



**2** Sheikh Nasser hails French contributions to humanity



**6** In US presidential race, how old is too old?



**24** Jordan campaigning to combat drug addiction



**28** FIFA Qatar 2022 plan would 'exacerbate' Gulf tensions



# MPs file no-confidence motion against Roudhan after grilling

Assembly to meet March 27 for voting • New MPs Mulla, Kandari sworn in

## Pompeo arrives in Kuwait



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ambassador to Washington Sheikh Salem Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah greets US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on his arrival at Kuwait International Airport yesterday. — AFP (See Page 3)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Ten MPs yesterday filed a no-confidence motion against Commerce and Industry Minister Khaled Al-Roudhan following a marathon nine-hour grilling in which the minister faced allegations of financial and administrative violations. Roudhan categorically denied the allegations and vowed to forge ahead with reforms, saying that he was grilled for "known reasons", but did not name them. "I know why I was grilled. It is very clear," said the minister without elaborating.

At the end of the grilling, Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said he received a no-confidence motion against the minister and that a special session will be held on March 27 to vote on it. The motion needs the votes of 25 elected MPs to pass, and if approved, it would mean an automatic dismissal of the minister.

Cabinet ministers are not allowed to vote on such motions.

Those who signed the motion are MPs Abdulkarim Al-Kandari, Khaled Al-Otaibi, Saleh Ashour, Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei and Mubarak Al-Hajraf (the two grillers), Mohammad Al-Mutair, Farraj Al-Arbeed, Thamer Al-Suwait, Shuaib Al-Muwaizri and Abdullah Fahhad. The motion was submitted after the two grillers charged that the minister did not answer their questions and that he failed to respond to the issues raised by the grilling. The minister denied the claims.

The two lawmakers who grilled the minister detailed a number of alleged financial and administrative violations, especially with regards to a real estate cheating scandal, the small- and medium-sized enterprises fund and the public industrial authority. Hajraf accused the minister of failing to confront the so-called real estate cheating



KUWAIT: Commerce and Industry Minister Khaled Al-Roudhan is seen during a session of the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

scandal, saying 11,000 victims or a total of 60,000 people - if their family members are included - have been harmed.

He said that the total amounts involved in the scandal reached KD 500 million and that some of the cheating companies' owners are not Kuwaiti, and accordingly,

no one will be able to compensate the victims. Several real estate companies operating in the country sold thousands of houses in several foreign countries, and most of the transactions were found to be fraudulent. Hajraf charged corruption is rife in the

Continued on Page 24

## Visit visa duration based on financial status of applicant

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Interior Ministry Undersecretary for Residency Affairs Maj Gen Talal Maarafi authorized residency

department directors in various governorates to assess expats' visit visa applications and grant them one- to three-month visit visas on the condition that sponsors have high income and are fully capable of hosting the visitors, namely parents.

In this regard, informed sources explained that tourist visit visas will be valid for three months and given to Europeans and resident expats' wives and children, while commercial or family visit visas for relatives other than wives and children will be limited to one month.

Meanwhile, Public Authority for Civil Information Director Musaed Al-Assousi stressed that after the decision made by the interior minister to cancel residency stickers, expats' civil ID cards will be used as both identification and residency documents. Assousi added that all types of residency visas will be issued without stickers except for temporary visas given according to article 14. He also noted that data included in civil IDs have been amended to include names in English and passport numbers.

## Azurion therapy platform to be available in Kuwait soon



KUWAIT: CEO of Central Circle Co Dr Ziad Al-Alyan and Vice President of Philips Health Systems Vincenzo Ventricelli sign an agreement for the first Azurion cardiac cath lab in Kuwait. The revolutionary state-of-the-art device will be installed in Al-Hadi Hospital.



KUWAIT: Philips Azurion is the next generation image-guided therapy platform that allows physicians to easily and confidently perform procedures with a unique user experience, helping them to optimize lab performance and provide superior care.

Azurion has been developed over a number of years in close collaboration with Philips' partners to ensure workflow solutions that meet the continuing demands of the intervention lab.

Azurion is designed to help perform pro-

cedures more consistently and efficiently. The highly intuitive usability of Azurion supports medics in quickly and confidently performing a range of procedures. This new future-proof platform will soon be available in Kuwait for clinics and physicians to use.



KUWAIT: Fire and rescue personnel try to free workers who were trapped after the roof of an under-construction mosque collapsed yesterday.

## Mosque roof collapse kills three workers

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Three workers were killed and two were injured when the roof of a mosque under construction in Nahda near Sulaibikhat cemetery collapsed yesterday. Kuwait Fire Services Directorate said Sulaibikhat and technical rescue firefighters were dispatched under the command of Capital fire center director Col Ahmad Al-Rashidi. The statement added the acci-

dent took place while concrete was being poured on the roof. Five people were trapped, and firemen worked to free them. The two injured workers were rushed to hospital by paramedics.

Investigations have begun to find out the reasons behind the collapse. Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Fahd Al-Shola called to conclude the investigations quickly so that whoever is responsible is held legally accountable. Shola gave direct instructions to report back to him with detailed reasons of the collapse and expressed his heartfelt condolences to the families of those who perished in the accident, and wished a speedy recovery for the injured.

## Kazakh leader resigns after 30 years in power

ALMATY: Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev shocked the nation yesterday by resigning after nearly three decades in power that transformed the Central Asian republic. Nazarbayev, 78, ruled Kazakhstan since before the collapse of the Soviet Union and leaves no obvious successor. He will continue to enjoy significant powers, however, thanks to his constitutional status as "Leader of the Nation" and lifelong position as chief of the country's security council.

"I have made a difficult decision - to resign

as president of the Republic of Kazakhstan," Nazarbayev said in a televised address to the nation. "I see my future task as ensuring the coming to power of a new generation of leaders who will continue the transformations being carried out in the country." Nazarbayev said the chairman of the Kazakh Senate, 65-year-old Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, would take over for the remainder of his mandate. A presidential election is due in March next year.

As well as his state positions, Nazarbayev will remain head of the ruling Nur Otan party. "I am staying with you, the needs of the country and people will remain my concern," he said. Nazarbayev was the longest-serving head of state in the former Soviet Union. Following the death of Uzbek president Islam Karimov in 2016, he was the last regional leader to have been in power since before the 1991 collapse of the USSR.



Nursultan Nazarbayev

Nazarbayev was elected in 1999, 2005, 2011 and again in 2015, when he took more

Continued on Page 24

## Kuwait arrests Syrian tycoon linked to Assad

KUWAIT: A prominent Syrian businessman with close ties to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad has been arrested in Kuwait, his lawyer said yesterday. Mazen Al-Tarazi was arrested late Monday at his offices, his lawyer Badr Al-Yacoub told AFP. He said that he did not yet know the reasons behind his client's arrest. Local authorities did not immediately release the charges against Tarazi. But Kuwaiti newspaper

Al-Qabas, citing unnamed informed sources, reported that the businessman is accused of money laundering and printing texts without authorization.

Tarazi, a longtime resident of Kuwait - which has the most press freedoms in the conservative Gulf - owns a publishing and advertising firm in partnership with a high-profile local businessman, Ahmad Al-Jarallah. Jarallah confirmed to AFP that police had raided his offices on Monday night and arrested Tarazi's secretary and two Al-Hadaf magazine employees. Tarazi is on an EU blacklist of Syrian nationals who have been banned from entry to European states and whose assets have been frozen over their role in the Syria war. — AFP

## Local

# Amir strongly condemns shooting in Netherlands

## Amir, Crown Prince receive Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — Amir Dhwani and KUNA photos



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable to King of Netherlands Willem-Alexander expressing strong condemnation over a shooting attack in a tram in the city of Utrecht killing three and wounding five others. His Highness the Amir expressed condolences over the victims of the attack, which he said violated with all human values, and wished speedy recovery for the wounded.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable to Willem-Alexander over the shooting in Utrecht. His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent a similar cable, while National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem sent a cable of condolences to Speaker of Netherlands House of

Representatives Khadija Arib, and President of the Senate Ankie Broekers-Knol. Three people were killed and five injured, three seriously, in the attack which took place on and outside a tram morning in the Kanaleneiland area in Utrecht.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad, in addition to Deputy Chairman of the Ruling Family Council Sheikh Dr Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah and Director of Environmental Public Authority (EPA) Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad Al-Hamoud Al-Sabah. — KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Deputy Chairman of the Ruling Family Council Sheikh Dr Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Director of Environmental Public Authority (EPA) Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad Al-Hamoud Al-Sabah.

## Minister stresses Kuwait's respect to int'l humanitarian law

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Justice Minister Dr Fahad Al-Afasi said yesterday that Kuwait respects and abides by the international humanitarian law under all circumstances. This came in Afasi's speech, which was delivered on his behalf by chairman of the Court of Appeals Justice Mohammad bin Naji, at the International Humanitarian Law Conference, held in coordination with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), under the slogan 'International Humanitarian Law Between Reality and Hope.'

He added that Islam is a religion that aims to ascertain, uplift and sustain the honor and dignity of human, in peace and war, and clearly rejects violence, extremism and terrorism. He stressed that it is a priority of the ICRC to follow up the implementation of international humanitarian law, pointing out the great efforts made by ICRC to achieve its goals. He said that some Arab countries had adopted the ICRC's activities and mechanisms of the dissemination of international humanitarian law, which greatly helped to improve its application. He noted the establishment of a regional center for the training of judges and prosecutors in the field of international humanitarian law at the Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies.

Meanwhile, the director of the Institute counselor Awaid Al-Thuwaimer stressed the importance of strengthening the rules guaranteeing the protection of human dignity in times of armed conflict.



Mohammad bin Naji

He pointed out the Institute's interest in launching training courses and programs on the rules of international humanitarian law and the role of the national judge in its application.

In the meantime, Head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) delegation Yahya Alibi, said in a similar speech that this conference is held every two years and gathered a number of judges in order to prepare highly qualified judges. He added that the (ICRC) will continue its efforts to support countries with regard to their specialized legal skills in international humanitarian law, pointing out that this conference is a practical translation of the ICRC and governments efforts, particularly the Government of Kuwait, to disseminate and apply the international humanitarian law. — KUNA



Canada's Ambassador to Kuwait Louis-Pierre Emond speaks during the function.



Canada's Ambassador to Kuwait Louis-Pierre Emond speaks with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

## Sheikh Nasser touts French language's contributions to human culture

KUWAIT: His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah has highlighted the French language's contributions to human history, literature, philosophy, politics and arts. "We meet again to celebrate the International Francophonie Day and to express gratitude for Francophone culture's contributions to humanity allow its history, especially in the realms of literature, philosophy, politics, arts and science," His Highness Sheikh Nasser said in a speech at a special function held at the house of Canada's Ambassador to Kuwait Louis-Pierre Emond on Monday to mark the International Francophonie Day.

He emphasized that the French has proved itself as one of the most important languages for interaction among people of different civilizations. It is a language that shared vocabulary, meanings and structures with other languages and showed its great ability to take and give during its long history. His Highness Sheikh Nasser pointed out. He noted that the French language was influenced remarkably by Arabic during the Muslim rule of the neighboring Iberian Peninsula, also or Al-Andalus. In the Andalusian era, the French interacted with the Arabic culture and borrowed from it several words and terms that became later a part of vocabulary. His Highness Sheikh Nasser said, noting that this was highlighted by many oriental studies researchers such as Henri Lammens. Pope Sylvester II (946-1003) was also one of the main figures in this interaction during that period, he added.

His Highness Sheikh Nasser also shed lights on the French language influence on other world languages and culture. "The French language was also a source of vocabulary for many Asian and African nations," he said. "This was also clear in Arabic vernaculars in which Arabs borrowed many French words and still use them in their daily life interactions," he explained. His Highness Sheikh Nasser said he believed that the



KUWAIT: His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah delivers a speech at a special function held to mark the International Francophonie Day. — Photos by Joseph Shagra

French language embodied the history and experiences of a large number of nations in the four corner of the globe. "The French was no longer considered a private language of the French people or conveyer of their culture production, but rather a language that conveys sentiments and cultures of many other nations in Americas, Africa and Asia," he suggested. He went on to say that the French words and grammatical structures had become a tool for recording feelings, ideas, thoughts, knowledge in an impressive way.

His Highness Sheikh Nasser also shed lights on the most prominent French and Arabic figures who enriched the cultural interaction between the two languages through their diverse works. He then thanked attending dignitaries and ambassador of Canada in Kuwait for hosting this event. He also emphasized the strong relations between Kuwait and all Francophone

countries and recalled their supportive stances to Kuwait during the Iraqi occupation period in 1990-91.

The event was attended by several sheikhs, senior officials, and foreign diplomats. The International Francophonie Day is observed within the International Organization of the Francophonie's 77 member states every March 20 to celebrate the French language and Francophone culture. There are over 369 million French speakers on Earth. The International Organization of the Francophonie is an international organization representing countries and regions where French is a lingua franca or customary language, where a significant proportion of the population are francophones (French speakers), or where there is a notable affiliation with French culture. Kuwait became an observer state in the organization in July 2017. — KUNA

## Yemen praises Kuwait relief work, aid to Yemeni people

KUWAIT: Yemeni Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Dr Najeb Al-Ouaj hailed on Monday Kuwait vital, vast aid and humanitarian efforts to his country in various sectors. In a statement to KUNA, after meeting with a delegation from Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society (KRCS) headed by its Deputy Director Anwar Al-Hasawi, Al-Ouaj said Kuwait tremendous work in Yemen has eased the suffering of the People and contributed to a better life there. Kuwaiti swift response and support to the Yemeni people is clear evidence of the Depth of the vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, based on clear humanitarian stands, Ouaj added. The minister said that KRCS programs were praised by the Yemeni authorities and the humanitarian organizations working there, noting that efforts of Kuwait Red

Crescent are visible around the world.

Ouaj said that during the meeting, they discussed all necessary needs to the most important services in the field of education, health and food security, in addition to drilling wells and special projects for the Yemeni with special needs in all Yemeni governorates. Meanwhile, Hasawi welcomed the visit by the minister and briefed the accompanying delegation on KRCS efforts at all international arenas, especially in Yemen. Hasawi said that KRCS provided the Yemeni people with many services and assistance in the areas of relief, water, sanitation, shelter, health care, development, orphans care and support of health centers with medical equipment. He added that the current situation in Yemen requires steps aimed at achieving a qualitative leap in relief efforts and providing greater care for the Yemeni brothers affected by the current crisis. — KUNA

Local

# Kuwait longtime friend, vital partner of US in region: State Department

## Third US-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue highlights extraordinary relations: Kuwaiti diplomat

WASHINGTON/KUWAIT: Kuwait is a longtime friend and vital partner that helps advance key US interests in the region, including defense and counterterrorism, the Department of State said late Monday. The statement came in prelude of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to the country as a first leg of a Middle East tour to reinforce "the value of our partnerships, as well as the importance of security and economic cooperation in achieving regional stability and countering the Iranian regime's malign activities."

During his travel to Kuwait, Pompeo is scheduled to participate in a series of bilateral meetings with high-level officials and attend the Third US-Kuwait Strategic

Dialogue, according to the statement. It added that also in Kuwait, Pompeo will laud the role of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah "in seeking a resolution to the Gulf dispute." He will also "highlight the importance of a united GCC in ensuring the success of the Middle East Strategic Alliance."

"While still in its formative stage, the United States has continued to advance discussions with our partners on the alliance, which includes the GCC member states, Egypt, and Jordan," the statement added. In this regard, it indicated that the US-Kuwait relationship "generates US jobs through hundreds of millions of dollars of direct investment in the United States."

"At this year's strategic dialogue, the Secretary and other US officials will expand the bilateral relationship on innovation, entrepreneurship, and small business development," the statement noted. It added that they will also work "to boost counter-narcotics efforts, deter illicit passenger and cargo flows, improve airport security and consular cooperation, and grow academic exchanges."

The US top diplomat will also meet with members of the newly created US-Kuwait Business Council and local business leaders "to build stronger relationships and enhance economic ties." He will also "thank Kuwaiti leaders for their help in monitoring sanctions compliance and work to combat sanc-

tions evasion," the statement said. The other two stops of his March 19-23 tour will also include Lebanon and Israel.

### Extraordinary relations

Meanwhile, Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for the Americas Reem Al-Khaled affirmed yesterday that the Third US-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue hosted by Kuwait highlights the exceptionally solid relations between the two countries. Khaled said that Pompeo's visit to the country to hold the third dialogue comes after two previous times hosted by the US in 2016 and 2017, and resulted in signing several agreements and memoranda in the fields of security, counter-terrorism, economy, commerce, education and

customs. Khaled noted that this visit will result in signing more agreements to boost strategic cooperation between the two friendly countries for the next 25 years in various sectors.

She also mentioned that Pompeo will be received during his visit by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and his Kuwaiti counterpart, Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Sabah to discuss bilateral relations and regional matters of common concern. She affirmed that the US-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue became an important annual event, praising the important role of the private sectors of Kuwait and the US in boosting economic cooperation and enhancing the commercial level. During his



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

tour in the region, the top US diplomat will also visit Lebanon and Israel. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Parliament Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem received yesterday in his office the visiting delegation of Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. The delegation consists of several former American ambassadors and a number of academics and specialists in Gulf affairs. — KUNA

## UC San Diego Health hosts alumni gathering

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: A seminar was held on Monday at Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel in Kuwait for alumni, friends and families of UC San Diego Health, where US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman encouraged them to leverage the connections and technical skills learned and developed at UCSD. "Studying abroad builds cultural competencies and a global network that help you succeed in diverse workplaces. Many top entrepreneurs in the Gulf have US degrees, so there is a valuable network of US alumni throughout the region. I encourage you to keep in touch with one another and your colleagues in the US," he said.

According to Silverman, the State Department is committed to promoting international education and encouraging students to study at one of 7,700 accredited US institutions. "US Education offers free advisory services to all students and can help provide resources and guidance for interested students to find their own best-fit institution in the United States," he noted. Currently, according to Silverman, there are over 10,000 Kuwaiti students in the US and over 61,000 from the GCC states.



KUWAIT: A group photo taken on the sidelines of a seminar held for alumni, friends and families of UC San Diego Health. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Dr Lawrence Friedman, Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs, who is responsible for the management oversight of managed care, occupational medicine and telemedicine, was at the event to promote UCSD's facilities and various achievements. Friedman is a critical member of the leadership team and plays an integral role in the growth of the health system as it expands programs regionally, nationally and internationally. He serves as the CEO of International Clinical Programs and is a physician champion for telemedicine for the University of California.

Speaking with Kuwait Times, Friedman

noted that patients are encouraged to use UCSD facilities if they are treated overseas, however if patients can be treated in Kuwait or other GCC countries, they should be treated in their respective countries. "That's our utmost hope, and one of many reasons why we are sharing our expertise and skills in medicine with them. UC San Diego is a popular institution in California. We have thousands of graduates and students from this part of the world. We organized this event for them to connect and update them on what is going on at UCSD and the advances we have made in the campus," he added.

## Deputy FM hosts Somali Minister, Iranian envoy



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with the Somali Minister of Education Abdullah Berri and his accompanying delegation. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah yesterday met with visiting Somali Minister of Education Abdullah Berri and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, they discussed ongoing preparations and arrangements for an international conference due in Kuwait for supporting education in Somalia. Present at the meeting were Assistant Foreign Minister for Protocols Ambassador Dhari Al-

Ajran, Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab Affairs Fahad Al-Awadhi, Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Foreign Minister's Office Affairs Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar and Head of the Organizing Committee of the Conference Dr Ghanim Al-Najjar. Meanwhile, Jarallah met with new Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Irani, with Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar attending. —KUNA



Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah meets with the new Iranian Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Irani.

## Kuwait praises UN efforts in protecting civilians

NEW YORK: Kuwait praised efforts of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in combating armed attacks and protecting civilians. This came during a speech late Monday by Kuwait's Permanent Delegate to the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi regarding the Central African country. He said that holding elections and the inauguration of new president Felix Tshisekedi are considered important turning points in Congo's history. He welcomed the official visits that the president made to neighboring countries to discuss ways to enhance bilateral relations and issues of common concern. Otaibi also expressed confidence in con-

solidating peace and sovereignty in the region. He called on all Congolese parties to refrain from violence and move to reconstruction and development, as well as maintain achieved gains of the country. Otaibi further pointed out that despite improvements, violence still prevails, with armed conflicts in some regions are ongoing. He also shed light on the country's health challenges, mainly epidemics and chronic diseases such as Cholera and Measles; still spreading in some regions, with 859 reported cases, including 536 deaths. Yet, Otaibi praised efforts of the Congolese health ministry in fighting Ebola epidemic, welcoming the adoption of a strategic response plan. — KUNA

## KIB supports local youth at Coalesce

KUWAIT: In a continuation of its efforts to support student and youth-based activities, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently sponsored this year's Coalesce, which was organized in association with The Hub Gallery and the Kuwait Architecture Students Association. Taking place at The Hub Gallery's premises, the initiative aims at providing a platform for architecture students and alumni to express themselves, as well as showcase their work and actively engage within the community.

The three-day event encouraged students to participate by leading their own workshops and showcasing their various talents such as painting, photography, and sculpting for the public to enjoy. Coalesce also featured a platform for discussion and debate hosted by prominent figures of the architecture community who have accomplished outstanding feats in areas outside their field. During the event, students were also able to learn from experts who are passionate about their profession, serving as a great platform for students to explore, develop and gain exposure as the architects of tomorrow.

On this occasion, Senior Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, Nawaf Najia, said: "This sponsorship came as part of our strong commitment to supporting students and doing our part to encourage our nation's next generation of professionals - including architects. Every architect has the opportunity to make a positive impact on their community by harnessing their potential to improve the nation's quality of life through design. By encouraging these youth, we give way for creative minds to truly make a difference."

Coalesce served as a unique platform for young architects to learn and share their learning with other aspiring architects, helping students discover skills and talents in each other and themselves; thereby supporting the next generation of architects. Additionally, the event included a competition wherein the works of students were rated and the winners received valuable prizes.

As part of its youth empowerment pillar, KIB remains adamant on sponsoring activities and events that support ambitious local



talents, believing that they are key players in the nation's development across various areas. Accordingly, the bank continues to

invest in supporting students, as it considers them to be the main driver of a bigger and brighter future for the nation.

## Local

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A 'painted lady' butterfly rests on a wall in Kuwait City yesterday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Malaysian Embassy organizes Real Estate Investment, Food Bazaar



KUWAIT: Malaysian Ambassador to Kuwait Dato Mohammad Ali-Selamat hosted some diplomats, Malaysian community members as they organized a food bazaar event in collaboration with RE Consult PLT, a property developer from Kuala Lumpur. — Photos by Joseph Shagra

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** The Malaysian Embassy in Kuwait in conjunction with the RE Consult PLT, a property developer from Kuala Lumpur organized 'Real Estate Investment and Food Bazaar' at the embassy grounds recently. The event was attended by several representatives from diplomatic circle along with the Malaysian community in Kuwait. Visitors enjoyed a fiesta-like atmosphere coupled with live music and raffle draws.

Malaysian Ambassador to Kuwait Dato Mohammad Ali-Selamat told Kuwait Times such activities are rare but he wants it on regular basis to support tourism and economy. "We started supporting Malaysian Real Estate sector only last year and we want this more often. We invited Kuwaiti investors to try our growing real estate sector espe-

cially in Kuala Lumpur. We have several iconic buildings out for investment that is why they are here to promote their properties," he said.

He said the real estate in Malaysia is rapidly growing and that they have several investors from Kuwait. "We noticed that Kuwaiti investors trust our real estate sector, the response is quite good yet we admit more work is needed to convince Kuwaitis to spend their money in properties in Malaysia," Ali-Selamat noted. Rozalina Rahim, Founder and CEO, RE Consult PLT presented their properties to individual visitors although they had invited a real estate speaker, Tunku Fauzi, where he explained and talked about specific projects such as M101 Skywheel Design Suites, Monopoly Mansion and Estate available for Kuwaitis. Apart from the stopover in Kuwait, RE Consult PLT also went to the cities of London, Dubai and South Korea for the same activities.



## Gulf Bank participates in Bahrain Start-up Week

**KUWAIT:** As part of Gulf Bank's sponsorship of Fikra Program for the 3rd consecutive year, the bank participated in Bahrain Start-up Week, in collaboration with Bahrain's Economic Development Board (EDB) and with the involvement of the entrepreneurs that were accepted to Fikra Program. Participating in a number of networking events, a bank representative met with key players in Bahrain's start-up ecosystem. An unbound conference, Bahrain Start-up Week kicked off on March 6th, 2019. The conference brought together the different entities involved in the form of a conference, exhibition and networking opportunities.

Ahmad Al-Amir, Assistant General Manager for

External Communication, Gulf Bank, said: "Fikra Program is an incredible initiative, providing invaluable knowledge and real-world experience to aspiring entrepreneurs in the region. Bahrain Start-up Week demonstrated the entrepreneurial strength of the start-up ecosystem in the country, and as gold sponsors of Fikra Program for the 3rd consecutive year, Gulf Bank is proud to support and guide young entrepreneurs to the realization of their business dreams."

Launched in 2015, as a corporate social responsibility program, Fikra Program is an intensive entrepreneurial training program. Aimed at empowering regional up-and-coming entrepreneurs, Fikra Program provides one-to-one mentorship for guidance and support as well as business training through workshops and field trips.



Ahmad Al-Amir



Local

# Govt refers north economic zone to legal advice, legislation department

## Authorities assigned to develop, reform government management system

KUWAIT: Kuwait government referred Monday to the Legal Advice and Legislation Department a project regarding development of the north economic zone, which should coordinate with Kuwait Silk City (Subbiya) and Boubyan Island Development Agency over the venture. The referral followed a briefing by First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to the cabinet over a recent meeting with parliament members to discuss 2019-20 development plan, and Kuwait's 2035 vision, a cabinet statement quoted Deputy Premier and Minister of State for Cabinet Anas Al-Saleh as saying. The meeting at the parliament reviewed north economic zone as being "Kuwait's gate towards stability and development through luring gigantic local and international investment and management, noted Saleh. Sheikh Nasser, added Saleh, said all remarks raised by MPs would be taken into consideration for the sake of development and prosperity of Kuwait.

### Management system

During its weekly meeting chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the cabinet assigned Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Science (KFAS) to coordinate with the supreme planning council to prepare a study to develop and reform government management system. The government also assigned the Public Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) to coordinate with relevant departments to enforce the national strategy to boost integrity and fighting corruption for 2019-24. The government assigned the Directorate General for Civil Aviation and Ministry of Public Works to follow execution of Terminal Two of Kuwait International Airport, and to report back to the cabinet every three months. It also assigned the Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) and Kuwait Silk City and Boubyan Island Development Agency to complete first phase of Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port.

Meanwhile, Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah briefed the cabinet about outcome of a recent meeting in Brussels, Belgium, over the support of future of Syria. He also briefed them about a visit by GCC Secretary General Abdullah Al-Zayani who discussed with Kuwaiti officials common GCC action, regional and international issues. Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Sheikh



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



First Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and other ministers are seen on the sidelines of the cabinet's weekly meeting.

Khaled Jarrah Al-Sabah briefed the cabinet about results of last Saturday's parliamentary by-elections in which Bader Al-Mulla and Abdullah Al-Kandari won in the 2nd and 3rd constituencies, respectively.

### Kuwait condemns shootings

In the meantime, the cabinet condemned the terrorist mass shootings that targeted two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, which resulted in the death and injury of dozens of people. The cabinet called on the international community to exert more efforts in order to eliminate the manifestations of violence and terrorism in all its forms. A gunman sprayed Muslim worshippers at two Mosques in Christchurch killing 50 people and injuring some 50 others.

The cabinet also expressed its condemnation of the shooting incident that took place this morning at a tram station in the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands, which resulted in the death of three people and injury of some five others. The cabinet stressed Kuwait position, which rejects these criminal acts that has claimed the lives of innocent people in violation of all humanitarian laws, norms and values. —KUNA

### Farmers' association

Chairman of Kuwait Farmers Association (KFA) Abdullah Al-Dammak strongly hailed the efforts exerted by First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah in supporting his fellow citizens in general and Kuwaiti farmers in particular, being KFA's honorary chairman. Speaking after a meeting Sheikh Nasser held with KFA board members and Sheikh Hamad Al-Khaled Al-Malek Al-Sabah - son of the late KFA former chairman Sheikh Khaled Al-Malek, Dammak explained that cordial talks were exchanged during the meeting along with the difficulties Kuwaiti farmers are facing, such as demands to increase subsidies and prolonging the period needed to pay off loans given by the industrial bank. "Sheikh Nasser totally understands all problems and promised to help resolve them," he added.

### 'MoI hospitality case'

The ministerial court yesterday adjourned hearing a contest filed by lawyer Yousef Al-Mehaish against shelving a case filed against former minister of interior Sheikh Mohammed Al-Khaled Al-Sabah in what is known in the media as the 'MoI hospitality case' till April 16, when the government is due to submit the State Audit Bureau's report on the case.



Meanwhile, head of the council's technical committee Abdulaziz Al-Majal echoed a similar view. The council attaching great attention to small enterprises, particularly the industrial, agricultural and environmental ones to boost the production base of the national economy, he said. He underlined the need for synergy among all state institutions to support SMEs as it would encourage youth to move smoothly from the public to the private sector. — KUNA

## 30% women suffer from urinary incontinence

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Head of the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department at Adan Hospital Dr Abeer Al-Thayedi announced that a specialized medical team at her department and the visiting Italian professor Mauro Cervigni operated on 12 women diagnosed with urinary incontinence and managed during surgery to repair the patients' pelvic muscles using the most up-to-date technologies. Thayedi said 30 percent of women suffer from urinary incontinence, adding that Adan Hospital's urology OPD is fully equipped with the latest devices used in diagnosing the disease and activating pelvic muscles under the supervision of a team of specialized gynecologists.

## Municipal council eager to remove obstacles facing SMEs

KUWAIT: The Municipal Council is sparing no effort to streamline the foundation and work of small and medium enterprises to widen the production base of the national economy, two municipal officials have concurred. The council backs SMEs, through legal means, to improve business environment, Hamad Al-Medlej, head of the council's legal and financial committee, said on the sidelines of a symposium on small enterprises hosted by the Kuwait Economic Society on Monday.

Medlej suggested that transferring SME's dossier from the Ministry of Commerce and to the Premiership would end problems facing small businesses and create business friendly environment. He said that the council was preparing the bylaws of the exhibitions and had positively responded to the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprises to allocate places for mobile vendors.

## Sabah Al-Saleh University City's parking spaces enough for all

KUWAIT: Kuwait University (KU) said Monday parking lots at Sabah Al-Salem Kuwait University City (SSUC) would be enough for all staff and students, and were designed in line with number of students and traffic. KU, which said six colleges in SSUC would be operational in the forthcoming first

semester later this year, added parking lots at the main campus, which included nine faculties, were enough for all staff and students. It added the increase of students in coming years was taken into consideration and there would be enough space for everybody. — KUNA

## Municipality retains 237 non-Kuwaitis

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Well-informed sources said that the Civil Service Commission (CSC) agreed to renew the temporary contracts of 237 non-Kuwaitis working for Kuwait Municipality and the Municipal Council. In other news, Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) promised to add land located to the south of Mina Abdullah that belongs to the state property con-

tracts department to its own assets. In a letter addressed to the Municipality, KNPC said with reference to the Cabinet's letter dated Jan 21, 2019 concerning public services, the company asked subjecting the 1,310,000-square-meter plot to the south of Mina Abdullah to its assets.

Separately, the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) stressed that the land plots it owns are integral components of its capital and it offers land not used for housing purposes for investment. In this regard and in a letter he sent to the Municipality concerning non-housing land plots, the authority's deputy director for planning and design Nasser Khraibot stressed that as per law number 47/1993, these land plots are part of the authority's capital and the authority's board of directors is the body responsible for setting related policies and offering these plots for investment.

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Deaths, jail and cyber spies: The dangers of dissent in Thailand

## India's richest man helps tycoon brother avoid jail



WASHINGTON: Combo photo shows (left to right) US President Donald Trump, former US Vice President Joe Biden and senator Bernie Sanders on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. With a septuagenarian president preparing his re-election bid, and two likely main challengers in their late seventies by 2020, Americans are facing an inevitable question: does age matter in White House politics? — AFP

# In US presidential race, how old is too old?

## Trump's likely main challengers in their late seventies

WASHINGTON: With a septuagenarian president preparing his re-election bid, and two likely main challengers in their late seventies by 2020, Americans are facing an inevitable question: does age matter in White House politics? Donald Trump, the oldest person ever elected US president, will be 74 on Inauguration Day 2021. Two likely contenders for the Democratic nomination who lead early polls, Senator Bernie Sanders and former vice president Joe Biden, will be 79 and 78, respectively. Senator Elizabeth Warren, the Massachusetts progressive also in the race, will be 71.

Democrats already sport several far younger White House hopefuls: Tulsi Gabbard and Pete Buttigieg are 37, Julian Castro is 44 and Senator Cory Booker is 49. History would suggest they have a better shot at victory than members of the gerontocracy. The last time Americans elected a Democrat older than 55 to the White House was Harry Truman in 1948. As Americans mull the prospect of a president turning 80 in his first term, two images from recent days stand out.

Candidate Beto O'Rourke, 46, drew attention to his own comparative youth, running a five-kilometer (three-mile) race at a brisk clip Saturday in Iowa, while Bernie Sanders, 31 years his senior, slipped in the shower and sustained a gash on his head that required seven stitches. (Sanders has been given a clean bill of health.)

For Biden and Sanders, their decades in the political arena mean greater name recognition among voters and valuable experience that they can apply to the most powerful position on Earth.

It could also weigh them down, as they seek to expand support and embrace modern forms of communication like social media. Biden and Sanders backers frequently brush off questions about their political favorites' ages, touting their vitality and firing off ageism accusations. Sanders can appear to have more support from young people than senior citizens. "His age doesn't matter to me, (and) there's no reason to believe he's not healthy," Garrick Dodson, who is 17 but will be old enough to vote next year, told AFP in Iowa.

He said Sanders inspired "a whole generation of kids" in the 2016 presidential race, with his progressive platform that includes universal health care and the fight against wealth inequality. "I love Bernie Sanders and will vote for him no matter what," Dodson added.

Trump, who delights in confounding health experts with his junk food cravings, was declared to be in "very good health" last month by his chief physician.

"And I anticipate he will remain so for the duration of his presidency, and beyond," chief physician Sean Conley said in a statement. But a rambling series of bombastic tweets by Trump in recent days caused concern. Aides defended the president's mental state. But lawyer George Conway, the husband of Trump counselor Kellyanne Conway and a regular critic of the president, insisted Trump's "condition is getting worse."

### 'Harder' at 80

Age has been no barrier to success in US politics. House

Speaker Nancy Pelosi has shown that, at nearly 79, she remains a remarkably shrewd politician. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, 77, is also fully engaged and a master tactician. Trump infuriated Democrats in 2016 by attacking Hillary Clinton, then 68, with claims his rival lacked the "mental and physical stamina" to be president.

Sanders, who would be the oldest-ever president by far, is firm on the issue: Voters need to treat candidates "not by their sexual orientation or their gender, and not by their age," he said last month. "I have been very blessed in my life with good health... and I think I had and still have a great deal of energy."

But gradual decline is inevitable. Eric De Jonge, director of geriatrics at MedStar Washington Hospital Center, said aging's effects become particularly noticeable after 80, when dementia becomes more prevalent. Organs naturally degenerate, there is neuron loss in the brain, blood vessels stiffen, exercise capacity decreases. "Exhausting 16-, 18-hour campaign days are going to be harder on an 80-year-old than on a 50-year-old, all other things being equal," De Jonge told AFP. "That doesn't mean you can't have a great candidate who's 75 years old."

For those entering the presidency in their late seventies, physical and cognitive deterioration could become an issue in their second term. De Jonge believes age is likely to play out in the 2020 campaign. "People will react to an incredibly robust and energetic 75-year-old and think 'Wow, that guy can really handle it and keep up with everybody, good for him,'" he added. "Or it may play out in the other way, that they may reveal certain symptoms of aging that are of concern to the electorate." — AFP



### Septuagenarian president preparing his re-election bid

## Doomed jihadists retreat within IS' shrinking bastion

BAGHOUZ: Holdout jihadists scurried along the reedy banks of the Euphrates in an increasingly desperate defense yesterday of the last scrap of their "caliphate" in eastern Syria. Advancing Kurdish-led forces forced diehard fighters from the Islamic State group out of the main encampment where they had been confined in recent days. The move brought a months-old operation to wipe out the last vestige of IS's once-sprawling proto-state closer to its inevitable outcome but the Syrian Democratic Forces stopped short of declaring victory.

Some of the jihadists now fighting for a few fields in a bend of the river seemed unwilling to surrender and a senior IS leader even issued a message calling for attacks. "This is not a victory announcement, but a significant progress in the fight against Daesh," SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali said, using an Arabic acronym for IS. A few days ago, the last denizens of the IS "caliphate" were crammed into a chaotic encampment on the edge of Baghouz, a jumble of mangled vehicles, hastily-dug berms and makeshift tents.

Thousands of people-fighters, their relatives and other civilians fled the death trap in recent weeks and turned themselves in after scaling a nearby hill to a position held by the SDF. The Kurdish-led force, which also includes fighters from local Arab tribes, moved in yesterday and took up positions in the deserted encampment, leaving holdout jihadists cornered. Syrian regime and allied forces are deployed on the other side of the river and the border, preventing any escape.

### Audio message

"Clashes are continuing as a group of ISIS terrorists who are confined into a tiny area still fight back," Bali said. With daily air strikes and shelling from the US-led coalition and its SDF ground partners, hundreds of fighters have been pummeled into submission in recent days.

The SDF said yesterday it had captured dozens of sick or wounded jihadists since gaining control of the camp. The state, which IS supremo Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed in mid-2014, once covered territory larger than Britain, straddling Syria and Iraq. It administered millions of people, ran its own court system, coined its own currency, printed its own school books and instilled fear on a global scale.



BAGHOUZ: Heavy smoke rises above the Islamic State (IS) group's last remaining position in the village of Baghouz during battles with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), in the countryside of the eastern Syrian province of Deir Ezzor. — AFP

It has crumbled under years of military operations in which Syrian and Iraqi forces backed by their international allies clawed back the land but left cities in ruins and populations homeless. Baghdadi's whereabouts are unknown and the Baghouz holdouts are fighting over land the size of a few football pitches but IS spokesman Abi Hassan al-Muhajir came out of months of silence to spur on his troops. "Avenge the blood of your brothers and sisters... Set up the (explosive) devices, deploy the snipers," he said in an audio message released on IS's usual social media channels late on Monday.

### Overcrowded camps

The loss of Baghouz, which looks a few days away at most, will mark the end of IS as land-controlling force but not as a potent military player in the region. Many of its leaders and fighters in Iraq and Syria have long reverted to a guerrilla war, launching hit-and-run attacks from desert, mountain and other hideouts.

US President Donald Trump, who jumped the gun

by more than a month on the end of the Baghouz battle, has ordered the complete withdrawal of US troops from Syria. But on March 7, US Central Command head General Joseph Votel warned the fight against the extremists was "far from over" and stressed the need to maintain a "vigilant offensive" against the group. The conflict in Syria entered its ninth year last week and the aid crisis spurred by the dying days of the IS "caliphate" compounded an already bleak humanitarian picture.

The thousands of ghost-like people who streamed out of the last IS stronghold in recent weeks now fill overcrowded camps and prisons run by the Kurds further north. The 70,000 people crammed into the biggest camp-Al-Hol-include more than 40,000 children, of dozens of different nationalities. Some are unaccompanied, others are unwanted by their countries or origin, and many have witnessed beatings or other forms of traumatizing violence that will require urgent and specialized care. — AFP

## Indian traders burn Chinese goods in protest

NEW DELHI: Hundreds of Indian traders burned Chinese goods yesterday and urged the government to raise import taxes on them to protest against China's trade and foreign policies. The traders, who also urged consumers to boycott Chinese imports, are concerned that Chinese products are hurting Indian manufacturers. But there is also anger in India after China used its veto to block the UN Security Council from blacklisting a Pakistan-based Islamist leader.

Masood Azhar is the founder of the militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), which claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb attack that killed 40 paramilitary police in Indian-controlled Kashmir in February. China prevented a UN Security Council committee last Wednesday from blacklisting Masood. It said it had done so to give more time for the committee to have consultations and study the issue. China is India's second biggest trading partner and a trade deficit has widened in favor of Beijing by nearly 75 percent to \$63 billion since 2014, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power.

Modi, who is seeking a second term in a general election beginning next month, faces criticism from both opposition parties and groups affiliated with his party for what they see as his failure to take steps to contain the growing influence of Chinese companies on the Indian economy. The Confederation of All India Traders, which represents millions of traders, said their action against Chinese goods was aimed at teaching it a lesson, after it used its veto to block Masood's blacklisting.

In the capital, New Delhi, traders burned Chinese goods including laptops, mobile phones, computers, fax machines and toys at the Sadar Bazar, the city's main market for Chinese goods. Chinese goods were burned in similar protests in several other cities. Demonstrators also urged people to boycott Chinese goods, and asked the government to increase import tariffs on Chinese imports that they said were hurting small Indian manufacturers and costing millions of jobs. — Reuters

International

# Turkey escalates crackdown, hunts dissent six years after Gezi protests

## Rock concert and map of bee species cited in indictment

**ISTANBUL:** Unzile Aksakoglu struggles to explain to her seven-year-old daughter why her father Yigit has spent four months in jail and may never leave, because of his alleged role in mass protests against Turkey's government when she was just a year old. After all, the people originally prosecuted over the 2013 protests - which began against the redevelopment of central Istanbul's Gezi Park and grew into nationwide anti-government unrest - were acquitted.

A Turkish judge ruled in 2015 that the protesters were exercising the right of freedom of assembly in what turned out to be the biggest popular challenge to Tayyip Erdogan's rule. But in November, Yigit Aksakoglu was detained and is now facing trial with 15 other civil society figures, writers and actors. For a while Aksakoglu's family hoped he would soon be released, but then on March 4, a 657-page indictment was released saying they had masterminded an attempt to overthrow Erdogan's government.

"I say to her, 'I promise I and your daddy's friends will get him out. Don't worry. This misunderstanding will end. But a part of me is really scared,'" Unzile said. Supporters of the detainees say the indictment contains no evidence and many bizarre accusations, and marks a new low for a country where 77,000 people already been jailed in a crackdown following a failed military coup in 2016.

The European Union said that by seeking life sentences, prosecutors were creating a climate of fear in Turkey, while the US State Department has said Washington is gravely concerned. The arrests are the latest step in a crackdown which Turkey says is a necessary response to security threats that the country faces and which has involved widespread purges in the armed forces, ministries and state organizations.

### Flowers and Gasmasks

In the summer of 2013, hundreds of thousands marched in Istanbul and across Turkey to protest against plans to build replica Ottoman barracks on Gezi Park by Istanbul's Taksim Square, chanting "everywhere is Taksim, everywhere is resistance". Eight young protesters and a police officer were killed in the unrest and 5,000 injured. The indictment, formally accepted by an Istanbul court on March 4, says

hundreds of properties were damaged in the protests.

It also includes assertions that rights groups have dismissed as fanciful conspiracies. It says the protests were organized by local extensions of "forces which control global capital", singling out billionaire philanthropist George Soros. Erdogan has vilified Soros as "the famous Hungarian Jew ... who assigns people to divide nations". The indictment says the "Gezi Uprising" was fuelled by Osman Kavala, a well-known civil society leader and businessman who has been in jail since October 2017.

A picture from Kavala's phone taken from an academic book showing how different types of bees are distributed across the Middle East was described in the indictment as showing Turkey's borders violated and redrawn. It said the fact that defendants discussed bringing milk, juice and pastries to Gezi, as well as gasmasks to counter the effects of tear gas, showed they were financing the protests.

The Taksim Solidarity group, which includes some of the 16 defendants, poured scorn on the indictment, saying it portrayed the handing out of flowers to police and the provision of sandwiches to protesters as signs of guilt. The demonstrations, the indictment says, were inspired by the worldwide "Occupy" protests and Arab uprisings starting in 2011 and a book by Boston-based academic Gene Sharp called 'From Dictatorship to Democracy'.

The indictment cites Gezi protest acts that matched Sharp's non-violent protest methods, such as Roger Waters' "The Wall" concert in Istanbul in August 2013 when photos of people killed in the protests were displayed on a huge stage backdrop. Amnesty International Turkey representative Andrew Gardner described the case as "an attempt to rewrite history" and said the request for life sentences without parole represented a "massive escalation" in Turkey's crackdown on civil society.

"What we are facing is an existential crisis for independent civil society in Turkey," he said. "It is a blatant attempt to scare and pursue critics on completely trumped-up, fanciful conspiracy theories." Erdogan equates the Gezi protesters with Kurdish militants and those accused of carrying out a failed coup in 2016. In campaigning for March 31 local elec-



**IZMIR:** Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks during his Justice and Development Party (AK Party) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) local election campaign rally in Izmir. Local elections in Turkey are scheduled on March 31, 2019. — AFP

tions he has often accused opposition parties of being allied with militants. The protests began to prevent the redevelopment of a park in a city with limited green space, but Erdogan dismissed the idea of environmental motivation, saying: "Those who planned and financed the Gezi events, tried to overthrow the government using 12 trees as an excuse are giving account to the judiciary. 'No one in Turkey gets away with crimes they committed any more,' the president said in a speech last week.

### 'No evidence'

Aksakoglu, who works for a Dutch foundation which supports young children's development, was interrogated for 11 hours after he was detained in November. The specific charges against him say he was involved in organizing meetings to prepare civil disobedience. When first jailed he angrily paced around his cell in prison west of Istanbul, wondering why he had been charged, his wife Unzile said. She

said his anger flared up again after reading the indictment.

Unzile said her husband is a social scientist rather than an activist and never met Kavala. The indictment said he had been in contact with someone who had. Kavala himself is accused of spreading protests through his organisation Anadolu Kultur, which promotes culture and rights. Osman Kavala's lawyer Ilkan Koyuncu said it was hard to see what his client was actually accused of, and the contents of the indictment offered no evidence to support the charges.

"You hold these people responsible for all the windows that were broken in June 2013... but provide no evidence. This is not something that can be done legally," he said. Then-prime minister Erdogan and his cabinet of the time are all plaintiffs in the case and the indictment names 746 people as injured parties in the nationwide protests, holding the defendants responsible for all injuries and damage to property, such as smashed windows.—Reuters

## Thousands rally in Algiers; army told to stay away

**ALGIERS:** Thousands of students, university professors and health workers rallied in Algiers yesterday calling for President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to quit, and a new group headed by activists and opposition figures told the army not to interfere. In the first direct public message to the generals from leaders emerging from nearly a month of mass protests against Bouteflika, the National Coordination for Change said the military should "play its constitutional role without interfering in the people's choice".

Bouteflika, who has ruled for 20 years, bowed to the protesters last week by announcing he would not stand for another term. But he stopped short of stepping down and said he would stay in office until a new constitution is adopted, effectively extending his present term. His moves have done nothing to halt demonstrations, which peaked on Friday with hundreds of thousands of protesters on the streets of Algiers and have continued into this week.

"We will not stop our pressure until he (Bouteflika) goes," said student Ali Adjmi, 23. "The people want you to leave", read a banner. Others shouted "the people and the army are one." The 82-year-old president has rarely been seen in public since suffering a stroke in 2013, and protesters say he is in no fit health to rule. "We are fed up with this system. It must disappear forever," said Djilali Bahi, a doctor at yesterday's demonstration.

So far, soldiers have stayed in their barracks during the protests. But on Monday, Chief of Staff Lieutenant-General Ahmed Gaed Salah hinted at a more active role, saying the

army should take responsibility for finding a quick solution to the crisis. Generals have traditionally wielded power behind the scenes in Algeria and have publicly intervened during pivotal moments, including cancelling an election in the early 1990s that Islamists were poised to win, triggering a decade of civil war.

The protest leaders issued their statement titled "Platform of Change" late on Monday, demanding Bouteflika step down before his term ends on April 28 and the government resign immediately.

"We belong to the people so we are against extending Bouteflika's fourth term," said Mohamed Yousfi, head of one of the doctors unions. Bouteflika's newly appointed deputy prime minister, Ramtane Lamamra, has launched a tour of allied countries seeking support. State radio said Lamamra's trip, which began yesterday in Moscow, is aimed at "reassuring Algeria's international partners".

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Russia, long a close military ally of Algeria, was concerned by the protests: "We see attempts to destabilize the situation, and speak out against any interference in this process," he said. Lamamra defended the government's reform proposals. Bouteflika has agreed to hand over power to an elected president, and the opposition will be allowed to take part in the cabinet that will oversee elections, he said at a joint press conference with Lavrov. One opposition leader, Ali Benflis, urged the government not to make Algeria's developments international. Protesters have been calling for a generation of new leaders to replace a ruling elite dominated by the military, businessmen and veterans of the 1954-1962 independence war against France. Algerian authorities have long been adept at manipulating a weak and disorganized opposition. But the mass demonstrations have emboldened well-known figures to lead the reform drive.

Prominent members of the new group include lawyer and activist Mustapha Bouchachi, opposition leader Karim Tabou and former treasury minister Ali Benouari, as well as Mourad Dhina and Kamel Guemazi, who belong to an out-



**ALGIERS:** Algerians carry placards and national flags as they take part in a demonstration in the capital Algiers against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika yesterday. — AFP

lawed Islamist party. Zoubida Assoul, leader of a small political party, is the only woman in the group so far. "Bouteflika just trampled on the constitution after he decided to extend his fourth term," said the National Coordination for Change.

With dark memories of the 1990s civil war which cost an estimated 200,000 lives, many Algerians have long placed a priority on stability. Bouteflika survived the 2011 "Arab Spring" uprisings that toppled other regional leaders, using oil and gas wealth to buy support and the security services to tamp down dissent. But with the economy souring and a younger generation less fearful of change, he has yet to formulate a strategy to placate Algerians. "A free and democratic Algeria," doctors chanted at the demonstrations. — Reuters

## Erdogan's use of mosque shooter's video draws NZ ire

**ISTANBUL:** Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan drew a sharp rebuke from New Zealand yesterday for using controversial video shot by the Christchurch mosque gunman as an election campaign prop. Erdogan, campaigning for local elections this month, has presented the attack as part of an assault on Turkey and Islam more broadly and projected the video of the killings at his rallies over the weekend. Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters protested on Monday that such politicization of the massacre "imperils the future and safety of the New Zealand people and our people abroad, and it's totally unfair".

Peters announced on Tuesday that he would be travelling to Turkey this week at Istanbul's request to attend a special meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Three Turkish nationals were wounded in the rampage, that killed 50 worshippers at two mosques in the southern New Zealand city of Christchurch on Friday. The accused gunman, a self-avowed white supremacist from Australia, livestreamed video of much of the attack and spread a 72-page manifesto on social media claiming it was a strike against Muslim "invaders".

The manifesto references Turkey and the minarets of Istanbul's famed Hagia Sophia, now a museum, that was once a church before becoming a mosque during the Ottoman empire. New Zealand authorities moved quickly to try and stop the spread of the shooter's video, warning that anyone sharing the footage faced prosecution, and Facebook removed the images from hundreds of thousands of its pages.

But at weekend campaign events, Erdogan projected the video and repeatedly referenced the attack, which he portrayed as a sign of rising Islamophobia that the West has ignored. "This is not an isolated event, it is something more organized," he said during a campaign event on Monday in Canakkale in western Turkey. "They are testing us with the message they are sending us from New Zealand, 16,500 km (10,250 miles) from here."

Erdogan did not project the video at the Monday event. Peters said he had complained directly to visiting Turkish Vice-President Fuat Oktay and Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. "We made it very clear that we oppose terrorism in whatever shape and form it might be and that we are for a free and open society," Peters said he told the Turkish officials. "We had a long dialogue on the need for any other country, or Turkey for that matter, to ensure that our country, New Zealand, was not misrepresented," he told a press conference.

"We did not start or bring about this disaster and they clearly understood that," he said. Speaking Tuesday of the upcoming OIC meeting in Istanbul, Peters said: "This important event will allow New Zealand to join with our partners in standing against terrorism and speaking up for values such as understanding and religious tolerance." "We are very clear that the terrorist attack in Christchurch, committed by a person who is not a New Zealander, is utterly contrary to our core beliefs," he said.—AFP

## New Zealanders give up guns, but some face a blowback

**CHRISTCHURCH:** New Zealanders have begun handing in weapons in response to government appeals following the Christchurch massacre, but the gesture has put some squarely in the social media firing line. John Hart, a farmer in the North Island district of Masterton, decided to give his semi-automatic rifle to police after Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced on Monday plans to tighten gun laws in light of the slaughter Friday of 50 Muslim worshippers.

She also encouraged owners to surrender unnecessary firearms after it emerged that the accused mosque attacker, Australia white nationalist Brenton Tarrant, had legally acquired the guns he used in the rampage. Hart said it was an easy decision for him to hand in his semi-automatic and tweeted that "on the farm they are a useful tool in some circumstances, but my convenience doesn't outweigh the risk of misuse. We don't need these in our country".

The tweet drew a barrage of derogatory messages to his Facebook account - most apparently from the US, where the pro-gun lobby is powerful and vociferous. Hart deleted the messages but posted online: "A warm kia ora to all my new American Facebook friends." "I'm not familiar with your local customs, but I assume 'Cuck' is a traditional greeting," he said of the insult, short for "cuckold", frequently used by far-right extremists.



**CHRISTCHURCH:** A church staff member walks past the fifty pairs of shoes lay outside the All Souls Church representing the 50 people gunned down at the two mosques in Christchurch yesterday. — AFP

Hart told AFP many of the messages made inaccurate references to his sexuality. "It was very sudden. It started about the time the US east coast was waking up. There seemed to have been a rallying call," he said. A more mild message, from Kaden Heaney asked: "What's the point of giving up yalls personal guns? Yall do realize what happens to societies that give up their guns right? Evil people will get their hands on guns, knives, bombs or whatever they want to kill no matter what the intentions of good

people are. Who will protect you."

Christopher @offwhiteblogger said: "You did the right thing then; you clearly aren't responsible enough to own a firearm." Police said they did not have data available on the number of weapons handed in since Friday. But they issued a statement saying that "due to heightened security and the current environment, we would ask that people please call us first before attempting to surrender a firearm." —AFP

## International

# European secret services view ultra-right as growing threat

## Growing tensions over immigration and Islamist attacks

PARIS: European intelligence services have for years been increasing surveillance of ultra-right groups which are seen as a growing threat and capable of carrying out attacks similar to those that left 50 dead at two mosques in New Zealand. Security services in France, Britain, Germany and Italy have repeatedly warned of the risks associated with growing tensions within Western societies over immigration and Islamist attacks.

"Europe is in great danger: extremism is rising everywhere and we, the intelligence services, are busy channeling resources into looking at the far-right," Patrick Calvar, the then director of French counter-intelligence, said in May 2016. "We have to anticipate and stop all these groups which, sooner or later, would like to spark inter-communal clashes," he added.

Peter Neumann, head of the London-based International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, told CNN on Friday that "across Western countries we've seen an increase for four of five years in the number of hate crimes and also right-wing terrorist violence. "I attribute that to deepening polarization which has increased extremism not only on the jihadist side but also on the extreme right-wing side," he added. European countries have suffered a wave of gun and bombing attacks since 2004 from people inspired by the Islamic State or Al-Qaeda terror networks which have left hundreds dead.

In New Zealand, Brenton Tarrant, who is accused of shooting dead 50 people in Christchurch last week,

said in an online manifesto that he had acted in part to avenge Ebba Akerlund, a young girl killed in a jihadist attack in Sweden in 2017. "The broader contextual drivers of extreme-right violence in the United Kingdom, particularly in relation to lone actors, appears to derive, at least in part, from a process of reciprocal radicalization," according to Graham Macklin, of Oslo University, writing in January in CTC Sentinel, a US military publication.

### 'Could happen in Britain'

The ultra-right, which was responsible for large outbreaks of violence in the 1980s, is now firmly back on the radar screens for security services. According to analysts at Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre (JTIC), counter-terrorism operations linked to far-right extremism or hate crimes increased by 88 percent between 2016 and 2017. And British Security Minister Ben Wallace told BBC radio on Monday that nearly 50 percent of people in a government-backed program to fight radicalization were involved in "far-right extremism."

The government is now looking to increase the budget for the program, known as Prevent, from its current level of 45 million pounds (\$59 million) in response to the New Zealand attack, Wallace said. A New Zealand-style attack "absolutely could happen in Britain," he added. In Germany, intelligence agencies will devote 50 percent more staff in 2019 to fighting right-wing groups, domestic intelligence chief Thomas



CHRISTCHURCH: Mullim cleric Mufti Zeeyad Ravat leads a prayer near the Al Noor mosque in Christchurch yesterday. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern vowed never to utter the name of the twin-mosque gunman as she opened a somber session of parliament with an evocative 'as salaam alaikum' message of peace to Muslims.— AFP

Haldenwang said last year. A number of neo-Nazi groups have been broken up over the past years in Germany.

The most recent operation against them involved the detention of seven members of the so-called "Revolution Chemnitz" group which was allegedly planning an attack linked to October 3 national day celebrations last year. And while many right-wing

groups are deeply nationalist, some, such as the British National Action (NA), have sought to grow ties across Europe to gain clout. "NA activists cultivated ties with militants in Germany, the Baltics, and Scandinavia," according to Macklin. "There is also evidence of NA activists visiting the Azov Battalion, formerly a far-right militia fighting Russian forces, in Ukraine," he added.— AFP

## Parts of US Midwest deluged in historic deadly floods

CHICAGO: The US Midwest struggled Monday with historic flooding that claimed at least three lives, displaced residents and damaged hundreds of homes and businesses. Swollen waters hit much of Nebraska, as well as parts of Iowa, Wisconsin, and South Dakota, after a major storm last week dumped snow and rain, even as melting snow was already raising the levels of area waterways.

Neighboring states could also be affected as floodwaters drain, officials said. President Donald Trump on Monday described the floods as "devastating" and said the White House would remain in close contact with state officials. "Our prayers are with the great people of South Dakota," he said in one tweet. In another aimed at Iowa residents, he said: "We support you and thank all of the first responders working long hours to help the great people of Iowa!"

### 'Historic' flooding

The National Weather Service (NWS) described the flooding as "major" and "historic," forecasting that it would continue across large sections of the middle of the country. "Flood Warnings and Advisories are scattered throughout the Plains, Mississippi Valley, and western parts of the Ohio Valley region, with a focus in Nebraska and western Iowa," the NWS said in an advisory.

"Farther west and north, areal flooding is also possible in the Northwest and Northern Plains as snowmelt continues over frozen ground." The early damage assessment total for the state of Nebraska was more than \$260 million, according to emergency management officials. Record flooding was reported in 17 locations in the state and 10 American Red Cross shelters were operating for displaced residents. At its highest point, the Missouri River was expected to crest at 47.5 feet (14.5 meters), beating its 2011 record by more than one foot.

"Comparisons to 2011 were inevitable," the NWS office in Iowa tweeted, "but these floods have resulted in many more rescues and widespread damage in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa." Failing levees were blamed for flooding in numerous communities - damaging homes and businesses. The US Army Corps of Engineers, which maintains federal levee systems, said a majority were compromised along an approximately 100-mile portion of the Missouri River in southeast Nebraska.

### Military base under water

Hundreds of people were rescued in Nebraska, where 54 cities issued emergency declarations, as did four Native American tribal areas. Fremont, a city of more than 25,000, was surrounded by floodwaters over the weekend and cut off from aid. It finally received food and other emergency supplies Sunday after crews managed to clear debris and mud from a road, officials said.

Three dozen Iowa counties were under states of emergency. Roads were closed throughout Wisconsin and more than 200 people were evacuated, according to officials. A third of Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska was overcome with floodwater, and was not expected to be dry again until Thursday. "It's important to understand that this is going to take weeks and months to recover so this will be a prolonged effort," one of the base's leaders, Kevin Humphrey, said in a statement.—AFP

## How to avoid snakebites

WATAMU, Kenya: If you live in a country with venomous snakes, or are travelling to one, here are a few tips to avoid being bitten.

### Do not provoke

Snakes usually will not attack unless they feel threatened. In the bush, wear sturdy leather shoes and stomp heavily when walking, striking with a stick on the ground in front of you to warn any reptiles you are coming - they will most likely just slither away. Most strikes occur when snakes feel cornered or under threat, or when people accidentally step on them.

### Be alert and prepared

Outside, have a good look around you for snakes that may hang from tree branches or swim in water, and be

## When snakes strike, lives shatter

WATAMU: On June 15, 2015, four-year-old Chepchirchir Kiplagat's life changed forever. Bitten by a snake as she slept, she permanently lost the use of the left side of her body. Sleeping beside her on a mattress on the floor of their modest, mud-walled home, Chepchirchir's two-year-old sister Scholar was also bitten. She did not survive.

"It was hard to tell what had happened because the children were crying from the pain," their father Jackson Chepkui, a 39-year-old livestock farmer, told AFP at home in the tiny village of Embosos in Kenya's remote western Baringo county. "We saw two blood spots on her (Chepchirchir's) wrist, that's how we were able to conclude that they were bitten by a snake." With tiny Scholar no longer breathing, Chepkui scrambled to save his surviving daughter.

Embosos does not have its own clinic, and the frantic father struggled to find a motorcycle taxi to take them to the nearest town: Marigat about 30 kilometers (18.6 miles) away. They finally arrived at about 1:00 am - some five hours after the child was bitten - only to find the clinic had no antivenom. They set off again for the town of Kabarnet, another 40 km away, again to find no stocks of the lifesaving serum. Finally, Chepchirchir was brought to a hospital in the city of Eldoret, a further 90 km away, by 5:00 am.

The little girl was in hospital for two months and suffered permanent damage. Of school age now, she requires a wheelchair her family cannot afford. Every year, snakes bite about 5.4 million people worldwide, of whom up to 2.7 million experience "envenoming" - when the animal transfers its poison through its fangs. This number is likely a vast underestimation, given underreporting and patchy recordkeeping, officials say.

An estimated 81,000-138,000 people die of snakebites annually, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), while about 400,000 survivors suffer permanent disabilities and other nasty after-effects. Snake venom can cause paralysis that stops breathing, bleeding disorders that can lead to fatal haemorrhage, irreversible kidney failure and tissue damage that can cause permanent disability and limb loss. Most snakebite victims live in the world's tropical and poorest regions, and children are worse affected due to their smaller body size.

The fate of victims like Chepchirchir and her little sister is avoidable, insisted Royjan Taylor, director of

careful when turning over rocks or other objects. And remember: snakes are evolved to be well-camouflaged in their environment, whether it be the desert, forest or bush. Thick, protective gloves are recommended for gardening and farming. Carry a lamp at night. Birds can help too: Many species possess an alarm cry to alert others of hidden danger. Inside, check your bed and dark corners - snakes can enter homes in pursuit of prey, heat or water. The neater your home, the more likely you will spot an out-of-place snake. A mosquito net around your bed can be an effective snake repellent.

### Once bitten

If you or someone else is bitten, try and remember the color and shape of the snake, and seek immediately medical care at a clinic or hospital. Remove any bracelets, rings or watches that may hamper blood flow in case of swelling. Do NOT try and catch the snake, apply a tourniquet, cut the wound, suck out the venom, or drink alcohol or coffee. Also do not seek to inject your own antivenom, which can induce a violent allergic reaction and needs to be administered in a professional environment with adrenaline and oxygen on hand.— AFP



BARINGO: Chepchirchir Kiplagat, a 8-year-old child who lost the use of the left side of her body after a snake bite is held by her father Jackson Chepkui outside their home in the village of Embosos, in the Baringo county.— AFP

the Bio-Ken venomous snake centre in Watamu on the Kenyan coast. Even simple barriers such as mosquito nets around beds can repel the slithering reptiles, while easy access to trained medical staff and species-specific antivenoms can save thousands of lives.

Figures on antivenom availability today are hard to come by, but a report by Nick Brown of the Global Snakebite Initiative a few years ago estimated it could be as low as 2.5 percent of what is needed, with the majority of African countries having no effective or affordable antivenom at all. And a recent study of more than 100 clinics in Kenya's southern Kilifi county revealed that nearly 90 percent of staff had had no training in snakebite treatment.

"Because it (a snakebite) can't be transmitted (like a disease), people tend not to look at it seriously. But we see so many snakebites, we see so much suffering because people lose limbs, they lose a leg" for something as random as "stepping on a snake," said Taylor. During a visit by AFP, the Bio-Ken centre receives a call on a dedicated telephone line that immediately jolts the team into action: a snake has been spotted. The call came from Emmanuel, 23, who waits for the team, machete in hand, at the spot where he last saw the reptile while locking his goat in its pen.

Moments later, Taylor and a colleague each grab an extremity of the snake using long pincers, and with a choreographed swoop, place it in a special box. Today's find: an African puff adder - the same type that bit Chepchirchir and Scholar. "This one was well hidden" under piles of dead leaves, said Taylor.—AFP



WATAMU: A black spitting cobra moves inside its enclosure at the Bio-Ken Snake Farm in the Kenya's coastal town of Watamu in Kilifi county.—AFP

## The battle to bring antivenoms to Africa

WATAMU, Kenya: Snake antivenoms have been around for 125 years, are effective and can be produced cheaply at scale. Yet Africa, with its abundance of deadly snakes, has an alarming shortage of the life-saving medicine. Experts and campaigners blame a combination of weak production capacity, feeble policy and oversight, high prices and a general lack of concern for the plight of people in poor, remote areas of the world.

The method of antivenom production has changed very little since it was first developed by French immunologist Albert Calmette in the late 19th century. It remains a painstaking, time-consuming process, although researchers are working to develop synthetic alternatives. First, a technician has to milk a snake's venom in a dangerous manoeuvre that sees it holding the animal's head still while it bites a cup covered in plastic film, releasing its poison - a small amount each time - into the container. Small venom doses are then injected into a large domestic animal, usually a horse, to trigger an immune response and the production of toxin-attacking antibodies.

After several doses over a period of about a year, the horse produces so many antibodies that it becomes immune to the venom, at which point blood can be taken from the animal. In a lab, antibodies are then separated from the blood, to be given to snakebite victims - who may need several doses. An antivenom usually works only for a specific species, or small group of species of snake. A key challenge, especially in poor, remote areas of the world where most snakebites occur, is that most antivenoms need to be refrigerated.

Already patchy, availability of antivenoms in Africa was thrown into disarray when French laboratory SANOFI stopped production in 2014 of its FAV-Afrique drug, which was effective against a number of species, including some of the most dangerous on the continent. The last available doses expired mid-2016. SANOFI was moved mainly by financial considerations. The prohibitive price of a single dose - more than \$100 - rendered sales in Africa unprofitable.

"The failure to use antivenom 'to save tens of millions of lives... is a shameful failure. Nowhere in the world is this more confronting than in Africa," says the Global Snakebite Initiative, adding in a report on its website that the "collapse of the snake antivenom market in Africa" was a "medical tragedy". The cause is multifold.

In a vicious circle, unaffordability leads to lower demand and falling sales, which result in reduced production, higher costs, and raised prices for consumers. Even an antivenom produced on the continent and effective against multiple snake species, is nigh impossible to find further north than South Africa, where it is made, a 2018 study by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine found.— AFP



International

# Deaths, jail and cyber spies: The dangers of dissent in Thailand

## Scores of dissidents, academics, 'Red Shirt' activists pushed into self-exile

**BANGKOK:** Dead dissidents dumped in a river, activists knotted up by the courts, and Big Brother-style internet laws - critics of Thailand's junta fear this week's election is poised to sharpen the dangers faced by those who disagree. This goes to the polls on March 24, in the first election since the 2014 coup that installed the generals in power.

But it will be held under new rules established by a junta that has made clear it has no intention of leaving the political stage. Scores of dissidents, academics and "Red Shirt" activists have been pushed into self-exile during the junta years, in what analysts say is one of the biggest political flights in Thailand's recent history.

Some found sanctuary in the West, but the majority fled to neighboring countries to avoid charges and jail terms. "I couldn't bear living under an unjust power anymore," said Thantawut Twewardomgul, an activist who had previously served a jail sentence for royal defamation. He left Thailand for Laos in the wake of the coup. In Laos, some launched digital radio stations to keep up their opposition to the generals and - in some cases - the kingdom's unassailable monarchy.

### 'Shocked and scared'

But rights groups say their continued activism may have jeopardized their lives. Three firebrand radio hosts have been reported missing in Laos since the coup, according to Human Rights Watch. Late last year the corpses of two aides of radio host Surachai Danwattanasorn washed ashore on the Thai-Laos border. Their disemboweled bodies were stuffed with concrete blocks and their faces battered beyond recognition.

The men lived with Surachai, 77, who had fled to Laos in June 2014 soon after the coup, and hasn't been seen since mid-December. His wife Pranee, who remains in Thailand, fears the lifelong activist - who spent nearly three years in

jail in Thailand after being sentenced under royal insult laws - is dead. "In a democracy, people should be able to criticize public figures," Pranee said. The grim case has injected fear into the exiled community. "We are shocked and scared. We are looking to leave Laos," another exile involved with the anti-junta radio, who declined to be named for their safety, told AFP.

### Activists at risk

After four years smothering political debate, the junta lifted some of its bans on political activity weeks before announcing elections. But there is little trust its repressive reflexes have dulled. Pro-democracy campaigner Nuttara Mahattana, 39, said she was slapped with "sedition" charges for anti-junta stunts. "Very few voices have risen in the kingdom against the junta. Someone had to do it," Nuttara said.

She is among thousands of activists facing prosecution in Thailand - rights groups say nearly 2,000 have gone to trial in military courts. These lawsuits are "a reminder of the perils of speaking out," said Tyrell Haberkorn, a researcher on Thai state violence from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Prosecutions under a royal defamation law - referred to as "112" after its criminal code - spiked early in the junta rule, with record sentences meted out.

It has been upheld as a necessity to protect the monarchy but rights groups decry it as a tool against dissent. There were no fresh charges in 2018 - two years after Thailand's new King Maha Vajiralongkorn ascended the throne - and the halt in cases could signal the palace's shifting attitude regarding 112's use, said a senior police source. But Haberkorn remains unconvinced the law, which she said was used to "create a climate of fear", is in retreat. "It will not disappear with elections." —AFP



**BANGKOK:** A visitor looks at the portrait of missing Thai activist Surachai Danwattanasorn displayed during a human rights forum at the Netherlands Embassy in Bangkok. Surachai Danwattanasorn, a prominent critic of Thailand's monarchy and the Thai junta, went missing on December 12, 2018 with his aides. —AFP

## Death of man in custody in Kashmir triggers protests

**SRINAGAR:** Protests flared in parts of Indian Kashmir yesterday after police said a man being questioned in connection with a security investigation had died in custody, the latest disturbances in one of the world's most militarized regions. The dead man, Rizwan Asad Pandit, a chemistry graduate who taught at a private school, according to his family, had been arrested as part of a "terror case investigation", a police spokesman said.

Inquiries were being carried out into the cause of his death, the spokesman said. Pandit's brother, Zulkarnain Asad Pandit, was skeptical that any investigation would reveal the truth. "We want an investigation of it but we know nothing is going to happen," the brother said. "We've all seen investigations for the last 20 years." Protesters threw stones at police in several parts of the Muslim-majority region following news of Pandit's death, with shops shutting in parts of the main city of Srinagar.

Police responded with tear gas. Tension between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, which both claim Kashmir in full but rule it in part, escalated dramatically after a suicide car bomb killed at least 40 Indian paramilitary police on Feb 14. A Pakistan-based militant

group claimed responsibility for the bomb. Muslim Pakistan denied any involvement but India has long accused its western neighbor of backing separatist militants fighting security forces in its part of Kashmir. In response to the bomb, Indian jet fighters attacked what it said was a militant camp in Pakistan. Pakistan denied any militant camp was in the area and said the Indian bombs exploded on an unoccupied hillside.

The next day, Indian and Pakistani warplanes engaged in a dogfight over Kashmir. Pakistan downed an Indian plane and captured its pilot after he ejected over Pakistani-controlled Kashmir. India and Pakistan have gone to war three times since 1947, twice over the divided Himalayan region. The dead man came from a family with links to the Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), his brother said, a political group that wants independence from India for Kashmir. The Indian government recently banned the group which it accuses of having links to militant organizations.

The security forces have arrested hundreds of JeI members since the Feb. 14 bomb attack. The group denies it is linked to militants. "He was totally innocent and he had no affiliation with any militant outfit," Pandit's brother said. Several prominent political figures in Kashmir condemned the death of the man. "Punishment must be handed out to the killers of this young man," said Omar Abdullah, a former chief minister of the state said on Twitter. —Reuters

## India's richest man helps tycoon brother avoid jail

**MUMBAI:** The epic feud between India's Ambani brothers has taken a new twist with the older and now vastly richer brother paying a debt owned by his struggling sibling, helping him avoid jail. Mukesh and Anil Ambani fell out spectacularly after their rags-to-riches father died in 2002 without a will, leaving them to fight for control of his Reliance Industries conglomerate.

With their mother acting as peacemaker, they eventually agreed to split Reliance, at the time India's most valuable listed company, and to stay out of each other's sectors. Mukesh's half has thrived while Anil's has

tanked. Mukesh, 61, is now Asia's richest man, worth \$54.3 billion, dwarfing Anil's assets of some \$300 million, according to Bloomberg News. Mukesh and his family live in a 27-storey luxury Mumbai skyscraper believed to have cost more than \$1 billion to build and regularly referred to as the world's most expensive home.

Anil's Reliance Communications is believed to have debts of around \$4 billion and started insolvency proceedings in February. That same month his woes deepened when the Supreme Court ruled he would be jailed if he failed to pay 5.5 billion rupees (\$77 million) to Sweden's Ericsson by Tuesday. Reliance Communications dropped a bombshell late Monday by saying that the debt had been settled - implying that none other than Anil's big brother had paid the money, prompting a humbled thank you.

"My sincere and heartfelt thanks to my respected elder brother, Mukesh, and (his wife) Nita, for standing by me during these trying times, and demonstrating the importance of staying true to our strong family values by extending this timely support," said Anil, 59. "I and my family are grateful we have moved beyond the past, and are deeply grateful and touched with this gesture," he added in a statement.

Mukesh's decision may not have been driven entirely by a desire to bury the hatchet, however. Monday's short statement did not say whether the payment was a gift or a loan but some Indian media reported that it may have been compensation for a deal between the two that recently collapsed. Anil had hoped to offload his company's telecom tower and spectrum business to his brother's Reliance Jio for \$2.4 billion. —AFP

## Indonesia death toll rises to 89, dozens missing

**SENTANI:** At least 89 people are known to have died after flash floods and landslides tore through Indonesia's Papua region, with the toll expected to rise further as rescuers hunt for dozens still missing, the national disaster agency said yesterday. Scores have also been injured in the disaster, triggered by torrential rain on Saturday, with some 6,800 people evacuated to temporary shelters.

The military has taken up the grim task of putting mud-caked corpses into body bags,

with the search hampered by mountains of debris including rocks and fallen trees. Seventy-four people remain unaccounted for, while around 150 suffered broken bones, cuts and other injuries.

"Many people are choosing to stay at shelters because they're still traumatized and scared of more flash floods, so some evacuation centers are packed," said national disaster agency spokesman Sutopo Purwo Nugroho. The government has issued a 14-day state of emergency in Papua, which shares a border with independent Papua New Guinea on an island just north of Australia. Flooding is common in Indonesia, especially during the rainy season which runs from October to April.

In January, floods and landslides killed at least 70 people on Sulawesi island, while earlier this month hundreds in West Java

province were forced to evacuate when torrential rains triggered severe flooding. Meanwhile, three people were killed - including two Malaysian tourists - and some 182 were injured after an earthquake Sunday triggered a landslide on the Indonesian tourist island of Lombok, next to Bali.

Lombok was rocked by several earthquakes last summer, killing more than 500 people and leaving over 150,000 homeless. Last September, the country was hit by an earthquake and tsunami in Palu on Sulawesi island which killed around 2,200 people. The Southeast Asian archipelago of some 17,000 islands is one of the most disaster-prone nations on Earth, straddling the Pacific Ring of Fire, where tectonic plates collide. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are common. —AFP



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## Dalai Lama eyes Chinese gambit after his death

The Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, said yesterday it was possible that once he dies his incarnation could be found in India, where he has lived in exile for 60 years, and warned that any other successor named by China would not be respected. Sat in an office next to a temple ringed by green hills and snow-capped mountains, the 14th Dalai Lama spoke to Reuters a day after Tibetans in the northern Indian town of Dharamshala marked the anniversary of his escape from the Tibetan capital, Lhasa, disguised as a soldier.

He fled to India in early 1959 after a failed uprising against Chinese rule, and has since worked to draw global support for linguistic and cultural autonomy in his remote and mountainous homeland. China, which took control of Tibet in 1950, brands the 83-year-old Nobel peace laureate a dangerous separatist. Pondering what might happen after his death, the Dalai Lama anticipated some attempt by Beijing to foist a successor on Tibetan Buddhists.

"China considers Dalai Lama's reincarnation as something very important. They have more concern about the next Dalai Lama than me," said the Dalai Lama, swathed in his traditional red robes and yellow scarf. "In future, in case you see two Dalai Lamas come, one from here, in free country, one chosen by Chinese, then nobody will trust, nobody will respect (the one chosen by China). So that's an additional problem for the Chinese! It's possible, it can happen," he added, laughing.

China has said its leaders have the right to approve the Dalai Lama's successor, as a legacy inherited from China's emperors. But many Tibetans - whose tradition holds that the soul of a senior Buddhist monk is reincarnated in the body of a child on his death - suspect any Chinese role as a ploy to exert influence on the community. Born in 1935, the current Dalai Lama was identified as the reincarnation of his predecessor when he was two years old. Many of China's more than 6 million Tibetans still venerate the Dalai Lama despite government prohibitions on displays of his picture or any public display of devotion.

### Up for discussion

The Dalai Lama said contact between Tibetans living in their homeland and in exile was increasing, but that no formal meetings have happened between Chinese and his officials since 2010. Informally, however, some retired Chinese officials and businessman with connections to Beijing do visit him from time to time, he added. He said the role of the Dalai Lama after his death, including whether to keep it, could be discussed during a meeting of Tibetan Buddhists in India later this year.

He, however, added that though there was no reincarnation of Buddha, his teachings have remained. "If the majority of (Tibetan people) really want to keep this institution, then this institution will remain," he said. "Then comes the question of the reincarnation of the 15th Dalai Lama." If there is one, he would still have "no political responsibility", said the Dalai Lama, who gave up his political duties in 2001, developing a democratic system for the up to 100,000 Tibetans living in India.

### Seminar in China?

During the interview, the Dalai Lama spoke passionately about his love for cosmology, neurobiology, quantum physics and psychology. If he was ever allowed to visit his homeland, he said he'd like to speak about those subjects in a Chinese university. But he wasn't expecting to go while China remained under Communist rule. "China - great nation, ancient nation - but it's political system is totalitarian system, no freedom. So therefore I prefer to remain here, in this country."

The Dalai Lama was born to a family of farmers in Taktser, a village on the northeastern edge of the Tibetan plateau, in China's Qinghai province. During a recent Reuters visit to Taktser, police armed with automatic weapons blocked the road. Police and more than a dozen plain-clothed officials said the village was not open to non-locals. "Our strength, our power is based on truth. Chinese power based on gun," the Dalai Lama said. "So for short term, gun is much more decisive, but long term truth is more powerful." —Reuters



Photo shows three Boeing 737 MAX 8 planes from Shanghai Airlines parked at Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport in Shanghai. —AFP

## China's 737 move shows growing aviation clout

The key role China played in grounding the troubled Boeing 737 MAX 8 has demonstrated its growing clout in global aviation and may give it an extra bargaining chip in trade talks with Washington. China ordered its domestic airlines to ground the plane on March 11, a day after the deadly crash of an Ethiopian Airways Boeing 737 MAX 8. That touched off a domino effect as other countries followed suit in light of the aircraft's second fatal accident in months, and came two days before the Trump administration and US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) ordered the plane grounded.

The situation raised eyebrows because China historically takes its cues from the FAA - particularly given the US safety regulator's familiarity with Boeing. Regardless of the trade war or big-power rivalries, it was a move that China had to make, aviation analysts said. China now has the world's fastest growing aviation sector as rising prosperity fuels travel among a huge population that a generation ago struggled to afford basic necessities.

A deadly safety mishap in Chinese skies would be a catastrophe for the Communist government. "China as a country simply has to be serious about safety. You can try to read more into it but ... it's a country prioritizing safety more than anything else because of the size of the market," said Janesh Janardhanan, director of Aerospace, Defence & Security at business consultancy Frost & Sullivan. "It was not a stand-alone isolated reaction, as many countries followed suit."

### Propaganda win

The turn of events has prompted suggestions that US regulators may have temporarily abdicated their vital watchdog role, giving China an opening to exercise more global leadership. But analysts said the Boeing crisis will likely prove an isolated incident and there was no reason to view the FAA's days as the world's de facto safety watchdog to be under threat. Boeing and European rival Airbus have a huge lead over China's homegrown passenger jets, which do not yet have a proven safety record. There also is concern over granting safety leadership to an opaque Communist Party government.

China had a dismal safety record culminating in a series of deadly plane incidents in the 1990s, improving the situation after inviting the FAA to work with the Civil Aviation Administration of China. "The FAA and the NTSB (an US agency which investigates accidents) are the gold standard-setters in aviation safety. Let's not forget that the airplane was invented in the US. China's decision in my view will not change this," said Shukor Yusof, head of Malaysia-based aviation consultancy firm Endau Analytics.

He added that on safety China "has improved a lot, obviously. But it hasn't reached US or EU standards". Robert Mann, head of US-based aviation consultancy RW Mann and Co, said predictions of the FAA's decline were "precipitous,

arguably irresponsible." But he noted that there was indeed propaganda value for China in the 737 fiasco. "Science and hard data-based decision-making are becoming subordinate to public opinion and appearances," he said.

### Home-made jets

Few question China's growing clout in aviation. A generation ago air travel was not that common in China, but the country is expected to surpass the US within a few years to become the world's largest market for air travel. More than 1.26 billion passengers moved through Chinese airports in 2018, an increase of 10.2 percent compared to the previous year, according to official figures. An improving safety record has no doubt helped fuel such traffic, and thousands more aircraft are expected to be needed by China to keep up with future growth.

"China is the largest user of new planes, new aircraft deliveries, so you will see them play an increasing role in terms of defining safety standards, in terms of end-user expectations," said Janardhanan. China's stance on the 737 gives Beijing added leverage in its trade dispute with Washington. Aircraft make up one of the biggest product segments in terms of US export value to China and it would not be difficult to see Beijing using the un-grounding of the 737 MAX 8 as a bargaining chip. —AFP

## Lenders and travelers stick with Ethiopian Airlines, for now

Financiers, passengers and industry partners are, for now, still backing Ethiopian Airlines' quest to become Africa's dominant carrier, despite a March 10 crash that killed 157 people. The causes of the Flight 302 tragedy will likely take months to establish. While much of the international focus has been on US planemaker Boeing and its 737 MAX 8 jet, the airline's reputation could also hinge on the results of the investigation.

Although crash inquiries focus on preventing future accidents rather than attributing liability, any findings that the carrier fell short in plane maintenance or piloting could be damaging. For the present, however, passenger confidence in Ethiopian Airlines, long regarded as one of the most reliable in Africa, has remained steady, according to the company. Cancellation and booking rates are unchanged since the crash, said spokesman Asrat Begashaw.

"We are operating as normal," he told Reuters. "Our brand is keeping its level, and we are okay." Two banking sources with knowledge of the matter said that, barring a major new twist in the investigation with long-term fallout, banks were still comfortable lending to Ethiopian Airlines. "Ethiopian is a solid company," said one, an official from an international bank that helped finance the acquisition of some Ethiopian Airlines planes. "No reason to change the way the bank sees its credit risk at this point."

A vote of confidence from lenders is important for the airline because its years of rapid expansion have largely been financed by international borrowing. The second source, a top European aviation banker, said Ethiopian Airlines was "a good airline, with a good reputation." "So unless it (the crash) is a major problem of piloting or maintenance - and it is far too early to talk about that - they will still have access to financing," the source added. The sources declined to be identified because the matters are confidential.

### Foreign investors

Ethiopian Airlines has borrowed from foreign banks including JP Morgan, ING Capital and Societe Generale over the past decade. It also has outstanding bonds worth \$540 million, though none due until 2024. Refinitiv data shows. The borrowing helped finance the acquisition



Devotees pray during a special service for the families of the victims of the crashed Ethiopian Airlines at Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Nairobi, Kenya. —AFP

of stakes in or establish partnerships with at least four African carriers, establishing hubs to feed traffic into Addis Ababa. Last year, the Ethiopian capital overtook Dubai as the main gateway for long-haul passengers into Africa.

The airline's fleet grew from 35 planes in 2007 to 111 in 2019. It now flies to more than 119 international destinations, up from 52 a decade ago. The expansion has made the state-owned carrier, founded in 1945, the most profitable major airline on the continent. Ethiopian's net profit in the 2017/18 financial year rose to \$233 million from \$229 million the previous year; operating revenue jumped 43 percent to \$3.7 billion.

Last year, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced plans to sell a minority stake in the airline as part of a broad strategy to open up the country to foreign investors. Industry analysts said it was too early to evaluate the impact of the crash on the airline's long-term plans but said, for now, its reputation remained largely intact. "It's a very strong management team, with good vision," said Naval Taneja, an author and professor at Ohio State University's Center for Aviation Studies. "We've got to look at the strength of the airline as a whole, not just this one incident." Those who want to travel across Africa have few options other than flying. Conflict, poor roads, and limited cross-border train transport often make travel by land difficult. Analysts said the crash was unlikely to damage Ethiopian's partnerships with African carriers, key to a strategy that helped increase passenger numbers from 2.5 million a decade ago to 10.6 million last year, or with other industry players.

One such partner is ASKY, a Togo-based carrier which Ethiopian Airlines helped launch in 2010. "Ethiopian's accident has not affected our partnership in any way," said Lionel Tsoto, the airline's head of public relations. "We continue just as before." Global aviation leasing firm GECAS said the airline was a "close and valued partner who we look forward to working with in the future." —Reuters

## Mosque shootings hit tight-knit Bangladesh community hard

Husna Ahmed was 19 when she arrived in New Zealand from Bangladesh on her wedding day. Waiting to meet her was Farid, the man she would marry in a few hours, as their families had agreed. A quarter of a century later, the life they had built together was torn apart at the Al Noor mosque in Christchurch when a gunman walked into the building, firing on worshippers at Friday prayers. Husna encountered the gunman on his way out of the mosque. He shot her on the footpath. She fell and he fired two more shots, killing her instantly.

Farid, who uses a wheelchair after an earlier accident, was talking to a friend and was delayed from joining worshippers at his usual spot at the front of the mosque, instead praying in a small side room. He managed to escape when he heard the shooting begin, returning when the gunman left, to find many of his friends and community members dead and comfort those who were dying. Farid found out about his wife's death when a detective he knew called his niece as they waited outside the mosque.

She passed the phone: "I don't want you to wait the whole night, Farid. Go home, she will not come," Farid said the detective told him. "At the moment I hear that, my response was I felt numb," Farid told Reuters. "I had tears but I didn't break down." His niece crumbled. A total of 50 people were killed in the rampage, with as many wounded, as the gunman went from Al Noor to another mosque in the South Island city. Most victims were migrants or refugees from countries including Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Syria, Turkey, Somalia and Afghanistan.

Husna was one of five members of a growing but tight-knit Bangladeshi community killed, according to the Bangladesh consul in New Zealand, Shafiqur Rahman Bhuiyan. Four others were wounded, one critically, he added. Members of the Bangladesh cricket team, in town for a test match against New Zealand, narrowly avoided the carnage, turning up at the Al Noor mosque soon after the attack took place. Based on what eyewitnesses told him, Farid said instead of hiding, Husna helped women and children inside the mosque and ran to the front of the building to look for him.

"She's such a person who always put other people first and she was even not afraid to give her life saving other people," Farid said. Australian Brenton Tarrant, 28, a suspected white supremacist, has been charged with murder. He entered no plea and police said he is



Farid Ahmad (center), a survivor of the Al Noor mosque shootings, but whose wife Husna was killed, is greeted by a well-wisher in Christchurch. —AFP

likely to face more charges.

The slaughter has rocked Christchurch, and New Zealand, to its core, blanketing the city in grief and driving Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern to promise swift gun law reform. Farid said he had forgiven his wife's killer. "I want to give the message to the person who did this, or if he has any friends who also think like this: I still love you," Farid said. "I want to hug you and I want to tell him in face that I am talking from my heart. I have no grudge against you, I never hated you, I will never hate you."

### Like a mother

A few hours after the massacre as evening fell, the front room of Farid's home in a sleepy Christchurch suburb where he runs a homeopathy business was full with survivors and friends grieving for a woman many described as like a mother to them. Husna was born on 12 October in 1974 in Sylhet, a city on the banks the Surma River, in northeastern Bangladesh. She was so fast that Shahzad Junior High School would only let her run three races, to give her rivals a chance, Farid said. She moved to New Zealand in 1994.

Thin, nervous and overwhelmed by leaving everyone she knew for a new life in an alien country, she burst into tears when her husband-to-be picked her up from Auckland airport. He comforted her on the long drive back to Nelson, where he was living, and where she quickly found her feet. With almost no other Bangladeshis in the small city, Husna made English-speaking friends and learned the language within six months. Farid said she spoke it with more of a Kiwi accent than he did.

When Farid's workmates at a meatpacking plant agreed to work half an hour longer on Fridays so he could take a break to pray, she cooked them a feast every week in thanks. And when Farid was partially paralyzed after being run over by a car outside his house, after four years of marriage, she moved with him to Christchurch and became his nurse. "Our hobby was we used to talk to each other. A lot. And we never felt bored," he said. —Reuters

## Business

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2019

**12** Commercial Bank of Kuwait launches 'Tijari Pay' money transfer service**13** Ooredoo Kuwait launches ANA, an incredible digital revolution**14** Canon Saudi Arabia opens its offices and business showrooms in Riyadh

KUWAIT: Robert Hayek (second right) addresses a press conference as Ayman Al-Mutairi (second left), Saud Al-Shabaak (left) and Dr Hani Ansi (right) look on. — Photos by Joseph Shagra

# Warba Bank partners with Boodai Aviation

## Partnership to provide financial assistance for medical treatment abroad

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Warba Bank announced yesterday a new partnership with Boodai Aviation Group on funding healthcare and medical treatment abroad during a press conference held at The Avenues. This partnership is through the medical tourism section of Souk Safar, which is specialized in providing all services for medical treatment abroad. According to this partnership, all those seeking medical treatment abroad can benefit from this offer, whether they are clients of Warba Bank or not. They will receive financing by Warba for their treatment.

There are different forms of financing available. "The first is through depositing the amount of the medical treatment as a fix deposit (Sunbula) at Warba Bank for a certain period. With this deposit, the client will enter weekly and quarterly draws during the deposit period. At the end of the period, the returns of the investment to the value of three percent will be deposited to the client's account directly. Then the client will fulfill the funding application in return for the financial guarantee, which is considered an added value for the client," said Ayman Al-Mutairi, CEO for Marketing and Corporate Communications at Warba Bank.

The second way is by applying for direct funding

by Warba Bank without any additional profits on the original amount. The limit is up to KD 25,000 with a flexible repayment period," he added.

Saud Al-Shabaak, Manager of the Direct Sales Department at Warba Bank noted that the bank aims to expand its banking and financing solutions portfolio that covers the needs of clients in all fields. "This provides more flexibility on banking transactions and brings the clients more benefits. So in addition to receiving the best medical services provided by Souk Safar in different countries, the client will also make good financial returns from the Sunbula deposit. Furthermore, he will get a chance to win one of the prizes of the weekly and monthly draws worth KD 1 million annually," he explained.

Robert Hayek, General Manager of Boodai Aviation Group, expressed his delight to enter into this partnership with Warba Bank, which will provide their clients the best medical services. "Our clients will get the best medical advice from specialists in the field," he pointed out.

Dr Hani Ansi, Head of the Medical Tourism at Souk Safar, said Souk Safar provides top medical services at various medical centers in countries including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Switzerland, UK, US and others. "Souk Safar is unique in the Kuwaiti market as it's located in the biggest shopping mall (The Avenues)



KUWAIT: Saud Al-Shabaak shakes hands with Robert Hayek following the press conference.

and includes various airlines, in addition to offices of international hotels. It also includes medical tourism, adventure trips, marine tours, car rentals, visa office, medical insurance and much more all in one place," he

noted. "The clients of Warba Bank will be privileged by getting free medical consultation before booking their stay through live video call with specialized doctors abroad," he added.

## Oil and equities prepare to party like it's 1999

LONDON: Investors seem to be betting history will repeat itself, with the Federal Reserve cutting interest rates to keep the US expansion going, just as it did in 1998, producing one final bull run in oil and equity markets.

Between September and November 1998 the Fed cut US interest rates aggressively, with three cuts amounting to a combined 75 basis points, to reverse the economy's loss of momentum.

Prompt reductions helped to ensure the US economy continued expanding for another 30 months before finally entering recession in April 2001, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research. Lower rates and continued economic growth subsequently fuelled a remarkable 56 percent increase in the S&P 500 equity

index over the next 18 months as well as the dot-com bubble.

Reflecting the strong economy, Brent prices more than doubled between September 1998 and August 2000 as oil consumption gains combined with OPEC output restraint and supply disruptions to tighten the market. Brent's six-month month calendar spread swung from a contango of more than \$2 a barrel in the summer of 1998 to backwardation above \$4 by the start of 2000 as excess inventories evaporated.

In 1998, low inflation gave the Fed policy room to offset a deteriorating international economy because of the Asian financial crisis. By the time the Fed started cutting in September, the US economy had already been expanding for 90 months, which was the third-longest expansion on record at the time. Unemployment was at 4.6 percent, the lowest for a quarter of a century, while core consumer prices excluding food and energy were rising at 2.8 percent a year (both close to current conditions).

Late-cycle interest rate reductions can provide a very strong stimulus, and the cuts in late 1998 contributed to a renewed surge

in activity so strong they were progressively reversed from the middle of 1999.

### Rat-cut bet

In the first few weeks of 2019, yields on benchmark 10-year US Treasury notes continue to trend lower and the yield curve is still inching towards full inversion - a sign investors are readying for a slowdown in growth and lower interest rates. The yield curve is already inverted from one year to three years ahead as bond traders anticipate falling rates in 2020/21.

At the same time, US equity indices and Brent spot prices are pushing steadily higher, implying that the US and global economies will avoid a severe slowdown. The apparent contradiction between the bearish direction of the bond market and the bullish direction of equity and commodity prices can be resolved by assuming interest rates will peak soon and then fall.

For the moment, investors appear to be betting the economy will slow enough to persuade the Fed to ease monetary conditions, but not so much that it will fall into a full-scale recession.

Most economists polled by Reuters still



BAKU: Azerbaijan's Energy Minister Parviz Shahbazov (right) and Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih attend a press conference at the end of the 13th meeting of the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) of OPEC and non-OPEC countries on Monday. — AFP

expect the Fed to raise rates at least once more before the end of September this year. But more than a quarter expect rates to have been cut at least once by the end of 2020. Even if the Fed chooses to leave policy-controlled rates unchanged, it could ease monetary conditions by reducing or

ending bond sales from its balance sheet, or by signalling that it will tolerate slightly more inflation risk. If the fourth quarter of 2018 was analogous to the fourth quarter of 1998, then the markets are betting 2019/20 will be a lot like 1999/2000 rather than 2001 or 2008. —Reuters

Business

# Commercial Bank of Kuwait launches 'Tijari Pay' money transfer service

## Service a first in Kuwait uses innovative QR code technology

By Faten Omar

**KUWAIT:** As part of digitizing all banking services for its customers, Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) has announced the launch of its innovative service, a first in Kuwait and the region, 'Tijari Pay' to transfer money using QR Code technology.

During a press conference that was held yesterday at JW Marriott Hotel, General Manager of CBK Retail Banking, Hameed Salman, explained the Bank's strategy and vision in terms of developing customer-centric banking services and utilizing modern technology to provide innovative banking services. Also, the concept of self-service in its branches where it is one of the first Kuwaiti banks that automate the majority of banking transactions, which contributed to providing fast and improved service to satisfy customers.

Salman reviewed the Bank's recent achievements emphasizing the bank's strategic direction towards digital transformation, including self-service banking for all branches across its branch network to carry out withdrawals, transfers, deposit of checks and other banking transactions with the uniqueness of the implementation of 'SMART QUEUING' technology. He also elaborated on other banking services through 'virtual service - KIOSK Virtual Banking' technology, to enable customers to open accounts themselves, update banking data, request bank certificates, request credit cards, and other services.

CBK is the first bank in Kuwait to launch a 'video banking' service, where customers can connect to the

bank via video through their smartphones to complete banking operations or to inquire about any transaction.

Bader Qamhiyeh, Acting General Manager, IT Department, addressed the technological and security aspects of the bank's services through a secure and sophisticated platform.

He gave a presentation on how to use this service and explained that any person or company can easily validate the documents by scanning QR code with the CBK mobile application available on the Androids and IOS gadgets, pointing out that this service includes a large number of documents such as account statement, balance certificate, and other documents.

Khalil Al-Qattan, Head of Digital Banking, reviewed some of the commercial banking services that distinguish CBK from other banks and offer the customer an easy, flexible and secure banking experience. 'Tijari Pay' is a unique and innovative service that offers a variety of payment and collection options among 'Tijari Pay' users. The users can also pay or collect money by scanning the QR code and downloading the code on their smartphones easily, securely and quickly to complete the transaction. This service is free and does not include any transaction fee.

The CBK officials thanked the participants and assured the customers that they will continue their efforts to provide more advanced digital banking services that meet the latest technological standards and provide customers with easy, flexible and safe banking transactions.



**KUWAIT:** (Left to right) Khalil Al-Qattan, Head of Digital Banking at CBK, Hameed Salman, General Manager at CBK Retail Banking and Bader Qamhiyeh, Acting General Manager, IT Department, during the press conference. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## AUB announces the winners of international purchases Campaign

**KUWAIT:** Ahli United Bank announced on the 13th of March 2019 the winners of its campaign that allowed AUB's Customers to win up to 100% of the value of their international purchases using their AUB Debit Cards.

The campaign lasted from 4 to 28 February 2019 and was launched on the occasion of the month of February and the celebration of Kuwait's national days, provides customers with 6 chances to win.

The lucky winner Mona AlHanaif won 100% of the value of her purchases up to KD 1000 and the five winners: Sami Aman Abdullah, Al Hamidi Soud AlAzemi, Mahmoud Ibrahim joro, Basemah Mostafa Qasem and Fawaz Fahad Al Suwalem won the value of their purchases up to KD 500.

AUB customers who shopped outside Kuwait during campaign's period by using the Debit cards of Ahli United Bank for KD 100 or more, and had the opportunity to recover up to 100% of the value of their purchases.

In a press statement, Ahli United Bank said: The timing has been chosen to coincide with the month of February and Kuwait's celebration of its national days during which many like to travel to spend the holidays abroad, thereby increasing their shopping worldwide.

This unique campaign complemented the package of unique prizes with which AUB rewards its customers for their confidence in the services and products offered by the Bank which has always been keen to present its customers with exceptional value through its various remarkable promotions that cater for their needs and even exceed their expectations.

In addition to the exciting campaign benefits, customers who spent using AUB credit cards automatically benefited from the Pearls reward program as well as AUB's instant discount program. These offers provided customers a real added value that rewards the AUB Credit Card and Debit card holders through unique discounts at major well-known companies and retail outlets in Kuwait."

## Germany launches 5G auction amid row with US over Huawei

**BERLIN:** Germany launches its auction for the construction of an ultra-fast 5G mobile network as a transatlantic dispute rages over security concerns surrounding giant Chinese telecoms equipment maker Huawei. The United States has warned it could scale back the sharing of sensitive information with Berlin if it does not exclude hardware made by Huawei from the infrastructure, arguing that Chinese equipment could help Beijing spy on Western companies and governments.

Attempting to play down the row on Monday, Jochen Homann, chairman of the German Federal Network Agency (BNA), said: "No matter whether a supplier comes from Sweden or China, companies must meet certification requirements and security checks."

'5G' - fifth generation - is the latest, high-speed generation of cellular mobile communications and Berlin will require winning bidders to offer 5G service to at least 98 percent of German households and along motorways and rail lines. Germany, Europe's biggest economy whose wireless networks however rank 46th in the world for download speeds, wants to close the sizeable digital gap by making the shift to the ultra-fast 5G system.

The BNA started the auction in Mainz at 0900 GMT yesterday and the process will allocate 41 different frequency blocks. Four operators are in the running, among them Germany's three main mobile network providers-Deutsche Telekom, Vodafone and Telefonica Germany (O2) — plus United Internet (I&I), a German company specializing in internet services.

Huawei is not one of the bidders but provides the four German companies with essential hardware such as antennas and routers. The US has accused Beijing of using Huawei's 5G network gear as a Trojan horse, forcing operators to transmit data to the regime, but Washington has not provided evidence to support their suspicions.

Huawei has strenuously denied allegations its equipment could be used for espionage. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Monday lashed out at what he called "abnormal, immoral" attacks on Huawei and demanded a "fair and just competition environment" for Chinese firms. US-led attempts to encourage other nations to ban Huawei equipment from their

**MAINZ:** People silhouette against a display projecting second round results of Germany's auction for the construction of an ultra-fast 5G mobile network at the German Federal Network Agency (BNA, Bundesnetzagentur) in Mainz, western Germany, yesterday. —AFP

telecoms infrastructure suffered a setback when Chancellor Angela Merkel's government decided against imposing company specific-restrictions on the 5G auction.

### US fears of security compromise

According to media reports, US ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell last week warned that Washington could review intelligence cooperation unless Berlin agreed a Huawei ban.

In a letter, Grenell told Peter Altmaier, Germany's economy minister, that intelligence-sharing cooperation could be scaled back if Berlin allows the Chinese firm to be part of the 5G network, the Wall Street Journal reported. The threat escalated last week when NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, US General Curtis Scaparrotti, warned Germany that NATO forces would cut communications if Berlin works with Huawei.

"We're concerned about their (Germany's) telecommunications backbone being compromised in the sense that, particularly with 5G, the bandwidth capability and ability to pull data is incredible," Scaparrotti told the House Armed Services Committee last Wednesday. "If

it also is inside of their defense communications, then we're not gonna communicate with them.

"And for the military that would be a problem," Merkel has tried to reassure senior figures in Washington by saying Germany would consult with the US over whether to use Huawei tech, but would "define our standards for ourselves".

However, Germany's Federal Intelligence Service (BND) shares some of the US fears.

BND security experts have asked the government to take China's overall strategy into account, including a law on forced cooperation in security matters, according to a report in Der Spiegel magazine. Other media outlets claim Berlin is drawing up a catalogue of measures, for all 5G providers, to change the telecommunications laws. These measures range from a non-espionage clause to the requirement of testing all components and the obligation to publish source code used in infrastructure.

In some cases, the government could insist equipment already installed is replaced, which could exclude Huawei from the infrastructure without pronouncing a formal ban on the Chinese firm, according to business daily Handelsblatt. —AFP

## EXCHANGE RATES

### Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

#### EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	304.300
Euro	346.750
Sterling Pound	405.630
Canadian dollar	229.140
Turkish lira	56.770
Swiss Franc	305.830
US Dollar Buying	303.100

#### ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.728
Indian Rupees	4.452
Pakistani Rupees	2.221
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.702
Nepali Rupees	2.776
Singapore Dollar	226.160
Hongkong Dollar	38.766
Bangladesh Taka	3.604
Philippine Peso	5.767
Thai Baht	9.640
Malaysian ringgit	77.826

#### GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.201
Qatari Riyal	83.633
Omani Riyal	790.903
Bahraini Dinar	808.560
UAE Dirham	82.904

#### ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	20.000
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	17.522

Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.223
Tunisian Dinar	102.800
Jordanian Dinar	429.800
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.030
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.338

### Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	303.940
Canadian Dollar	228.675
Sterling Pound	405.930
Euro	347.430
Swiss Frank	306.720
Bahrain Dinar	808.290
UAE Dirhams	83.155
Qatari Riyals	84.390
Saudi Riyals	81.945
Jordanian Dinar	429.975
Egyptian Pound	17.465
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.703
Indian Rupees	4.441
Pakistani Rupees	2.179
Bangladesh Taka	3.612
Philippines Peso	5.767
Cyprus pound	18.085
Japanese Yen	3.731
Syrian Pound	1.589
Nepalese Rupees	2.782
Malaysian Ringgit	75.400
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	45.670
Thai Bhat	10.590

Turkish Lira	56.195
Singapore dollars	224.844

### BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
<b>Europe</b>		
British Pound	0.396195	0.410095
Czech Korune	0.005447	0.014747
Danish Krone	0.042151	0.047151
Euro	0.337434	0.351134
Georgian Lari	0.112862	0.112862
Hungarian 0.001007	0.001197	
Norwegian Krone	0.031519	0.036719
Romanian Leu	0.055581	0.072431
Russian ruble	0.004712	0.004712
Slovakia	0.009095	0.019095
Slovenia	0.028888	0.033888
Swedish Krona	0.297357	0.308357
Swiss Franc		
<b>Australasia</b>		
Australian Dollar	0.207708	0.219706
New Zealand Dollar	0.202315	0.211815
<b>America</b>		
Canadian Dollar	0.222757	0.231757
US Dollars	0.300200	0.305500
US Dollars Mint	0.300700	0.305500
<b>Asia</b>		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003051	0.003852

Chinese Yuan	0.043712	0.047212
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036676	0.039426
Indian Rupee	0.003856	0.004628
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002649	0.002829
Korean Won	0.000259	0.000274
Malaysian Ringgit	0.070595	0.076595
Nepalese Rupee	0.002609	0.002949
Pakistan Rupee	0.001597	0.002367
Philippine Peso	0.005773	0.006073
Singapore Dollar	0.219789	0.229789
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001363	0.001943
Taiwan	0.009752	0.009932
Thai Baht	0.009292	0.009842
Vietnamese Dong	0.000013	0.000013
<b>Arab</b>		
Bahraini Dinar	0.792591	0.809091
Egyptian Pound	0.017643	0.020243
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000210	0.000270
Jordanian Dinar	0.424290	0.433290
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000151	0.000251
Moroccan Dirhams	0.022112	0.046112
Omani Riyal	0.784071	0.789751
Qatari Riyal	0.079294	0.084234
Saudi Riyal	0.080060	0.081360
Syrian Pound	0.001290	0.001510
Tunisian Dinar	0.096709	0.104709
Turkish Lira	0.049327	0.060827
UAE Dirhams	0.081425	0.083125
Yemeni Riyal	0.000989	0.001069

Business



KUWAIT: Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Thani speaks during the panel discussion



A group photo

# Ooredoo Kuwait launches ANA, an incredible digital revolution

## Al-Thani: Ooredoo's vision is in line with 'New Kuwait' 2035

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait announced yesterday during a press conference held at the Four Seasons Hotel, the launch of ANA, the first operator to provide personalized mobile plans to enrich customers' digital lives in partnership with Matrixx Software, a Silicon Valley-based company that specializes in advanced mobile software, to digitally transform the mobile experience for mobile customers in Kuwait. 'ANA' specializes in helping mobile customers buy, manage, share and pay for digital services.

Ooredoo is the first operator in the Kuwait market to launch such a service, which provides an all-digital, individually customized mobile product that gives customers complete control of their mobile plans and digital worlds, and makes it easier to buy, use and pay for Ooredoo services directly from their mobile phones.

Ooredoo ensures that 'ANA' will be the ideal platform for the Kuwait market and help provide consumers with smart and new communication technology in line with the plans of digital transformation and the vision of New Kuwait 2035.

Meanwhile, during the panel discussion, Chief Executive Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Thani said, "ANA will enrich our customers' digital experiences with the freedom to choose and customize the digital package that fits their needs through features like eSIM, roaming and booster packs. Customers can create their own mobile number, make appointments, track health, pay bills, and much more. We are proud to push the digital experience boundaries for our customers, bringing the best of Silicon Valley through our partnership with Matrixx". Al-Thani further added, "The launch of Kuwait's first all-digital, individually customized mobile product is a true reflection of our digital transformation strategy that we are pursuing in Ooredoo Kuwait and living up to our



CEO at Ooredoo Kuwait Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Thani



Sheikh Mubarak Nasser Al-Sabah



Abdulaziz Al-Loughani



Farah Saleh Al-Babtain

vision of enriching people's digital lives".

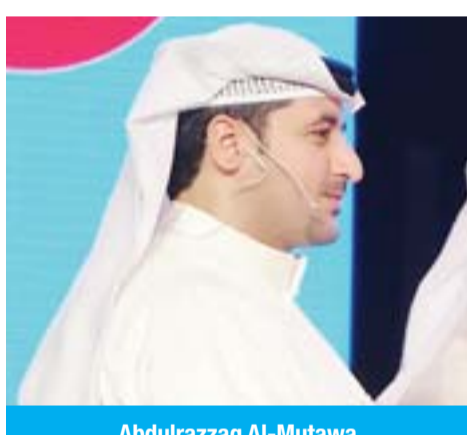
Ooredoo is keen to use ANA to help empower a growing population of young, digital savvy customers with the latest technology, in line with Kuwait's wider digital transformation plans related to New Kuwait 2035. A group of entrepreneurs participated in the discussion session, where it was moderated by Mijbil Al-Ayoub, Senior Director Corporate Communications at Ooredoo Kuwait.

The participants talked about the different projects that they manage and founded, offering their advice and experience in the field of e-commerce for those who wish to start a new project in this field.

For her part, Farah Saleh Al-Babtain, creative director of Group Xen, which runs around 7 different fields of business, explained that they are motivated to diversify in different areas, believing that the customer deserves the best.

She said: "We will not hesitate to offer the best goods or services available in the market for our customers."

Babtain pointed out that Spark Sports Club project has the ability to expand regionally and globally as a registered trademark, adding "This project summarizes our



Abdulrazzaq Al-Mutawa

efforts to provide our customers with the opportunity to choose the suitable package of the latest equipment in the world of sport and enjoy a unique sports experience."

Abdulaziz Al-Loughani, Co-Founder and Managing Director at Faith Capital, and Chief Executive of Floward, said that the competition on the e-commerce is based on the criteria that the consumer's think, including quality, wide variety, prices, ease of use of the application, speed of delivery and excellence customer service.

Loughani further added, to compete in e-market, you have to focus on the points mentioned, and then think about the impact of the service or product on consumer's life.

Chief Executive Officer of Ghaliyah, Abdulrazzaq Al-Mutawa said that he majored in media and when he returned to Kuwait in 2010, he wanted to start with a new business idea derived from his specialization. However, he felt that the media in Kuwait need to develop and keep abreast of the developments of international and digital media, in advertising and developing its traditional methods. "The community must be developed into smartphones, and into digital advertising where I expect the end of traditional newspapers era in the upcoming years," he said.

Al-Mutawa said that when he put up the idea of establishing an electronic media company, he was told to change his mind because it was not acceptable.

For his part, the inventor and businessman, Sheikh Nasser Mubarak Al-Sabah, spoke about artificial intelligence and how to benefit from it in projects, both at the level of companies and individuals, indicating the pros and cons of this new development.

He predicted that in the next 30 years, a

man would not have to go out of his house to do anything. Even his work could be done at home through technology, hoping that Kuwait's vision 2035 could be compatible with the technological developments that taking place in the world.

Al-Sabah announced the patent of the first Kuwaiti Arab citizen to invent a drone pilot in nine different forms, where it changes its shape according to the purpose are to be used, saying it is registered as a patent in the United States.

He mentioned Telly, the Gulf media project, which is a media platform in cooperation with Kuwait State Television, indicating that it is applied to smartphones with 3 million followers per month. "The project has 15 employees and benefits Kuwaiti students in the United States." Adding that the project got the fourth place as the most downloaded app with four stars rating.

At the conclusion of the panel discussion, Nasser Daoud from Ooredoo's Marketing Department stated that the company designed a package that the customers can customize according to their needs: starting from choosing the phone number, Internet use, calls minutes or any needs and services.

## India-Omani group strikes \$3.85bn deal to build Sri Lanka refinery

COLOMBO: India's Accord Group and Oman's Ministry of Oil and Gas have signed a \$3.85 billion deal to build an oil refinery in Sri Lanka, the biggest single pledge of foreign direct investment ever made in the country.

The deal represents a challenge to China, which had until recently been on track to be the dominant foreign investor on the island, and a possible coup for New Delhi. India has been concerned in the past few years about China muscling into Sri Lanka and other countries in the region where India is the traditional power.

Sri Lankan officials said the 200,000 barrel-per-day refinery will be built on 585 acres near the site of the new Hambantota international port and a related industrial zone on the nation's southern coast.

The refinery, construction of which is expected to begin on March 24 and be completed in 44 months, is set to produce 9 million metric tons of refined products a year for export from the Hambantota port, which serves the busiest East-West shipping route.

Privately owned Accord Group will control 70 percent of the joint venture and the Sultanate of Oman's Ministry of Oil and Gas the rest. Accord's ownership comes through a Singapore investment vehicle which is 90-percent owned by its Silver Park International Pvt Ltd operation.

China Merchants Port Holdings, China Harbour Engineering Corp and other



A worker outside Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

Chinese companies are investors in the port and industrial zone. China's separate \$1.4 billion financing of facilities on reclaimed land near the nation's main Colombo port is currently the island's biggest single foreign direct investment.

Tensions between India and China have created political turmoil in Sri Lanka. A bust-up between President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe over how far to accommodate Indian interests led to months of political chaos late last year.

India fears Sri Lanka, just off its southern coast, could become a Chinese military outpost. The refinery will be Chennai-based Accord's first foray into oil refining. Its current interests include power generation, brewing and health-care. The joint venture plans to invest \$1.89 billion in share capital and \$1.96 billion via loans, the project document seen by Reuters showed.

"With this refinery, our exports will grow by \$7 billion per year," Nalin Bandara Jayamaha, Sri Lanka's deputy minister of development strategies and international trade, told reporters at a news conference in Colombo. The industrial zone at Hambantota has been delayed by a land acquisition process which has been hit by protests by local residents. —Reuters

## Chinese investor weighs sale of Toulouse airport stake

PARIS: A Chinese firm that holds the largest stake in southern France's Toulouse airport is considering selling out and has already received interest from potential investors, its chief said.

"Maybe a new shareholder or a new operator can bring better value to the airport," Mike Poon told AFP in an interview on Monday, adding the company was "studying opportunities".

Poon heads Casil Europe, the holding company created by China's state-owned Shandong Hi-Speed Group and the Hong Kong-based Friedmann Pacific Asset Management, which bought 49.99 percent of the airport for 300 million euros (\$340 million) in 2015.

Last year the French government opted against selling Casil an additional 10 percent, which would have given it a controlling stake in the fast-growing regional hub. It was a victory for local governments and the Toulouse Chamber of Commerce, which own a combined 40 percent stake and who had accused Casil of under-investing in order to extract as much profits as possible.

But Poon countered that the airport had invested more than 84 million euros (\$94 million) since Casil acquired its stake — 30 percent more than required under the development plan signed with the state.

Earlier this year Casil said it was considering bids for its stake, though Poon said no final decision on a sale has been made. "We continually received a lot of solicitations from different potential investors," he said.

Press reports have suggested that French infrastructure group Eiffage would be a candidate, as would Vinci, which is also hoping to purchase the state's stake in Paris airports operator ADP.

In 2017, President Emmanuel Macron launched efforts to privatize state-owned businesses to raise funds for helping new technology ventures. Traffic at the Toulouse airport has grown rapidly, reaching 9.6 million people last year, when the number of foreign passengers surpassed domestic travellers for the first time. — AFP

## UK unemployment rate hits 44-year low

LONDON: The British unemployment rate has struck a 44-year low, official data showed yesterday, despite a broader economic slowdown as Brexit looms. The jobless rate-or proportion of the workforce that is unemployed-hit 3.9 percent in the three months to the end of January, the lowest level since 1975, the Office for National Statistics said.

That followed 4.0 percent in the three months to December, the ONS added in a statement, while expectations had been for no change. The total number of unemployed people slid by 35,000 to 1.34 million in the year to January, which was 112,000 lower than a year ago.

Economists said the labor market update painted a bright picture, despite a slowing economy with Britain scheduled to leave the European Union next week.

"A much stronger labor market report than expected-and particularly impressive given recent slower UK economic activity, heightened Brexit uncertainties and a weaker global economy," said EY economist Howard Archer. "The latest strong jobs data is somewhat surprising as some surveys had indicated that a growing number of employers are now adopting a 'wait-and-see' approach on employment given the current heightened uncertainties."

The ONS added that wage growth continued to outpace inflation.

Average earnings including bonuses increased by 3.4 percent in the year to January from a year earlier.

That handed another boost to the purchasing power of workers' salaries.

Meanwhile, British supermarket giant Sainsbury's and Walmart-owned

Asda yesterday vowed to slash prices to overcome regulatory concerns and secure a blockbuster merger. The Competition and Markets Authority watchdog last month warned that the planned merger raised "extensive competition concerns" and could spark higher prices and less choice.

The warning, contained in early findings of the CMA's in-depth probe, has sparked heavy criticism from the two supermarket firms, particularly over the level of competition in the sector. "Sainsbury's and Asda strongly disagree with the CMA's provisional findings," the pair said in a statement yesterday, adding that the regulator's initial verdict contained "significant" economic and legal errors.

"The two businesses are proposing to merge so that they can lower prices for customers in an increasingly competitive market, while improving quality and service." They vowed "to deliver £1.0 billion of lower prices annually by the third year post-completion", in a move that they said would lower consumer prices by ten percent on everyday items. The price-slashing investment will be funded by an estimated £1.6 billion in cost savings.

Sainsbury's and Asda, the nation's second and third biggest supermarket chains respectively, unveiled merger plans in April 2018 to create a retail king that would leapfrog UK number one Tesco.

Long-established UK retailers are battling sliding consumer sentiment and Brexit uncertainty alongside a broader economic slowdown. They also face fierce competition from online US titan Amazon-as well as German-owned discounters Aldi and Lidl. — AFP

## Business

# Canon Saudi Arabia opens its offices and business showrooms in Riyadh

## Canon's direct presence to enhance diversification, competitiveness

**RIYADH:** Canon Saudi Arabia, a subsidiary of Canon Middle East (CME), officially opens its first office and business solutions showroom in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The company was formed in partnership with Ali Zaid Al-Quraishi & Brothers (AZAQ) in June 2018, and with two additional offices and showrooms in Jeddah and Khobar, will represent the largest regional B2B direct presence for Canon in the Middle East region.

The opening was attended by senior Canon executives including Stefano Zenti, Executive Vice President Developing Regions Business Group, Canon Europe and Anurag Agrawal, Managing Director, Canon Middle East and Canon Eurasia, as well as Faisal Al-Quraishi, Chairman, AZAQ.

Canon believes that establishing a long-term presence in Saudi Arabia adds value to the economy by contributing to the development of a sophisticated digital infrastructure mandated by Vision 2030 to attract investors and enhance the competitiveness of the Saudi economy. Canon Saudi Arabia will further expand Canon's business products and services across the Saudi market where there is a growing need for digital and other technology-based imaging services to support a more agile, robust, and efficient business environment.

"Canon Saudi Arabia is strategically positioned to support the nation's ambitions of developing a competitive business environment in the region's largest economy, which is expected to grow by 1.8 percent this year and by 2.1 percent in 2020. We have invested in the market to provide better wider coverage and deliver a holistic approach to business solutions.

Whether these businesses are large corporations or small and medium enterprises, our innovative services and solutions are customizable to address the businesses' requirements and position them as leaders in their respective industries. This drives business competency to allow for economic growth and competitiveness of Saudi-based businesses on a global scale," said Anurag Agrawal, Managing Director Canon Middle East and Canon Eurasia.

In addition to supporting businesses achieve their objectives, Canon Saudi Arabia will be investing in its employees and enhancing their skills and capabilities through extensive learning and development programs, with a focus on embracing and enhancing the talent of Saudi youth to support the country's Saudization drive. Through these initiatives, the company aims to grow to 300 employees by 2023.

Faisal Al-Quraishi said: "The joint venture and partnership between CME and AZAQ comes as a result of a long business relationship between Canon and Al-Quraishi Group that is 50 years in the making; and this development comes as natural progression of our successful business ties. AZAQ sees this partnership as a contribution to the country's 2030 vision whereby Canon, a global brand, contributes to the Kingdom's transformation through its innovative technologies and solutions. Furthermore, the partnership will be highly committed to train young Saudi nationals as well as advance technology in private and government sectors alike."

Shadi Bakhour, B2B Business Unit Director Canon Middle East and General Manager, Canon Saudi Arabia, said: "According to recent reports, The Kingdom's print market is estimated to pass the \$7 billion mark in 2022,



Canon Saudi Arabia opening ceremony in Riyadh

which is a testament to the growth opportunities available in this sector. Through our strategy of being closer to our customers in Saudi, we are able to meet this demand and offer services that address their challenges

and creates opportunities for them. Our Managed Print Services for instance ensures efficiency, minimizes downtime, and saves on costs so businesses can focus on their core offering."

## Joyalukkas Exchange is now open at Dubai Investment Park 2



**DUBAI:** Joyalukkas Exchange, the money exchange arm of Joyalukkas Group, further enhanced its presence in the UAE region with a new branch in Dubai Investment Park 2. With the new branch, Joyalukkas now has a strong presence of 11 branches spread across various parts of the UAE.

To celebrate the newly opened branch, a special offer was announced for patrons wherein they will be rewarded with special gifts for every transaction made. The new branch is a part of Joyalukkas Exchange's ambitious expansion plans with more branches set to be open in the near future in Oman and Kuwait as well.

Joyalukkas Exchange is renowned for providing customers with a world-class experience in foreign exchange and cross-border remittances with fast credit at best rates. Patrons also earn reward points on every transaction, which gives them access to value-added services in the partner establishment or it can also be redeemed for gifts.

Joyalukkas Exchange - an integral part of the Multi-Billion Joyalukkas Group is currently spread across UAE, Oman and Kuwait and is enjoying the patronage of residents and tourist in the 3 countries by offering a solid mix of service, convenience, speed, value and innovation.

## Huawei Mate X ushers in a new age of foldable 5G smartphone

**KUWAIT:** Huawei Mate X is Huawei's latest innovation and venture into the era of 5G. It might be relatively an easier job to have a foldable phone with two parts that are a screen and a keypad, but how could Huawei build two foldable parts that are a screen and provide a new interfacing mode between user and device. Thanks to Huawei's Falcon Wing Mechanical Hinge, Huawei managed to achieve this extraordinary job.

Showcased for the first time at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona 2019, the Falcon Wing Hinge mechanism was highlighted as a standout aspect of its beautiful design and its impressive performance was greatly admired. Huawei Mate X received 31 awards from the media's best tech review platforms and won the GLOMO Award for Best New Connected Mobile Device at MWC19 Barcelona.

### Falcon wing foldable design

The Falcon Wing Mechanical Hinge supports movement, folding and unfolding of the device and contributes to the overall blend between technology and aesthetics. It acts like a falcon's pair of wings and hence comes the naming. Because it unfolds into a tablet mode that measures 8 inches, it doubles the viewing area for phone users and allows them a better and bigger entertainment experience. But if is fold-

ed or closed, Huawei Mate X smartphone measures 6.6-inch with a FullView display.

### New Interstellar Blue

With the Huawei Mate X, Huawei is debuting the new color Interstellar Blue. The inspiration is drawn from a sky glittering with stars. The back is also made of a new material - hard to tell what it is - but it looks bright and clean.

### Flexible display

Huawei Mate X has a dual OLED display which measures 6.6 inch and is truly a FullView display. It transforms into a full flat 8-inch tablet and 5.4 mm thick when it is unfolded or open, and it is bezel-less with no holes or notches so users get an extraordinary viewing time. Additionally, Huawei has supported it with an advanced heat dissipation to make this secure and in full swing.

Moving between tablet and phone modes brings a new experience to users. The FullView display on HUAWEI Mate X is flexible and OLED panel. Because it opens and closes, that contributes to productivity and entertainment scenarios. For example, a bigger screen allows consumers to have a massive viewing area when they read a book or edit a document. It also comes handy in situations when someone wants to drag images from a photo gallery to the emails in split-screen mode.

It is known that Huawei smartphones come with powerful cameras and inside Huawei Mate X's slim body we found three Leica cameras that play the role of both front and rear cameras. Plus taking photos and recording video, this phone has a feature that is likely to be unprecedented in a smartphone and



Huawei names it Mirror Shooting. When it is folded and in the smartphone mode, Huawei Mate X shows a view finder on both sides, so even persons being photographed can see how their pictures would look like before a picture is snapped.

### Fingerprint Power Button

The power button here has a double role for both powering and unlocking the handset. The integrated button authenticates user identity when powered up-to keep the device safe and secure.

### 5G modem chipset

Huawei Mate X is equipped with Huawei's latest chipset the 7nm 5G multi-mode modem Balong 5000, which supports 2G, 3G, 4G, and 5G on a single chip and provides ultra-high 5G download speeds, at 4.6Gbps on the Sub-6GHz band (theoretical). Balong 5000 also supports both standalone (SA) and non-standalone (NSA) network architectures for 5G. With non-

standalone, 5G network architecture is built on top of legacy 4G LTE networks, whereas standalone 5G, as the name implies, will have its own independent architecture.

4,500mAh battery and 55W Huawei SuperCharge

A 4,500mAh battery is packed inside Huawei Mate X. It utilizes AI smart power saving technology to rationalize energy consumption and fulfill the demands for bigger battery performance in the 5G era. 55W Huawei SuperCharge tops the battery up to 85 percent in just 30 minutes, ridiculously good for those who prefer a fast-paced lifestyle.

Huawei Mate X is a new breed of smartphones that will combine 5G with a foldable screen and a new interfacing mode for a completely-new user experience. It would not have happened without Huawei's vested and dedicated investments in R&D, where the company spent \$13.5 billion between 2017 and 2018, and has promised a further \$600 million on 5G research.

## Warba Bank announces 5 winners of Al-Sunbula draw

**KUWAIT:** Warba Bank, "the Best Investment Bank" and "Best Corporate Bank" in Kuwait, held its weekly Sunbula draw number 11. The draw announced the five lucky winners in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and bank officials.

The bank proudly announced the lucky five winners of the KD 1000 prize: Salem Mohammad Abdulaali Al-Otaibi, Ghazi Obaid Merdhi Al-Enezi, Nayel Hamed Ali Al-Rashidi, Bader Naser Munawer Al-Shammari and Mohammad Arbeed Jluwi Al-Arbeed.

Al-Sunbula both account and fixed deposits are the perfect choices for customers who wish to save money and achieve steady returns while at the same time have the opportunity to win cash prizes throughout the year.

In line with the bank's mission to develop and differentiate its offerings, Warba Bank has enhanced its Sunbula campaign for 2019 with more cash and prizes reaching more than KD 1 million. Warba Bank will continue its weekly

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

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

Furthermore, Warba Bank is leveraging on its Customer Onboarding solution, in line with its ambitious five-year strategy that enables non-Warba Bank customers to request the opening of Al-Sunbula account in a simple electronic manner without having to visit the branch, through 5 simple steps in 5 minutes. New customers will be able to request opening the account at any time, anywhere, through the new and unique electronic system used to implement this service. Representatives will then contact the customer to determine the appropriate time to visit the branch to get required signatures, verify the customer's identity, deliver his/her debit card, and activate the account.

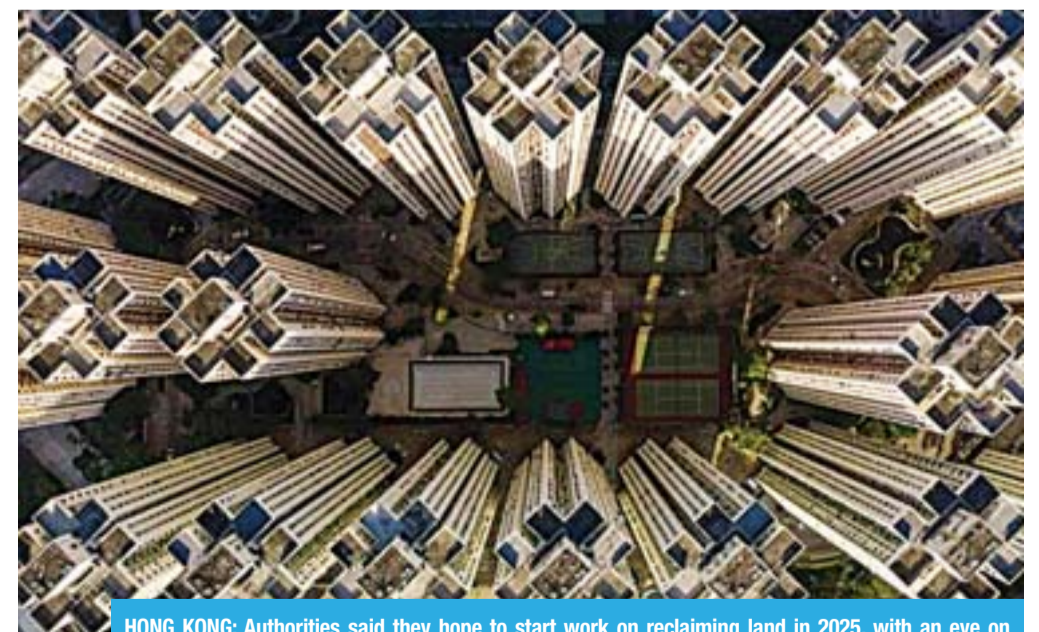
## Hong Kong to build \$79bn artificial island

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kong plans to build one of the world's largest artificial islands with an eye-watering \$79 billion price tag, city officials announced yesterday. The government's HK\$624 billion proposal to reclaim 1,000 hectares (2,471 acres) of land around the territory's largest island, Lantau, has been touted as a solution to the pressing housing shortage in the city, which is notorious as one of the least affordable markets on the planet.

Authorities said they hope to start work on reclaiming land in 2025, with an eye on allowing residents to move to the island in 2032. The artificial island-the city's most expensive infrastructure project to date-would be four times the cost of building Hong Kong International Airport, which opened on Lantau in 1998, and far outstrip Dubai's famous palm-tree shaped Palm Jumeirah, which reportedly cost \$12 billion to build.

The man-made island would be nearly three times the size of New York's Central Park and provide up to 260,000 flats, more than 70 percent of which would be used for public housing, the government has said. But critics say the vast reclamation project is too costly and could damage the environment, especially marine life, with many also expressing frustration over the lack of a public say in the plans.

"When all aspects of Hong Kong's public serv-



HONG KONG: Authorities said they hope to start work on reclaiming land in 2025, with an eye on allowing residents to move to the island in 2032.

ices and facilities are on the brink of collapse, will the (Lantau project) — as the government's panacea-solve problems or create a bigger crisis?" pro-democracy lawmaker Eddie Chu said on his Facebook page.

He estimated the cost of the project could balloon to more than \$112 billion by 2025, when reclamation work is expected to start. Authorities are also planning to build another 700-hectare artificial island around Lantau, but have not released any further details about that project or its cost.

Lantau island is also home to a new mega bridge launched last year-billed as the world's longest sea bridge-connecting Hong Kong to neighboring Macau and mainland China at a time when Beijing is seeking to tighten its grip on its semi-autonomous territories. Thousands of people have taken to the streets to protest the plans for the artificial island. Campaigners have also warned that the dwindling number of much-loved pink dolphins in waters surrounding Lantau may disappear altogether due to large-scale infrastructure projects. —AFP

What's On



# X-cite inaugurates 27th branch at the Gate Mall

As part of its remarkable success in the Kuwaiti market and its constant endeavor to provide customers with top-notch deals, X-cite by Alghanim Electronics, the largest multi-brand electronics retailer in Kuwait, announced the inauguration of its new store on Thursday, March 14, at the Gate Mall in Eqaila, offering visitors state-of-the-art technology and products under one roof.

During the celebratory event, which was attended by senior company officials and a host of prominent media figures, X-cite emphasized that its strategy has always evolved around its customers. X-cite's 27th branch opening exemplifies the company's determination to expand its services and meet the people of Kuwait's needs through its innovative electronic products and services.

Considered as one of the largest malls in Kuwait with a rental space of 70,000 square meters, the Gate Mall constitutes a major shopping destination with a myriad of retail activities and services, including clothing, electronics, entertainment, restaurants and much more. The mall enjoys a distinctive location in Eqaila commercial area, adding even more value to X-cite's expansion plan to become closer than ever to all of its customers while providing them with up-to-the-minute and sophisticated technologies in its new showroom. It's worth mentioning that X-cite was keen to provide its newest store the same identity, design and services, highlighting the company's both local and regional leadership.

X-cite's sole aim is to offer customers a unique shopping experience turning the visit of any of Alghanim electronic stores into an exciting and enjoyable experience. Whether looking for the latest personal and entertainment electronics, home appliances, personal care, fitness or office electronics, X-



cite is the go-to showroom for all family members. Additionally, X-cite's stores provide customers with the ability to interact with the displayed products, by experiencing and learning more about the advantages of offered electronics conveniently.

Through its customer-centric concept, X-cite offers customers competitive quality and prices to serve every segment, providing them with the highest level of service, engaging with them, and earning their trust through supporting services and offerings. X-cite also enable customers to shop from the comfort of their homes through its free mobile app and shopping website at [www.xcite.com](http://www.xcite.com).

X-cite has established itself as a leading brand

in providing the latest products to customers as it continues to build strong relations with international brands in the electronics sector. Continuously seeking to satisfy the needs of its customers, X-cite provides them with diverse services that enable customers to experience products and interact with them, and the service of buy online and pick the product in store, whether in their 27 showrooms or through the website, designed to make online shopping a fast and easy experience. X-cite also offers premium maintenance and purchase services at most of its major showrooms throughout Kuwait and other services such as free delivery and X-care packages.



Health & Technology

# Forget flying carpets, flying taxis are coming your way

AUSTIN: We've all dreamed while stuck in traffic jams of being able to just lift off and fly over the gridlock. According to experts gathered this week at the South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas, that is likely to happen sooner than later, with flying taxis expected to take to the skies by 2025. "People have been dreaming about it for decades on paper, and now the technology is here," said Michael Thacker, executive vice-president for technology and innovation at Bell. "The only question is, what are we going to do with it?"

Thacker said his company has joined with ride-hailing app Uber and several aeronautics firms, including France's Safran, to create a fleet of flying taxis that are called vertical take-off and landing vehicles (VTOL). The Nexus, as this hybrid electric propulsion aircraft is named, was first unveiled in January at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Between 20 and 30 other firms are working on similar concepts, among them start-ups or major companies such as Airbus, which recently presented its electric aircraft CityAirbus.

Uber plans to launch its air taxis first in Los Angeles and Dallas, two major traffic-congested American cities. Asked about using helicopters as an alternative, Thacker said the taxis are financially sounder and quieter. "The noise has to blend in with the background noise of the city," he said. He predicted the vehicles could start to be commercially

used around 2025. "It's not going to replace ground transport, it will augment it in another dimension," he said. "And it's not going to jump overnight with thousands of aircraft. "There will rather be a few dozens of them in a few cities... at first using helipads and helicopter routes."

Bell executives said drones transporting goods, such as emergency medical products, should take to the skies well before taxis given lesser restrictions imposed on such aircraft. "Transport of goods don't have so many requirements in terms of safety and acceptability by people," he said. Jaiwon Shin, associate administrator for the Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate at NASA, said although 2025 appears like a reasonable date for a limited launch of flying vehicles, it will take longer for the market to fully expand. "For this market to really flourish... I think we really need to mature the market at scale and that may take a decade," he said. Also, experts say, several barriers still need to be overcome before flying vehicles get the green light.

**A third dimension**

You have to see "if you can actually test the vehicle in an urban space without having visual line of sight over people with buildings," said Shivika Sahdev, with the consulting firm McKinsey. One of the biggest technological hurdles to overcome is the battery. Most of the prototypes designed use elec-

tric propulsion and batteries currently don't have enough power to fly a car for a long distance. Still, industry experts are optimistic about the new technology.

In a report entitled "Vision 2050" presented at SXSX, the Aerospace Industries Association (AIA) predicts that by 2050, the use of flying taxis and other autonomous drones will be widespread, mainly thanks to artificial intelligence. "For me, artificial intelligence is easier in the air," said Scott Drennan, director of innovation at Bell. "There's a lot of space up there and so we have a lot of room, we have a third dimension to maneuver in."

"It's not the Wild Wild West up there," he added. "I think the rules of the sky are more defined than the rules of the road." Another advantage to flying cars is their GPS, said Anil Nanduri, vice president of Drone Group at Intel. "GPS precision today is a couple of meters plus minus," he said. "For ground-based vehicles... it's not accurate enough to have the precision you need. But once you go up to third dimension, it's enough." For those still skeptical about driving in the skies, tech reporter Aarti Shahani has only this to say: "If you had told me 10 years ago that I would open something called an app to order a car driven by a stranger for my mom who lived 3,000 miles away, I'd tell you you were crazy. "And actually, that's what I do now all the time for her." —AFP

## Cancer deaths falling for half decade in EU: Study

PARIS: The death rate from cancer has been falling for half a decade in the EU, researchers said yesterday, although the overall number is expected to rise to 1.4 million this year due to an expanding population. The chances of dying from cancer for men has dropped about six percent from 139 deaths per 100,000 males in 2014 to 131 this year, according to a paper in the Annals of Oncology medical journal.

For women, the improvement is 3.6 percent, from 86 deaths per 100,000 females to 83, the study showed. However the total number of deaths is expected to increase to 1.4 million in 2019, a rise of nearly five percent from 1.35 million in 2014. Some 787,000 will be men and 621,900 women. The study showed that lung cancer among women will this year claim more lives than breast cancer — 96,800 against 92,800. —AFP

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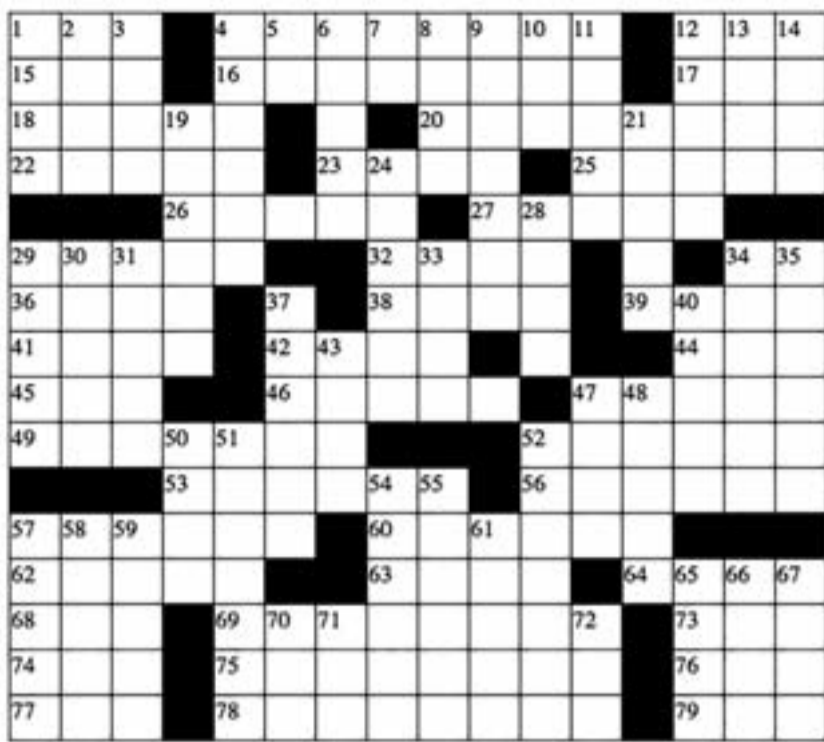
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Stars

CROSSWORD 2162



ACROSS

1. A workplace for the conduct of scientific research.
4. A resident of Alabama.
12. A castrated tomcat.
15. How long something has existed.
16. Any plant of the genus *Caragana* having even-pinnate leaves and mostly yellow flowers followed by seeds in a linear pod.
17. The sense organ for hearing and equilibrium.
18. A painful emotion resulting from an awareness of inadequacy or guilt.
20. Fodder harvested while green and kept succulent by partial fermentation as in a silo.
22. Egyptian statesman who (as President of Egypt) negotiated a peace treaty with Menachem Begin of Israel (1918-1981).
23. In bed.
25. American professional baseball player who hit more home runs than Babe Ruth (born in 1934).
26. An Indian side dish of yogurt and chopped cucumbers and spices.
27. A battle between the successors of Alexander the Great (301 BC).
29. Strike with disgust or revulsion.
32. A slender double-reed instrument.
36. In or relating to or obtained from urine.
38. Related to or located at the back.
39. Not easy.
41. A distinguished female operatic singer.
42. According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
44. (British) Your grandmother.
45. The United Nations agency concerned with international maritime activities.
46. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
49. Porridge made of rolled oats.
53. A member of the Semitic speaking people of northern Ethiopia.
56. The basic unit of money in Spain.
57. Popular music originating in the West Indies.
60. A proposal for an appropriate course of action.
62. At full speed.
63. One of the Muslim people of Africa.
64. A Hindu prince or king in India.
68. Devoid of warmth and cordiality.
69. (heraldry) Of or relating to heraldry or heraldic arms.
73. A boy or man.
74. Relating to or characteristic of or occurring on the sea or ships.
75. Fringed or adorned with tassels.
76. A sudden loss of consciousness resulting when the rupture or occlusion of a blood vessel leads to oxygen lack in the brain.
77. The fatty flesh of eel.
78. Characterized by lightness and insubstantiality.
79. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.

DOWN

1. A girl or young woman who is unmarried.
2. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
3. A small ball with a hole through the middle.
4. Any organic compound formed by adding alcohol molecules to aldehyde molecules.
5. A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
6. A Buddhist who has attained nirvana.
7. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
8. American novelist (1909-1955).
9. Cassava with long tuberous edible roots and soft brittle stems.
10. The part of the nervous system of vertebrates that controls involuntary actions of the smooth muscles and heart and glands.
11. Sole genus of the family Naiadaceae.
12. Wheelwork consisting of a connected set of rotating gears by which force is transmitted or motion or torque is changed.
13. The villain in William Shakespeare's tragedy who tricked Othello into murdering his wife.
14. A submarine gun operated by gas pressure.
19. A percussion instrument consisting of a pair of hollow pieces of wood or bone (usually held between the thumb and fingers) that are made to click together (as by Spanish dancers) in rhythm with the dance.
21. The sound of laughing.
24. African tree having an exceedingly thick trunk and fruit that resembles a gourd and has an edible pulp called monkey bread.
28. A Chinese breed of small short-legged dogs with a long silky coat and broad flat muzzle.
30. Indicating the most important performer or role.
31. The person in a rank around whom the others wheel and maneuver.
33. A small cake leavened with yeast.
34. Neckwear worn in a slipknot with long ends overlapping vertically in front.
35. An accessory or adjoining anatomical parts or appendages (especially of the embryo).
37. Flightless New Zealand birds similar to gallinules.
40. Of or like a feeble old woman.
43. Goddess of the dead and queen of the underworld.
47. An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
48. (Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation) Optical device that produces an intense monochromatic beam of coherent light.
50. (New Testament) The sages who visited Jesus and Mary and Joseph shortly after Jesus was born.
51. Proceed or issue forth, as from a source.
52. A Japanese shrub that resembles members of the genus *Spiraea*.
54. Having branches.
55. Someone who admires a young woman.
58. A person who acts as host at formal occasions (makes an introductory speech and introduces other speakers).
59. Ox of southeast Asia sometimes considered a domesticated breed of the gaur.
61. A light semitransparent fabric.
65. Type genus of the Alcidae comprising solely the razorbill.
66. An island in Indonesia south of Borneo.
67. The sixth month of the civil year.
70. Any of various long-tailed rodents similar to but larger than a mouse.
71. A hormone secreted by the anterior pituitary gland that controls the degree of pigmentation in melanocytes.
72. A lipoprotein that transports cholesterol in the blood.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Work isn't the best place for you today. You're still trying to compartmentalize your life and figure out how to make your work better. That may mean more education, starting your own business, seeking money to help you go where you've not gone before or going back to work and loving it. All of these possibilities are on your mind. You want to be closer to your loved ones. Family is a bond that isn't easily broken but you don't want any kind of separation from family or friends you've made family too. Take time today to be with those for which you care. Possibly a cookout is just the thing in this about to be spring weather. If not, order in a pizza and salad. Spend some time with those you love.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

This is a good day at work where ideas are exchanged making you feel wonderful. It's right up your alley. Your boss may be in the middle of it too which leads to a more ingenious planning session. Communicating with others is what makes you feel eager to continue working harder both at your job and at home with your family. An older family member and you might be making up after a little set-to over the weekend. Taurus. There was nothing meant by it and both of you love each other. Let bygones be bygones. Family means a lot to you as it should. Take some time to enjoy this evening.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Compassion and consideration should be two qualities you keep close to heart today and display often. Otherwise explosive arguments could take place causing you to lose something you truly love either at work or at home, maybe both places. That's the emotions in the air kind of day you're experiencing now. Coming to grips with your past might have a place on today's agenda. Whatever it is get it over with now or it will haunt you in days to come. Gemini. Karma works that way. It's a shadow following you in life. Even your freedom can be challenged today. Keep your head down and thoughts on a good future.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

This is a great time to be with others at work and at home. Those at work have to be special to you and not the ones with which you have a "wait and see" attitude. People you care for have been vetted if they aren't family. You need those you found to be friends thinking of you with the best intentions and feeling that you do your best. Those friends know they can count on you and that's great. Cancer. That should be your answer. Your home life needs the same consideration on your family's part.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Today is all about you, your thoughts, your motivations and your reasons for loving the person you do. Every once in a while you have to revisit your reasoning for the way you believe. This is the day that provokes those thoughts. Yesterday may have started a little of this self-reexamination but today it's in full force. Political persuasion might be undergoing a change or the decision to get more involved in government may be part of it. Morals and not just should you, shouldn't you but the whole point of society at large is on your mind. Religion or spirituality makes you think. This is a good day, Leo. Get your mind together so that you'll know



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You're coming to the end of a cycle that is being accentuated now where letting go your past success is a necessity. Anytime something old is dismissed something new can bring in better. That's where you are in your life now. Make new habits and create new and better options. Try to keep from being too serious right now. Give yourself options, Virgo. Know that whatever you think with emotion is correct. If you think you're wrong about your moves, you are. If you think you're right about those same moves, you are. The world is here for you, Virgo. Manifest what you want.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Right now at work it's best for you to be seen but not heard. Sticking to yourself, getting your work done in the best manner possible and staying away from people may help you keep your job. Thinking about the good old days is part of your emotional attitude now. You want to change your home life up from bottom to top, redo and revamp. Family and friends mean more to you now. Being with them helps you to maintain some balance in your life and you know balance is what Libra strives for in most cases. More power to you in your efforts.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Even your social acquaintances are urging you forward towards better business goals right now. You're meeting people who can help you promote yourself. Enjoy being in the universe's limelight. It's better than struggling to make yourself seen. Ambition is stronger now than a few days ago but you feel exhilaration instead of being tired from all your hard work. This is a wonderful time for you, Scorpio, where you can see the universe at work to help you accomplish all you want. This could take a toll on your love life though if you're not careful to consider your mate's feelings. Enjoy the work.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

It seems you're very lucky today but you know that luck is created by the one who is the recipient. More money is coming your way perhaps because you took that new job and should be starting soon. Either that or your boss got wind of it and offered you more. Sagittarius. Everything you've been thinking about seems to have dropped into your lap and you're glad. Right now, you want the whole shebang including sex. That desire is something you'll capture after work or perhaps during your lunch break. Who has to eat? Enjoy this new-found bounty.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Real estate is playing on your mind now, either buying a new home or making an investment in some property. You feel like putting down stronger roots now. You may find yourself thinking about adding to your family starting with your loving life partner. Marriage may be crossing your mind too. Family means more to you and you need to enjoy time with them as well. Discuss with them your plans. They may have some good ideas on how to achieve exactly what you desire. You're not easily distracted but irritation comes without difficulty as others get on your nerves. Capricorn. Try to enjoy this day.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You have new found personal satisfaction with whom you are. That's marvelous. When you know you're making the right decisions and personifying what you need, getting others on board and working towards what you desire, you're in charge. All type relationships from work to home take on new responsibilities and appreciations. You're up to the task. Aquarius, even changing your life to accommodate all the new jobs. Your destiny is yours to create. Love is more important now than it's been in a long time. Perhaps marriage or a renewal of vows is in the works.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You hadn't realized that the past few days of feeling isolated has given you the time to think and visualize better ways of accomplishing work goals. Now it comes. You're seeing the product of those thoughts and ideas taking shape today. Furthermore, workmates appreciate the new accomplishments as well. They show it with pats on the back all around. This puts you in a better mood because your emotional world is becoming balanced again. You can get back to living well. Pisces. You'll find yourself delving into more educational items or looking for people who think as you do too. Enjoy. Have a night out with friends.

Wordsearch Puzzle

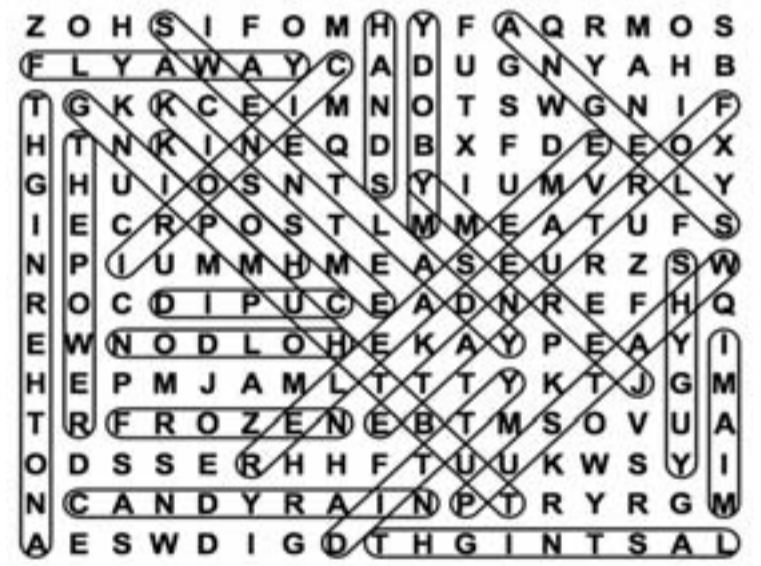
90's Songs 6 - Word Search



- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| BABY<br>BLACK<br>DREAMLOVER<br>EVERY MORNING<br>HIGH ENOUGH<br>HYPNOTIZE<br>I BELIEVE<br>IMPULSIVE | INSENSITIVE<br>LULLABY<br>ONE WEEK<br>POISON<br>REGULATE<br>SABOTAGE<br>SHINE<br>TEMPTATION | THIS HOUSE<br>TOO MUCH<br>UNPRETTY<br>WATERFALLS<br>WHATTA MAN<br>WILD NIGHT<br>ZOMBIE |
|--|---|--|

Yesterday's Solution

90's Songs 5 - Solution



- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| ANGELS<br>ANOTHER NIGHT<br>CANDY RAIN<br>CUPID<br>DITTY<br>FLY AWAY<br>FORTUNATE<br>FROZEN | HANDS<br>HOLD ON<br>HOOK<br>IRONIC<br>JEREMY<br>KISS ME<br>LAST NIGHT<br>MIAMI | MY BODY<br>RELEASE ME<br>SHY GUY<br>SWEET LADY<br>THE POWER<br>TUBTHUMPING<br>WHAT'S UP |
|--|--|---|

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



# Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2019



A group of students, center, sings in front of flowers left in tribute to victims at the Botanical Garden in Christchurch, four days after a shooting incident at two mosques that claimed the lives of 50 people. — AFP

## Abel Prize for maths awarded to woman for first time

The Abel Prize in mathematics was awarded yesterday to Karen Uhlenbeck of the United States for her work on partial differential equations, the first woman to win the award, the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters said. "Karen Uhlenbeck receives the Abel Prize 2019 for her fundamental work in geometric analysis and gauge theory, which has dramatically changed the mathematical landscape," said Abel Committee chairman Hans Munthe-Kaas in a statement.



This handout photo in Princeton, New Jersey released by The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters / Institute for Advanced Study shows scientist Karen Uhlenbeck. — AFP

"Her theories have revolutionized our understanding of minimal surfaces, such as those formed by soap bubbles, and more general minimization problems in higher dimensions," he said. Uhlenbeck, 76, is a visiting senior research scholar at Princeton University, as well as visiting associate at the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS), both in the US.

The Cleveland native "developed tools and methods in global analysis, which are now in the toolbox of every geometer and analyst," the Academy said. She is also a role model and a strong advocate for gender equality in science and mathematics. She is the first woman to win the prize, which comes with a cheque for six million kroner.

Named after the 19th century Norwegian mathematician Niels Henrik Abel, the prize was established by the Oslo government in 2002 and first awarded a year later, to honor outstanding scientific work in the field of mathematics, a discipline not included among the Nobel awards.—AFP

## New Zealand uses haka to heal after attacks

New Zealanders are gathering to thump chests, stomp feet and stick out their tongues—staging impromptu performances of the haka war dance to show solidarity with a Muslim community shattered by the mass shooting in Christchurch. Kiwis ranging from heavily tattooed bikers to business executives, children and the elderly have lined up to perform the intimidating ceremonial dance which begins with fierce chants roughly translated as "I Live! I Die!"

As the country struggles to respond to the horrific tragedy, it was perhaps inevitable that many would turn to the haka—a dance whose origins lie with the indigenous Maori community but which has become a global symbol of New Zealand as the battle cry of its national rugby team, the All Blacks. The aggressive ritual and threatening histrionics may seem out of step with the somber atmosphere gripping the nation after Brenton Tarrant, a 28-year-old Australian and avowed white supremacist, allegedly gunned down 50 Muslims during prayers last Friday.

But the haka is not only meant to intimidate, but also to mourn, melding both hostility and beauty into an outpouring of true emotion, said Te Kahautu Maxwell, a professor of Maori at Waikato University. "Haka is used for death and mourning. It is an integral part of the Maori mourning process. Haka is used to show love and compassion. Haka is used to uplift the spirits of bereaved families," Maxwell said.

With their eyes bulging while bellowing out the ritual's loud rallying cries, tattooed members of one of New Zealand's biggest criminal biker gangs joined with local children to channel that emotion through a haka for relatives of the dead gathered near Christchurch hospital this week.

### God's gift

Other haka performances have burst forth across Christchurch and elsewhere in the country as well as in Australia, where large communities of New Zealanders live. The haka stirs strong emotions in shooting survivor Kawthar Abulaban. She was in Christchurch's Al Noor mosque when the shooting erupted, eventually escaping through the back door. In the days since, she has repeat-

edly watched videos of the haka performances staged in response to the massacre, welling up each time.

"Because you can feel it when you see them. You feel it, it touches your heart. Every time I see it I cry, it means too much," she said. According to Maori legend, the haka originated at the beginning of time as a gift from Tanerore, the son of Tama-nuira, the sun god. "Just as heat haze shimmers on a hot summer's day, in the haka all parts of the body shake from the crown to the soles of one's feet," Maxwell said, describing the intended meaning behind the dance's movements.

Lisa Tumahai, who heads the Ngai Tahu, the main Maori iwi, or tribe, on New Zealand's South Island, said it was a natural reaction by Kiwis looking to show support for their Muslim neighbours. "No matter how angry or scared we are feeling at the moment, we must come together as one strong community to show care and compassion for those who made Aotearoa their home and who have now lost precious loved ones," she said. Aotearoa, or "land of the long white cloud", is the Maori name for New Zealand.

### 'We have been invaded'

In a further show of solidarity, the New Zealand government invited a Muslim imam to intone the Koranic bismillah in praise of Allah at the opening of the parliamentary session on Tuesday. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern followed up by saying "Wa alaikum salaam wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh"—"May the peace, mercy, and blessings of Allah be with you too." Schools, Maori tribes and sports teams will each have their own haka, and the version performed by the All Blacks, called "Ka mate, Ka mate", tells of a 19th-century warrior, Te Rauparaha, who hid in a food storage pit to escape his enemies.

The opening life-and-death chant reflects Te Rauparaha pondering his fate. Maxwell said the haka reflected the overwhelming sadness following the massacre, as Kiwis grapple with the "fact we have been invaded and this terrible act has been committed on our shores." Maxwell added that as Muslim victims came under fire last week, "you can imagine they were thinking 'am I going to live? am I going to die?'"—AFP



School students perform the haka during a vigil in Christchurch, three days after a shooting incident at two mosques in the city that claimed the lives of 50 Muslim worshippers. — AFP photos



Marlen Khutsiev — AFP

## Soviet New Wave film-maker Khutsiev dies at 93

Renowned Soviet-era film-maker Marlen Khutsiev, one of the country's most influential post-war directors, has died aged 93, the Russian Union of Cinematographers said yesterday. A leading representative of the Soviet New Wave, "he lived a life full of drama and joy," spokeswoman Tatyana Nemchinskaya told AFP. The director's career spanned more than

six decades and he worked into his 90s.

President Vladimir Putin expressed condolences on the passing of the "distinguished" director, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. Georgian-born Khutsiev was famous for cult films in the mid 1950s and 1960s that captured the mood in Soviet society during Nikita Khrushchev's Thaw. His works included "Spring on Zarechnaya Street" (1956) and "I am Twenty", known in the West as "Ilyich's Gate" (1965).

"He created a revolution in the 1960s and became a symbol of our Thaw," prominent filmmaker Pavel Lungin told AFP. Lungin said "Ilyich's Gate", which portrayed the lives of ordinary Soviets and featured filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky in a cameo, was a "manifesto" of the era. The movie incurred Khrushchev's wrath and was heavily censored. The original director's cut only premiered in 1988, during Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika.

Over his career, Khutsiev earned the admiration of Federico Fellini, Jean-Luc Godard and other film greats. But at home "he

walked a precarious line," said the New York Museum of Modern Art, which presented the first major North American retrospective of his work in 2016. Russian film critic Andrei Plakhov compared Khutsiev to Michelangelo Antonioni, the celebrated Italian director.

Eldar Shengelaia, the Georgian Soviet-era film director and a friend of Khutsiev, said his works were world cinema classics. "He left an indelible mark on everyone's life," the 86-year-old told AFP. Khutsiev received numerous international awards and prizes at film festivals such as Venice and Berlin. He was born on October 4, 1925 in Georgia's Tbilisi, then known as Tiflis, and studied at the Moscow-based Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography, Russia's best-known film school.—AFP



## Raye partners with Timberland to launch their new sneakers

**T**he 21-year-old songstress - who became the face of the iconic footwear brand last year - has joined forces with the label to release an exclusive short film, which is set in the tropical palm house at Kew Gardens, to introduce the highly-anticipated trainers. Raye joins 'Bestie' rapper Yungen as the second artist to feature in 'The Green Room', a concept which seeks to celebrate the culture of green spaces in our cities, and the singer loved being on set because "green spaces" were a big part of her creative space as a child. She said: "Growing up in South London green spaces provided a little haven for me, I used to sneak out of the house and run to the park to write down poems and lyric ideas. Today, I still like to take time to escape and spend a moment just being in nature, I think it's so important

for your wellbeing. The 'Friends' hitmaker also admitted that she has been surrounded by powerful "role models" her whole life. She said: "I had a lot of role models growing up and I have a long strong powerful women in my life. Being a role model to other young women is pretty cool and if I can inspire anybody through the music I make or the journey I've taken and people watching me on that journey, it feels amazing and I want other people to feel like they can achieve it too." In the short video, as well as reflecting upon her experiences, influences and choices, Raye also performs a brief snippet of her song 'Confidence'

## 'Riverdale' bosses working out best way to honor Luke Perry



**T**he 52-year-old actor passed away earlier this month after suffering a stroke and while producers plan to address his death through his character, Fred Andrews, they haven't yet figured out how they will do that because they are still in mourning for the star. Showrunner Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa told 'Entertainment Tonight': "You know, honestly, we are I think all still in shock and are all still processing and grieving. We know that we have to address it in some way, but we're giving ourselves a little bit of time and space before we figure out the best way to honor him." And the executive producer has promised that Luke's "wise and vivacious" spirit will live on through the show, even though he

knows it will never be the same without him. He added: "Luke was, is, and will always be a big part of 'Riverdale'. We're kind of a family and when a loss like this happens, you carry it always. It changes and it hopefully becomes a little less painful as time goes by, but you're changed. "When I was with the crew, I said, 'It will never be the same,' and that's true because Luke was such a part of the show. "There are still a few more episodes that have Luke in them, so we're glad to share those. "His spirit-which was so generous and wise and vivacious-we hope will infuse every episode, so in my mind, every episode for the rest of time on 'Riverdale' will have a bit of Luke in it." — Bang Showbiz



## Justin and Hailey Bieber push back their wedding party

**T**he couple are planning to have a special ceremony to mark their nuptials, which took place quietly last year but they want to focus on Justin getting better first before they go ahead with the party. A source told People magazine: "They will still have a wedding eventually, but this is not their focus right now. They haven't sent out any new save the dates. They will wait until Justin feels better and is excited about planning their wedding again." And Justin is said to be "very focused on getting better" after receiving treatment for his mental health over the past few months. An insider shared: "Justin is still receiving treatment on both coasts, but is doing okay. He is very, very focused on getting better. He wants to be in a great place for his own and Hailey's sake. He is still confident that he will get there. Justin is still receiving treatment on both coasts, but is doing okay. He is very, very focused

on getting better. "He wants to be in a great place for his own and Hailey's sake. He is still confident that he will get there. They seem happy about spending a few days in L.A. Hailey isn't putting any pressure on him at all. She only wants him to focus on his mental health." The comments come after the 'Sorry' hitmaker revealed he was "struggling a lot" in a candid Instagram post earlier this month. He wrote: "Just wanted to keep you guys updated a little bit hopefully what I'm going through will resonate with you guys. Been struggling a lot. Just feeling super disconnected and weird. I always bounce back so I'm not worried just wanted to reach out and ask for your guys to pray for me. God is faithful and ur prayers really work thanks .. the most human season I've ever been in facing my stuff head on.. (sic)"

## Ariana Grande keeps her iconic look for 'Sweetener World Tour'

**T**he 25-year-old songstress kicked off her much-anticipated tour at the Times Union Centre in Albany, New York on Monday night, and the 'God Is A Woman' hitmaker has kept her "over-the-knee boots" and "ponytail" because it's completes her onstage persona and allows her to "own" the stage. Speaking to the New York Post newspaper's Page Six column, Roach said: "Ariana Grande is absolutely iconic. The ponytail is iconic. The A-line skirts are iconic. The over-the-knee boots are iconic. For me, it's a formula to play with. "[The look is] authentic to her, she owns that space and I don't think she should

change or try to change to please anybody. She owns the ponytail. If you put that silhouette behind a screen and backlit it, everyone in the world would see that and say, 'That's Ariana Grande.' And that's powerful!" "I can't tell you too much about it. I can tell you that I've never seen Ariana this excited. She's in a place now that she's never been as a woman, as a human, as a musician, as an artist." The 'Thank U, Next' chart topper took to her Instagram after her opening night and posted a video of her performing her track 'Successful', whilst thanking her fans for their "love" and continuous support.

## OSN launches new 'Binge' channel

**B**inge watch to your heart's content, on a channel that is specially designed for doing just that! OSN, the region's leading entertainment network, has unveiled a new OSN 'Binge' Channel offering viewers a TV- destination for an uninterrupted marathon-viewing experience. Launching on April 1, 2019, OSN Binge Channel will kick off with the most talked about show on the planet, Game of Thrones-seasons 1 to 7, with five episodes aired back-to-back every night, from 10 pm KSA, until the new season launches on April 15, 2019.

Other shows to binge watch include Scandal (season 7), The Good Doctor (season 2), Succession (season 1), Lethal Weapon (seasons 2 and 3) and Westworld (seasons 1 and 2). Viewers can set their boxes to series link and record shows to watch at their leisure or simply kick back and relax, delighting in the knowledge that one of their

favourite shows will always be on OSN. With the launch of 'Binge', OSN has further reinforced its customer-first strategy to deliver exceptional value through exclusive content, adding even more to its digital platforms-OSN Play and OSN on Demand.

Emad Morcos, Chief Content Officer, OSN said: "Over the past few months we've been listening to our customer's suggestions and feedback, and two key things that were strikingly clear was that our customers want a simpler more focused channel offering and an easier way to find more of the content they love and that's how the OSN Binge Channel was born. We're also putting even more content on OSN Play and OSN on Demand than ever, making sure that series-lovers across the region can always watch anytime, anywhere and on any device."

The launch of OSN Binge is part of OSN's channel refresh which will offer a richer programming experience for all customers. With consolidated content, fewer repeats, new channel names and a stellar programming line-up, OSN is making the TV viewing experience truly extraordinary.

## With high-tech glasses, Japanese ALS patient makes the beat go on

**T**he music booms and lights flash as Masatane Muto, a wheelchair-bound disc jockey, uses his eyes to put on a show at a recent Tokyo music festival. Muto, who lost the use of his hands to Lou Gehrig's Disease, wears a pair of high-tech glasses connected to an app that controls music-mixing software. "Through my performance, I hope to show that everybody should be given the chance to express themselves," Muto, 32, told Reuters Television after performing at the J-Wave Innovation World Festa.

Muto was a 27-year-old advertising executive when he was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease - a progressive neurological disease in which patients gradually lose control of most of their muscles, though mental function remains unimpaired. The disease, which gained prominence in 2014 through the "Ice Bucket Challenge" global video fundraising campaign, is terminal, with most patients dying within three to five years of their diagnosis. There is currently no treatment.

A three-point sensor on the nose pad of the JINS MEME glasses detects subtle electronic changes in the surrounding skin which are caused by blinking or movement of the eyes. The eyeglasses sell for 27,300 yen (\$245) a pair, cheaper than many other eye-tracking devices. The source code for JINS MEME has been released to the public in the hope that others will find their own ways of using it, Muto said.

"ALS is thought to be an incurable disease, but I believe hope is now growing for ALS patients to pur-

sue their lifestyle and quality of life with the help of technology," he said. Muto said his next dream is to perform at the opening ceremonies of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020. "By then I may be bedridden, but I can perform with the help of technology and the support of many people," he said.—Reuters



DJ Masatane Muto, diagnosed with the amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), mixes music using a smart eyewear called 'Jins Meme' which detects eye and head movements, during his performance on the stage in Tokyo, Japan. — Reuters photos





Italian fashion designer Maria Grazia Chiuri, center, acknowledges the audience at the end of the Christian Dior Haute Couture Spring-Summer 2019 collection fashion show in the United Arab Emirate of Dubai. — AFP photos



# Dior unveils capsule collection in 1st Dubai show



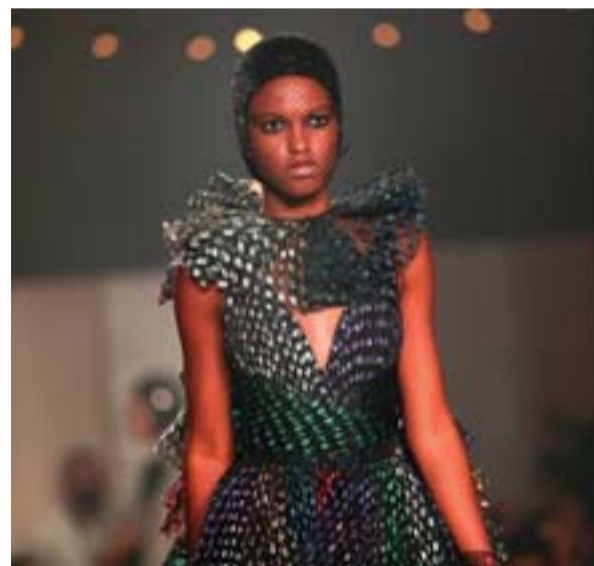
In a tent in Dubai surrounded by fire-breathers and circus performers, Dior unveiled a 15-piece capsule collection that dug into the house's archive to honor the woman of today. Italian designer Maria Grazia Chiuri, the first woman to lead the legendary French label, and her hallmark feminism were present in force, with a limited collection that drew on motifs popularized by Christian Dior himself, redefined to accommodate the contemporary woman.

Pleated skirts in muted, metallic rainbow colors and redingotes laced with hand-embroidered gold frogging were paired with pedestrian-friendly, fantastically glittery flats and chunky-heeled boots—with neither stiletto nor peep-toe in sight. "In this specific show we made a little capsule, that is like a small, new collection, of 15 pieces," Chiuri said ahead of the show.

"Women are same around the world"

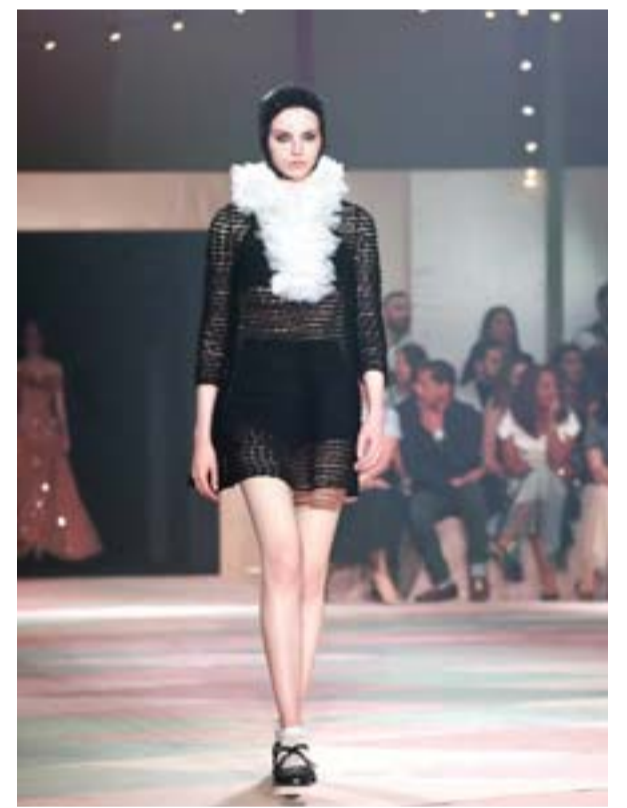
"Every time we move to another country, in some ways it's the location that gives us inspiration. "When you think about Dubai, you think of a place that in a sense is very Mediterranean, where there is the sun. So we use more color, different techniques, different shapes." Chiuri's closing look was a three-piece, multi-colored polkadot ensemble featuring a structured leotard, billowing full-length skirt and ruffled cape.

Pulling from her last show at Paris Fashion Week, the Dubai catwalk also featured Chiuri's circus-inspired organza and tulle dresses, ringmaster blazers and lion-tamer jackets—a nod, she says, to the sisterhood that binds women. "In the circus, in specific—because it's the circus that we used—all the women worked together. And each woman trusted the other woman, because it's impossible to make this kind of exercise if you don't trust each other," Chiuri said.



Celebrated milliner Stephen Jones' eye-catching glitter skullcaps topped every look, part Pierrot-joins-Instagram, part glam Amelia Earhart. "There is this element in the circus that fascinates me a lot. That is the clown. Behind the mask of the clown, you don't know if there's a man or a woman. You know that it's a person," Chiuri explained. "So I covered the hair, because I would like for people to focus on the clothes."

One black-and-gold pattern on both boots and skullcaps in particular stood out—a star, polka dot and paisley combination, a tribute to the star Christian Dior found on the sidewalk outside of what would become his flagship store, and a nod to the arabesque of the Arab world. "The more I go around the world the more I think that the women are the same around the world," said Chiuri, an advocate of the idea of a global sisterhood. "There is perhaps differences in taste, but this is also about personality, for women and for men."—AFP



Models present creations by Christian Dior during the Haute Couture Spring-Summer 2019 collection fashion show in the emirate of Dubai.



## Lifestyle | Features

## Gaza border protests provide artist with inspiration, and raw materials

One year on from the start of Gaza's border protests, the weekly clashes with Israeli soldiers have become part of the texture of life in the Palestinian enclave, providing inspiration and even raw materials for local artists. Diorama artist Majdi Abu Taqeya spends hours creating three-dimensional miniature replicas of the protest scenes, with figures carved from remnants of Israeli ammunition collected from the landscape along the frontier.

Wool and cotton are turned into the white and black smoke that swirls over the five protest camps that have been set up along the fortified frontier since the protests began on March 30, 2018. Elsewhere on Abu Taqeya's wooden boards, Palestinian protesters, ambulances, Israeli troops and tanks and even the wire fence itself are all created in miniature. He uses empty shells of bullets, tear gas canisters and sometimes shrapnel of Israeli missiles.

A bullet triggered the idea, the artist said. At the first day of the protests, Abu Taqeya's youngest brother was shot in his leg and doctors took out the bullet, which he then brought home. "I

## Artist carves figures from empty bullet shells

turned it into a small statue of a soldier and I gave it to him," he said. "It was then when I got the idea to start recycling the remnants of the occupation," said Abu Taqeya, a 38-year-old retired naval policeman.

Gaza health authorities said some 200 people have been killed by Israeli fire since Palestinians launched the protests a year ago. They are demanding the right to return to land from which their ancestors fled or were expelled during fighting that accompanied Israel's founding in 1948. An Israeli soldier was shot dead by a Palestinian sniper along the frontier.

Israel says it uses lethal force to defend the frontier from militants trying to destroy its border fence and infiltrate under cover of the protests. On Monday, U.N. war crimes investigators urged Israel to rein in its troops at the border. In Nusseirat refugee camp, where Abu Taqeya lives, some neighbors who had been wounded gifted the artist bullets extracted from their bodies.

"This bullet was taken from a girl's body, I turned it into a bullet with a butterfly on the top," said Abu Taqeya. On Thursday, organizers of the protests called for mass rallies on March 30 to mark the anniversary, raising concerns of possible heavy casualty toll. Abu Taqeya urged demonstrators to steer clear of the fence.

"We must not give the occupation any pretext to open fire. These protests must be peaceful," he said, using a Palestinian term for Israel. Israel pulled its soldiers and settlers out of Gaza in 2005. Citing security concerns, it still maintains tight control of the Hamas Islamist-run territory's borders.—Reuters



Palestinian diorama artist Majdi Abu Taqeya works on miniature figures he carves from remnants of Israeli ammunition collected from the scenes of border protests along the Israel-Gaza border, in the central Gaza Strip.—Reuters



This handout picture shows Laore Gein standing in a movie theatre in Guangzhou in China's southern Guangdong province.—AFP

## Chinese metro apologizes after goth makeup removal demand

China's goth community posted selfies wearing black lipstick and somber white makeup in an online protest over a peer who was forced to remove her makeup before boarding a subway car. The social media blitz prompted an apology from the transport company in the southern city of Guangzhou. Goths are a subculture known for their black clothes and makeup—with a popular segment known as "Gothic Lolita" whose members dress in dark outfits inspired by Victorian dolls.

Writing about the encounter on her Weibo social media account, the woman, who goes by the username EIGA-In My Heart, said she was stopped by a female security officer at a Guangzhou metro station on March 10 after her makeup was deemed "too scary". "On the basis of what law am I being stopped and my time being wasted? If there is, I will make a banner for the station of my own expense stating: thick makeup and goth outfits are prohibited on the metro," she wrote, adding that it was not the first time this has happened to her.

The community jumped to her defense on social media, posting selfies in full make up on Twitter-like Weibo using the hashtag, #ASelfieForTheGuangzhouMetro. In a country where anything deemed subversive and counterculture can be subject to censorship, the hashtag has quickly gained traction, attracting thousands of posts and some nearly 5.8 million views. The Guangzhou Metro apologized last Saturday, admitting an "improper handling" of the situation.

"We are deeply remorseful and strive to improve," the operator said in a post on Weibo. "At the same time, we apologize to the affected user." This was not the first time security officers have stopped passengers for having overly thick makeup, members of the goth community said. Self-identified goth Laore Gein, who posted a selfie in support, told AFP that she had been stopped at another Guangzhou subway station last November, after she had cosplayed for a Harry Potter movie.

"I eventually had to take the taxi home," she said. But other users were less supportive, accusing posters of using the hashtag to simply put up pictures of themselves. "Since you have to take the subway and go to public places, you have to consider the perception of others," one user wrote. The style grew out of so-called gothic rock in the 1980s in Britain. Followers, many of whom cultivated a pale and gaunt look, wore black clothes and were typically immersed in the macabre and supernatural. In recent years, it has gained a following in Asia, particularly in Japan, and has a nascent community in China.—AFP

## Chasing celluloid dreams at China's Tinseltown

Fed up with the drudgery of his sales job in southern China, Lu Qi quit and travelled a thousand kilometers north to one of the country's biggest film studios with hopes of making it in movies. That dream remains a work in progress for Lu and thousands like him who eke out a precarious living as extras at Hengdian World Studios. Just as movie-goers use film to escape reality, so too do many of Hengdian's army of more than 6,000 extras.

"I failed so many times (in sales) and haven't made much progress," said Lu, his head shaved bald save for a knit cap keeping it warm. "Most people here have no degrees, skills or relations. (We) can't do any business either, so we are just here to escape the reality and the competition out there," the 24-year-old added. Hengdian, in eastern China's Zhejiang province, was once a poverty-stricken town amid rugged hills. But in the mid-1990s the investment firm Hengdian Group expanded into movies.

It bulldozed the landscape and erected the mammoth studio complex, which now claims to be the world's largest film and TV shooting base. Sometimes dubbed the "Hollywood of the East" or simply "Chinawood", local media reported more than 70 percent of China's films and TV shows have been at least partly shot on a 330-hectare site. Sets range from ancient palace complexes that can accommodate casts of thousands to contemporary mansions and modern green screens. "You can complete a Beijing-Hong Kong trip in one day," Hengdian tour guide Wu Rongrong declared as she stood before a life-sized reproduction of Beijing's Forbidden City while gesturing toward a replica of an old Hong Kong street complete with opium bars.

## Cast of thousands

The studio has been the backdrop for Chinese blockbusters like "Hero" (2002) and has been graced by A-lis-



ters like Jackie Chan and Fan Bingbing. Its growth has out-run the local supply of manpower. "At first, we recruited mostly locals as extras. Now the majority of them come from out of town," said Zhou Fenglai, a Hengdian official who deals with performer management. An estimated 6,000 to 8,000 people are on hand daily to serve as extras at Hengdian.

Lian Chunyu grew up on horseback on the plains of China's Inner Mongolia region, before parlaying that experience into work as a Hengdian stunt rider for eight years. Even though his face is never seen in movies, it's still a thrill to be part of it. "It would be difficult for me to get used to doing something else after this," he said. Lu, who spends a few months a year in Hengdian and the rest at home in Guangdong province, checks his WeChat group messages each morning for studio work, usually finding something daily.

Lu and Lian make about 100-200 yuan per day, enough to cover rent and meals, while those with more

acting experience can make more. Male extras get an additional 40 yuan each time they shave their heads—partly to make sure there is ample manpower for often used scenes requiring the Manchu-style shaved head and braided queue. As well as the extra cash, Lu also likes that such a specific look rules him out of military roles. "It's very uncomfortable running around in the mountains wearing armor and being blown up," Lu said, comparing it to work as a "coolie."

## Herded like cattle

Between scenes, Lu shoots videos of himself with props and costumes, which he uploads to social media. Many extras do live online broadcasts and performances, making additional money via digital payments from their followers, he said. One downside: being barked at and herded like cattle. "Most film crews are really terrible, cursing people and such. That's despicable. The bigger the production team, the worse they are," said Wang Xiaopin, a 47-year-old extra from central Henan province.

"It doesn't matter how well you perform. In their eyes, you will always be unqualified." China's entertainment sector has blossomed in recent years as the government looks to build up the domestic industry and replace imported foreign content with homegrown fare. But many projects have been put on hold after the government last year began cracking down on alleged widespread tax evasion and exorbitant pay for big-name stars.

That has made work scarcer for now, and while sources at Hengdian say some extras have left, Lu remains optimistic. "I still want to be an actor," Lu explained, adding: "I believe the future will be better than the past."—AFP



These photos show extras dressed in period costume taking a break during filming for a Chinese TV drama at Hengdian World Studios in Dongyang in China's eastern Zhejiang province.—AFP



## AMERICAN FANS EAGERLY EXPECT MEGHAN AND HARRY'S BABY

Fascination, pride and the best soap opera in the world have many Americans eagerly awaiting the impending birth of Prince Harry and Duchess of Sussex Meghan Markle's first child. After some 29 million Americans watched the televised May 2018 wedding of Harry to Californian actress Markle, the prospect of the first British royal baby born to an American mother is proving even more compelling.

"It's going to be massive," said J.D. Heyman, deputy editor of People magazine. "When Meghan presents the baby, when Meghan and Harry step out onto a balcony ... I think what you will see is an enormous outpouring of affection for both of them." "The excitement around this equals the births of certainly Prince William's babies and, frankly, Harry and William's birth(s)" more than 30 years ago, Heyman added.

Despite America's War of Independence fought against Britain some 240 years ago, Americans have

long been obsessed with British royals, who regularly feature on the front pages of celebrity magazines. British producer Nick Bullen, a co-founder of subscription streaming service True Royalty TV, which launched last summer, said a colorful and dramatic history with larger-than-life figures such as King Henry VIII drives the modern fascination with the royal family.

"The British royal family is the best soap opera in town," he said. "It's as simple as that." True Royalty TV is based in London but draws its largest number of subscribers from the United States. While celebrity



media outlets are chronicling Markle's pregnancy with daily pictures and speculation over the baby's sex and due date, True Royalty TV plans documentaries and talk-show discussions on topics including: how will the royal couple raise their first child?

"Imagine raising an American royal in Britain," Bullen said. "It's hard enough I think for a lot of Americans to come to London and get to grips with boarding schools and prep schools and little caps and little shorts and how we raise children in the UK. "Will Dorian, Meghan's mum, be involved in the baby's raising?" Bullen said. "Will it have holidays in California? Will it be doing baby yoga? People want to know all that level of detail."

Not everyone is getting caught up in royal baby fever. "I actually don't have too much of an opinion about it," shrugged Evan Jorgensen, as he strolled along the Venice Beach boardwalk in California on Monday. But most people Reuters spoke to said they were excited and pleased. Americans feel tremendous affection toward Markle, said Heyman. "There's a personal pride that many people feel, that an average American girl of a multiracial background has risen to this position," he said.—Reuters



# Jordan campaigning to combat drug addiction

AMMAN: Issam was reduced to tears recounting his life as a drug addict, as Jordanian authorities press an unprecedented campaign in the Muslim-majority country where substance abuse remains taboo. Slogans such as "No to Drugs" are part of the new drive, launched in the wake of a worrying rise in the number of cases of addiction, possession and smuggling, to raise overall awareness of the issue, according to the anti-narcotics department.

Jordan's public security directorate has also started a primetime radio show that airs every Tuesday to address the dangers of drug addiction. "Drugs have made me an outcast. No one respects me or even looks at me," Issam said during the show, hosted by Major Anas Al-Tantawi of the anti-narcotics department. "It got to the point where I sold my furniture and my five-year-old daughter's gold earrings ... I tried to commit suicide twice." As the show came to a close, Tantawi said: "They are victims, and we must help them, not discard them."

Brigadier Anwar Al-Tarawneh, director of the anti-narcotics department, told AFP there has been a 32 percent increase in cases of addiction, possession smuggling in Jordan since 2017. The evidence is there. In a room in the department, the shelves are crammed with white plastic bags and brown envelopes bulging with seized drugs - including heroin, cocaine and amphetamines. Some were smuggled into the country in hollowed-out books, or shoes or disguised as pastries in a box.

But authorities say hashish is the most commonly used drug in the kingdom, where 20,000 people were arrested in 2018 for drug abuse. Drug traffickers in Jordan, which has a small population of just over nine million, face sentences of between three

and 20 years, depending on the amount and type of drugs seized. Under a 2016 law, addicts are exempted from serving time if they agree to treatment at a rehabilitation center.

But drug addicts are generally still looked down upon by Jordan's conservative society. "Drugs are a (vice) that affects one's mind, soul, finances and health," Muslim preacher Raed Sabri, who has a YouTube channel, told AFP. Recovering addicts however must be "cared for and not discarded so that they can again be contributing members of society," he insisted. The kingdom's anti-drugs campaign targets those aged between 18 and 27, who make up 47 percent of users, according to the anti-narcotics department.

According to Jamal Al-Anani, a psychiatrist and drug addiction specialist, "curiosity, lack of maturity and stress" are the main causes that lead to addiction among teenagers. Apart from workshops in schools and universities, Tarawneh said authorities were using "modern methods", including social media, to reach those most vulnerable.

At a 170-bed rehab center in the capital Amman, affiliated with the public security directorate, posters on the walls read "Drugs are a Monster, don't come near" and "Drugs are a Waste of Money". Treatment lasts between one and two months, said Fawaz Al-Masaeed, the center's director. "There are three stages: Detox, treatment and rehabilitation," he told AFP, and the center follows up with patients for four months after their discharge.

Omar, 32, said his mother encouraged him to check in to the centre after having struggled with drug addiction for 14 years. "A friend offered me a cigarette when I was depressed, telling me 'Take this, it'll make you relax.'" Omar, now a father of four, told AFP. "When I

essence by supporting Sisi. "It is not possible for any party in connection with the current regime ... to claim to be liberal," Nafaa said.

Badrawi, who is also a senior Wafd member, however maintains that the party adheres to its liberal policies, dismissing rights group's accusations as "baseless". "We (as the Wafd party) don't object for the sake of objection. We only raise objections when the people or the nation are in danger," Badrawi said.

Another core value of the old Wafd was its support for secular governance. To this day, the party's motto is still "religion is for God and the nation is for all". Its emblem remains the cross interlinked with the crescent moon, symbolic of national unity. This secular spirit was blurred after the party forged alliances with the Muslim Brotherhood group on several occasions since its resurrection.

"Its alliance with the Brotherhood damaged its image and reduced its popularity," said Nafaa. Wafd has also backed general-turned-president Sisi since his rise to power after the military ouster of former Islamist president Mohamed Morsi, who hails from the Brotherhood. In the 2018 elections, the party threw its support behind Sisi who ran virtually uncontested winning 97 percent of the vote.

Wafd currently holds 43 seats in the 596-seat parliament which convened in 2016, two years after Sisi took office. As an established party, it counts prominent businessmen among its ranks and is considered to be well financed compared to others. "Wafd has some 220 branches and more than 500,000 members nationwide," said Wafd spokesman Yasser Al-Hodeibi. But it is not clear whether all the party's members are active. It also possesses the only partisan newspaper, according to Hodeibi.

Despite its ample financial capabilities, the party failed to field a candidate in the 2018 elections. But it has nonetheless promised to run a candidate in the upcoming elections in 2022. — AFP

years in office. "From the ruins of the USSR, we managed to build a successful state with a modern market economy in Kazakhstan," he said. "We put Kazakhstan on the map, where there had been no such state."

Recent years have seen growing frustration over falling living standards, however, as Kazakhstan's commodity-dependent economy struggled to recover from a 2014 plunge in oil prices and Western sanctions against Russia, a key trading partner. Nazarbayev's resignation came less than a month after he sacked his government citing a lack of economic development. Nazarbayev subsequently named 53-year-old Askar Mamin as the new prime minister and announced a plan to spend more than \$5 billion on social programs and state salaries. There is no obvious succession plan in place and there are no clear alternatives to Nazarbayev's rule in the largely Muslim country, which has a significant ethnic Russian minority. — AFP

authority, saying that he began distributing industrial plots in a very transparent manner after the distribution had been suspended for 12 years. He said that he sacked the head of the small and medium enterprises fund after he refused to cooperate with the Audit Bureau investigation into alleged violations.

He added that the fund's case is still with the Audit Bureau and that the ministry has managed to take back money spent illegally. But the two lawmakers accused Roudhan of not answering all the issues and charged that the minister did not respond to several charges of corruption and violations.

Earlier, Bader Al-Mulla and Abdullah Al-Kandari were sworn in after their victory in the recently-held by-elections in the second and third constituencies. Mulla, born in 1971, holds a PhD in civil law and is a lawyer at the court of cassation and constitutional court. He is also a professor of civil law at Saad Al-Abdullah Academy for Security Sciences and a lecturer at Kuwait University. Also born in 1971, Kandari has a master's degree in law from Kuwait University. He is also a lawyer at the court of cassation and constitutional court, and is a member of the Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), among other posts.



AMMAN: Jordanian psychiatrist Jamal Al-Anani talks to a drug-dependent youth at a rehabilitation center on Jan 7, 2019. — AFP

asked for another, I realized it was hashish ... I was 18 years old." After years of substance abuse, "my health deteriorated, I lost 27 kilos, I lost my job, and it strained

my relationships with everyone around me. I destroyed my life." Now after his rehabilitation, Omar hopes "to start a new life". — AFP

## Egypt's Wafd party eclipsed under Sisi rule

CAIRO: A century after Egypt's March 1919 revolution, the prominent Wafd party credited with leading popular demands to end the British occupation, has now been largely sidelined on the country's political scene, analysts say. A onetime liberal opposition force with a mass following, Wafd is considered Egypt's oldest surviving party, having started its political life under the then monarchy during the early 20th century.

But in recent times critics say the party's role has descended into irrelevance under the rule of President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. "The party has completely lost its luster and no longer attracts liberals," said political science professor at Cairo University Hassan Nafaa. "Wafd still lives on the credit of its historic track record."

Since its founding in the wake of the 1919 revolution, the party quickly rose through Egypt's political echelons leading several governments which were largely at odds with the king. It remained for years the face of Egyptian politics before being dismantled along with others amid the rise of the military rule in Egypt in 1952.

It was not until more than 20 years later that Wafd rose again from the ashes rebranding itself as the "New Wafd" under late president Anwar Al-Sadat. But Wafd MP Fouad Badrawi maintains his party still has "impact" on the ground despite the political blows it has received over the years. "It has been through multiple ups and down over the years, but it is still surviving," he said. The "New Wafd" claims to embrace the principles of the old party with civil rights and freedoms at its core.

Critics however argue that Wafd has lost its liberal

## Kazakh leader resigns after 30...

Continued from Page 1

than 97 percent of the vote. The votes were internationally criticized and he was accused of tolerating little opposition to his rule. But under Nazarbayev, the sprawling nation of 18 million parlayed its energy resources and strategic location into influence, emerging from ex-Soviet obscurity to host Iranian nuclear talks and Syria peace negotiations.

The gleaming futuristic new capital Astana, built in the years since independence, symbolized Nazarbayev's drive to transform the country. In his address, Nazarbayev listed a series of achievements, saying the economy had grown by 15 times during his

## MPs file no-confidence...

Continued from Page 1

public industrial authority, saying that several such cases are being studied by the anti-corruption authority.

Subaei accused the minister of failing to impose the law on the national fund for small and medium projects, saying it is full of corruption. He also accused him of appointing more expatriates in the ministry. Roudhan however denied the allegations and said he was pleased to be questioned in the Assembly because this gives him the chance to explain what he has achieved. He said that the real estate cheating scandal took place before he became minister and it was he who began implementing solutions and referred some of the complaints to the public prosecution.

Roudhan said 90 percent of the 976 complaints were submitted during his term and that as many as 687 cases were sent to the public prosecution. The minister also denied alleged corruption at the industrial

## Macron, on and on... French leader debates for 8 hours

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron has set a new personal record for talking during a public appearance by debating for more than eight hours with intellectuals and scientists. For two and half months, the 41-year-old has criss-crossed France for town-hall meetings as part of his "Great National Debate", launched as a remedy to the anger seen in the "yellow vest" protests. Previous sessions had seen him show off his stamina, with the former investment banker fielding questions from voters on issues ranging from hospital closures to foreign policy, often for four or five hours or more.

But on Monday night he surpassed himself talking in Paris for eight hours and 10 minutes, finishing at 02:30 am in a room that had slowly emptied of spectators and even participants, some making their excuses before the end. The title of the debate - "the main challenges and future issues that France will be confronted with" - set the tone for sometimes dense discussions at the presidential palace, which were broadcast on France Culture radio station. Sixty intellectuals, economists and environmental scientists took part with Macron, who won office in May 2017 promising to speak rarely to increase the impact of his declarations.

The "Great National Debate" was written off by some critics before it started, but it has helped pull the

centrist leader out of the worst crisis of his presidency caused by protests which began in mid-November. A poll published last Thursday by the Elabe survey group showed Macron's approval rating up eight percentage points since December, with 31 percent of voters having a positive opinion of him. The "yellow vest" protests started over fuel taxes, but snowballed into a national revolt against Macron's governing style and pro-business policies.

He has repeatedly defended his record during debate appearances and again made the case on Monday for highly contested tax cuts for the wealthy, which he introduced early in his term. "We haven't sufficiently kept productive capital in France which creates jobs," he told the audience. Around 10,000 meetings were organized nationwide between mid-January and last Friday, when the debate officially finished, with participants encouraged to discuss government policy and make suggestions.

But a group of five political scientists who were asked to guarantee the independence of the debate process regretted last week that Macron had been so personally involved. With Monday's discussion he has now joined 11 debates. "It was perhaps useful to have the president and the government implicated at the beginning of the process to motivate citizens," one of the guarantors, Pascal Perrineau, said on March 12. But "the way in which that has continued, after initially motivating, has depressed participation," he added. Political opponents have accused Macron of camouflaged campaigning ahead of European parliament elections in May, while some have compared him to Hugo Chavez or Fidel Castro - Latin American leaders with a famous taste for hearing their own voices. — AFP



PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron gestures during a meeting with some 60 intellectuals as part of the "Great National Debate" on Monday at the Elysee Palace. — AFP

## Saudi Arabia invests \$23 billion to improve Riyadh quality of life

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia said yesterday it would spend 86 billion riyals (\$23 billion) to boost the quality of life in the capital Riyadh, increasing green space and recreational areas and installing 1,000 works of art across the city. The four projects unveiled are part of efforts to open up Saudis' cloistered lifestyles, encourage physical activity and make life more fun in the conservative kingdom, alongside reforms to diversify the economy away from oil.

They are the latest in a series of planned development investments that King Salman has launched at the side of his son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. State media showed the pair touring a diorama of the plans, which include a park four times the size of Central Park and 135 km of cycling track. The king also ordered that one of the capital's main roads be renamed

after his son.

Work on the four new projects will start in the second half of the year and come on line gradually between 2023 and 2030. They will create 70,000 jobs and offer investment opportunities worth 50 billion riyals to local and foreign investors, state news agency SPA said. One initiative aims to increase six-fold the percentage of green areas in Riyadh, notorious for its multi-lane highways and concrete block buildings, by planting 7.5 million trees. Seven museums, an open art fair, pedestrian bridges and community gardens are also called for.

Such features were unimaginable in Riyadh just a few years ago when religious police patrolled the streets enforcing strict social codes like gender segregation and bans on public music. But life in the capital has become more relaxed in recent years after the crown prince clipped the wings of the religious police, ended a ban on cinemas and began organizing public concerts. He has won the support of many young Saudis. Saudi citizens have no vote and falling oil income could affect their living standards in coming years. As a result, improving quality of life is seen as important for ensuring political stability. — Reuters



Sports

# Lightning capture Presidents' Trophy beating Coyotes 4-1

## Jets extend Central lead with 3-2 win over Kings

TAMPA BAY: Tampa Bay earned its first-ever Presidents' Trophy, and Steven Stamkos set a franchise record for the most goals as the Lightning beat the visiting Arizona Coyotes 4-1 on Monday night. Victor Hedman's goal in the first minute of the third period broke a 1-1 tie, and Tampa Bay's top-ranked penalty-kill held Arizona scoreless with the man advantage in the game's last 1:39. Anthony Cirelli, who also had an assist, and Yanni Gourde each produced short-handed, empty-net goals in the final minute. Stamkos, 29, scored the game's second goal of the first period. His 384th career tally broke the franchise record for goals previously held by Vincent Lecavalier, who was a member of the Lightning for 14 seasons. Stamkos is in his 11th season. The Lightning, who improved to 31-6-2 on home ice secured the No. 1 seed for the postseason. They became the second-fastest ever to notch the Presidents' Trophy, doing it in their 73rd game. The 1995-96 Detroit Red Wings did it in 71 games.

### CANUCKS 3, BLACKHAWKS 2 (OT)

Bo Horvat scored 16 seconds into overtime to lift Vancouver to a victory at Chicago. Horvat buried his 25th goal of the season with a shot from point-blank range on the Canucks' first chance of the extra session. Alexander Edler and Markus Granlund also scored for Vancouver, which won its second game in as many nights. Thatcher Demko earned his third career victory by stopping 29 of 31 shots. Jonathan Toews and Erik

Gustafsson scored for the Blackhawks, whose five-game winning streak came to an end. Patrick Kane tallied assists on both Blackhawks goals, giving him 101 points (41 goals, 60 assists) on the season. Chicago's Corey Crawford stopped 31 shots.

### JETS 3, KINGS 2

Kyle Connor had a goal and an assist, and Winnipeg won at Los Angeles to extend its lead in the Central Division. Kevin Hayes and Tyler Myers also scored, and Laurent Brossoit made 15 saves for the Jets, who moved three points in front of the Nashville Predators with 10 games left. Sean Walker and Dustin Brown scored for the Kings, and Jack Campbell stopped 25 shots.

### GOLDEN KNIGHTS 7, SHARKS 3

Jonathan Marchessault had two goals and two assists, and Reilly Smith had a goal and three assists to lead visiting Vegas past San Jose. The Golden Knights won for the ninth time in 10 games. William Karlsson added a goal and an assist, and Mark Stone, Paul Stastny and Cody Eakin also scored goals for Vegas. Golden Knights goalie Malcolm Subban, playing in back-to-back games for the first time in his career with Marc-Andre Fleury sidelined due to a lower-body injury, made 36 saves. Logan Couture scored two goals and Joe Thornton also scored for San Jose, which remained one point short of becoming the second team in the Western Conference to clinch a playoff berth. — Reuters



LOS ANGELES: Ilya Kovalchuk #17 of the Los Angeles Kings loses the puck between Mathieu Perreault #85 and Laurent Brossoit #30 of the Winnipeg Jets during the second period at Staples Center on Monday in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

## Austrian ski star Hirscher undecided on retirement

VIENNA: Austrian ski legend Marcel Hirscher said yesterday that he would decide "relatively soon" if he would retire or call it quits after winning a record eighth consecutive overall crystal globe this season.

Hirscher said he felt "very, very tired" at the season's end and wanted to see how quickly he would recover. "I'm now 10 years in the World Cup circus. I want to see how I feel going into summer and if it's physically and mentally possible to have another such (strong) season." "I surely notice that I'm 30. I'm not 18 anymore... I want to race for the big globe. For that one really needs 100 percent" of physical and mental stamina, he said in a press conference in Vienna.

Austria's slalom sensation finished outside the top 10 in the men's World Cup season finale having already secured the discipline's small globe. The performance at the end of his strong season reminded him it is not a given to win every race, he said yesterday. He said he stood currently at "49-51", but declined to say if he leaned toward retiring or staying on.

Hirscher now has two more overall World Cup wins than the second most successful skier in history, another Austrian Annemarie Moser-Proell, who won six large globes. The most successful man had been Marc Girardelli of Luxembourg, with five. American Lindsey Vonn and Austrian Hermann Maier both won four.

Earlier this year, Vonn marked her retirement at age 34, following Norwegian skiing legend and her close friend, Aksel Lund Svindal, 36, who skied his last race in February. Hirscher has often talked of retirement over the last year, previously saying he wanted to spend more time with his family. His wife gave birth to a son



VIENNA: Austria's alpine ski legend Marcel Hirscher (R) poses next to Raiffeisen Bank International Head of Group Marketing Leodegar Pruschak behind World Cup trophies during his press conference at Raiffeisen headquarters in Vienna yesterday. — AFP

last October.

So far, Hirscher has celebrated 67 World Cup victories—falling short of the record of 86 set by Sweden's Ingemar Stenmark—out of a total of 138 World Cup podiums. He has also won two gold medals at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, eclipsing his previous best, a slalom silver from Sochi four years earlier.

Hirscher, who has also secured seven world champi-

onship golds, is feted in Austria as one of the country's favourite sporting sons. He was born in Annaberg with his family spending summer seasons in an alpine hut in the mountains around the city of Salzburg, according to a media interview with his father.

He started to ski at the age of two taught by his father, who has been by his side and coached him throughout his career. — AFP

## Masters champion Reed set to defend first major title

WASHINGTON: Patrick Reed says he's mentally stronger with better shotmaking entering the Masters than he was last year when he won the green jacket, even if his results don't show it. The 28-year-old American will defend his first major title at next month's 83rd Masters tournament, but so far he hasn't managed a top-10 showing since sharing second in November at Dubai. "It definitely would help," Reed said of a strong result during a Monday teleconference. "But honestly I feel like the state of mind I'm in right now is better than it was last year at this point."

"I'm doing things on the golf course I feel more comfortable doing than last year. I just need to go out there and put four rounds together." Reed, now 16th in the world rankings, reached Augusta National last year after sharing second at the Valspar Championship and seventh at the Arnold Palmer Invitational plus a share of ninth at the WGC Match Play.

This month, Reed shared 50th at the Palmer and 47th last week at The Players Championship after a final-round 78. "The preparations are going really well. I feel like I'm in a better place than I was last year at this time," Reed said. "The thing is to keep building on what we've been working on."

"Just being able to work the ball both ways, consistently hit golf shots and put myself in a mind frame—that's what you need to compete at majors." Players winner Rory McIlroy, top-ranked Dustin Johnson, world number two Justin Rose and 14-time major winner Tiger Woods are betting favorites ahead of the April 11-14 show-

down at Augusta National.

But Reed was unfancied last year as well when he outdueled McIlroy, Jordan Spieth and Rickie Fowler to capture the title. "One of the greatest tests in the game is playing in the Masters because you have to do everything almost perfectly," Reed said.

"Augusta doesn't only challenge your golf game, it challenges your body physically and tests you mentally." Reed yearns for the Masters champion duties, having had his Champions Dinner menu set since age 13 — ribeye steak, macaroni and cheese with creamed corn and spinach.

"I can't wait to get back on the property, walk around the grounds and go into the champions locker room and look at all the names there," Reed said. "This year, having all the extra activities going on. I think it's going to be a lot of fun. To experience what it's going to be like on the first tee as defending champion, I can't wait to see what that feels like."

The last time Reed was on that tee, last year's final round, he was unsettled. "I felt the butterflies going," he said. "Once I got up to that iron shot, the nerves went away. I got myself in the right mind frame after that one shot."

Reed says his best moment in the green jacket was being hugged by his daughter minutes after the victory, and his least favorite will be handing it back to Augusta National officials. "That's going to give me motivation to try and repeat and win multiple," Reed said. "It has just given me motivation. It kind of picks me up."

Reed says one key he has learned from Augusta National is that even the best players never stop learning around the famed course, saying he would tell his younger self to "hit more fairways and leave the ball below the hole."

"You just learn new things about the golf course year in and year out," Reed said. "It's like every tournament you play but more penalizing times 100. "You just have to make sure you're really sharp in every part of your game." — AFP

## Japan Olympic chief facing corruption probe to step down

TOKYO: The head of Japan's Olympic Committee said yesterday he would step down in June, as French authorities probe his involvement in payments made before Tokyo was awarded the 2020 Summer Games.

"Considering the future of the JOC, I think the most appropriate thing is to leave things to a new leader from the next generation so that they can host the Olympics and carve a new era," Tsunekazu Takeda told a meeting of the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) in Tokyo.

He said his decision had "nothing to do with the investigation". The 71-year-old said he would also be stepping down from the International Olympic Committee. Takeda has come under pressure not to seek an additional term when his current mandate ends in June after it was revealed that French authorities believe they have evidence of corruption in the awarding of the 2020 Games to Tokyo.

Current JOC rules require candidates for the top post to be 70 or younger at the time of their candidacy, but there had been rumours the committee was considering a change to allow Takeda to stay on through 2020.

In recent months however, the investigation into Takeda has become an unwelcome distraction for organisers of the Games, with less than 500 days until the opening ceremony. Asked why he did not step down immediately, Takeda said: "I really feel sorry for causing this sensation, but I think I'm responsible for fulfilling my chairmanship until my term ends."

Takeda has denied any involvement in corruption and again protested his innocence yesterday. "As I have said, I did not do anything wrong. I will continue to make an effort to prove my innocence," he told journalists.

In January, it was revealed that Takeda was facing a judicial process in France over two payments totalling 2.8 million Singapore dollars (US\$2.1 million). He has been placed "mis en examen", a legal step that roughly translates as being charged.

It does not automatically trigger a trial but means that prosecutors believe there is strong or corroborated evidence of wrongdoing. Takeda has said he was "never involved in any decision-making process" over the payments and that the money was legitimate reimbursement for "a consultancy contract signed through appropriate approval procedures."

The French investigation, launched in 2016, centres around two payments made to Singapore-based firm "Black Tidings", a firm linked to Papa Massata Diack. Diack is the son of the former head of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), Lamine Diack, and is also embroiled in a bribery scandal.

He is suspected of having received several million euros in bribes, either for sponsorship contracts or to favour the Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo Olympic bids. He has been on Interpol's most-wanted list since 2015, but the Senegalese government has refused to extradite him to France despite pleas from IOC chief Thomas Bach.

The payments, labelled "Tokyo 2020 Olympic Game Bid" and paid from a Japanese bank account, were made before and after the IOC voted for Tokyo to host the Games. — AFP

## Hong Kong-Australian swimmer dies at 26

HONG KONG: Record-breaking Hong Kong and Australia swimmer Kenneth To has died suddenly aged 26 after falling unwell at a Florida training camp, leaving fellow competitors in shock. Chinese star Sun Yang, a one-time team-mate of To's, was among the mourners for the popular swimmer who won Commonwealth and world championships medals with Australia before switching to represent his native Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Sports Institute said To, who held 16 Hong Kong swimming records, was on a three-month training programme at the University of Florida when he was taken ill. "He felt unwell at a training session and was taken to hospital where sadly, he passed away," a statement said Tuesday, adding that the Institute was "deeply shocked and saddened".

"He was extremely popular and loved by his teammates and competitors. Kenneth was known as a truly exceptional person, warm, funny and kind. His sudden passing is a huge loss to local sports."

Multiple Olympic champion Sun, who teamed up with To for the 4x100m freestyle relay at the 2017 China National Games, was among those to pay tribute. "Your love and passion for swimming will always be in our hearts, thank you for everything you've given to swimming," Sun posted on Chinese social media.

"May there be no pain in heaven...RIP"

To was part of the Australian teams that won Commonwealth gold in the 4x100m freestyle relay in 2014, and silver in the 4x100m medley relay at the 2013 world championships. He shifted to represent Hong Kong in 2016, but remains the Australian short-course record-holder in the 100m and 200m individual medley.

"I still can't accept the news of his death, it's so shocking," Hong Kong swimmer Yvette Kong told the Apple Daily newspaper. "He made a lot of contributions to the Hong Kong swimming world. It is such a pity." — AFP

## Sports

# Bring on the World Cup, we fear no one: Afghan spin king Khan

## Afghanistan's cricketers now need only to believe in themselves

**DEHRADUN:** Trailblazing bowler Rashid Khan said Afghanistan will fear no one when the World Cup starts in May after a maiden Test win enhanced the reputation of the rising cricket nation. Khan, who is one of the world's leading bowlers in short-form cricket, said Afghanistan's confidence was growing after beating Ireland on Monday in just their second Test match.

The 20-year-old leg-spinner, who tops the world Twenty20 bowling rankings and lies third in the 50-over standings, took five for 82 as Afghanistan beat their fellow Test newcomers in Dehradun.

Before an expected starring role for Sunrisers Hyderabad when the 2019 Indian Premier League (IPL) begins at the weekend, Khan said Afghanistan's cricketers now need only to believe in themselves.

"We have the talent and we have the skills," he told AFP in an interview. At last year's Asia Cup, Afghanistan made a breakthrough by topping their group in the 50-over competition ahead of established Test nations Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

"How we played in the Asia Cup was totally different and we showed that we can beat any side," said Khan, whose side even tied a match with heavyweights India in the last-four stage. "The only thing is to believe in your skills. Just to be relaxed in big matches and enjoy your game," he said.

"And that's how we should be in the World Cup." War-torn Afghanistan only gained one-day international (ODI) status in 2009 and Test status in 2017, but their recent rise has coincided with Khan's emergence as a world-class spinner.

He made his ODI debut in 2015 as a 17-year-old and credits fast-paced Twenty20 tournaments such as the IPL for developing his bowling repertoire, which

includes a mesmerising googly. "The IPL gives you lot of motivation. Once you play in these leagues, it gives you confidence playing with big players," said Khan, who cost Hyderabad \$597,000 in 2017 and took 21 wickets for them last year.

"And then you perform there on flat wickets like the IPL and that gives you a kind of satisfaction and confidence that I can deliver when I am in the national side." Khan has travelled the world to take part in Twenty20 leagues including Australia's Big Bash, the Caribbean Premier League and the Pakistan Super League.

"It really helps to improve your skills working with different coaches and players," he said. "Pick their thoughts and experience and that really helps you improve your game." Khan, one of 12 siblings, learnt his cricket with a tennis ball in the remote and humble province of Nangarhar before making his international debut against Zimbabwe in Bulawayo.

The world took notice when he became the fastest bowler to 100 ODI wickets, completing the milestone in 44 games, eight fewer than Australia's Mitchell Starc. He now has 123 in 57 matches. Khan says the key to his success is that he focuses only on practising and playing despite bearing the huge expectation that he will take wickets every time he bowls. "I don't put that pressure on myself. I keep trying to enjoy myself. Enjoy my bowling whether I take wickets or not," he said.

"I focus on doing the right things and bowl well. I don't focus on the result but focus on my hard work." Khan, who is a big fan of Pakistan all-round great Shahid Afridi, said it was tough learning to play cricket in a country ravaged by war for decades.

While many of the Afghanistan's players learnt the game in refugee camps across the border in Pakistan,



**DEHRADUN:** Afghanistan's captain Asghar Afghan (L) and Rashid Khan pose with the trophy after winning the Test cricket match between Afghanistan and Ireland at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in the northern Indian city of Dehradun on Monday. —AFP

Khan played with his seven brothers to hone his skills. "It was tough because of the lack of facilities. No good grounds and equipment. But we still enjoyed our cricket," said Khan with a smile.

"We never put it in our mind that we don't have facilities or stuff like that and tried to focus on our game. "My brothers used to watch and play cricket and that's

how I became a big fan of the game."

Afghanistan lost their debut Test to top-ranked India inside two days in 2018, but came back a much-improved side against Ireland a year later. "The win against Ireland will help motivate our first-class cricketers," Khan said. "People will start loving Tests rather than Twenty20s and ODIs." —AFP

## Pujara or Pant as Ganguly suggests extreme No 4 choices for India

**NEW DELHI:** Former captain Sourav Ganguly has offered two extreme choices to end India's quest for the perfect number four batsman at this year's World Cup, suggesting they choose between a dour Cheteshwar Pujara and a daredevil Rishabh Pant for the role.

India continue to fret over the crucial batting slot after a series of candidates fluffed their auditions ahead of the World Cup in England and Wales. Their last ODI series before the showpiece event did not suggest any remedy either, with Ambati Rayudu scoring 13, 18 and two in the first three matches against Australia while Pant scored 16 in the fifth.

Ganguly caused quite a consternation by suggesting the name of Test specialist Pujara who played the last of his five ODIs in 2014. "I suggest Pujara's name because he's in great form. We've seen how well he did in Australia," Ganguly said of the 31-year-old architect of India's first-ever Test series victory in Australia earlier this year.

Ganguly pointed out how Rahul Dravid, someone Pujara is often likened to for their similar batting approach, became part of India's ODI squad despite not being a power-hitter. "I've seen Rahul Dravid playing World Cup and excelling at number four and five. We used to assign him a role. So I suggest, if you don't have a ready number four batsman, you can consider Pujara," Ganguly told reporters yesterday.

In case it's too radical a choice, Ganguly also suggested the name of Pant, more a plunderer than an accumulator of runs. The 21-year-old, who has built a growing six-hitting reputation, impressed in the test series in England and Australia and is expected to be India's second choice wicketkeeper behind Mahendra Singh Dhoni at the World Cup.

Pant has not been as impressive in one-dayers, but Ganguly attributed it to his limited chances that came only when Dhoni was either resting or recovering. "Rishabh is coming in and going out all the time and that's never good for anybody. The reason he succeeds in test cricket is because he plays it consistently," said Ganguly, who has joined Delhi Capitals as an advisor ahead of the Indian Premier League beginning on March 23.

"How many Indian wicketkeeper-batsmen have got test hundreds in England and Australia? And he scored them at ease, it's not that he struggled... for me, he's your future. "For the next 10 years, you'll see that boy a lot in all formats... He'll be a huge asset to the Indian team in the years to come."

As Delhi Capitals head coach, Ricky Ponting has had a good look at Pant and the former Australia captain agreed with Ganguly's assessment of the player. "If I were an Indian selector, I'd be picking him in the World Cup squad and I'd play him as a batter," Ponting said.

"I'd play him at number four in the Indian team. He's that sort of guy with that sort of talent who can win you World Cup. He's just got that X-factor..." India begin their quest for a third 50-over World Cup title against South Africa at Southampton on June 5. — Reuters

## 21st Asian Clubs Handball tourney begins today

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The 21st Asian Clubs Handball Tournament will begin today at Kuwait club hall, and will continue until April 1st. The tournament will qualify winners to the "Super Globe 2019" (continental champions world championship). Kuwait Sports Club chairman, chairman of the Higher Organizing Committee Khalid Al-Ghanim welcomed the participating teams and wished them a pleasant stay in Kuwait.

He said the handball community is interested in the brotherly gathering of Asia's athletes and strengthen relations between Asia's youth regardless of results, and to serve the game and take it to the highest levels.

He said when Kuwait club was asked to organize the tournament, "we decided to work day and night to prepare everything related to the event according to best international standards as set by the international and Asian Handball Federations, to ensure its success,



Khalid Al-Ghanim



because it is the first official tournament to be held in Kuwait following a three year suspension of Kuwait sports at the international level."

Al-Ghanim thanked Director General of Public Authority for Sports Dr Humoud Fulaiteh and his deputy Dr Saqer Al-Mulla for their major support to host the tournament, he also thanked Kuwait Handball Federation, as well as the Asian Federation for cooperating to make the tournament a success.

Al-Ghanim thanked Deputy Director of PAS for construction and maintenance Sheikh Humoud Mubarak Al-Sabah for his efforts and keenness to provide all needs,

especially in the main hall so that to make suit this important Asian event.

Thirteen teams will compete, and they are placed in four groups. The first group has the clubs of Mudhar from Saudi Arabia, Dragon from China and Sadaqa from Lebanon. The second includes Al-Jaish from Syria, Musqat from Oman and Wakra from Qatar.

The third group includes host Kuwait, Barbar from Bahrain, Karkh from Iraq and T-sport from India.

Kazma from Kuwait, Sharqia from UAE and Dehail from Qatar are in the fourth group, as the opening ceremony will be at 5:45 pm.

## No trophy, no regrets as Federer departs Indian Wells for Miami

**INDIAN WELLS:** Roger Federer departed Indian Wells empty-handed for a second straight year, but the Swiss great sees no reason he can't get back on track at the Miami Masters.

"Sure, it's frustrating and disappointing and sad to some extent," Federer said after falling 3-6, 6-3, 7-5 to Austrian Dominic Thiem in Sunday's final.

Thiem, 25, denied Federer a record sixth Indian Wells title and returned to his career-high of fourth in the world-bumping Federer down to fifth going to the second leg of the "Sunshine Double" of Indian Wells and Miami.

But Federer, the 20-time Grand Slam winner who claimed a remarkable 100th career title in Dubai last month, can afford to take the defeat in stride-especially when he's playing well and feels his 37-year-old body is fully fit.

"It's just not as dramatic," he said of falling to a player who was "just a bit better when it mattered".

"Whereas, when you're hurt and things are difficult, maybe those hurt more.

"I'm going to Miami. The body is perfectly fine. That also always keeps me upbeat, and I feel it's a privilege when I feel this way leaving a tournament. "I have been playing every single day for the last three weeks. I can be very happy and proud of that fact."

As at Indian Wells, Federer could meet fellow Swiss Stan Wawrinka in the third round in Miami. Federer is a three-time winner at Miami, but he



Roger Federer

lost his second-round opener last year after falling to Juan Martin del Potro in the final at Indian Wells.

With that in mind, Federer shied away from predicting he would bounce back in a big way from his loss to Thiem, with the Miami event's move to a new venue adding to his sense of uncertainty.

"Now it's totally different," Federer said of the tournament moving from its longtime home on Key Biscayne to the Hard Rock Stadium-home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins.

A new stadium court inside the actual stadium is the centerpiece of the new venue, which also features a secondary grandstand court and two smaller show courts and practice courts.

"Everybody's got to get used to center court or the conditions at the new site," Federer said. "I'm eager to find out how it's going to be like. There are still a lot of open question marks. Right now I feel really good." — AFP

## Ganguly downplays fatigue fears over IPL-WCup double

**NEW DELHI:** Sourav Ganguly offered advice yesterday for cricketers worried the short turnaround between the Indian Premier League and the World Cup could leave them fatigued-just enjoy it while you can.

The gruelling Twenty20 tournament starts Saturday and runs flat-out for nearly six weeks, leaving barely any breathing room before the World Cup gets underway on May 30. Coaches and captains are preparing for star players to be recalled from the IPL by their national cricket boards for a rest in the days before the game's biggest spectacle gets underway in England and Wales.

But Ganguly, one of India's most successful former skippers and special adviser to the Delhi Capitals IPL team, said those fretting about timetables and fatigue should "just play". "Yes, it is a lot of cricket, but just play. You don't play forever," he told reporters in Delhi.

"I have always said there is a limited time to play the sport and when you are getting the opportunity at the international level and the IPL level, these will not come back. "So just find a way to get rest, get fresh... make the most of it."

Teams play 14 matches each in just under six weeks during the IPL, which has evolved into one of the world's richest sporting competitions and attracts foreign stars and coaches. Australian batting legend Ricky Ponting, who is coaching the Capitals and has played in the IPL himself, said he was prepared for players to pull out before the tournament ends in May. "I can see it from a board's point of view, that they want to make sure they can put their best team on the park for the entire World Cup," Ponting said in Delhi. "They are doing whatever they can to look after their players, so I am sure at some stage as well, some of the Indian fast bowlers might be on some sort of restrictions at the back end of this tournament."

"But at the end of the day, a lot of that stuff, that's out of our hands, we can't control that. You know, we'll just continue to pick our best eleven players, put them on the field and try and win as many games as we can." The Delhi franchise has struggled to make a mark in the competition, finishing at the bottom of the table in the last edition. They have never won the IPL although they made it to the semis in 2008 and 2009. —AFP

## Sports

# Gambling Germany boss Loew goes all-in ahead of Serbia friendly

## Friendly against Serbia is a warm-up for Euro 2020 qualifier

**BERLIN:** Germany coach Joachim Loew hopes to prove his critics wrong and open 2019 with a win when his new-look team host Serbia in a friendly in Wolfsburg today.

Loew, who arrived in Wolfsburg later than expected due to a dental operation this week, is hoping to bounce back from a painful 2018, in which Germany suffered an early World Cup exit and were relegated from the top tier of the UEFA Nations League.

The friendly against Serbia is a warm-up for Sunday's prestigious opening Euro 2020 qualifier away to the Netherlands with the Germans hunting revenge after a 3-0 thrashing at the hands of the Oranje last October at the Amsterdam Arena.

Amid fears that German football is in decline, the 59-year-old Loew is under pressure to show that he can build a new era of success around a younger generation of players. Yet he has also faced fierce criticism for his decision to strike veteran World Cup winners Mats Hummels, Jerome Boateng and Thomas Mueller from the national team set-up, falling offside with their club Bayern Munich in the process.

The controversial call has been seen as a gamble, which has heightened the pressure ahead of today's game. "Loew is going all-in in a high-stakes game of poker," wrote German football magazine Kicker on Monday. Yet the Germany boss has insisted that the right conclusions have been drawn from the failures of last year.

"We have had a think since the World Cup," he admitted on Friday. "We need to be quicker, more ambitious and more dynamic. We lost all that at the World Cup and our game became quite predictable."

Loew has given three young players their first inter-

national call-up.

Hertha Berlin defender Niklas Stark, 23, Werder Bremen midfielder Maximilian Eggstein and RB Leipzig full-back Lukas Klostermann, both 22, join the squad, which now contains just two survivors from the World-Cup-winning class of 2014 in Manuel Neuer and Toni Kroos.

Loew confirmed on Friday that Neuer remains his first-choice goalkeeper, despite calls for him to promote Barcelona stopper Marc-Andre ter Stegen to the number one role.

Yet he also called upon younger players such as Niklas Sule, 23, Leon Goretzka and Joshua Kimmich, both 24, to step up into leadership roles.

"Some players need to take the next step," he said. "Goretzka and Kimmich are guys with clear ideas, ambition and opinions."

"Sule has to take on responsibility, we expect more from him now," said Loew. "He needs to organise and direct proceedings at the back."

As the direct heir to rejected defensive duo Hummels and Boateng, Sule will be under particular scrutiny against Serbia. Many have questioned Loew's decision to get rid of two such experienced defenders, including his predecessor and former colleague Jurgen Klinsmann, who coached Germany to third at the 2006 World Cup with Loew as his assistant. "My personal hope is that the door remains open for Hummels, Boateng and Mueller," Klinsmann told AFP subsidiary SID this week.

"They are top players, and it's important to have them at your disposal if you need them."

"It obviously increases the pressure on the team a bit when you make a decision like that."

4-1 demolition of Ireland in the Nations League last September saw Wales produce some scintillating football. Wales eventually finished second in their Nations League group behind Denmark and Giggs said: "I put myself under pressure last year so whether it's a honeymoon period or not, I'm not too sure."

"I put myself under pressure. That's the only pressure I feel really. I think I will be judged on the qualifying games. I knew that going into the job. Getting Wales to a major championships, that's how I will be judged."

Coleman guided Wales to the semi-finals of Euro 2016, the country's first appearance at a major tournament for 58 years but his six-year stay came to an end after Wales failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

"People do expect (qualification), understandably because of what we achieved at Euro 2016," said Giggs ahead of today's pre-Slovakia friendly with Trinidad



**WOLFSBURG:** Germany's head coach Joachim Loew oversees a training session on the eve of the friendly football match Germany v Serbia in Wolfsburg yesterday.— AFP

and Tobago in Wrexham. "But it's been once in 60 years, so we don't qualify on a regular basis. That's what my job is now, to qualify or at least compete. We didn't qualify for the World Cup, but we competed."

"In the past we nearly got somewhere and in the next campaign we were nowhere near. We want to be competing or getting close on a consistent basis. If we do that then we will get more championships than not." Giggs's commitment, or the perceived lack of it, has attracted criticism from some quarters in Wales given his ambassadorial, business and consultancy interests around the world. The 45-year-old is involved with a football academy in Vietnam and is also an ambassador for the Champions League, as well as holding various commercial interests.

"My primary job is to get Wales to a European Championship," he said. "I have other commitments, but I take the job of managing Wales very seriously and I'm 100 per cent committed," he added.— AFP

"The fact that we have no teams left in the Champions League is a fiasco. I can only hope that there is a reaction, a change in approach which will get us back on top." — AFP

## Giggs determined to win over Wales doubters

**LONDON:** Ryan Giggs is determined to win over his doubters and believes that the 2020 European Championship campaign will define his time as Wales manager. Wales start their Euro 2020 qualifiers at home to Slovakia on Sunday, with the jury still out on Giggs's 14 months in charge since he succeeded Chris Coleman.

Giggs has a record of three wins, one draw and five defeats from his nine games in charge. But the former Manchester United star has fast-tracked an exciting group of young players into the senior set-up, and the

## Four things to watch for in opening rounds of Euro 2020 qualifiers

**ZURICH:** Four things to watch for in opening two rounds of the Euro 2020 qualifying competition which will be played between Thursday and Tuesday:

### NEW FORMAT

There are two different ways to qualify for Euro 2020: either through the usual qualifying system which starts on Thursday or via the new Nations League competition which began in September. The 55 teams have been divided into 10 groups of five or six, and the top two teams in each qualify directly.

The remaining four finalists will be the top team in each division of the Nations League which has not already booked their places through the conventional qualifying competition. As the Euro 2020 matches will be hosted by 12 countries, there will be no automatic qualification for any of the host nations.

### RONALDO BACK FOR PORTUGAL

Cristiano Ronaldo has been included by defending champions Portugal for the first time since the World Cup for their matches at home to Ukraine and Serbia. The 34-year-old sat out the Nations League in the autumn by "mutual consent" with coach Fernando Santos and Portugal showed they could manage without him, sailing through four games against Italy and Poland unbeaten.

However, Santos, rebuilding the team after their round of 16 exit in Russia, waved away suggestions that Portugal no longer need their most capped player and all-time leading scorer. "Any team would be stronger with Ronaldo," he said. "We have a great responsibility and our aim is to defend our title. We have to maintain that united spirit."

### NEW START FOR GERMANY

Germany will be looking to end a run of five competitive matches without a win when they open their campaign away to bitter rivals the Netherlands on Sunday. After crashing out of the 2018 World Cup in the first round with a defeat to South Korea in their final group game, Joachim Loew's side drew two and lost two matches as they finished bottom of their Nations League group and were relegated.

Loew responded with drastic measures, saying he would no longer call up stalwarts Jerome Boateng, Mats Hummels and Thomas Mueller because he needed to look to the future. With close to 250 internationals between them, Hummels (70 caps), Mueller (100) and Boateng (74) were part of the same generation which won the 2014 World Cup, thrashing hosts Brazil 7-1 along the way. "The more I think about it, the more the way it was done makes me angry," said Mueller in reaction to his exclusion from the squad. "It's mostly the character of the decision that I don't understand. Mats, Jerome and I are still able to play at the highest level."

### MANCINI STICKS WITH YOUTH

Apart from Germany, no team is under more pressure than Italy after they failed to even qualify for the Nations League. Roberto Mancini's team face a potentially tricky group which includes Bosnia and Greece although they start with relatively straightforward matches at home to Finland and Liechtenstein.

Mancini has stuck by his decision to prioritise youth, leaving out experienced players such as maverick forward Mario Balotelli and Torino striker Andrea Belotti while including youngsters Nicolo Zaniolo and Moise Kean.—Reuters

## Sanchez wants to bring 'joy' to Man Utd fans

**LONDON:** Manchester United forward Alexis Sanchez is determined to succeed at the club and says he still believes in himself despite a disappointing first year at Old Trafford.

The Chile international, who is likely to be sidelined for another month with a knee injury, has endured a frustrating time since his move from Arsenal in January 2018. He has managed just five goals in 41 appearances for the club, with only two in 23 in this current injury-troubled season. But with the team's fortunes transformed since caretaker manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer replaced the sacked Jose Mourinho in December, Sanchez is looking towards a better future. "I want to keep showing my love for football. I know what I can do. I have belief in my ability," he told Inside United magazine.

"United are such an important club, not only in England but on a global level, and I would love to help bring a trophy to the supporters." "Obviously, I want to make the United fans really happy," the 30-year-old added. "I want to score goals. I want to bring them joy. I want to win silverware."

"When we lost last year's FA Cup final to Chelsea, I was not happy. Not happy at all. In fact, I was sad because I just wanted to make our wonderful supporters happy. I saw the fans who had come to pack out Wembley Stadium. They were all around me—all red. I liked it. Wembley was all red." Meanwhile, Mohamed Salah has failed to score in seven consecutive Liverpool games but team mate Virgil van Dijk says it is only a matter of time before the goals come for the Egyptian forward.

Salah, who scored 44 goals for Liverpool last season and helped them reach the Champions League final, has notched 20 goals in 41 games in all competitions, with 17 of them coming in the league.

"People can say all they want but I think all the teams in the Premier League would love to have him in their side," defender Van Dijk told the club website <https://www.liverpoolfc.com/news/first-team/342301-van-dijk-salah-liverpool-form-goals>. "The goals will come. That's something for a striker that is maybe going to be in your head but we tell him every time: you just need to keep working, keep going and you will be fine." —Agencies

## When the German FA banned women's football...

**BERLIN:** At 75, former footballer Baerbel Wohlleben still clearly remembers the moment in 1974 when a journalist asked, "but when you head the ball, doesn't it mess up your hair?" At that time, Wohlleben had already turned 30, but was only officially three years into her career as a footballer, because until 1971 the German Football Association (DFB) banned women from playing in competitions.

Moreover, any clubs allowing women to train or play at their facilities was liable to be sanctioned. "...this aggressive sport is essentially alien to the nature of woman," decreed the DFB in 1955. "In the fight for the ball, the feminine grace vanishes, body and soul will inevitably suffer harm." Back then, even the idea of women wearing shorts was clearly a problem for the DFB as "the display of the body offends decency and modesty". Nevertheless, the sexist rules from a bygone era did not stop Wohlleben playing football and she will be cheering the German team at the women's World Cup kick-off in France this June.

At the age of 10, she kicked a ball for the first time on July 5, 1954 - the day West Germany won the World Cup for the first time by beating hot-favourites Hungary 3-2 in the final in Bern, Switzerland. The "Miracle of Bern", as Germans still regard it, saw their team come from 2-0 down against the mighty Hungarians.

"We were invited to a neighbour's house and it was the first time I had seen a television," remembered Wohlleben. "After the victory, we celebrated like crazy, went down to the garden and that's where I said 'I want to play football'."

For the next four years, she trained alongside boys at the same club as her three brothers, even playing some games at Under-15 level. However, with women's football then frowned upon in German society, Wohlleben drifted away. She played handball until, aged 27, a group of girls assembled a team in Woerrstadt, near her village of Ingelheim, where Wohlleben still lives. "We were playing friendlies, on pitches which were half grass, half sand, because competition was forbidden by the DFB," explained Wohlleben.

"We never had any training sessions together, but played a few games against Denmark and Italy. The DFB knew it, they allowed us to play, but still told us 'you do not have the right to form a national team'."

Wohlleben never actually became a full international, because she was no longer playing regularly by the time the first recognised women's interna-



**INGELHEIM:** File photo shows Former German football player Baerbel Wohlleben, first German women's football champion and first woman winning the award "goal of the month" in 1974 holds a football during an AFP interview at her home in Ingelheim am Rhein near Mainz, Germany, on February 27, 2019.— AFP

tional took place when a West Germany team beat the Swiss 5-1 in 1982.

In 1974, the first sanctioned women's championships took place in Germany and Woerrstadt made it to the final, beating Gelsenkirchen 4-0 with Wohlleben scoring her team's superb third goal from a tight angle 20 metres out. She was soon in for a surprise. "I received a phonecall from Cologne, from the national (television) broadcaster, and was told my goal was chosen as the goal of the month for September - a woman had never won the award before," Wohlleben said.

"I didn't believe it - I thought it was nonsense." After some persuasion that it was not a hoax, she proudly received her medal in Cologne, but, 45 years on, she still chuckles at the questions she faced. "What does your husband think about it? Does he agree with it? Who looks after the home when you're playing?" "I told them, 'my husband can also cook, why shouldn't he?'"

"It was a different time, you have to remember that until 1977, German women were not allowed to work without the written consent of their husbands." Even in the twilight of her years, Wohlleben is still a strong personality with infectious enthusiasm - she claims to have never suffered directly from sexism as a footballer.

"Those watching laughed at the girls who were playing badly, but they had nothing to laugh at with me - I had been playing football for years with the boys and I had some talent." "There were some obscene expressions that were below the belt, but that just reflects the character of the individual, who behaves like that." —AFP

**25** Austrian ski star Hirscher undecided on retirement

**26** Bring on the World Cup, we fear no one: Afghan spin king Khan

**27** Gambling Germany boss Loew goes all-in ahead of Serbia friendly



## Nuggets top Celtics, seal playoff spot

Pacers fall at Portland for 10th straight time



BOSTON: Marcus Smart #36 of the Boston Celtics shoots the ball against the Denver Nuggets on Monday at the TD Garden in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

**BOSTON:** Nikola Jokic had 21 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists, and the Denver Nuggets beat the host Boston Celtics 114-105 on Monday night to clinch a playoff berth. Will Barton had 20 points, Gary Harris added 16 and Paul Millsap had 12 points and 11 rebounds for Denver, which is back in the postseason for the first time since 2013. The Nuggets (47-22) swept the season series from Boston and surpassed their win total from last season with 13 games to go. Denver needs just 10 wins to match the franchise record for a season set in 2012-13. Kyrie Irving led the Celtics with a game-high 30 points, and Al Horford scored 20. Boston played without Gordon Hayward, who left the Saturday game against the Atlanta Hawks with a neck strain.

**Spurs 111, Warriors 105**

DeMar DeRozan scored 26 points, and LaMarcus Aldridge added 23 points and 13 rebounds as San Antonio beat visiting Golden State for its ninth win in a row. The victory was the Spurs' 11th straight at home and guaranteed San Antonio (42-29) its NBA-record 22nd consecutive winning season. Rudy Gay added 17 points for the Spurs. Stephen Curry led the Warriors with

25 points, and Kevin Durant tallied 24 in his return to the lineup after missing the past two games with a sprained ankle.

**Pelicans 129, Mavericks 124 (OT)**

Dirk Nowitzki reached a milestone, but his Dallas teammates failed to make it a celebratory evening, blowing a four-point lead in the final 19.1 seconds of regulation as visiting New Orleans pulled out the overtime victory. Nowitzki made his first two shots, both trademark jumpers, in the opening four minutes to surpass Wilt Chamberlain as the NBA's sixth-leading all-time scorer. Julius Randle finished with a game-high 30 points for New Orleans, and Elfrid Payton recorded his fifth consecutive triple-double with 19 points (11 coming in the fourth quarter and overtime), 11 assists and 10 rebounds. Luka Doncic notched a triple-double for the Mavericks with 29 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists.

**Trail Blazers 106, Pacers 98**

Damian Lillard scored 30 points and dished out 15 assists as Portland downed visiting Indiana, which has lost nine of the teams' past 10 meetings and 10 straight on the Blazers' home court. Jusuf Nurkic con-

tributed 18 points and 11 rebounds, and Al-Farouq Aminu added 16 points for Portland, which has won four of five games overall. Myles Turner scored a season-high 28 points and grabbed 10 rebounds for the Pacers, who fell to 0-2 on a four-game road trip. Bojan Bogdanovich scored 15 points.

**Heat 116, Thunder 107**

Goran Dragic hit six 3-pointers and scored 26 points off the bench to lead visiting Miami, and Dwyane Wade scored 25 in his final game at Oklahoma City. James Johnson also added 14 points as Miami's reserves outscored Oklahoma City's 67-10. Dragic had 11 assists. Kelly Olynyk contributed 18 points and nine rebounds to help the Heat win for the seventh time in nine games. Oklahoma City was playing without Russell Westbrook, who was suspended after picking up his 16th technical foul of the season in a Saturday loss to the Golden State Warriors. Paul George led the Thunder with 31 points, and he grabbed nine rebounds.

**Jazz 116, Wizards 95**

Rudy Gobert had 14 points and 14 rebounds, and visiting Utah beat

Washington. Gobert, the reigning Western Conference Player of the Week, was 6 of 6 from the field and made 2 of 3 free throws. Donovan Mitchell scored 19 points and Jae Crowder added 18 for the Jazz. Ricky Rubio had 10 assists. Jabari Parker led Washington with 19 points, and Bradley Beal, the Eastern Conference Player of the Week, added 15 on 4-of-12 shooting.

**Raptors 128, Knicks 92**

Jeremy Lin scored 20 points off the bench, Pascal Siakam added 19 points and eight rebounds, and Toronto hammered visiting New York. Kyle Lowry added 15 points and eight assists for the Raptors before leaving the game with an ankle injury during the third quarter. He did not return to action. Fred VanVleet scored 13 points and handed out 12 assists for the Raptors, who have won all three meetings with the Knicks so far this season. Allonzo Trier scored 22 points for the Knicks while Kevin Knox added 12 points and Damyean Dotson added 11. New York lost for the ninth time in 10 games.

**Bulls 116, Suns 101**

Robin Lopez scored 24 points on 11-of-14 shooting to lead Chicago to a road win

over Phoenix. Zach LaVine contributed 17 points, eight rebounds and seven assists for the Bulls. Chicago snapped a five-game losing streak and won for just the second time in the past nine games. Lauri Markkanen added 17 points and nine rebounds, Kris Dunn scored 14 points and Cristiano Felicio had 10. Deandre Ayton scored 25 points on 12-of-17 shooting and also collected 12 rebounds, three steals and three blocked shots for Phoenix.

**Cavaliers 126, Pistons 119**

Rookie Collin Sexton poured in 27 points, including a go-ahead 3-pointer with less than two minutes left, and Cleveland beat visiting Detroit. Cedi Osman supplied 21 points and six assists for the Cavaliers, who had seven players score in double figures. Brandon Knight contributed 16 points, four rebounds and five assists, while Nik Stauskas led the Cleveland bench with 17 points. Marquese Chriss added a double-double with 10 points and 10 rebounds. Wayne Ellington scored 25 points to lead the Pistons, while Andre Drummond had 21 points and 21 rebounds. Pistons All-Star Blake Griffin sat out for just the third time this season. — Reuters

## FIFA Qatar 2022 plan would 'exacerbate' Gulf tensions

**DOHA:** FIFA President Gianni Infantino's plan to expand the Qatar World Cup to 48 teams and increase the number of host countries risks worsening existing Gulf diplomatic tensions, claim analysts. The ambitious expansion proposal—which Infantino has optimistically stated might help Middle East peace—could see the extra matches hosted in Kuwait and Oman in 2022.

But far from making a politically turbulent region more harmonious, analysts say FIFA's proposal could deepen

regional fissures and leave Kuwait and Oman, as well as Qatar, open to further political arm-twisting from the regional power bloc of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

"There is a very real risk that expanding the World Cup to include Kuwait and Oman would make these two countries vulnerable to the same sort of regional pressure Qatar has faced since 2017," said Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, a research fellow at Rice University.

"Particularly since Kuwait and Oman also have followed their own approaches to regional affairs." It could also foster resentment in those countries missing out on games, notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Ulrichsen added.

"The idea of a regional World Cup that includes Kuwait and Oman but not Saudi Arabia or the UAE would likely be a cause of considerable bitterness in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi."

Since June 2017, World Cup host Qatar has been blockaded by the Saudi-led countries in a bitter political spat, one of the worst Gulf diplomatic conflicts for years. Saudi Arabia and its allies, which also include Egypt,

accuse Qatar of promoting terrorism and being too close to Riyadh's great political and religious rival, Tehran.

Qatar denies its rivals' allegations and accuses them of seeking regime change in Doha. For 21 months—and counting—Saudi Arabia and its allies have imposed a political, economic and travel boycott around Qatar which shows few signs of easing.

Notably though, the blockading countries do not include the traditionally neutral Gulf states of Kuwait and Oman, which have been left to tread a politically precarious line. Andreas Krieg of King's College London, who has worked as an adviser to the Qatari government, said Kuwait and Oman "both have issues with Saudi and the UAE".

At the same time, Kuwait has been the regional negotiator in the crisis, while Oman is an economic winner from the conflict, its trade with Qatar jumping 240 per cent since 2016, according to Doha.

"The Gulf dispute as it exists would be further exacerbated by having a World Cup over three countries," added Krieg. He said FIFA proposals to share the Qatar World Cup with Kuwait and Oman would reinforce the

feeling that the Gulf has split into two competing blocs of three countries, with Saudi, UAE and Bahrain on the other side.

"From a political point of view, it [expansion] doesn't make sense." Even if Qatar is forced to share its World Cup, the first in the Middle East, it is unlikely to please Riyadh or Abu Dhabi, adds Krieg. "I don't see how Saudi and the UAE get anything out of that," he says.

Yet FIFA's plans to expand the 2022 World Cup appear to be gaining support among some football administrators. The results of a much-vaunted FIFA "feasibility study", announced at a meeting of football's governing body last week in Miami, backed expansion in Qatar.

"We came to the conclusion, yes it's feasible to move from 32 to 48 teams at the World Cup provided certain conditions are met," Infantino said, declaring himself "happy" with the finding.

A final decision will be announced in Paris in June, and while the expansion plan has been gaining a seemingly irresistible momentum, some remain unconvinced. Europe's governing body, UEFA, said expansion would create "many problems" and was "not realistic". —AFP