 1.50.3 minute.

The horse "Hala Shammah" from Dasman Stable won the cup of Sheikh Dr. Ibrahim Al-Duaj in the third run of 1200 of local production horses with 1.12.1 minutes.

The fourth run of 2,000 meters for original Arab Horses for the cup of the Dean of Bayan Stable Sheikh Fahad Jaber Al-Ahmad, the horse "Dijokeet" from Al-Nashama stable won the race with 2.20.1 minutes.



## McGregor arrested in Miami after run-in with fan

**MIAMI:** Mixed martial arts fighter Conor McGregor was arrested Monday by American police for allegedly smashing a fan's cell phone outside a Florida nightclub. The 30-year-old Irishman was charged with criminal mischief and strong-armed robbery after Miami police said he allegedly slapped the phone out of the fan's hand and then stomped on it.

Miami Beach police said they were called to the scene outside the LIV Nightclub at 5:00 am (0900 GMT), The Miami Herald reported. The police started their investigation and McGregor was arrested later that day at a nearby home and then booked into the Miami-Dade jail.

According the arrest report, the fan tried to take a photo of McGregor using his mobile phone, valued at \$1,000. After the fighter allegedly slapped it away and then stomped on it, he took the phone without giving it back. The robbery was caught on surveillance cameras set up around the club and the nearby Fontainebleau Hotel. McGregor is a mixed martial



Conor McGregor

arts star who is best known for losing to boxing icon Floyd Mayweather in a 2017 boxing match.

Bail was set at \$12,500. McGregor was arrested last year in New York after police said he attacked a charter bus carrying several rival martial arts fighters, throwing a dolly through the window. He pled guilty to disorderly conduct and was sentenced to community service and an anger management course.—AFP



## Faisal Nawaf Al-Sabah wins Endurance Cars Race

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Over Take team led by Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Nawaf Al-Sabah won third place in the Endurance Cars Race 2019, which is the largest motor sport at the Arabian Gulf region. The race was organized by Gulf Run, in which 16 teams from

many countries participated in this 24 continuous hours. Head of the Over Take team Sheikh Mubarak Faisal Nawaf Al-Sabah said he is keen on participating in this sport because it is exciting in addition to testing endurance. He also thanked the race golden sponsor Zain Kuwait, and the Gulf Run team.

## Budget battles and boxing blues: The rocky path to Tokyo 2020

**TOKYO:** From tears of joy when Tokyo was selected to a plagiarism scandal, budget battles and doubt over the boxing competition, the path towards the 2020 Olympics has not always been smooth.

With 500 days to go, organisers stress the Games are back on track and construction on schedule.

Here are some key moments in Tokyo's rocky Olympic road.

### TEARS OF JOY

TV news presenters broke down in tears and thousands of people erupted in screams of delight when the IOC awarded the games to Tokyo in September 2013. With emotions running high, many Japanese turned their thoughts to the thousands of victims of a devastating earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, with the Olympics eyed as a golden opportunity to rebuild.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe vowed Tokyo would be a "safe pair of hands", with a reputation for efficiency and competence.

### STADIUM SHOCK

Unfortunately, that reputation for efficiency quickly went out of the window when Abe was forced to tear up blueprints for the proposed national stadium as costs ballooned out of control. "I have decided we must go back to the drawing board," a red-faced Abe said in July 2015, amid public anger over its \$2-billion price tag—which would have made it the world's most expensive stadium. The decision also affected the 2019 Rugby World Cup, which was due to host the final in the stadium. That match will now be played in Yokohama, south of Tokyo.

### LOGO LARCENY

More embarrassment followed in September 2015 as organisers had to ditch the logo for the Games amid accusations of plagiarism and questions about the designer's credibility. Belgian designer Olivier Debie said the original design was stolen from his logo for a theatre in Liege, western Belgium, and vowed to take the issue to court. As the scandal mounted, officials were forced to withdraw the logo, saying it "no longer has public support".

### VENUE RELIEF

After the setbacks came a welcome piece of positive news in November 2017 as Tokyo unveiled its first new permanent venue. The Musashino Forest Sport Plaza, which will host badminton and modern pentathlon fencing, was the first of eight new permanent venues to be completed. The 10,000-seat venue cost an estimated \$300 million and will also host wheelchair basketball at the 2020 Paralympics. It also contains a swimming pool, gym and fitness studios available for use by the general public and is part-powered by solar energy.—AFP



## Sports

# Zidane risks reputation to usher in new era at Real Madrid

**‘For the best coaches and players, there is always self-belief’**

**MADRID:** Zinedine Zidane stood for 29 minutes fielding questions but all of them really came down to two: Why now? And, what next?

In a packed auditorium in the belly of the Santiago Bernabeu on Monday night, Raul and Roberto Carlos took their seats in the front row while journalists squeezed up against the walls, an hour and a half after the official announcement.

Santiago Solari had been sacked as coach of Real Madrid and in his place Zidane would return, 284 days after he had left. On May 31 last year, sitting next to the club's president Florentino Perez, Zidane had said the team would not keep winning with him in charge.

They failed to win without him, first under Julen Lopetegui, the sacked Spain coach, and then Solari, the interim-turned-permanent coach, who watched on as Madrid's season went up in smoke in six days.

Solari's exit was inevitable but the idea any suitable replacement would take over for 11 La Liga games, with nothing to preside over except the aftermath of a crisis, seemed fanciful. "When the president called me the first thing I thought was: go," said Zidane. Which begs the question: what has changed? Rest may have refreshed motivation, particularly for Zidane, who said himself, "I have never been far away".

He has stayed in Madrid and attended a handful of matches, while three of his sons still play for the club at various levels. For him, the move back might have been less of a leap than it seems from the outside.

Yet the greatest lure may be that the team has been failing. For the best coaches, and players, there is always self-belief, a sense that no problem is too big to solve. Zidane knew he would return with more authority than ever, far more even than after he had hoisted a third consecutive Champions League trophy.

The suspicion then was that he was just a face, a popular manager to keep the ship steady while star

players engineered their own success. As two coaches came and went, Zidane's stock rose with every chance missed, every seat left empty and every point that Barcelona moved further away.

"I returned because the president called me, I love him and I love this club," he said. "We will change things, for sure, for the years to come." Zidane could have waited until the summer but the job might not have been available. Jose Mourinho, speaking on his increasingly regular public appearances, seemed eager.

Perez was under fire from all directions, from the fans, many of whom blamed the board more than Solari in the newspaper polls, and from the players, led by Sergio Ramos. "The problem is bad planning," Ramos reportedly shot back during a heated argument with Perez following last week's defeat to Ajax.

A new coach could ease the pressure and one like Zidane, remove it almost completely. "We need to start working on a new glorious era," said Perez. "That is why we welcome back Zinedine Zidane."

Zidane has three months to decide what needs changing. He arrives under no illusions. Madrid triumphed in Europe but in La Liga last season, Barcelona finished 17 points ahead. Now the gap is 12.

"I don't forget what we won but I also don't forget the bad things we did all together last year," he said. The temptation might be to discard a lot and spend even more, but the challenge for Zidane is to find the balance between reform and revolution. A fresh start could bring ousted players in from the cold while progress made by talented youngsters like Vinicius Junior, Sergio Reguilon and Marcos Llorente could quickly be lost.

Ronaldo has gone and, while it was unavoidable the team would miss him, others have struggled to fill the void. Gareth Bale and Zidane were barely speaking



**MADRID:** Real Madrid's newly appointed French coach Zinedine Zidane (R) poses with his wife Veronique (C) and Real Madrid's Spanish president Florentino Perez (L) after giving a press conference on Monday in Madrid. — AFP

during the second half of last season and Bale is understood to be less than enthused by the Frenchman's return. A clean slate is possible but a parting appears more likely.

Decisions will need to be made too on Marcelo and

Isco, who have both endured torrid seasons, while Keylor Navas was once a favourite of Zidane's, which could spell trouble for Thibaut Courtois. Luka Modric, heavily linked with a move to Italy last summer, may feel it is time for something new. — AFP

## Spotlight on Salah to rediscover CL shine

**LONDON:** Liverpool travel to German champions Bayern Munich today hoping to complete a clean sweep for Premier League sides in the Champions League last 16. But with the tie poised at 0-0 after a tense first-leg at Anfield three weeks ago, much will depend on Liverpool's front three of Mohamed Salah, Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane rediscovering their scoring form on the road in Europe.

Tottenham drew first blood for English sides in three Anglo-Bundesliga battles with an impressive 4-0 aggregate victory over Borussia Dortmund, while Manchester City are expected to comfortably see off struggling Schalke with a 3-2 first leg lead to take home for yesterday's second leg.

However, Bayern, so consistently the cream of the crop in Germany, pose an all-together different challenge for Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp on his return to his homeland. For once a raucous atmosphere was not enough to help the Reds build a first leg lead on home

soil three weeks ago, meaning Liverpool must end a run of five straight defeats in the Champions League away from Anfield to progress to the last eight.

Last season Salah, Firmino and Mane scored 10 Champions League goals each as Liverpool's firepower carried them to the final. Seven games into this European campaign, that same trio have combined for just six goals - four of which came in a routine home win over Red Star Belgrade.

Indeed, the only goal Liverpool managed at all in three group stage defeats on the road to Napoli, Red Star and Paris Saint-Germain came via a James Milner penalty in the French capital. Mane and Firmino at least warmed up for the trip to Munich by each scoring twice in a 4-2 win over Burnley on Sunday as Liverpool remained in the Premier League title race, just a point behind pace setters City.

Salah, by contrast, has struck just once in his last eight games, although he did make a positive impact as a provider against Burnley and in the recent 5-0 thrashing of Watford. "For me Mo Salah was the best player on the pitch and he did not score," said Klopp on Sunday. "I'm not sure that you will see that in a lot of ratings, because he's a striker and didn't score so then you make of it what you want. But we have no problem with confidence." The spotlight on Salah all season has been intense after an

incredible 44-goal debut campaign at Anfield that saw him challenge for the Ballon d'Or.

And his lack of impact away from home is a worrying trend that has now prolonged for months rather than weeks. The Egyptian's last goal from open play on the road was on December 21. He was substituted after an anonymous 79 minutes in a 0-0 draw at Manchester United and missed two glaring opportunities in another goalless draw in the Merseyside derby with Everton.

"I know he scored in February but, for me, since Christmas, he's been struggling. The worst thing is his touch, his touch has deserted him," former Liverpool defender Steve Nicol, a European Cup winner with the Reds told ESPN.

"This is the business time of the season so it needs to be sorted out pretty quickly." However, unlike United and Everton's more cautious tactics in recent weeks, to blunt the Liverpool counter-attack, Bayern's need to score could favour the visitors' pace on the break.

"They'll need to come out a bit more, their fans will demand they try to create," said Liverpool left-back Andy Robertson. "It's all about trying to keep them out first and foremost and then hopefully we can take the chances we get." There would be no better way for Salah to silence his doubters than landing a knockout blow to one of European football's heavyweights. — AFP



### Matches on TV

(Local Timings)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE		
FC Barcelona v Olympique Lyonnais		23:00
beIN SPORTS HD 2		
Bayern Munich v Liverpool		23:00
beIN SPORTS HD 1		

## Klopp wary of Allianz Arena return with Liverpool

**MUNICH:** Jurgen Klopp brings Liverpool to Germany to resume their battle against Bayern Munich with the hosts billing today's Champions League last 16 return leg as an all or nothing showdown.

After a goalless draw at Anfield in the first leg three weeks ago, everything is to play for at Munich's Allianz Arena. Klopp knows what awaits his Reds in the highly-charged arena where Bayern tend to raise their game and away teams face a barricade of whistles whenever they touch the ball.

"The four goals are all well and good," said Klopp after Liverpool's 4-2 win on Sunday at Burnley, with Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane both scoring twice. "But what does that have to do with Munich? It will not be so easy to score four goals there as well."

The 51-year-old has a modest record of nine wins, five draws and 16 defeats in 30 games against the Bavarians-as coach of either Liverpool or former clubs Mainz and Dortmund-dating back to 2004.

However, in his seven seasons with Dortmund, between 2008 and 2015, Klopp managed an impressive four wins, plus a draw and four defeats, from nine games in Munich. He tasted victory on his last visit to the Allianz Arena in April 2015 when Dortmund beat Bayern on penalties in the semi-final of the German Cup.

Klopp knows that his team must walk tall at Bayern's home. "It's a much more positive moment for Bayern. They are top of the table and winning games comfortably again," Klopp told Liverpool's website. Bayern have hit form, winning their last three games with a goal ratio of 12-1 since the first-leg draw.

"But if we are at our best, we can be exceptional." Liverpool fans hope Reds' striker Mo Salah has a red-letter day in Munich after just one goal in his last eight games. His lack of goals has not stopped Liverpool staying in contention for the Premier League title as Mane and Firmino have filled the breach.

The Liverpool match is seen as a season-defining tie for the German champions. The five-time winners last failed to get through the last 16 stage in 2011 and confidence is high after they moved into top spot in the Bundesliga at the weekend for the first time since September.

"It's a very important game - everything is riding on this," said sporting director Hasan Salihamidic. "The boys have put some more self-confidence in the tank," he added after Saturday's 6-0 mauling of Wolfsburg.

Bayern will be without the suspended Thomas Mueller, but James Rodriguez will slot seamlessly into the attacking midfield role. Like Klopp, the Colombian expects a red-hot atmosphere having proved his form with a stunning goal at the weekend.

"The fans will get right behind us and drive us on, so that we feel good and give our all," Rodriguez told Bayern's website. "We will have to put in the perfect match in order to go through. Liverpool have quick players, who feel good when they get a lot of room, but I think we have every chance to go through." — AFP

## Chinese FIFA referee in spotlight

**SHANGHAI:** A referee who has taken charge of World Cup qualifiers is the latest high-profile figure to be accused of plagiarism in China, joining a slew of top Communist Party officials. A former vice president and a supreme court judge were among a half-dozen officials who borrowed from other people's work without citing them for their university theses, a recent AFP review found.

Top Chinese football referee Fu Ming has now been dragged into the scandal, triggered by his controversial performance during a top-flight match which saw state media accuse him of "bias". The 36-year-old's decisions on Saturday in the Chinese Super League game between Shandong Luneng and Henan Jianye were criticised by fans of both sides and threw him into the spotlight.

In the aftermath Fu, one of five professional referees in Chinese football, was accused on social media of plagiarising parts of an academic paper he wrote about the sport. Nanhang Jincheng College said in a statement on Weibo, China's version of Twitter, that it was monitoring the claims against Fu, who has been an international referee since 2014.

It later deleted the post and Fu has not responded publicly to the accusations, which were a major theme of discussion on Weibo. Fu was a sports teacher at the institution in Nanjing, near Shanghai, from 2005 to 2016.

Fu, who officiated Asian qualifiers for the 2018 World Cup and was at the Asian Cup earlier this year, was the subject of scathing criticism in state media yesterday. The English-language version of the China Daily accused him of "favouritism" in Saturday's controversial 2-2 draw, "which tarnishes sportsmanship and the image of Chinese soccer".

"The case should prompt the Chinese Football Association to do more to uphold a good image of Chinese football," the newspaper said. "It should investigate the decisions and disclose the results in a timely manner to quell the public's suspicions that there were some underhand dealings behind Fu's performance." — AFP

## Ranieri off to winning start with Roma

**ROME:** Claudio Ranieri got off to a winning start as Roma coach with Stephan El Shaarawy and Patrik Schick's first-half goals enough to squeeze past lowly Empoli 2-1 on Monday to keep in touch with the Champions League places.

Eusebio Di Francesco was sacked after the team's elimination in the Champions League last-16 last week with Ranieri returning to the club he coached for 18 months until February 2011.

The 67-year-old former Roma player was welcomed back to the Stadio Olimpico with a banner reading "Good luck Mister Ranieri".

"I thank the fans, as they gave us a big hand this evening," said Ranieri.

"I didn't expect us to play better, because this was a tense team that was anxious and still dealing with recent events.

"Putting a team together when we didn't have many players, and without the bigger players, the leaders that give a sense of direction to the side, wasn't easy," added the former Leicester and Chelsea coach.

"I knew it was going to be tough."

Captain Daniele De Rossi, Kostas Manolas, Lorenzo Pellegrini and Cengiz Under were all out injured with Edin Dzeko, Federico Fazio and Aleksandar Kolarov suspended.

It was nervy debut against a side who are just one point above the relegation zone.

El Shaarawy turned in off a corner after nine minutes for his ninth league goal this season only for Empoli to level when Roma defender Juan Jesus headed into his own net.

The Romans nearly conceded another when Giovanni Di Lorenzo sent just wide before Schick put the hosts back on front after 33 minutes, jumping highest to nod in his third league goal this season.

Midfielder Nicolò Zaniolo hobbled off with a calf injury with Schick also coming off injured while captain Alessandro Florenzi was sent off for a second yellow card with ten minutes to go.

El Shaarawy was then handed the captain's armband for the first time.



**Claudio Ranieri**

Empoli looked to have scored a late equaliser when Rade Krunic fired into the goal on 89 minutes but a VAR review disallowed it for a Dmitri Oberlin handball in the build-up.

Slovenian forward Zan Celar, 19, got his first start after Schick came off as Ranieri's side held on in a nervy six minutes of injury time to get back winning after their 3-0 defeat to Lazio last time out.

Roma remain fifth, three points behind Inter Milan who occupy the final Champions League berth, and four adrift of third-placed AC Milan, with the city rivals going head-to-head on Sunday.

Roma will be without Florenzi when they play SPAL next weekend. — AFP

**25** Ailing Zverev topped, Djokovic rained out at Indian Wells



**26** Wagner's two-day demolition of Bangladesh secures series



**27** Zidane risks reputation to usher in new era at Real Madrid



## Clippers' Williams makes history off bench

Sexton scores 28 points as Cavaliers rout Raptors



LOS ANGELES: Marcus Morris #13 of the Boston Celtics shoots the ball against the LA Clippers on Monday at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

**LOS ANGELES:** Lou Williams scored 34 points to become the most prolific bench scorer in NBA history as the Los Angeles Clippers blew out the visiting Boston Celtics 140-115 on Monday. Danilo Gallinari scored 13 of his 25 points in the opening quarter, and Montrezl Harrell added 20 points as the Clippers won their fifth consecutive game and improved to 9-3 since their roster was restructured at the trade deadline. Williams, who leads the NBA in points off the bench this season, passed Dell Curry as the highest scoring player off the bench of all time and now has 11,154 as a reserve in his career. Curry had 11,148 points as a reserve. It was Williams' eighth game of the season with at least 30 points, all since Dec. 28. Terry Rozier scored 26 points for the Celtics, who saw their three-game winning streak end. Boston went 3-1 on a four-game road trip, all against California teams. Jaylen Brown scored 22 points, and Kyrie Irving added 18 and 11 assists for the Celtics.

### ROCKETS 118, HORNETS 106

Clint Capela dominated the paint as Houston stretched its winning streak to nine games with a victory over visiting Charlotte. Capela paired 19 points on 8-of-12 shooting with 15 rebounds and controlled the interior as the Rockets produced a 55-39 rebounding advantage. James Harden led the Rockets with 28 points and 10 assists. Eric Gordon chipped in 22 points, and Chris Paul contributed 10 points and 10 rebounds. Hornets star Kemba Walker finished with a game-high 40 points on 14-of-20 shooting. He shot a combined 11 of 11 in the second and third periods, pouring in 31 points during that stretch.

### THUNDER 98, JAZZ 89

Dennis Schroder scored 24 points, and Russell Westbrook had 23 points and 11 rebounds as Oklahoma City beat Utah in Salt Lake City. The win was just the third in nine games for the Thunder, who beat the Jazz for the fourth time this season to sweep the season

series. Paul George struggled offensively yet again for Oklahoma City, though he finished with 14 points and 11 rebounds. Utah, which got a game-high 25 points from Donovan Mitchell, lost for the third time in the past four games.

### CAVALIERS 126, RAPTORS 101

Collin Sexton scored 28 points as Cleveland cruised past visiting Toronto. Kevin Love, with 16 points and 18 rebounds, recorded his ninth double-double in 14 games for the Cavaliers this season. Love also was a force on the defensive end, drawing four offensive fouls. Cleveland's Cedi Osman added 19 points. Kawhi Leonard led the Raptors with 25 points and nine rebounds. Toronto's Serge Ibaka and Cleveland's Marquese Chriss were ejected following a fight near the end of the third quarter.

### NETS 103, PISTONS 75

Spencer Dinwiddie scored 19 points as Brooklyn seized control late in the first half and claimed a lopsided win over Detroit in New York. In the final game before a season-long seven-game road trip that starts Wednesday in Oklahoma City, the Nets won their fourth straight. Allen Crabbe added 14 points for Brooklyn. Andre Drummond collected 13 points and 20 rebounds for Detroit, which had its five-game winning streak stopped. Blake Griffin finished with 10 points on 1-of-10 shooting.

### WIZARDS 121, KINGS 115

Bradley Beal scored 27 points, Bobby Portis added 17 points and 13 rebounds, and Washington defeated visiting Sacramento. Jabari Parker scored 18 points and Tomas Satoransky had 17 as the Wizards started a crucial five-game homestand by ending a two-game losing skid. Beal added nine rebounds, nine assists and four steals. De'Aaron Fox led seven Kings in double figures with 23 points. Nemanja Bjelica had 15 points and 12 rebounds for Sacramento. — Reuters

## Blatter: Sarkozy helped Qatar land 2022 World Cup

**LAUSANNE:** Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter alleged Monday that ex-French president Nicolas Sarkozy had played a crucial role in helping Qatar win the right to host the 2022 World Cup. Blatter was speaking the day after FIFA was urged to launch an investigation into claims it was offered a secret television deal by Qatar's state-run broadcaster Al-Jazeera just three weeks before it awarded the tournament to the Gulf state.

Documents published by British newspaper The Sunday Times appear to show that Al-Jazeera executives signed the television contract before the bidding campaigns to host the World Cup had finished. Blatter reiterated his claim that then-UEFA president Michel Platini's support for Qatar's bid set in train a series of attacks on the FIFA chief that led to his unceremonious removal from the job he had held for 17 years.

"Qatar was awarded the 2022 World Cup after the political intervention of president Nicolas Sarkozy, who asked Michel Platini and his supporters to vote for Qatar," Blatter told AFP. "These four votes tipped the balance in favour of Qatar and against the USA. This situation sparked attacks from the losing parties on FIFA and me personally, from defeated England on Russia for the 2018 World Cup and from the USA, who lost to Qatar," Blatter said.

Despite an extensive campaign featuring then-British prime minister David Cameron and Prince



Sepp Blatter

William, England was eliminated in the first round of voting for the 2018 World Cup, leaving Russia to defeat a joint Spain-Portugal bid by two votes in the second round.

For the 2022 tournament, Qatar swept to victory with 11 of the 22 votes, beating the USA, South Korea, Japan and Australia. Both votes were mired in controversy because half of the FIFA committee members who cast votes have since been suspended, banned for life, fined or prosecuted for corruption.

The Sunday Times alleged that the Al-Jazeera television contract included a fee of \$100 million (89 million euros) that would be paid into a designated FIFA account if Qatar was successful in the World Cup ballot held in December 2010. — AFP