

Friday Times

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Time to diversify labor



Local Spotlight

By Muna Al-Fuzai

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Some people are arguing the increase in the number of expatriates is the cause of many problems in Kuwait, such as imbalance in the population, overcrowding on roads and rising unemployment among Kuwaitis. The list is long. I wonder if this is a problem, why doesn't anyone offer a solution?

Why don't we address this situation without harming or abusing the dignity and rights of expat workers in Kuwait regardless of their nationality and accusing them of being the reason of corruption and imbalance in the country? In this article, I have a proposal for this subject that I hope is considered!

I think the demographic issue needs to be reconsidered and amended so that citizens and expats have greater options. One way is by allowing Palestinians back into Kuwait, for example, especially young people such as doctors and engineers, while facilitating the entry of Sudanese and Yemenis, for instance, and others. The influx of youth will result in diversity in Arab nationalities and infuse new blood, especially in the medical and industrial sectors.

I recall former minister of social affairs and labor Hind Al-Sabeeh saying in a press statement in 2018 about her wish to bring skilled Sudanese to Kuwait's labor market. Any update on that? That's one wish of mine. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 left a great void that used to be filled by Palestinian brothers, especially in the medical and educational sectors. With the exit of this large number of workers from Kuwait, it was evident that Kuwait needed to fill their spots, whether in the government or private sector, and naturally the state tried to replace the Palestinians with various Arab, Asian and foreign nationals.

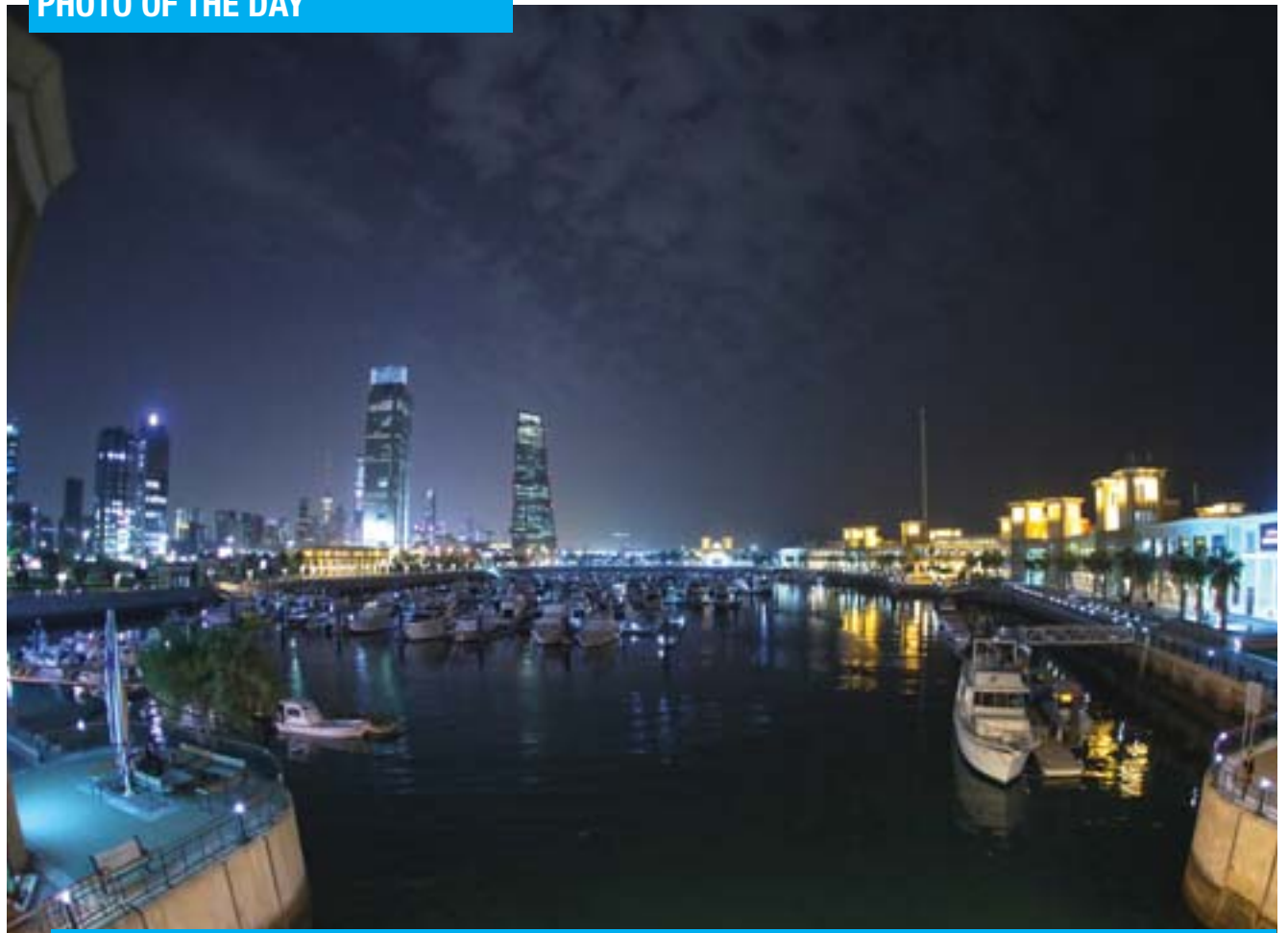
I believe that when debating the issue of imbalance in the population structure in Kuwait, we must consider that it is wrong to rely on one human element, whether Arab or Asian. Kuwaitis are about 30 percent of the population compared to 70 percent of expatriates. This large number of expatriates compared to citizens is normal in most Gulf countries, but the solution should not be at the expense of expatriate workers, whether Arab or others, because all expats came based on an agreement with an employer.

We know all about the government's statements about the so-called replacement plan with citizens, but this has a direct relationship with the issue of unemployment and is not a solution to modify the imbalance in population or improve the situation without any harm to the rights of employees.

I believe that adjustment in demographics needs amendment of laws that regulate the relationship between the worker and the employer. The problem is not in the text but in people and actual implementation, which leads to instability in the relationship between the two parties. Sometimes the reasons are due to the employer, who does not fulfill his obligations towards his employees, which results in many complaints submitted to the Public Authority for Manpower.

We need a strict legal and legislative system that regulates the labor market and work contracts between the parties in all fields concerning non-technical and non-specialized employment, which does not benefit the country, and bring in specialized technical labor that can help the country without political considerations over a certain nationality. It is time to change and diversify labor.

PHOTO OF THE DAY



KUWAIT: Kuwait City's high-rise buildings seen from Souq Sharq. — Photo by Joseph Shagra

Al Hambra Launches Weekend Buffet at the Avenues



Al Hambra Restaurant announces the launch of its unique and international weekend buffet at the Avenues that is inspired from all around the world and is aimed to allow the taste of our ingredients to speak to you for themselves and showcase you with an exceptional range of its authentic taste.

The Al Hambra restaurant - originating from the idea of Al Hambra Palace in Spain - takes you on a culinary world tour with international dishes that feature a wide variety of our fresh salads and appetizers such as; red quinoa and avocado, marinated beetroot, jarjeer and watercress, hummus, mutabal, sushi, shrimps and many more. As well as our delightful and flavorful dishes that includes murabbiyan, chicken and meat machboos, basmati rice, beef, and other options of your choice. A wide range of

lavishing desserts are also offered to you which includes a variety of different kinds of Arabic sweets, cheese cake, crème caramel, fruit salads, and many more.

The highlight of this buffet is not only its fresh flavors, but also its commitment to responding to the demands of our guests and satisfying their appetite with our wide variety of lavish options. We introduce to you our International Buffet starting with dinner on Thursdays, starting at 7:30 pm, brunch & dinner on Fridays, and lunch on Saturdays starting at 12:30pm.

Along with Al Hambra, Sheraton Kuwait offers you with a variety of its cuisines at the Avenues which includes; Le Tarbouche Lebanese cuisine, Shahrayer Iranian cuisine, Bukhara Indian cuisine and The English Tea Lounge where you can enjoy our Happy Hour offers while dining in.

CONDOLENCES

Kuwait Times Editor-in-Chief,
management and staff convey their
deepest condolences to

**Zamani and
Husseini families**

on the sad
demise of

Aisha Abdullah Al-Husseini

(Widow of Abdullah Asad Zamani)

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on her



KUWAIT: Photo captures Kuwait's landscape along the Arabian Gulf. In spite of the financial opportunities of living in Kuwait, foreign workers are struggling to cope with the high cost of living.

Expatriates struggle to make ends meet as hardship bites

By Chidi Emmanuel

It is always a solemn moment whenever Tina comes home and doesn't see her six-year-old daughter Rosaline. "Life without her is just empty," she said as she narrated her ordeal. According to Tina, life went from bad to worse when her husband lost his well-paid job last year. "Things became very hard for us. We could neither pay Rosie's school fees nor get her a nanny. So we decided to send her to my mother in Ghana. My husband is just managing as a sales representative and I am working in a salon. To keep Rosie here (in Kuwait), we need at least a studio apartment, an affordable school for her, renew her residency, etc. These are luxuries we cannot afford right now. I miss her a lot," Tina lamented.

In spite of the financial opportunities of living in Kuwait, foreign workers are struggling to cope with the high cost of living. Some expats are seeking ways to readjust to the harsh realities. These include moving to smaller apartments, sharing apartments, sending their families home and other cost-cutting measures. Another area that people find difficult are expenses related to raising children, as the overall cost of bringing up a child gets higher and higher every day.

With inflation at its highest level, driven primarily by rising

housing and utility costs, a lot of expats said they spend more on accommodation and groceries these days. From Fahaheel to Salmiya, there seems to be an unusual trend as most newly-completed apartment buildings remain empty. In some buildings in Maboula and Sabah Al-Salem, caretakers (haris) are offering one month's rent free in a bid to woo tenants. "I got a good bargain. At least the haris waived a month's rent (KD 250) for me - that's why we moved to Maboula," said Ruth Kadri, another Ghanaian expat.

As companies struggle with slower business and authorities impose more fees on foreigners, Kuwait's economy is losing some of its luster for expats who once flocked to the country. According to a recent report, the number of foreign workers dropped by around 0.3 percent in recent months. The good times for foreign workers in Kuwait, who for decades lived tax-free amid hugely subsidized utilities, may well and truly be over. The government has increased healthcare costs for expatriates. Unlike in the past, the health ministry is now passing the high

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costs of medical operations, equipment, medicines, laboratories and various medical supplies to expat patients.

Public hospitals and polyclinics in Kuwait are now collecting increased fees for services offered to expatriates. The new fees include KD 5 for visiting the emergency department at the general hospital; KD 10 for visiting outpatient clinics; KD 10 per day for inpatients; KD 30 for a stay in the intensive care unit (ICU); KD 50 for a private room and KD 200 as deposit, etc. As for maternity cases, KD 10 will be collected from patients per visit, in addition to KD 50 for a normal delivery.

“Expatriates are seeking ways to readjust to the harsh realities”

A tax-free income is one of the key benefits of living and working in Kuwait, but with changing financial circumstances, some foreign workers have decided to leave Kuwait for good. Expatriate salaries and benefits used to allow people to live a luxurious life and still save. But over the past few years, spikes in costs have taken away the feel-good factor from their lives.

Adams has sent his family back to Canada. “Things are not the same anymore here. I really can’t cope with the high cost of living here,” he said during a sendoff party his friends

organized for them. “First, I had to move from a three-bedroom to a two-bedroom and eventually to a one-bedroom apartment, but still there are school fees and medical bills to pay, which have skyrocketed over the last few years. At this point, I couldn’t manage it anymore, so I had to let them go,” he said in dismay.

Most expats in Kuwait are now forced to tighten their budgets as prices of commodities, medical fees, etc have gone up, with core living expenses such as housing, education, medical expenses and transportation fees showing no sign of going down. Eighteen years ago, Khalil Faisal left his family in Bangladesh to move to Kuwait. “My salary of KD 120 remained the same. I could manage then, but I can’t now because of the high cost of living. It is better for me to be with my family than to waste my whole life here,” he said before he left Kuwait for good a few months ago.

Another family forced out due to the financial crisis was of Ahmed Ibrahim. Just like Khalil, Ahmed said he could hardly save any money in the past three years. He had no other option than to relocate his family (wife and two teenage children) to Egypt, where he plans to open a business. “At least I can afford to pay the children’s school fees in Egypt,” he said.

Recent months have seen a surge in layoffs as companies cut costs. “I was told to quit as part of cost-cutting measures. I was a longtime employee of the company.” These are the words of Indian expat Sachin Sahaj, one among a number of expats who had their employment terminated last month.

According to recent reports, work contracts of 3,140 non-Kuwaitis serving in the public sector have been cancelled in recent months, Chairman of the Civil Service Commission (CSC) Ahmad Al-Jassar said. These contracts have been invalidated as part of the state’s policy of replacing expatriates with nationals in the government sector. The dismissed personnel served in various ministries, government departments and independent bodies. Jassar affirmed that these workers have been laid off in line with the state’s policy of Kuwaitizing jobs in the sector, as stipulated by CSC decision 11/2017, which exempted jobs in health sector.



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Kuwait, US dialogue focuses on

- US appreciates Amir's efforts to help reach settlement in GCC dispute
- Agreement to provide defense articles, training and materials to Kuwait

KUWAIT: Kuwait and United States held the Third United States-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue which mainly focused on enhancing their strategic partnership. The following is a press release on the talks, released under the title 'Enhancing Our Strategic Partnership':

The governments of the State of Kuwait and the United States held the third US-Kuwait Strategic Dialogue, the first such dialogue hosted in Kuwait, on March 20, 2019. US Secretary of State Michael R Pompeo and Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah co-chaired the opening session.

These dialogues produce concrete advances in our strategic partnership in defense, security, trade, investment, education, consular affairs, customs, border protection, and health issues. The dialogue builds on the September 2018 meeting between President Trump and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the White House and represents a year's progress of the Strategic Dialogue's working groups.

Our two countries took the opportunity of this Dialogue meeting in Kuwait to renew their shared commitment to promote the stability and security of the region. Secretary Pompeo expressed the appreciation of the American people for the outpouring of affection and tributes from the leadership of Kuwaiti people on the passing of President George HW Bush.

This dialogue process, begun in October 2016, has materially benefitted both nations; today, we are taking further steps to serve our peoples. Secretary Pompeo and Deputy Prime Minister Al-Sabah signed a document formalizing the structure of the Strategic Dialogue and affirming both countries' intent to continue broadening our relationships to meet mutual interests.

Extraordinary efforts

On political cooperation, the United States and Kuwait discussed the most pressing regional political issues, including the ongoing GCC dispute. The United States reiterated its appreciation for the Amir's extraordinary efforts to help reach a settlement, and the United States and Kuwait renewed their call for a resolution.

Our two countries share a common view of the need for GCC unity in effectively confronting the region's many challenges and in promoting a peaceful and prosperous future to the region. We discussed our productive coordination as members of the UN Security Council in 2018 and our priorities for the year ahead.

We look forward to continuing our close collaboration in the Council in 2019 to address issues affecting international peace and security, such as countering terrorism and the use of weapons of mass destruction.

The United States and Kuwait recognize the importance of the establishment of the Middle East Strategic Alliance among the United States, the GCC member states, Egypt, and Jordan.

Both countries welcomed the discussions on January 9 in Muscat, Oman, on the economic and energy pillars, and the consultations on February 21 in Washington, DC, on the political and security pillars of the Alliance. We look forward to further coordination on the establishment of the Alliance,

which will enhance multilateral cooperation between the United States and the participating States and address threats to our shared vital interests in regional stability, security and prosperity.

The United States recognizes the continuous efforts taken by Kuwait towards maintaining security and stability in Iraq, as well as supporting the Government of Iraq in the process of reconstruction, by hosting the Kuwait International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq on February 12-14, 2018, which resulted in \$30 billion in pledges to Iraq. We welcomed the constructive dialogue that took place at the Ministerial to Promote a Future of Peace and Security in the Middle East in Warsaw, Poland on February 13-14.

The United States appreciates Kuwait's significant contributions to peace and security in some of the world's most troubled regions and its willingness to serve as a key source of direct assistance to internally displaced persons, as well as to refugees hosted in other countries.

The United States welcomes Kuwait's recent announcements of additional humanitarian assistance for Yemen and Syria. The United States and Kuwait expressed their support for UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths and reiterated the need for all parties to implement the agreements reached in Stockholm during the December 2018 meeting and to continue working to advance the political process.

Particularly as co-members of the UN Security Council at this time, our delegations reiterated the need for the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 to help end the Syrian conflict and bring lasting stability to that country. We discussed and reviewed efforts to promote Middle East Peace and resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We also discussed other regional issues, such as Syria, Libya, and the destabilizing behavior of Iran. Both countries welcomed the February 6 ministerial meeting in Washington, DC, of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS/DAESH and reaffirmed the Coalition's commitment to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. Both countries called upon the international community to fully implement UN Security Council resolutions regarding North Korea.

Kuwait's security

On defense partnership, the United States reiterated its commitment to Kuwait's security. Today, both countries continue to work together closely to ensure that the Armed Forces of Kuwait are effectively equipped to defend their nation through the acquisition of US systems such as the F/A-18 Super Hornet and the M1A2 tank, and by expanding US comprehensive professional training programs.

We discussed our future defense cooperation and the priority of moving forward with modernizing the military facilities in Kuwait used jointly by our forces, as guided by our Joint Military Commission. We discussed future cooperation and the integration of our Armed Forces to enhance the defense of Kuwait in the most efficient and cost effective manner.

The Joint Military Commission will continue considering opportunities for such integration, which both sides agree will enhance the defense of Kuwait. The Kuwait and US defense partnership plays an important role in regional security and stability, and it extends to areas of combating terrorism and deterring external aggression.

The US appreciates Kuwait's efforts in hosting the Armed Forces Chiefs of Staff Meeting of GCC countries, Egypt, Jordan, and the commander of the US Central Command in September 2018. Kuwait and the US are looking forward to the multinational exercise "Eagle Resolve" to be held in Kuwait in 2020 with participation from GCC countries and the United States, to enhance the military capabilities and deterrence force.

Today, we signed an agreement that will allow the US Department of Defense to provide defense articles, training, including counter-terrorism training, and materials to Kuwait on a grant basis. Both countries welcome the recent dedication of the site of the National Desert Storm and Desert Shield War Memorial in Washington, DC, and look forward to the future opening of this memorial. It will commemorate and honor those who participated in the liberation of Kuwait through their active duty service in support of Operation Desert Storm and Operation Desert Shield.

With regard to security cooperation, the United States and Kuwait are strong partners in the fight against terrorism. Together, we are making the Kuwaiti and American people more secure. We agreed to expand this cooperation in order to thwart potential terrorist attacks. The United States reiterated its appreciation for Kuwait's cooperation and its facilitation of the effort to ensure a lasting defeat of ISIS. Both countries remain committed to take further steps to confront global terrorist threats and cut off the financing of terrorism.

Recognizing the benefits from combining our resources to defeat this scourge, our nations are taking specific steps to increase information sharing that will help deter terrorist attacks; our growing security cooperation seeks to deny refuge or sanctuary to terrorists and criminals.

Training of Kuwaiti prosecutors and regular workshops provided by the United States will help the Kuwaiti government bring those engaged in the support or financing of terrorism to justice. This collaboration will continue.

The United States welcomes Kuwait's future engagements in the US government's Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program, which have recently been agreed to by both countries.

In implementation of this agreement, the United States will provide training to Kuwait's law enforcement personnel to build their counterterrorism capabilities and skills.

High-risk travelers

Today, the United States and Kuwait completed agreements to improve our cooperation to identify high-risk travelers that threaten both countries' security. This will make all flights more secure.

The United States and Kuwait discussed the dangers to society posed by narcotics trafficking. We signed today a memorandum of cooperation to enhance the counter-narcotics cooperation between the US Drug Enforcement Administration and the Kuwaiti Drug Control General Department. This will enhance our ability to disrupt transnational criminal organizations.

The United States and Kuwait recognize the critical importance of cybersecurity and agreed on the need for close cooperation to prevent cyber threats. Cybersecurity cooperation between the United States- and Kuwait is growing across the public and private sectors.

boosting strategic partnership

The governments of the United States and Kuwait signed a Letter of Intent on Cybersecurity Cooperation in September 2018. Today, we discussed further avenues for this cooperation. Both sides look forward to enhanced collaboration, including joint efforts to fight cybercrime and to further an open, interoperable, secure, and reliable, cyberspace.

The United States welcomes Kuwait's decision to join the 24-7 High Tech Crime Network, which facilitates point-to-point contact for investigations involving electronic evidence that require urgent assistance from member nation law enforcement partners.

Trade and investment

On Trade and Investment, increasing trade and investment ties between Kuwait and the United States have contributed to the growing prosperity of both countries.

Two-way trade rose to more than \$8 billion in 2017. Bilateral investment positions remain strong. Other cooperative actions underway focus on better managing risks associated with travel and the trade in goods, preserving the integrity of financial transactions and raising the level of cybersecurity.

During the Strategic Dialogue, both countries pledged to seek ways to continue reducing barriers to trade and investment. Growing commercial relations between the United States and Kuwait complement our close official bilateral relations.

During the second annual US-Kuwait Economic Forum on January 14, the US Chamber of Commerce and the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry signed a memorandum of cooperation to foster collaboration between the two. The US Chamber of Commerce is preparing to launch a first-ever US-Kuwait Business Council, to be composed of corporate members from both countries.

On Tuesday, the US Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) held a roundtable with business leaders to discuss ways to increase trade and investment between the two countries.

These developments follow important business-to-business exchanges during the year, including Kuwait's strong participation at the Select USA Investment Summit in Washington, DC in June 2018, and Kuwait's successful Investment Outreach Roadshow in Silicon Valley in November 2018. Kuwait has been an active long-term investor in the US, mainly through the Kuwait Investment Authority where the majority of its investments are allocated in the US or in US dollars.

The United States recognizes the efforts of Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority in facilitating investment procedures in Kuwait. Kuwait Vision 2035 provides potential fertile ground for direct investment in Kuwait.

Today, our two sides signed a memorandum of understanding between the Kuwait National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development and the US Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration to promote innovation, entrepreneurship, and small business development. Formalizing this relationship supports Kuwait's effort to further develop the private sector and to diversify its economy. The United States and Kuwait welcome the recent agreement between Boeing and the Kuwait Direct

Investment Promotion Authority to deploy for the first time in Kuwait training solutions for the next generation of Kuwaiti pilots.

On Educational and People-to-People ties, education remains a solid building block of the US-Kuwait partnership and a lasting bond between our peoples. Five generations of Kuwaitis have studied in the United States. Both countries continue to encourage more Kuwaitis to join the nearly 10,200 Kuwaitis studying for academic credit, and an additional 2,500 in intensive English language institutes in the United States. These numbers are expected to rise.

We will continue to cooperate closely to prepare Kuwaiti students to succeed at quality US educational institutions, including through enhanced coordination in English language teaching and college admissions advising.

In recognition of the unparalleled quality and diversity of US institutions of higher learning, our two sides will endeavor to expand the number of US institutions and fields of study available to Kuwaiti scholarship recipients, and the number of universities in Kuwait with US affiliations. We also will work together to facilitate an increase in the numbers of US students and scholars studying or conducting research at universities in Kuwait.

People-to-people connections

In recognition of the importance of bilateral cooperation in the field of culture, the two governments signed a Statement of Intent to work together to enhance cultural understanding and people-to-people connections between the United States and Kuwait, in order to support the shared ideals of tolerance and appreciation for cultural diversity.

As a result of this Statement of Intent, both parties will encourage partnerships between US and Kuwaiti cultural institutions, professional exchange programs, a diverse range of cultural programs, and programs that support and engage youth.

During the 2017 Strategic Dialogue, the United States and Kuwait signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation in the field of higher education. That agreement has already resulted in many productive academic and professional exchanges.

In the next few months, a Fulbright Specialist in student advising for US college admissions will work with the Kuwaiti Ministry of Higher Education to ensure that Kuwaiti students have the most accurate and complete information about US institutions. The Kuwaiti Ministry of Education and the US Embassy will also be jointly funding an intensive English course for Kuwaiti public school teachers in spring 2020.

Finally, the US Embassy will fund a new afterschool English course for underprivileged students in Kuwait, beginning in fall 2019. During the dialogue, we also discussed opportunities for increased collaboration, training, and exchange between our countries in the fields of education and academic research.

The United States and Kuwait welcome the reinvigoration of the American Kuwaiti Alliance, which works to expand people-to-people exchanges, increase business, investment and trade, and foster cross-cultural understanding.

On consular Affairs, Customs, and Border Protection, we reaffirmed our commitment to the protection of our nationals in Kuwait and the United States and around the world, solid-

ifying our international obligations to provide consular notification and access to detained citizens and expanding our efforts to assist our citizens during crises.

The United States and Kuwait are working to improve our communication and partnership to prevent and resolve international parental child abductions according to the laws and regulations in both countries. Kuwait and the US affirmed their intention to establish a mechanism for prisoners' transfer.

Kuwait's National Assembly recently ratified our Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement to improve information sharing, training, and enforcement of our customs and immigration laws. The entry into force of this agreement marks a significant milestone in collaboration on security and trade facilitation between the two countries. We welcome the cooperation agreement signed in September 2018 between our two governments that set up efforts to prevent the trafficking of nuclear and other radioactive materials, and we recognize the importance of mutual training and exercises.

Visa reciprocity review

We also completed a comprehensive review of visa reciprocity to ensure fair treatment of our citizens in both countries. We also signed an agreement between KGAC and CBP that will enhance security and protect the international supply chains through data sharing that will identify high-risk cargo shipments.

Kuwait and the United States welcomed the recent resumption of the Kuwait Airways direct flight to New York City, this was done in coordination between our two governments. This will have positive effects on all fields including business and tourism.

The United States and Kuwait look forward to closer collaboration between the US Transportation Security Administration and the Federal Aviation Administration and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation. Kuwait reiterated its interest in becoming a pre-clearance border point to the United States.

On Health Cooperation, the United States and Kuwait are strengthening their bilateral relationship in the area of healthcare and healthcare management. We have begun negotiations on a memorandum of understanding between the Kuwait Ministry of Health and the US Department of Health and Human Services that will identify areas of mutual collaboration.

Looking ahead, the United States and Kuwait commit to further increasing cooperation in all of the areas of greatest practical benefit to our governments and to our peoples, as we formalized today in the signing of the overarching Strategic Dialogue agreement. Today, we set a roadmap for the advancement of our relations in the coming year.

Bilateral working groups will work together to: facilitate systems that will defend Kuwait; modernize jointly-used military facilities; extend information sharing and cooperation to thwart acts of terrorism, including the financing of terror; enhance cybersecurity; expand trade and investment; protect and enforce the intellectual property rights of Kuwaitis and Americans; broaden our educational and research linkages; cooperate to provide high quality, cost-effective health care; and facilitate travel procedures between our two countries. We look forward to making progress in these areas when the Dialogue meets next in the United States.— KUNA

- Agreement to identify high-risk travelers that threaten both countries' security
- Agreement to promote innovation, entrepreneurship, and small business development

Foreign Minister hails strong ties with Senegal

Kuwait looks forward to new govt in Senegal: Sheikh Nasser



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah cuts the cake during the ceremony. — Photos by Joseph Shagra



His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah is welcomed at the reception.

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah has lauded the strength of friendship bonds with Senegal. "They are a role model for friendly and brotherly relations between Arab and African nations," Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled told reporters on the sidelines of his participation in the Senegalese embassy's celebration of Senegal's national day. He recalled the West African country's support to Kuwait

during the Iraqi occupation in 1990s. "Kuwait will never forget Senegal's historic stances in the most delicate times particularly partaking in the Kuwait liberation war," he said.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled pointed out that the two countries, through the higher joint committee, were working to boost cooperation in various domains. He hailed Senegal's contribution for the success of the Kuwait-hosted Afro-Arab Summit in 2013. The diplo-

mat said that he was looking forward for the formation of the new Senegalese government after the recent elections. He wished Senegal more progress, stability and welfare.

Similarly, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said his country is looking forward to the formation of a new Senegalese government that could realize the aspiration of friendly people of Senegal for more stability and prosperity. Speaking

to reporters during the reception, HH Sheikh Nasser congratulated Senegalese President Macky Sall on his reelection. He expressed best wishes for the Senegalese leader, government and people, and congratulated Senegal on its Independence Day, to be celebrated on April 4. Senegal's national election commission announced on February 28 that President Sall won 58.7 percent of votes in the first round of voting. — KUNA

Official lauds Amir for sponsoring woman award

KUWAIT: A senior official has praised His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for sponsoring the national award for women of extraordinary achievements. Representative of His Highness the Amir and chairperson of the higher committee for Kuwait distinctive woman award, Maryam Al-Aqeel, said His Highness' patronization of the prize "affirms the sagacious leadership's keenness and care for bolstering woman's pivotal role and empowering her in various local and international sectors." Aqeel, also the Minister of State for Economic Affairs, said in a statement during a ceremony for distributing the award to winners of the prize that it "aims at building a platform of competition and positive integration."

Minister Aqeel added that the special

award "puts the excellent (females) in the limelight so that they may form basis for an international network for outstanding women and stimulating young ones to prove themselves and attain their societies' promotion." The activity was held at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center, one of Kuwait's key cultural landmarks, situated at a seaside district in Kuwait City. The launch of the award complements Kuwait's efforts and support for implementing the fifth objective of the United Nations sustainable development program, designed for attaining gender equality. Moreover, it encourages them to occupy leading posts, in line with New Kuwait Vision 2035 and the 2030 sustainable development agenda.

Dr Moudi Al-Humoud, the award deputy chairperson, declared names of the winners, from among 136 nominees representing 22 countries. Kyrgyzstan's former president Roza Otunbayeva won the first award in the category of public service. She was the first woman in her country to occupy the top post and had a record of contributions to reforms in diverse fields. Sheikha Aisha Al-Sayabiah, the head of the public authority for artifacts in the Sultanate of Oman, bagged the second ward, followed by engineer Hasniyah Hashem who had served as chair of the Kuwaiti



Maryam Al-Aqeel

Equate Petrochemical Company between 2016 and 2017.

Secretary General of Kuwait Red Crescent Society Maha Al-Barjas won the award in the section of civil society, followed by Director of Kuwait Center for Autism Dr Sameera Al-Saad. The third-degree award was earned by Dr Maali Al-Asousi, the director of Direct Aid Society's Yemen Bureau. The award for the private sector was earned by Chair of Savco Nour Al-Qutami and Dalia Badran, a media and business woman. — KUNA

German deputy speaker due in Kuwait today

BERLIN: Vice President of the Bundestag Thomas Oppermann has expressed his aspiration to seek to enhance relations with Kuwait during his visit to the country scheduled today. In a statement to KUNA on the planned mission's eve, Oppermann said that he planned to discuss means of cementing parliamentary relations between the two countries and exchange views with the Kuwaiti officials on issues of joint interest.

Oppermann expressed admiration of the wide-scale Kuwaiti parliamentary experience and Kuwait's balanced policies toward various regional and international issues. Kuwaiti Ambassador to Germany Najib Al-Bader said in a statement as he emerged from a meeting with the senior legislator that the latter's visit would be helpful for boosting co-operation in various domains. He added that the deputy speaker would meet during the visit with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, his deputy Essa Al-Kandari, and state officials for talks on means of bolstering the mutual cooperation for common interests. — KUNA

MP Hayef threatens ‘heavyweight’ grilling against Interior Minister

Expatriate labor shelter in good condition

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Islamist opposition MP Mohammad Hayef yesterday said he plans to file a “heavyweight” grilling against Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah unless he makes the necessary reforms. Hayef said he believes the grilling will be too “tough” that the minister will not be able to face and urged the minister to carry out the necessary reforms and halt violations.

The lawmaker said the grilling will be based on three issues: Security issues that include human rights violations and administrative and financial violations and a third issue that he said will only reveal when he files the grilling. If the minister does not take the necessary measures to start re-

solving the issues, the grilling will be filed in time to be on the agenda of the next session early in April, MP Hayef said. Earlier this week, 10 MPs filed a no-confidence motion against Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan following a marathon grilling over alleged financial and administrative violations.

Meanwhile, head of the assembly's human rights panel MP Adel Al-Damkhi yesterday praised the humanitarian conditions at the domestic helpers shelter in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, saying the conditions there are excellent. Damkhi said after an inspection visit to the shelter that some 400 domestic helpers are housed in there as they wait to be deported from the country. The lawmaker said the committee studied the conditions at the

center and recognized the shortcomings and these will be included in a report following meetings with concerned officials. He also called on authorities to try to cut the waiting period for laborers at the shelter and urged for resolving some humanitarian cases there.

In the meantime, head of the assembly foreign relations committee MP Abdulkarim Al-Kundari called on the foreign ministry yesterday to make a clear position towards the second murder of a Kuwaiti citizen in Egypt in the past four months. He said the ministry should openly explain the situation and if there was need to highlight the security conditions in Egypt and if there was a need to warn Kuwaitis against travel there. He said that the second victim was murdered



MP Mohammad Hayef

almost in the same place and under similar conditions and accordingly the



**Interior Minister Sheikh
Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah**

foreign ministry must issue a statement to explain the situation.

Worker dies in third case in as many days

By A Saleh, Meshaal Al-Enezi and Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: An Egyptian man was killed yesterday when he fell while working at a building under construction in Jabriya. Security sources said the person who called police reported hearing screams before he found the body on the first-floor stairs. A case was filed as 'suspected murder' and referred to the public prosecution for further investigations. This is the third fatal work mishap incident to be reported in Kuwait in the past three days. On Wednesday, a repair technician died after he fell from a window cleaning winch. A day before, a ceiling collapse at the site of a

mosque under construction killed three Egyptian construction workers in Nahdha.

Suicides

Security sources said two Indian men were found hanged in two separate incidents. A man was found hanging dead in an abandoned building in Mina Abdullah. The second man was found hanging dead from a tree behind a power transformer in Abu Halifa. Concerned authorities were contacted to deal with the incidents, as preliminary investigations indicate that the two cases are suicides.

Rape

A Pakistani boy recognized a policeman accused of kidnapping three children and raping one of them. The Pakistani said the same policeman raped him two months earlier. Detectives' investigations revealed new cases he might be involved in which suspects were not identified, including the case of the 13-year-old Pakistani.

108,594 illiterate expats in Kuwait

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Recent statistics showed that the total number of illiterate expatriates in Kuwait is 108,594, including 70,702 males (65 percent) and 37,892 females (45 percent). Statistics also showed that the total number of non-Kuwaitis older than 15 is 2,729,242, including 1,961,178 males and 768,064 females. Moreover, statistics said the illiteracy rate in Kuwait in 2017-2018 was 2.93 percent of the total population and 1.69 percent of Kuwaitis, compared to 2.98 and 1.8 percent respectively in 2016-2017, which reflects the state's interest in education, keenness on fighting illiteracy and increasing the cultural and educational level amongst the population.

Municipal services' fees

Kuwait Municipality Director Ahmad Al-Manfouhi stressed that discussing the proposal made to increase the fees collected for municipal services will take place within three months after passing special charters regulating municipality work. "There are no plans to discuss any new fees - what is being circulated on social media concerns an old study that had been referred to the financial department long ago," he underlined. Manfouhi said the first phase of the e-system will be launched by the end of this month, the 'Barayeh Salem' project will open next month and the municipality will soon sign contracts for Egaila, Abdullah Al-Ahmad Street and Jahra projects.

Manfouhi said Minister Fahd Al-Shola had formed a special committee to revise the municipality law and amend it. Responding to a question about cleaning contracts, Manfouhi said the new contracts worth KD 123 million will be signed soon, noting that the previous ones had cost KD 280 million. In addition, Manfouhi said that a meeting will be held next week with the Interior Ministry's undersecretary to discuss construction violations in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, 'bachelors' residing in family residential areas and securing municipal employees to avoid any assaults on them while doing their jobs.



KUWAIT: The traffic department announced that the Ghazali bridge from and to Shuwaikh port and the free zone will open today in cooperation with the Public Authority for Roads and Transport, as it will help the traffic flow in both directions. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun



Indian soldier kills 3 comrades in Kashmir

Burundi schoolgirls jailed for doodling on president's photo

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AKRE: An Iraqi Kurd holds lit torches in the town of Akra, 500 kilometers north of the capital Baghdad, during celebrations of Nowruz (Noruz), the Persian New Year. The Persian New Year is an ancient Zoroastrian tradition celebrated by Iranians and Kurds which coincides with the vernal (spring) equinox and is calculated by the solar calendar. —AFP

Dozens dead as ferry sinks in Iraq

Iraq's worst accident in years - over 72 killed • Amir sends condolences

MOSUL: A ferry packed with families celebrating Kurdish New Year sank in a swollen river in the former jihadist stronghold of Mosul yesterday, leaving at least 72 people dead in Iraq's worst accident in years. There was an outpouring of grief among residents who only recently resumed festivities on the banks of the Tigris after the northern city's recapture from the Islamic State group. The vessel was packed with men, women and children crossing the Tigris to go to a popular picnic area to celebrate Nowruz, the Kurdish New Year and a holiday day across the country.

HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday addressed a cable to Iraqi President Barham Saleh expressing sincere condolences on the deadly ferry accident. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the

Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to the Iraqi president.

While war and militant attacks have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives in Iraq in recent years, such accidents are relatively rare. "It's a disaster, no one expected that," said a young man who had just managed to reached the shore. "There were a lot of people on the boat, especially women and children," he told AFP. Seventy-one people died including 19 children, according to interior ministry spokesman Saad Maan, while 55 people were rescued. "The boat sank because there were too many passengers on board, more than a hundred," another security official based in Mosul told AFP. The health ministry said earlier that 33 women were among those killed.

The authorities had warned people to be

careful after several days of heavy rains led to water being released through the Mosul dam, causing the river level to rise. Videos shared on social media showed a fast-flowing, bloated river and dozens of people in the water around the partly submerged boat. Search operations were continuing hundreds of metres downstream from the site where the boat sank, according to an AFP journalist.

Hundreds of people who had flocked to the forested area for the first days of spring gathered on the river banks as the disaster unfolded. Ambulances and police vehicles transported the dead and wounded to hospitals in the city of nearly two million people. Photos of victims, many of them women and children, were posted on the walls of a morgue for families unable to enter because of the large crowd outside to identify their relatives. IS turned Mosul into

their de-facto Iraqi capital after the jihadists swept across much of the country's north. The city spent three years under the group's iron-fisted rule until it was recaptured by Iraqi troops backed by a US-led coalition in 2017.

Previously Iraq's last major boat disaster was in March 2013 when a floating restaurant sank in Baghdad, killing five people. Prime Minister Adel Abdel Mahdi put health services on alert and instructed all available teams to mobilize to find survivors after Thursday's accident. He ordered a swift investigation "to determine responsibilities". Former prime minister Haider Al-Abadi called for a period of national mourning. Several political leaders denounced the lack of safety at dilapidated leisure facilities in a country where the dismal state of public services was one of the triggers for widespread protests last year. — AFP

International

US Secretary of State Pompeo calls Hezbollah risk to Mideast stability

Top US diplomat on regional tour to push hard line on Iran

JERUSALEM: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo described Hezbollah on Wednesday as a risk to Middle East stability and conferred with Israel about the heavily armed, Iranian-backed Lebanese group ahead of a trip to Beirut. Pompeo, who has been on a regional tour to promote the Trump administration's hard tack against Iran, received a warning from Israel which worries it may again be in the sights of Hezbollah forces winding down their intervention in Syria's war.

Meeting Israeli President Reuven Rivlin in Jerusalem, Pompeo listed Hezbollah, Palestinian Hamas and Yemen's Houthis - all recipients of Iranian support - as "entities that present risks to Middle East stability and to Israel". "They are determined to wipe this country off the face of the planet and we have a moral obligation and a political one to prevent that from happening. You should know that the United States is prepared to do that," Pompeo said in public remarks at the meeting.

For its part, Israel has carried out repeated air strikes on Hezbollah in Syria, where the Shiite Muslim militia - along with Russian air power - helped President Bashar Al-Assad turn the tables against mainly Sunni Muslim rebels and militants. In a speech broadcast on the Persian new year yesterday, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the Islamic Republic had

successfully resisted "unprecedented, strong" US sanctions. Iran has faced economic hardship since US President Donald Trump withdrew last year from the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers and reimposed sanctions. Focusing his remarks on Lebanon, Rivlin told Pompeo that its prime minister, Saad Al-Hariri, "cannot say to anyone that Lebanon is separate from Hezbollah" - a reference to the group's political clout in Beirut where it has ministers in the government as well as lawmakers in parliament.

"If some(thing) will happen from Lebanon toward Israel, we will hold Lebanon as the responsible (party)", Rivlin said, speaking in English. Washington also has been increasingly voicing concern at Hezbollah power, echoing Israel, whose forces were fought to a standstill by the militia in a 2006 Lebanon war. Pompeo's visit to Jerusalem was widely seen in Israel as a boost for Netanyahu, who enjoys a close relationship with Trump, just three weeks before a closely contested Israeli election.

In a further signal of solidarity with Israel, Pompeo was later scheduled, accompanied by Netanyahu, to visit Judaism's Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City. In May 2017, Trump became the first sitting US president to visit the wall, but did not ask Netanyahu to join him. Seven months later, Trump broke with decades



JERUSALEM: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo prepares to touch the stones of the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City yesterday, during the second day of his visit as part of his five-day regional tour of the Middle East. — AFP

of US policy and recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, incensing Palestinians who claim the city's eastern sector as the capital of a future

state they seek. Last May, Washington moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Pompeo also visited the embassy yesterday. — Reuters

In Egypt, Nile islanders determined to stay put

WARRAQ ISLAND: Residents of a Cairo island with lush fields and unpaved roads, a world apart from Egypt's traffic-choked metropolis, are determined to stay put as judges rule on their possible expulsion. Accessible only by ferry, the island of Warraq stands in sharp contrast to the capital with more than 20 million inhabitants across the Nile.

But the government's growing interest in Warraq has stoked fear among the 100,000 islanders who make a living mostly from agriculture, fishing and crewing the ferries. "Why haven't they (the authorities) held direct negotiations between us and investors?" asked 40-year-old plumber Amr Khalifa. "We know full well that every inch of this island is worth gold."

In 2017, Egyptian authorities moved to demolish "illegal" buildings on Warraq as part of a campaign aimed at restoring state-owned land. The operation triggered violent clashes between residents and security forces in which at least one person was killed before the campaign was suspended. Rubble from the demolitions, however, remains as a warning to the islanders that their battle is far from over. On Saturday, the administrative court made up of Egypt's top judges is to rule on the residents' appeal against the government's decision to raze their buildings.

'We will not leave'

In a 2017 report, the government said Warraq, an agricultural area of 1,000 acres, had been "illegally encroached for more than 15 years and transformed into an informal residential area". Many of Warraq's residents insist they hold legal property contracts.

Sprawling slums have encircled Cairo over decades due to a dramatic population boom and economic hardship. The real estate market remains beyond the purchasing power of low and middle-income Egyptians. They have been hard hit by austerity measures including a currency flotation, slashing of subsidies and new taxes aimed at reviving Egypt's battered economy following its 2011 uprising. "We were expecting more development, not expulsion," said 32-year-old Abu Rawash Mohamed, a ferry owner, adding that curbs had been imposed on the entry of building materials. "If you ask any kid on a street here what this place means to them... they would say we will not leave this island," he said. "The government must understand... that on the island of Warraq we have a special nature," said "Captain" Abdel Fattah, a local benefactor. "There are strong ties between families on the island, nobody will abandon the other."

'Luxury projects'

The government has repeatedly denied it plans to expel the residents of Warraq to make way for a luxury investment project. Last April, however, the cabinet decreed the transfer of Warraq to the New Urban Communities Authority which operates under the housing ministry. The move was billed as part of a plan to develop the island in cooperation with the armed forces engineering authority, which is tasked with building grand hotels and tower blocks. The authority is also leading the construction of a new administrative capital east of Cairo. Warraq residents are adamant they will not quit the island. "The government wants us to leave this beauty... But where will we go?" asked Mohamed.

On the facades of a building, the graffiti reads: "The island is not for sale". The fate of the islanders has drawn the attention of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, Leilani Farha. "The government has expressed an interest in initiating luxury developments throughout Cairo," she said in October after a visit to Egypt. "There is concern that the island... will fall prey to this vision." She has since criticized "new expropriations and home demolitions", triggering charges from the government of "unfounded allegations" over its housing policies. — AFP

Morocco's Christians urge religious freedom ahead of visit by Pope

RABAT: Morocco's Christian minority yesterday called on authorities in the Muslim-majority country to guarantee religious freedoms, ahead of a visit by Pope Francis. The Co-ordination of Moroccan Christians, a group representing converts to Christianity in a nation that is 99 percent Muslim, appealed for "basic freedoms of which we, Moroccan Christians, are still often deprived."

These include freedom of public worship as well as the right to have church or civil weddings and Christian funeral rites and education, it said in a statement. "We dream of a free Morocco" which embraces religious diversity, the group said, adding that it hopes Pope Francis's visit this month will be a "historic occasion" for the country.

"We also call on the Moroccan authorities to no longer put pressure on the country's official churches, including the Catholic church in Morocco, to dissuade them from accepting converts to Christianity, the statement said. The pontiff is due to visit the North African country on March 30-31 at the invitation of King Mohammed VI. More than 40,000 Christians - mostly foreigners - are estimated to live in Morocco, whose king describes himself as the "commander of the faithful". Religious pluralism is enshrined in the constitution and freedom of worship is guaranteed, according to the Moroccan authorities. — AFP

International

Ghana, Togo and Benin on alert against jihadist threat

Rising militant activity has been detected

LAGOS: An alarming rise in jihadist attacks in Burkina Faso is posing a mounting threat to security in three of its coastal neighbors, according to security sources and analysts. Benin, Ghana and Togo have so far been spared the Islamist violence that has hit their landlocked neighbor since 2015 – a fallout from instability in Mali, a haven for groups linked to Al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State group.

Yet the speed at which violence has spread in Burkina Faso has taken many by surprise. In recent months, attacks have occurred in the eastern region, which borders Benin and Togo, sparking fears that the jihadist bushfire in the Sahel is heading towards the coast. Security fears have increased since the killing of four Burkinabe customs officials and a Spanish priest who was returning from a meeting in Togo's capital, Lome. They were killed just after crossing the border.

Bakary Sambe, the head of the Timbuktu Institute in Senegal's capital, Dakar, said the upsurge in violence "seems to indicate that Burkina Faso is the last obstacle that these groups want to get over to reach the coast". Northern Ghana, Togo and Benin could become "ideal staging points" for jihadists hiding in forested areas or isolated rural locations along the porous border,

he added. "What's more, stretching their area of operations far from the current epicenter of jihadism could allow them access to the sea via west African ports" and possibly new networks for acquiring weapons, he told AFP.

Border activity

Ghana and Togo went on high alert against attacks after gunmen from Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) killed 19 people in the Ivorian resort of Grand-Bassam in March 2016. In the W Regional Park, which straddles Benin, Niger and Burkina Faso, rising militant activity has been detected in recent years. The Thomas More Institute, a European think-tank, said this month that "fighters from Mali reportedly conducted a reconnaissance operation in 2014-2015 reaching as far as Benin". In December last year, four alleged jihadists from Burkina Faso, Mali and Ivory Coast were arrested in Mali on suspicion of preparing to attack New Year celebrations. Other sources point to "recent incursions of small groups" from

Burkina Faso to villages in northern Togo and Benin, where locals have been asked to stop selling alcohol. Radical messages have also been preached in mosques, they added. Burkina Faso, Ghana, Togo and Benin last year conducted joint operations against banditry and cross-border criminality, leading to the arrest of more than 200 people. Several were suspected of jihadist activities.

One senior Togolese security official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said military reinforcements had been sent to the north since the Spanish priest was killed. He gave no further details but said of the security situation in Burkina Faso: "The threat is real. Everyone is on the alert." The Togolese and Beninese security forces are working in close collaboration with the Burkinabe.

"Patrols have been organized regularly in recent times in border villages, especially at night-time," Ghana Army spokesman Colonel Eric Aggrey Quarshie said the military was "on top of" protecting the northern border. "Everything

is under control," he added, without elaborating. But Ghana's National Disaster Management Organization said it was beginning to see the effects of violence in Burkina Faso. In recent weeks, more than 300 people, including 176 children, have sought refuge in the Bawku area of northeast Ghana.

Breeding ground

Most attacks in Burkina Faso go unclaimed but are blamed on Ansarul Islam, the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (JNIM) or the Islamic State in the Greater Sahel (ISGS). Ansarul Islam emerged near the Mali border in December 2016. The JNIM has sworn allegiance to AQIM, while ISGS was behind the deadly ambush of US troops in western Niger in 2017.

Rinaldo Depagne, West Africa project director at the International Crisis Group, said the exact nature of the relationship between these groups and others was unclear. But he said the militants were exploiting the "weak link" – the government in Ouagadougou, which does not have the means to confront the problem on its own. "The increase in fronts allows them to avoid the military response from Western armies and forces of the G5 Sahel group (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad)," he added. — AFP



Mali, a haven for groups linked to Al-Qaeda and IS

Old foes, millennials stand in way of Thai junta polls victory

CHAIYAPHUM: Thailand holds its first election in eight years on Sunday under rules concocted by a junta to keep it in power, but with the appeal of both old foes and the new millennial vote posing an unpredictable challenge. The junta seized power in 2014, vowing to rescue the country from a treadmill of coups, short-lived civilian governments, and protests. But the kingdom goes to the polls on March 24 as divided as ever. The arch-royalist army has no intention of leaving politics and has scripted a constitution that gifts it a foothold in power for a generation.

Standing in its way are supporters of its nemesis, ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra, who has dominated Thai politics since his first election win in 2001. He was toppled by an earlier coup in 2006, but his affiliated Pheu Thai party taps a deep seam of loyalty from the poor but populous rural north and northeast. Thousands of rice farmers gathered in a school yard earlier this week for a Pheu Thai rally in rural Chaiyaphum, applauding promises of better times ahead under an elected government and whistling disapproval at every mention of the junta.

"We still love Thaksin... we want him to come back," 65-year-old Lamoon Moorsorping told AFP. Shinawatra-allied parties hope to win a comfortable majority of the 500 elected seats up for grabs across a country wearied by junta rule. But Sunday's vote is the first under new rules that mean winning the popular vote does not automatically translate into leading a government, or choosing the next prime minister.

Instead, 250 junta-appointed senators are poised to play a key role in shaping the next administration. With the senate onside, the junta-linked party needs just 126 elected seats to secure a par-



CHAIYAPHUM: Pheu Thai party candidate for Prime Minister Sudarat Keyuraphan (center) speaks during a rally in Chaiyaphum province, ahead of the March 24 general election. — AFP

liamentary majority – setting up a potential collision over a denied mandate. "Forming a government and governing will be different," warns Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a political scientist at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University. "We will probably see some kind of deadlock... that will lead to some kind of constitutional crisis."

With days to go, election fever has gripped much of a country starved for nearly five years of political expression. Advance voting last Sunday saw a near 90 percent turnout, while acerbic commentary, memes and satirical swipes are pinballing across social media. More than seven million millennials are eligible to vote for the first time, most unencumbered by old political loyalties – injecting uncertainty into the outcome. Sunday's poll will essentially be a "vote on the military" said Thailand expert and historian Chris Baker. —FP

Pakistan convicts 2 over blasphemy lynching case

PESHAWAR: A Pakistani anti-terrorism court sentenced two men, including a local government official, to life in prison yesterday for their role in the brutal campus lynching two years ago of a university student accused of blasphemy. Mashal Khan, 23, was attacked and killed by a mob on the campus of a university in Mardan, in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, following a dormitory debate about religion.

In February last year the court convicted 31 people, sentencing one person to death, while acquitting 26 others. A joint investigation team had later found the blasphemy allegations against Mashal Khan to be false. Outrage over the killing raised concerns about the misuse of Pakistan's draconian blasphemy laws, which stipulate the death sentence for insulting Islam or the Prophet Muhammad. Yesterday the court sentenced two more men to life imprisonment, while acquitting two others.

Arif Khan, a local government official who had been a member of Prime Minister Imran Khan's ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, was convicted for provoking and participating in the lynch mob. The court ruling noted two videos in which Khan is seen "torturing Mashal" and "congratulating his co-accused for committing the murder". Khan's grave continues to be guarded by police, due to fears that it will be defaced by religious hardliners despite his name being cleared of blasphemy. —Reuters

Qatar asks IAEA to intervene over 'threat' posed by UAE nuke plant

IAEA urged to create regional safety framework

PARIS: Qatar has called on the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to intervene in a dispute over a \$24 billion nuclear power plant which the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is building. Relations between Qatar and its neighbor are already strained after the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Bahrain severed diplomatic, trade and transport ties with Doha in June 2017 over allegations that it supports terrorism, a charge Qatar denies.

In a letter to the IAEA, which was seen by Reuters, Qatar says the Barakah plant poses a serious threat to regional stability and the environment and calls for a framework to ensure the safe operation of nuclear energy in the Gulf. Qatar said that a radioactive plume from an accidental discharge could reach its capital Doha in five to 13 hours and a radiation leak would have a devastating effect on the region's water supply because of its reliance on desalination plants.

"Qatar believes that the lack of any international co-operation with neighboring states regarding disaster planning, health and safety and the protection of the environment pose a serious threat to the stability of the region and its environment," the letter from Qatar's Foreign Affairs ministry to IAEA Director General Yukiya

Amano said. Qatar also said that the technology is relatively untested as there is only one other commercial reactor of this type in operation in South Korea. The UAE said on Wednesday that its nuclear energy program conforms to IAEA standards and international best practices. "The United Arab Emirates ... adheres to its commitment to the highest standards of nuclear safety, security and non-proliferation," Hamad Al Kaabi, UAE Permanent Representative to the IAEA, said in a statement to Reuters. He added that Barakah, the Arab world's first nuclear plant which was originally set to come online in 2017, was now expected to begin operation by 2020. The IAEA, a Vienna-based organization which is the world's top nuclear safety authority, declined to comment on exchanges with its member states. Qatar said regional concerns about nuclear safety will be amplified when the Saudi Arabian civil nuclear program comes on stream. The Kingdom has invited bids from the world's top nuclear firms to build reactors.

Further delay

The UAE's Nawah Energy Company said in May 2018 that Barakah, the world's largest nuclear plant under construction, should start operations between end 2019 and early 2020.

Barakah is being built by Korea Electric Power Corporation (KEPCO), but problems with training enough local staff have delayed the startup of its first reactor several times and in November Nawah signed a deal with French utility EDF to operate the plant.

Since the 1986 Chernobyl accident, when a Russian-design reactor in Ukraine spread radiation over large parts of Europe, the potential cross-border impact of nuclear accidents has

led to several disputes between neighbors. Earlier this month, the Barakah plant's owner Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation (ENEC) said voids had been discovered in the concrete of reactors 2 and 3, although it said these posed no safety risk and would not delay the start-up. The repair works on the third reactor were due to be completed by the end of last year, while the UAE's FANR regulator reviews plans to repair smaller voids in unit 2. — Reuters

Palestinian shot dead after stone-throwing at Israeli cars: Medics

JERUSALEM: A Palestinian was shot dead late Wednesday in the occupied West Bank, Palestinian medical sources said, with the Israeli army saying a soldier opened fire after Israeli cars were stoned. The Palestinian health ministry said Ahmed Manasara, 26, was shot dead near a checkpoint close to Bethlehem, without providing further details. The Israeli military said that a soldier had "opened fire after identifying rocks being thrown at Israeli vehicles." "The incident will be examined," the army said

in a statement yesterday.

Official Palestinian news agency Wafa said Manasara was in the car when he was shot dead, with another Palestinian in the car seriously wounded. Manasara's death comes a day after two Palestinians were killed in clashes near Nablus as tensions in the West Bank rose ahead of the April 9 general elections in Israel. Palestinian attacks against Israeli soldiers and settlers occur sporadically in the West Bank, under Israeli occupation since the 1967 Six-Day War.— AFP



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Desperate for votes, May angers lawmakers in Brexit blame-game

UK PM seeks short extension to March 29 deadline

LONDON: Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday faced a backlash after blaming lawmakers for the Brexit chaos gripping Britain—the very people she hopes will finally approve her withdrawal deal. May made a rare address to the public on Wednesday, putting the onus on MPs to break the deadlock with just eight days to go until Britain is officially due to leave the European Union.

“You the public have had enough. You’re tired of the infighting. You’re tired of the political games and the arcane procedural rows,” she said. “Tired of MPs talking about nothing else but Brexit. You want this stage of the Brexit process to be over and done with. I agree. I am on your side. It is now time for MPs to decide,” she added.

May is in Brussels to ask for a short extension to the March 29 deadline, with a third vote on her unpopular deal expected in parliament next week. She lost the two previous votes by majorities of 230 and 149, but did little to win over MPs by portraying them as being against the public. “Her speech was incendiary and irresponsible,” said Labor MP Wes Streeting. “If any harm comes to any of us, she will have to accept her share of responsibility.” Labor colleague Lisa Nandy, a Brexit supporter who has previously suggested she was open to May’s deal, called the comments “dangerous and reckless”.

‘I could have wept’

Pro-EU backbencher Dominic Grieve led the Conservative backlash, criticizing a similar speech made by May in the House of Commons earlier in the day. The former attorney general is one of those the premier is trying to win over to vote for her deal, but said he had “never felt

more ashamed to be a member of the Conservative party, or to lend her my support.” “When the prime minister came to despatch box today... I confessed I think it was the worst moment I have experienced since I came into the House of Commons,” he said.

“She spent most of her time castigating the House for its misconduct and at no stage did she pause to consider whether it is in fact the way she is leading this government which might be contributing to this situation. ‘I have to say I could have wept.’”

Anand Menon, professor of European politics at King’s College London, told BBC Radio London that it was “strange” for May to court MPs by “abusing them”. Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt defended his leader, telling BBC Radio 4 yesterday that “no prime minister in recent years has been tested in the way that she has.” “Let’s not forget the extraordinary pressure she is personally under,” he said.

‘Brexit paralysis’

May has not ruled out any outcome, including leaving with no deal and also cancelling Brexit altogether, apparently in the hope that hardliners on both sides will drop their opposition in order to prevent their worst-case-scenarios from being realized. But MPs and cabinet members have instead capitalized on May’s weakness, with government ministers on both sides threatening mass resignations.

Some pro-EU ministers have said they would quit if she proceeded with plans to leave without a deal, forcing May to hold a symbolic parliamentary vote on ruling it out. Brexit-backing ministers this week threatened to walk out if she asked the EU for a long delay to the Brexit dead-

line, forcing her to limit her request to Brussels for an extension until June 30.



BRUSSELS: (From left) Luxembourg’s Prime Minister Xavier Bettel, Netherlands’ Prime Minister Mark Rutte, Belgium’s Prime Minister Charles Michel, President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker and Britain’s Prime Minister Theresa May talk to each other yesterday in Brussels on the first day of an EU summit focused on Brexit. — AFP

line, forcing her to limit her request to Brussels for an extension until June 30.

Conservative MP Nigel Evans said that if May couldn’t deliver Brexit on time “she has to go”, suggesting that MPs were hardening against May ahead of the possible vote. But ministers loyal to the prime minister remained con-

fident that May could still win the day, despite her personal unpopularity. “Right now the choice is do we resolve this or do we have Brexit paralysis?” Foreign Secretary Hunt told the BBC. “I think it’s entirely possible when people look at the choices... people will say actually what the country wants is to get on with it.” —AFP

Woman sues Harvard University over ‘slave ancestor’ pictures

NEW YORK: A US woman who says she is descended from slaves who were photographed in 1850 by a racist Harvard University professor on Wednesday sued the university over the “exploitation” of the images of her ancestors. Tamara Lanier filed suit in the northeastern state of Massachusetts over the photographs taken in South Carolina of a slave and his daughter, known only by their first names: Renty - the patriarch of her family - and Delia.

The images, thought to be the earliest known photographs of American slaves, are currently in a museum at the university near Boston. They were commissioned by Swiss-American Harvard scientist Louis Agassiz, a white supremacist theorist who also worked on glaciers. Renty and Delia were forced to pose naked, “without consent, dig-

nity or compensation” as the professor sought to “prove” black people’s inherent biological inferiority,” Lanier, of Connecticut, said in the suit.

While several US universities have recognized in recent years their ties to slavery, Lanier accuses Harvard of having “never reckoned with that grotesque chapter in its history, let alone atoned for it.” She also accused the university of working to “sanitize the history of the images and exploit them for prestige and profit,” and denounced the use of Renty’s image on a cover of a \$40 anthropology book it published in 2017.

In rejecting Lanier’s claim of lineage and her attempt to recover the photographs, the suit claims Harvard is “perpetuating the systematic subversion of black property rights” and “capitalizing on the intentional damage done to black Americans’ genealogy” through policies such as forced family separation, the erasure of slaves’ family names, withholding records and criminalizing literacy. Lanier is demanding Harvard - among other things - immediately give up the pictures to her, acknowledge her lineage and that “it was complicit in perpetuating and justifying” slavery, and pay unspecified damages. Harvard refuse to comment on the suit, except to say that it had not yet been served. —AFP

Burundi school girls jailed for doodling on president’s photo

NAIROBI: Three teenage schoolgirls in Burundi have been sent to prison to await trial for scribbling on a picture of President Pierre Nkurunziza in textbooks, activists said yesterday. The girls, aged 15, 16 and 17, face up to five years in prison for insulting the head of state if found guilty. Judges said the three girls should be “prosecuted for contempt of the head of state”, and ordered them to a juvenile section of a prison in the north of Burundi at Ngozi to await trial, said FENADEB, a civil society umbrella group of 48 organizations.

The trio has been in custody since March 12, when they were arrested with three other schoolgirls and a 13-year old boy. The boy was released immediately because he was below the age of criminal responsibility, while the three girls were released without charge. The girls are accused of

defacing photographs of Nkurunziza in five textbooks belonging to their school, but teachers pointed out that the books are shared among all the pupils as there are not enough for everyone to have their own. A judicial source, who called the case “very sensitive” and said it was overseen directly by the Attorney General, reported that the girls arrived at the prison on Wednesday afternoon.

It was not clear when they might face trial, but the father of one of the girls said they were already “too scared to eat”, according to Lewis Mudge, from Human Rights Watch (HRW). In 2016, several schoolchildren were handed prison sentences for similar scribbles on the president’s face, and hundreds of pupils expelled, sparking an international outcry. Burundi has been in turmoil since Nkurunziza in April 2015 sought a fiercely-contested third term in office.

The violence has claimed at least 1,200 lives and displaced more than 400,000 people between April 2015 and May 2017, according to estimates by the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has opened an investigation. “With so many real crimes being committed in Burundi, it’s tragic that children are the ones being prosecuted for harmless scribbles,” HRW’s Mudge added. “Authorities should focus on holding perpetrators of serious rights violations to account instead of jailing schoolchildren for doodles.” — AFP

International

‘Don’t cry’: Celebration trumps pain at funeral in Christchurch

New Zealand buries victims of mosque massacre

CHRISTCHURCH: Heads bowed, their hair covered by black headscarves, female family members of Mohemmed Daoud Nabi gently wept as they approached his body until a fellow mourner called out “Don’t cry.” It was a refrain heard repeatedly throughout the short, emotional funeral for 71-year-old Nabi, one of 50 people slain by a white supremacist gunman in Christchurch last Friday during a live broadcast rampage that caused global revulsion.

Those bidding farewell to the septuagenarian were determined to send out a message. This was a day of celebration, not of loss. Nabi was the man who unknowingly opened the door to his killer at the city’s Al Noor mosque, reportedly welcoming him with the words “Hello Brother”. And that was the memory those laying him to rest wanted to broadcast yesterday.

Huddled together under a marquee on a grey

and blustery day, Nabi’s sons recited prayers in Dari and Arabic as the former head of their family lay in a wooden casket at their feet. “Those who live abroad and die or killed there will go to paradise,” one of the sons said, a reference to Nabi’s journey two decades before from war-torn Afghanistan to his adopted homeland New Zealand. “He was killed in a mosque in a house of God. He was a true servant. He was a pious person,” he added.

After prayers mourners carefully lifted the casket aloft and carried Nabi towards the newly dug grave at Memorial Park Cemetery, one of dozens for victims of the massacre. Those gath-

ered were a reflection of the breadth of the community affected by Friday’s massacre, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, bikers, refugees, young families—all touched by Nabi and the warmth he showed. Some held placards advocating peace and tolerance. Some sported those now two ubiquitous words: “Hello Brother”.

As Nabi’s body, wrapped in a white shawl, neared the grave, quietness descended over the crowd. Family and close friends then gathered to pour earth from plastic buckets into the open casket. Stretching out across the cemetery were row upon row of empty graves still waiting to be

filled in the coming days. It was a stark reminder of the sheer scale of the killings, 50 dead among a small, tight-knit community in a town with a population of some 350,000 people. Yet the mood in the compound remained joyous and steered away from despair.

Heavily tattooed biker gang members mingled with men wearing Afghan dress, non-Muslims and smartly dressed community leaders, embracing, sharing memories and stories. A long line of mourners took turns to hug Nabi’s sons. “I’m happy because he went straight to Jannah (paradise),” Omar Nabi said. “The gunman didn’t even know he opened the gates to heaven for my dad. He is laughing at him and smiling at us... Have you ever congratulated anybody for a death? This is the time and this is the place. Don’t cry. Don’t be sad. Congratulations. Your father made it to heaven.” —AFP

“ He was killed in a mosque in a house of God ”

Italy in shock after bus hijack inferno

CREMA: Italy was in shock yesterday after the dramatic rescue of 51 children taken hostage by their school bus driver who torched the vehicle in protest at Mediterranean migrant deaths. The Italian driver of Senegalese origin on Wednesday hijacked the bus as it was taking the 12-13 year-olds from a gym to school in Crema, east of Milan.

Armed with two petrol canisters and a cigarette lighter, Ousseynou Sy threatened the youngsters, took their telephones and told the adults to tie them up with electric cable. The 40-minute ordeal, during which the bus also slammed into a car, was brought to an end when police managed to smash windows open and get those onboard out just as the driver set fire to the vehicle.

A dozen children and two adults were taken to hospital for smoke and fume inhalation, according to emergency services. “It’s crazy, absurd, it’s unacceptable. Someone has to pay, and dearly,” said Filippo Razzini, the father of a pupil at the school in the small town of Crema who was not on the bus. “It’s good to go back to school today because unfortunately these things are today a reality. But if it were up to me I’d be out there waiting for this guy somewhere,” he said.

The driver’s lawyer said his client had wanted to “draw attention to the consequences of (Italy’s) migration policies”. Italy has clamped down on immigration under far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, demanding it close its ports to charity vessels rescuing migrants who are



CREMA: Italian Carabinieri policemen stand guard outside the ‘Giovanni Vailati’ secondary school as pupils arrive for class yesterday in Crema, east of Milan. —AFP

trying to cross the Mediterranean. “This villain has to pay for everything,” said Salvini, whose League party is riding high in the polls in part because of its tough anti-migrant stance. He said Sy’s citizenship could be revoked if convicted of terror under a tough security decree introduced last year.

‘Lone wolf’

The Milan police anti-terrorism unit has been charged with investigating the hostage-taking, during which Sy reportedly told students: “No one is getting out of here alive.” Police were alerted to the situation after one of the students held on the bus called them from his mobile phone. The incident has shaken Crema’s community.

“My daughter was in shock yesterday, she said ‘Mummy, I could have been there too’,” parent Luisa Ginelli said yesterday. The driver had no links with Islamic terrorism and “acted as a lone wolf”, Alberto Nobili, head of counter-terrorism at the

Milan public prosecutor’s office, told a press conference. Nobili said yesterday that Sy had planned the hijack over several days and “wanted the whole world talking about his story”. He posted a video on YouTube to explain his actions and call on relatives and friends in Crema and Senegal to take action, saying: “Africa-arise.”

Sy got his Italian nationality and job in 2004 and managed to keep subsequent convictions for drink driving and sexual assault of a minor secret from his employer, the Corriere della Sera newspaper reported. A neighbor told La Stampa newspaper that he was known as “Paolo”. “That’s what we called him because his name was too complicated. I saw him go out every morning, he drove a bus. A quiet man but solitary,” she said. Colleagues told Italian media that Sy’s separation from his Italian wife, with whom he has two teenage children, was “when his problems started.” —AFP

New Zealand bans assault weapons, triggering similar calls in the US

WELLINGTON: New Zealand imposed an immediate ban on assault weapons yesterday, taking swift action in response to the Christchurch massacre and triggering renewed calls from leading American politicians for curbs in the United States. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said assault rifles and military-style semi-automatic weapons would be banned with immediate effect, making good on a pledge to ensure that nothing like last week’s slaughter of 50 people ever occurs in the Pacific nation again.

The killings by an Australian white supremacist have caused national soul-searching over New Zealand’s lax gun laws. But the tough crackdown promises to have political repercussions beyond the country’s shores, including in the United States where gun control is one of the most divisive political issues.

“In short, every semi-automatic weapon used in the terrorist attack on Friday will be banned in this country,” Ardern said. She added that high-capacity magazines and devices similar to bump stocks—which allow users to fire weapons faster – will also be banned. Proponents of gun control in the United States and around the world praised the move and denounced the US pro-gun lobby on social media, while American gun supporters defended their constitutional right to bear arms.

‘Follow NZ’s lead’

“This is what real action to stop gun violence looks like,” Democratic US Senator and presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders tweeted. “We must follow New Zealand’s lead, take on the NRA (National Rifle Association) and ban the sale and distribution of assault weapons in the United States.” High-profile Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez contrasted the swift ban with US failure to enact even modest controls following recurring deadly shootings such as the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut in 2012, in which 20 children and six school staff died. —AFP

International

‘When is it going to stop?’ Marital rape victims ask

In US, Nepal, UK, S Africa, it is a crime for a husband to rape his wife

KUALA LUMPUR: When Neelambika’s husband slapped her, she decided to end their marriage, but this only made him angrier and he began to repeatedly rape her while she tried to sleep on the sofa – which is legal in Malaysia. Neelambika, 60, a part-time teacher with one child, could not afford to move out as divorce proceedings dragged on for more than a year. “My bed was on the couch in the living room and that’s where the marital rape happened,” Neelambika, who declined to give her full name to protect her identity said from the capital, Kuala Lumpur.

“It was about wielding his power and control over me ... I endured it but something died inside of me.” In more than 50 countries, including the United States, Nepal, Britain and South Africa, it is a crime for a husband to rape his wife, but this is not the case in most of Asia, where campaigners are pushing for legal reform. Like other forms of domestic violence, marital rape can lead to trauma, depression, loss of income due to injuries, loss of work, poor school performance by children and even murder.

Although statistics on marital rape are hard to come by, one third of women who have been in a relationship say they have experienced

physical or sexual violence at the hands of their intimate partner, according to the World Health Organization. A spokesman for Malaysia’s law minister Liew Vui Keong did not respond to requests for comment. Last year, a deputy minister in Malaysia’s prime minister’s department, Mohamed Hanipa Maidin, told parliament that the government had no plans to make marital rape a crime as it was hard to prove in court, according to local media reports.

Neelambika said she didn’t even consider going to the police as they had no powers to stop the assaults, and she was keen that the small community where her family lived didn’t find out. She was too ashamed to confide in anyone. When she did stay overnight with friends or family, her husband turned up at her work or parents’ house, demanding she return home. “He knew I just wanted a divorce, so he was going to make use of me during that period,” she said. “He just felt he had that right – that he was still my husband and he could do anything he wanted.”



While many Asia-Pacific countries have introduced domestic violence and harassment laws over the last decade, only 15 out of 39 states in the region have criminalized marital rape, according to the gender equality agency UN Women. Many countries do not collect data on marital rape – not just because it is not a crime, but also because social pressures mean it is rarely reported or discussed. Victims of sexual violence are often blamed and stigmatized, said Ingrid FitzGerald, a regional gender expert at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which promotes sexual health.

Malaysia women raise alarm

East Timor has Asia’s highest rate of reported sexual violence by an intimate partner, at 40 percent, while Myanmar is among the lowest, at 4 percent, UNFPA said, based on countries where survey data is available. Women are often torn between wanting the violence to end by reporting it and not wanting the husband and main breadwinner to be jailed, FitzGerald said. Their decision depends on how easy and so-

cially acceptable it is to get a divorce and on women’s financial independence.

“Rape is rape – whether it occurs to a woman of a particular age, in marriage or a relationship – it’s still rape,” FitzGerald said. Even where marital rape laws do exist, police often do not take women’s complaints seriously and blame victims, while authorities fail to provide adequate protection, said Melissa Alvarado, a program manager at UN Women.

“There is definitely work to be done to create that more sensitized and empathic response for women so they can more boldly tell their stories,” she said.

No shame

Despite the taboos, positive changes are happening. In 2017, India’s top court struck down a decades-old clause in the country’s rape laws permitting a man to have sex with his wife if she is aged between 15 to 18 – ruling that it was rape, and therefore a criminal offence. Ahead of India’s elections next month, women’s rights groups have been urging political parties to include criminalizing marital rape in their manifestos. Last month, Singapore’s parliament proposed a bill – backed by the government – to make marital rape a crime.—Reuters

Modi or Gandhi? Indian mystics split over poll outcome

MUMBAI: Transgender mystic Zoya Lobo turns over three oracle cards, studies them for a minute and looks up. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will definitely win India’s general election this summer, she proclaims. Clairvoyant Larra Shah also predicts a victory for Modi owing to his “extremely powerful aura”, but astrologer Raj Kumar Sharma thinks opposition leader Rahul Gandhi will win because his party’s moon sign is Virgo.

Vedic astrology is big business in Hindu-majority India and stargazers are making a host of predictions for the world’s biggest elections starting next month—their many followers hanging on every utterance. Some 900 million voters are registered to cast ballots in the vote in April and May which will see Gandhi’s Congress party seek to dislodge Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from power. Shah, 49, a celebrity holistic healer who practices tarot reading, says most of them will plump for Modi, himself a devout Hindu. “When it comes to tarot cards Modi is like the emperor or the magician where the power of self-knowledge, of spiritual balance, of karma, is in perfection,” she explains to AFP. “Rahul Gandhi is more like the devil because he’s always confused. There is a conflict there because he is a Gemini so has a dual personality,” Shah adds.

Modi, 68, and the right-wing Hindu nationalist BJP swept to power five years ago by winning 282 out of 543 seats, forming the country’s first majority government in almost three decades. Shah expects Modi to be returned, but with a vastly reduced majority. Pre-election polling suggests an even closer contest, with many forecasting that neither party will win the 272 seats needed for a



ALLAHABAD: An Indian reveler (center) wearing a mask with the picture of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi dances with other as they celebrate the Holi festival in Allahabad yesterday. — AFP

majority. Lobo also has a prediction that hits closer to home for her—a 35 percent chance that Modi will do something to help India’s two-million-strong transgender community.

Indians consult soothsayers for advice on a raft of subjects from whom to marry to whether to buy a house or strike a business deal. Many businessmen, Bollywood actors and politicians have personal astrologers scrutinize their stars closely to determine auspicious days to hold functions, release a movie or make political announcements. For the election, Sharma says the planets are aligning in favor of Congress-based on the birth dates of the parties and their leaders—and that it will be able to persuade smaller, regional parties to join them in a coalition. “Congress’s moon sign is Virgo and at present a favorable Jupiter Mahadasha (period) is happening for them while the BJP’s moon sign is Scorpio,” he explains.—AFP

Hundreds of couples livestreamed in South Korean spycam porn

SEOUL: More than 800 South Korean couples were livestreamed having sex in love motels, Seoul police said yesterday in one of the largest-scale and most intrusive examples yet of the country’s spycam epidemic. The hyper-wired South has been battling the increasingly widespread proliferation of so-called “molka”, or spycam videos, which largely involve men secretly filming women in schools and toilets, among other places.

The latest case is unusual for involving couples and the livestreaming element. According to police, four men installed tiny cameras – all of them with a lens just one millimeter wide – in 42 rooms in 30 motels, hidden inside hairdryer holders, wall sockets and digital TV boxes. They then livestreamed the footage 24 hours a day to a subscription website with some 4,000 members, hosted on a server overseas. Some viewers also paid a 50,000 won (\$44) monthly supplement for access to “exclusive” content — edited highlights available on repeat.

More than 800 couples were shown on the site over three months, mostly having sex, police said. “About 50 percent of the 1,600 victims are male,” an official from the National Police Agency told AFP. The gang earned 7 million won from the scheme, he said, adding that two suspects had been arrested and two more were being investigated. More than 5,400 were arrested for spycam-related crimes in South Korea in 2017, but fewer than two percent were jailed. Last year, Seoul several times witnessed thousands of women protesting against spycam videos as part of the country’s #MeToo movement. In South Korea, motels are a relatively affordable option for many travelers from home and overseas, and a popular destination for couples seeking privacy away from parents or other family members.—AFP

A tale of two Delhis: Deadly air exposes rich-poor divide

Air pollution kills more than one million Indians every year

NEW DELHI: Walls draped in lush vertical gardens and air filtered through purifiers insulate diners at a swanky New Delhi food court from the choking haze outside in one of the most polluted places on earth. But these eco-eateries, offering cleaner air as well as modern menus to the well heeled are beyond reach for the poor, who have little means of escaping the deadly smog which coats the city for much of the year. Air pollution kills more than one million Indians every year, according to a study by Lancet Planetary Health, and Delhi is ranked one of the most toxic urban centers to live, regularly exceeding World Health Organization (WHO) limits.



Delhi ranks one of the most toxic urban centers to live

WHO recommendations for PM2.5 — tiny and harmful airborne particles — and some days registers levels more than 20 times safe limits. Experts warn the long term health consequences of living enveloped in pollution are disastrous, often causing chronic sickness and in some cases early death.

Across town, Abhimanyu Mawatwal is settling down for lunch at a food court in Worldmark Aerocity, a grand commercial centre boasting purified air. A meal here could cost twice Singh's monthly salary, but it is a price Mawatwal is willing to pay because outside the smog is at hazardous levels. "I love to come here for my meals. It is like getting a quick oxygen shot," the office worker says, surrounded by creeper vines and a faux stream as he breathed lungfuls of filtered air circulating through expensive filters.

"We need to bring greenery to concrete jungles and create places where everybody can come for a breath of fresh air," insists S K Sayal, CEO of Bharti Realty which owns Worldmark Aerocity. Delhi's affluent, who are often better informed about the dangers of pollution, increasingly expect the same safety measures they have in place at home, to be available when they are out.

High-end eateries, bars and cinemas are tapping into that demand — installing electronic air purifiers and creating dedicated areas of rich vegetation to help filter airborne toxins. But for Singh, and the one in five Indi-



NEW DELHI: A family carries belongings while looking for a rickshaw amid heavy smog in New Delhi. For the well-heeled in New Delhi, eating out means enjoying a gourmet spread amid sprawling green spaces but the poor must deal with dust and toxic fumes from vehicles zipping past rickety roadside food stalls in the world's most polluted major city. — AFP

ans living on less than \$2 a day, visiting such places is nothing more than a fantasy. "What will I do if I spend all the money on one meal? How will I feed my family?" said the rickshaw cyclist, who earns about 1,200 rupees (\$17) a month.

He cannot dream of buying the foreign-made air purifiers to protect his family at home — machines favored by Delhi's elite,

expat communities and office workers — that easily cost Singh's annual wage. "The rich and the poor have to breathe the same poisonous air. But the poor are more exposed to pollution," explains Sunil Dahiya, a campaigner for Greenpeace India. He adds: "Most of the time, they don't even know the effects the toxic air is having on their health. Poor communities are definitely at the losing end." — AFP

Indian soldier kills 3 comrades in Kashmir

SRINAGAR: A paramilitary trooper in Indian-administered Kashmir shot dead three of his comrades yesterday, officials said, as fresh violence raged in the restive territory where 40 troops died in a bombing last month. Separately an Indian soldier was killed in the latest exchange of fire with Pakistani forces across the de-facto Line of Control (LoC) border since the two nations launched tit-for-tat air strikes last month. Police said the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) trooper opened fire on his colleagues with his service rifle at a camp in Udhampur, some 200 kilometers (125 miles) south of the main city Srinagar.

"He shot himself too and is in a critical condition at a hospital," Jammu police official MK Sinha told AFP, saying the man "may have been under the influence of drugs". According to rights group Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), 20 Indian armed forces personnel killed themselves in 2018, the most in a decade. Since 2004 there have

been 80 incidents of "fratricide" and 323 suicides, it says. Experts say that the factors include stress, long duty hours, denial of leave and domestic issues, prompting authorities to initiate de-stressing initiatives for soldiers such as yoga.

Separately yesterday morning, a soldier was killed when India and Pakistan again exchanged fire across the LoC near the southern area of Sundarbani, army spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Devender Anand said. Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since the end of British colonial rule in 1947. Both claim it in full and have fought two wars over the territory. India accuses Pakistan of backing rebels fighting for independence of all of Kashmir, while some want the entire territory to be part of Pakistan. India has some 500,000 troops in its part.

On February 14 a suicide bombing claimed by a militant group based in Pakistan killed 40 CRPF troopers. India and Pakistan then carried out tit-for-tat air strikes, alarming the international community. Tensions have since eased but cross-LoC fire has continued, as have gun battles between suspected militants and Indian security forces. Two such clashes raged separately in the northern Kashmir valley yesterday. Two police officers were wounded when militants lobbed a grenade within a cordoned area amid an exchange of fire. — AFP

11 dead, 50 rescued as building collapses

NEW DELHI: Eleven people were confirmed dead yesterday three days after a building under construction in southern India caved in, officials said. Building collapses are frequent in India. Many firms use cheap materials and bribe officials to evade regulations, while on-site safety is lax. Around 400 rescuers have been scouring through tons of concrete and steel after the latest tragedy in Karnataka state on Tuesday.

Fifty-three people have been rescued from the rubble of the five-storey building in Dharwad district, but three more bodies were pulled out on Thursday. "At least 15 people are possibly still under the debris and it's unlikely they will survive," emergency official Srikant, who goes by one name said. Heavy earth-movers and rescuers with specialized equipment and sniffer dogs were deployed in the increasingly desperate operation. The victims were mostly from northern Indian states who came to the region for work. Police have charged the builder with manslaughter but he remains free, with investigators saying he will be arrested after the rescue operation is over. Last September, five people were killed after a Delhi apartment block collapsed. Months earlier, a six-storey building in the capital had given way, killing nine. Millions of Indians, who will vote in elections in April and May, live in dilapidated old buildings, many of which are susceptible to collapse during rain. — AFP

6 dead, dozens injured; blast rocks Chinese chemical plant

Death toll in China landslide rises to 20

BEIJING: A huge explosion rocked a chemical plant in eastern China yesterday, killing at least six people and injuring dozens as it knocked down factory buildings, damaged homes and sent a huge plume of smoke skyward. The windows of houses and a school in the surrounding area were shattered by the force of the explosion, and residents were evacuated, according to authorities and images published by local media.

The latest industrial incident to rock China in recent years occurred at around 2:50 pm at a facility run by Tianjiayi Chemical in Yancheng, Jiangsu province, city officials said on their official Twitter-like Weibo account. Around the time of the explosion, China's earthquake administration reported a 2.2-magnitude tremor in Lianyungang, a city near the Yancheng blast.



Tremor reported in Lianyungang

An aerial view of the blast area showed a large swath of destruction in the industrial park, where multiple fires still raged as firefighters tried to douse them with hoses. A CCTV reporter on the scene said that toxic fumes were coming from the blast site. At least six people were killed and 30 seriously injured, while numerous others in the vicinity were slightly injured, city officials said on Weibo yesterday.

"At present, on-site rescue is still going on... The cause of the accident is under investigation,"

officials said. Rescuers interviewed by CCTV repeatedly described the ground situation as "complex", adding that the focus is still on trying to pull people from the site. Injured residents near the site of the explosion have been sent to hospital for treatment, according to local authorities. Medical staff, as well as personnel from the public security bureau and fire department, have been sent to the scene, they added.

According to official news agency Xinhua, citing local authorities, the explosion occurred following a fire in a fertiliser factory in the chemical industrial park. Workers near the site of the blast were trapped after shockwaves from the explosion knocked down nearby factory buildings, the report said. Workers covered in blood were seen running out of the factory, Xinhua added, citing witnesses. Images broadcast

by state media showed an enormous explosion, with flames engulfing the top of the chemical plant while other shots showed thick grey smoke billowing skyward from the site of the blast.

Pictures from a local news outlet showed a classroom with blown out windows, children's backpacks scattered among broken glass and hastily abandoned schoolwork. Strong winds around the site helped disperse fumes though there remain concerns about the toxicity of the



YANCHENG: Firemen and Chinese paramilitary police officers search at an explosion site in Yancheng in China's eastern Jiangsu province yesterday. —AFP

fumes, Yancheng's environment bureau said in a later statement, adding that residents in the surrounding areas have been "basically evacuated". While there is a small river next to the site, there it is not used as a drinking source, the agency added.

Landslide rises to 20

Rescuers have retrieved the body of a final missing person in a northern China landslide, bringing the death toll to 20, local officials said yesterday. The incident last Friday in Shanxi

province flattened several residential buildings and a public bathhouse. Authorities initially reported 10 deaths and 10 missing people. "As of 11:22 am (0322 GMT) on March 21, the last missing person in the... landslide has been found," the Shanxi Fire Department said in a statement on its official social media page. "There were 20 casualties in this incident." The post was accompanied by pictures of orange-clad rescuers carrying what appeared to be a filled body bag on a stretcher. The cause of the landslide has not been confirmed. —Agencies

Bangladesh town barbers face fines for 'foreign' cuts

DHAKA: A barber's association in a northern Bangladesh town has warned its members not to give "foreign" haircuts or beard styles on pain of fines, an official said yesterday. An association order has been hung up at every barber shop in the town of Bhupur in the conservative Muslim-majority South Asian nation of 165 million people.

Any stylists infringing the directive face fines of 40,000 taka (\$480). Flamboyant hairstyles adopted by some of the Bollywood and Hollywood movie heroes and top cricketers have become increasingly popular among young men in Bangladesh, where short and neat cuts used to be the norm. The head of the association Shekhar Chandra Sheel told AFP they took the measure following a request from the local police chief.

"He asked us not to cut hair and beards following the Western model. He said these hairstyles are spoiling our young generation," he said. He said barber shops in the neighboring towns of Sakhipur and Basail have also adopted similar measures. Bhupur police official Rashedul Islam said that he made the appeal after local parents, guardians and teachers urged him to stop their sons getting foreign styles. "I asked the barbers to come and have a cup of tea with me. And I requested them not to cut hair like the ones done by errant young men," he said. —AFP

Canned air and water-spraying drones: Smog remedies

HONG KONG: As millions of people in Asia choke under polluted skies, authorities have turned to water-dispersing drones and outdoor air purifiers to improve air quality, while companies have tried to cash in by selling everything from canned air to lung-purifying teas. According to the World Health Organization, 92 percent of the population in the Asia Pacific region are exposed to levels of air pollution that pose a significant risk to their health, according to UN Environment. Here is a look at some of the ways those living under the haze try to limit minimize its effects.

Spraying water

As public anger rises over toxic air, authorities have turned to spraying water, which is thought to stick to pollutants and carry them to the ground, but tools such as water cannons have been criticized as having little effect and being a "band-aid" solution that distracts from root causes. New Delhi - the world's most polluted major city - tried in 2017 to use helicopters to sprinkle water over the city, but the choppers were not able to fly due to low visibility caused by smog.

In Bangkok, the government tried a raft of measures to combat a murky haze that blanketed the city for weeks in January, including spraying overpasses with water, cloud seeding and even deploying a fleet of water-dispersing drones. Cloud-seeding is used to stimulate rain by injecting chemicals into clouds using rockets, cannons or aircraft, but the technique is not always successful. An attempt by South Korea to create artificial rain to tackle air pollution in January failed, after an aircraft sent to seed clouds with silver iodide only produced several minutes of misty rain.

Outdoor air purifiers

The northern Chinese city of Xi'an is experimenting with a giant air purifier the size of an industrial smokestack which can reduce PM2.5 concentration by 15 percent within 10 square kilometers, according to researchers. Hong Kong this year opened a 3.7km tunnel equipped with an air purification system touted as the largest of its kind in the world in terms of volume of air handled - 5.4 million cubic meters of vehicle exhaust every hour.

The government says it will be able to remove at least 80 percent of harmful particulates and nitrogen dioxide using large fans which suck exhaust into air purification plants in three ventilation buildings along the tunnel. New Delhi last year announced a plan to install huge air purifiers at traffic intersections and mount air filters on the roofs of buses that trap pollutants as they move, according to Hindustan Times.

'Smog refugees'

During particularly bad spates of air pollution, which tend to come during the winter, residents in smoggy Chinese cities escape to cleaner places, such as resorts in the south of the country, for a temporary break and return after it has cleared. Ctrip, China's largest online travel agent, estimated in 2016 that every year, over a million residents of smoggy cities such as Beijing and Shanghai leave the country to escape the smog. Popular destinations for these so-called "smog refugees" include places such as Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Some even travel to Antarctica on these "lung-cleansing trips," according to Ctrip.

Commercial remedies

Although experts say residents in smoggy cities are unlikely to see health effects from breathing bottled air, that hasn't stopped entrepreneurs from selling them canisters of the stuff from New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and Switzerland. For about US\$22, consumers can order an 8 litre can of Banff Air from the popular tourist spot in Canada, or pay US\$125 for a jar of air from the British countryside. —AFP

Lifestyle

Friday Times

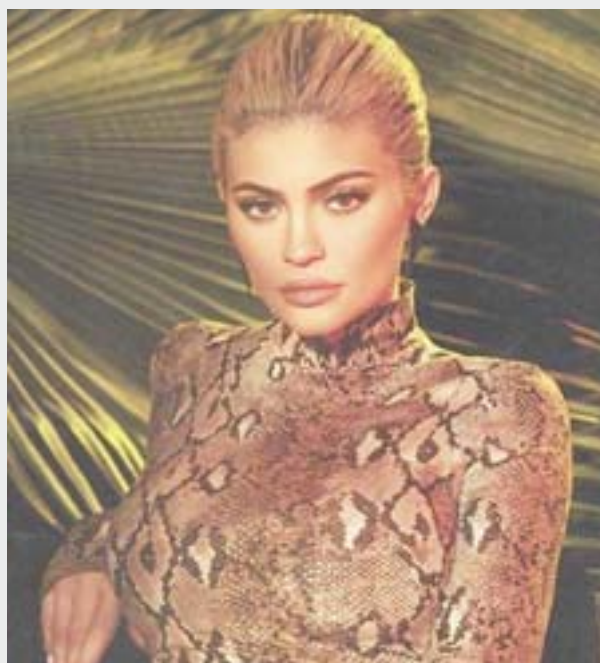
www.kuwaittimes.net

FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2019

A visually impaired Indian student from The Devnar School for the Blind applies colored powder to a teacher as they celebrate the Holi festival in Hyderabad. — AFP

Holi: The festival of colors

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Kylie given up on repairing friendship with Jordyn Woods

The 'Life of Kylie' star fell out with her best friend last month after she allegedly kissed her half-sister Khloe Kardashian's boyfriend Tristan Thompson, and insiders told TMZ they haven't "made any progress" in fixing their fractured relationship over the last few weeks. Jordyn appeared on Jada Pinkett Smith's 'Red Table Talk' to discuss the incident, during which she denied cheating with Tristan, and was said to have hoped the candid interview would help her win her friend back over, but instead, it's reportedly had the opposite effect and Kylie doesn't believe their relationship could ever be the same again. Jordyn lived with Kylie - who has 13-month-old daughter Stormi with boyfriend Travis Scott - until the scandal broke, and while her belongings are still in the 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians' star's guest house, the lip kit guru is now waiting for her to clear out her things so they can officially draw a line under their friendship. However, the source revealed Kylie is still open to staying "amicable" with Jordyn, 21, in the future, though they will never be as close again. It was recently claimed Kylie, also 21, is trying to widen her circle of friends following the recent fall out as she no longer wants to rely on just one pal. A source said: "Kylie has had a rough few weeks. She is still upset about the Jordyn situation, although she seems to be doing much better

Gervais thinks 'getting fat and ugly' has helped his comedy

The 57-year-old comic didn't find fame until his late 30s and is glad he didn't as he would have been "awful" and had nothing to talk about if he'd started his stand-up career in his 20s. He said: "No, I wasn't [doing it in my 20s]. God, I would have been awful. I didn't know anything. I can't think what I would have talked about. "Before I could do it, I had to learn to relate. Getting fat and old and ugly helped with that. "I don't know if you've heard of Simon Amstell. He's a British comedian. He once said something about young, handsome people doing comedy, like, 'People are already looking at you; why do you need this?'" The 'After Life' creator is a prolific Twitter user and admitted he finds the microblogging website very useful when it comes to finding inspiration for new material. He explained in an interview with the New York Times newspaper: "If I'm doing a warm-up show and I'm about five minutes short of material, I'll search Twitter for provocative things. "You find those dark corners. That's a good thing about Twitter: I used to have to meet these maniacs, like Agent Clarice Starling meeting Hannibal Lecter. Now I can find the dregs from the safety of my Hampstead mansion."



Hailey 'crazy' about her nightly skincare regime



The 22-year-old model - who was known as Hailey Baldwin before tying the knot with Justin Bieber last year - has insisted that sleep is a big part of her beauty ritual and every evening, before bed, she has to complete her nightly routine and take her make-up off because otherwise her OCD sets in and she can't drift off. Speaking to W Magazine, she said: "I'm starting to get better about wearing SPF every day - I was never really good at that. I'm crazy about my skin at night. Every night, it's a routine. "There's never not been a scenario where I haven't taken my makeup off before going to sleep. "I could have been doing all of the things and I still would have managed to take it off. "We'll be trying to go to bed and I'll just be roaming around. Because I'm a little bit—not a little bit, I'm full-on-OCD, I have to make sure everything is correct before going to sleep. "I need to make sure the dog is in the cage. "I need to make sure the lights are off, the door is locked, the teeth have to be brushed. I have a crazy routine. "Then I'll lay down and I'll remember one thing I didn't do and if I didn't do it, I have to get up and finish it. "So I'll get up again and walk around. "Justin will be like, 'What are you doing?! Go to sleep!'" The blonde beauty also praised her mother, Kenna Baldwin, for instilling the importance of a good skin regime in her from such a young age, because now she has "soft" skin due to moisturising daily.

Irina Shayk keeps her 'life' in her handbag

The 33-year-old Russian supermodel - who has collaborated with Tod's for the latest redesign of the Iconic D bag - has revealed her must-have items, which she keeps inside her purse at all times, such as sugary sweets to help "fight off" jet-lag and a portable phone charger. Speaking to British Vogue magazine, she said: "My life is in my bag. Sunglasses, a little candy - a splash of sugar to get you over the jet-lag is the best way to fight it off! "A charger, a little mirror on the back of your cell phone case so you can check how you look." Irina will release her much-anticipated redesign for the Italian label's D-Styling bag in their spring/summer 2019 collection later this month, and the star insisted that the accessory has become an "essential" part of her wardrobe. She added: "The first thing that I've always associated Tod's with is a trusted timelessness. The D-Styling bag is a definite favorite and has made itself at home among my daily essential pieces." Meanwhile, the brunette beauty - who has two-year-old daughter Lea with Bradley Cooper - previously admitted that although becoming a mother has improved her life, it hasn't changed her personal style, and she thinks that having children shouldn't stop a person "expressing" themselves.



Duff and her boyfriend scares away intruder

The 31-year-old actress and partner Matthew Koma - who have five-month-old daughter Banks together - were in the kitchen of their Beverly Hills mansion at around 8.30pm on Tuesday (19.03.19) evening, when they noticed a man in their backyard. According to TMZ, the couple somehow managed to scare away the intruder before calling police. Officers attended the scene, and when doing a search, discovered a window screen had been removed, though the intruder didn't make it inside the house. Cops dispatched extra patrols around the area and are continuing to investigate as the man is still on the loose. The incident came after Hilary - who also has six-year-old son Luca with ex-husband Mike Comrie - was previously robbed of hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of jewellery from the same property in 2017. At the time, the blonde beauty and her family were in Canada, and thieves targeted her empty home. They broke through a door and no alarm went off so they were able to make off with the jewelry without detection.



Lopez's sunglasses collection is "as bad" as her shoes



The singer-and-actress has teamed up with her husband-to-be Alex Rodriguez to create a capsule collection of men and women's shades with the Australian brand Quay. Asked about her own personal stash of sunnies, she said: "Oh my God. It might be as bad as shoes. 'There's a lot of sunglasses. It's like one accessory that you can buy over and over and over. There's just so many different moods and styles you have, I don't know I have so many.'" The 'Second Act' star says their joint range has "captured" both of their personal styles, and is "glamorous" and "sexy". Speaking to Elle.com, she said: "The main thing for us was making sure it captured both of our styles. It needed to be classic but also glamorous and sexy because that's kind of the field that we like to play in as far as fashion goes, and our life by the way. 'We just wanted to have a strong sense of our self-expression and of who we really are. I think they really nailed that.'" And the 49-year-old beauty felt like the collection was a "natural" collaboration for the pair because she has been wearing the brand's shades for "years", and has even worn shades on the red carpet. She said: "Honestly, whatever I get involved with it's not like, 'Oh, I want to do sunglasses' or 'Oh, I want to do leggings,' it's not like that. It's always about something that naturally has to do with my life. I've been using Quay sunglasses years. 'You can go back and see photos of me rocking Quay styles. They noticed and were like, 'Hey, maybe we should do something together because we see that you're a big fan of the brand.' It was just one of those things that really was a natural collaboration."

KALING CREATING A NEW COMEDY SERIES FOR NETFLIX

The 'Ocean's Eight' star will reteam with her 'Mindy Project' writer Lang Fisher and executive producer Howard Klein for the coming-of-age story, which will be inspired her own childhood and is described as an exploration of the complicated life of a modern-day first generation Indian American teenage girl. Mindy - who has written about her teen years in her books 'Is Everyone Hanging Out With Me' and 'Other Concerns' and 'Why Not Me?' - tweeted: "I'm joining the @netflix fam! @louliefang and I are working on a brand-new @netflix TV comedy about the life of a modern-day first generation Indian American teenage girl. Get ready for lots of relatable, awkward teen moments. More coming soon (sic)" Meanwhile, Mindy recently admitted she felt "awful" when Fox cancelled 'The Mindy Project' in 2015, though it was picked up on Hulu and continued until November 2017. Opening up about how she felt when told Fox were stopping production, she said: "It was awful. It felt personal. I was the face of the show. My name was in the title." The Indian/American actress credits her success to having "mentors" who believed in her. She said: "For many years, I thought that hard work was the only way you could succeed, but it's simply not true. Particularly if you're a woman of color, you need people to give you opportunities, because otherwise it won't happen. Talent is an important part of success, but you also need mentors to find promise in people that don't necessarily seem like they will fit in."



Letterman thinks he should have retired earlier



The 71-year-old broadcaster stepped away from the program in 2015 after more than 30 years and while he believes he outstayed his welcome, he claimed no one had "the guts" to fire him. Speaking on 'The Ellen DeGeneres Show', he said: "Yes it is true, and I'll tell you what happened. 'It turns out nobody had the guts to fire me. And I should have left like 10 years ago. You want to make sure you have some energy to direct toward other things.'" David praised the 'Finding Dory' star for doing other things alongside her long-running show and admitted he should have done more himself. He said: "I did not. All I cared about was myself. I was looking through the wrong end of the telescope." Elsewhere on the program, the presenter - who now hosts 'My Next Guest Needs No Introduction' on Netflix - recalled a funny incident in a hotel that left him convinced he was going to be sent to prison. Ellen's producer Mary used to work on 'The Late Show' and she and David were once playing catch on the 14th floor of 30 Rockefeller Plaza in New York City - only to accidentally break a window with a baseball, which flew down onto the crowds outside. David quipped: "Well how many are dead? 'So I'm stunned and I go over to where the window is and I'm just kind of hiding and looking down there...and people were looking up because shards of glass had rain down on the Avenue of America. And I see a guy down there point up and go, 'Oh hey there's David Letterman!' and I just thought I was spending the rest of my life in prison."



Tourists look at an embalmed giant turtle displayed at Ngoc Son temple in Hanoi. — AFP photos

Eternal shell: Sacred giant turtle embalmed in Hanoi

A sacred giant turtle that died in Hanoi’s storied Hoan Kiem lake has been given a new lease on life by city authorities who have embalmed the beloved creature for posterity — and tourist visits. Hanoians were shocked by the death of the critically endangered Swinhoe softshell turtle in 2016, believing its passing was a sign of ominous times ahead.

The reptile is believed to be the last in a long line of large turtles in the city’s central Hoan Kiem lake, revered as symbols of Vietnam’s independence struggle according to mythical lore passed down for generations.

Nicknamed “Cu Rua” which means “great grandparent turtle”, it was thought to be between 80 and 100 years old when it died. Visitors welcomed the turtle’s resurrection at the popular Ngoc Son temple on Hoan Kiem lake, where the 170-kilogram creature was put on display last week, sitting atop a red carpet in a glass case with an ornately carved wooden frame.

“It’s great to see it here. Everyone can admire it now, a symbol of Hanoi,” tourist Tran Thi Anh told yesterday. The enormous creature sits near another which was similarly embalmed and encased in glass in 1968. They are not the only preserved heroes in Vietnam: the country’s revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh is on display at a sprawling concrete and grass Ba Dinh square in the city’s French Quarter. And in a unique take on the encasing custom, a restaurant owner who served Hanoi’s famous pork noodles to the late chef Anthony Bourdain and former US president Barack Obama has preserved their dining table in a glass box.

The turtles on display at Hoan Kiem lake — which means “Lake of the Restored Sword” in Vietnamese — are believed to be the protectors of an ancient sword in the green-tinged waters. According to popular legend, former emperor Le Loi was given the weapon in the 15th century by the lake’s Golden Turtle God, which he used to fight off Chinese invaders before returning it to

Hoan Kiem. There are believed to be just four surviving Swinhoe turtles left in the world — two in a Chinese zoo and two others in Vietnam, according to the Asian Turtles Program.

Superstition is ubiquitous in Vietnam, and any sightings of the giant turtles are deemed auspicious. The same holds true today for other turtle species living in the lake. “I just saw some smaller turtles coming to the surface of the lake... it seems good luck to see them, don’t you think?” said visitor Nguyen Tri Ton, laughing. “It’s good they embalmed Mr Turtles here to keep them alive for all the people of Vietnam,” he added. Local officials initially tried to suppress news of Cu Rua’s death in 2016, fearing it would be seen as bad luck ahead of a party congress to choose the country’s top leaders. — AFP

Boulder-sized sunfish washes ashore in Australia

A boulder-sized fish of a kind known to “sink yachts” has washed up on an Australian beach. The 1.8 meter specimen — believed to be a Mola Mola, or ocean sunfish — came ashore near the mouth of the Murray River in South Australia at the weekend. The enormous creature is distinct for both its size and peculiar shape featuring a flattened body and fins. The fish can weigh up to 2.5 tons according to National Geographic.

A photo circulating on social media showed two people on a beach standing over the giant specimen, which had died. “The amount of news and media from all over the world wanting to report it has been on another level,” Linette Grzelak, who posted the image to Facebook said. “Never expected this.” South Australian Museum fish collection manager Ralph Foster said the fish was actually at the smaller end of the scale for the species.

It earned its name for basking in the sun near the ocean’s surface, but is also known to dive several hundred meters into the depths, he said. “I’ve actually had a good look at it, we get three species here and this is actually the rarest one in South Australian waters,” Foster told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). “They can get a lot bigger... it’s probably an average-sized one, they can get nearly twice as big as that,” he added. Mola Mola have also been known to damage vessels, Foster added. “We get a lot of them hit by boats and some of them are so large they actually sink yachts,” he said. “We know very little about them, it’s only in the last few years that technology has allowed us to start learning about them. “They are amazing things, they really are.” — AFP



This handout picture taken on March 16, 2019 and released courtesy of Linette Grzelak on March 21 shows a sunfish that was washed ashore and found dead in Coorong, near the mouth of the Murray River in South Australia. — AFP photos



Tweet Impact: Los Angeles ‘meteor’ sets internet alight

A “meteor” that tore across the Los Angeles skyline set Twitter alight with speculation it was a real life “Deep Impact”. A bright orange fireball that arced over Hollywood — home of countless disaster movies — sent people scrambling to capture the scene for social media — even if it later turned out to be more fiction than fact. “Anyone else just see the Meteor over LA?”, one person wrote on Twitter. “Incredible. Coolest thing I’ve seen.”

“Anyone else see a giant meteor or fireball in the middle of downtown Los Angeles like a few minutes ago? It looked like a meteor but it was WAY too low to the ground,” wrote Kasey Clark. The Los Angeles Police Department weighed in to calm people’s nerves with a Public Service Announcement, and remind them that theirs is the city of fantasy and dreams. “PSA: A meteor did not crash into Downtown Los Angeles, and no, it’s not an alien invasion ... just a film shoot. This is Tinseltown after all,” the LAPD wrote on Twitter. The phenomenon was a publicity stunt by Red Bull, which fitted skydivers with LEDs and pyrotechnics as they plunged out of a helicopter 4,000 feet above the city. Still — for a few moments at least — the people of Los Angeles were allowed to dream. “Is Captain Marvel back?” wrote Twitter user @MightyMisterX. — AFP



Holi. *The festival of colors*



Holi, the popular Hindu spring festival of colors is observed in India and across countries at the end of the winter season on the last full moon of the lunar month. — AFP photos



Alejandro Prohenza, owner of a Jawa motorcycle with sidecar, poses in Havana. — AFP photos



People commute on an old motorcycle with sidecar along a street of Havana.



Enrique Oropesa, a motorcycle riding instructor, poses in the sidecar of an old motorcycle.

Cuba a thriving hang-out for Soviet era motorcycle sidecars

Cuba's love affair with 1950s-era American cars is still intact, but the communist-run island also has a lingering attachment to a stalwart of Soviet-era leftovers, the motorcycle sidecar. Ranging from rusting relics to the pampered and the pristine, hundreds of old motorcycle sidecars rattle through the streets of Havana. The retro appeal gets a lot of attention from tourists "but here it's common, normal," says Enrique Oropesa Valdez.

Valdez should know. The 59-year-old makes a living as an instructor teaching people how to handle the sidecar in Havana's traffic, where riders seem able to squeeze the machines through the narrowest of gaps. And they've built up an intense loyalty among the mend-and-make-do Cubans. "They're very practical," according to Alejandro Prohenza Hernandez, a restaurateur who says his pampered red 30-year-old Jawa 350 is like a second child.

Cheaper and more practical than the gas-guzzling, shark-finned US behemoths, the bikes are used for anything from the family runabout to trucking goods and workers' materials. "A lot of foreigners really like to take photos of it," says Hernandez. "I don't know, I think they see it as something from another time."

Different world

Cuba lags several decades behind the rest of the world due to a crippling US embargo, so the makers' badges on the ubiquitous sidecars speak of a bygone world. Names like Jawa from the former Czechoslovakia and MZ from the for-

mer East Germany, as well as antiquated Russian Urals, Dniepers and Jupiters. Havana's military acquired them from big brother Moscow at the height of the Cold War in the 1960s and 70s, for use by state factories and farms. Over the years, they gradually filtered down to the general public.

That's how Jose Antonio Ceoane Nunez, 46, found his bright red Jupiter 3. "When the Cuban government bought sidecars from the Russians in 1981, it was for state-owned companies," he said. Later, the companies "sold them on to the most deserving employees," he said. His father, who worked for a state body, passed the bike on to him. "Even if the sidecar gets old, I'll never sell it because it's what I use to move around. It's my means of transport in Cuba, and there aren't many other options," said Nunez.

Valdez himself has a cherished green 1977 Ural. "I like it a lot, firstly because it's the means of transport for my family, and secondly because it's a source of income." And it costs less than a car, still out of reach of many Cubans. Settled on the island with his Cuban wife, 38-year-old Frenchman Philippe Ruiz didn't realize at first how ubiquitous the motorcycle sidecar was. "When I began to be interested, I suddenly realized that I was seeing 50 to 100 a day!"

Renovating a house at the time, he saw that many sidecars were being used to transport building equipment. Through an advert on the internet, he bought a blue 1979 Ural a few months ago for 6,500 euros. "It's a year older than me and in worse shape," he said. "Soon he had to strip the bike down and 'start repairing everything.'" With few spare parts avail-



Jose Antonio Ceoane, owner of an old motorcycle with sidecar poses.

able in Cuba, "people have to bring them in from abroad," which slows down repairs. But he has no regrets.

An experienced motorcyclist, he's discovered a whole new side to his passion by riding the Russian machine. "It's very funny, it's a big change from the bike because we cannot turn the same way, we can't lean, so you have to relearn everything but it's nice." "It's especially nice with the family because you can put a child in the sidecar, my wife behind, and suitcases," he said. In future he hopes to take advantage of the interest in the old bikes to rent it out. "I think it will be a bit of a change from all the convertibles here." — AFP



Locals travel on an old motorcycle with sidecar.



A mechanic repairs an old motorcycle with sidecar.



Artist Psyche of Sound performs using Zen Drum instrument as part of Dubai Metro Music Festival at Bur Juman Metro station. — AFP photos

Dubai metro stations come alive with the sound of music

In many countries it is a common sight, but when musicians began playing their instruments at a Dubai metro station, surprised commuters stopped to take photos of the rare performances. The emirate is known among its residents for its pristine streets and impeccably clean metro stations — where commuters can be fined for chewing gum, or even drinking water, on a train. Khadija played her guitar, as passersby listened intently.

She was performing as part of the week-long Dubai Metro Music Festival taking place across five stations. “I am very happy because they chose me, and I am proud to be an Emirati doing this here,” the 19-year-old said. “I am excited to perform for the public and grab their attention,” she said, as her friend stood by nodding in encouragement. Khadija played the guitar continuously and only took her eyes off her fingers once to readjust her thin black veil.

Twenty-five musicians from different countries — including Portugal, Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Lebanon — are participating in the festival that ends on Saturday. While some musicians were playing traditional instruments, others were using more creative methods, such as glass and old typewriters. The metro in Dubai — home to three million people, most of whom are expatriates — was launched in 2009. Egyptian Amir Hassan, one of hundreds of thousands of people who use the public transport



Artist Omar Hamdan performs using Buzuq instrument as part of Dubai Metro Music Festival at Bur Juman Metro station in Dubai.

on a daily basis, said this is the first time he has ever seen a performance in the station.

“I’ve seen performances in malls and other centers, but this is a first,” he said. “If I had more time, I would stay longer and watch.” Organizers said the goal behind the festival was to “break that routine” of the daily commuters. “Music spreads happiness and positivity to regular metro commuters or visitors,” said Shaima Alsuwaidi, a manager at Brand Dubai, the creative arm of the Dubai

government’s media office. Dubai — with its opulent shopping malls and luxury resorts — welcomed last year a record 15.9 million tourists. The city-state, one of seven sheikhdoms that make up the UAE, aims to attract 20 million visitors annually by the time it hosts the six-month global trade fair Expo 2020. — AFP



Latin sensation J Balvin to headline Lollapalooza festival

Colombian reggaeton superstar J Balvin will headline this year’s edition of Lollapalooza, organizers of the festival announced Wednesday, a landmark moment for Latin music in the US mainstream. Balvin will play alongside the other seven headliners including Ariana Grande and Childish Gambino at the top music festival in Chicago, set for August 1-4.

The 33-year-old superstar achieved mass appeal in 2017 thanks to the smash success of “Mi Gente,” a hit rooted in the African dance beats of French DJ Willy William’s “Voodoo Song.” After recording the initial version Balvin worked on a remix with pop royalty Beyoncé to produce a charity version for hurricane relief later that year. Lollapalooza — a festival conceived in the 1990s as a celebration of alternative culture — has never featured a Latin act that performs in Spanish so prominently on its billing.

Medellin-born Balvin did perform twice at last year’s Coachella festival — but only as a guest alongside Cardi B and Beyoncé, with whom he had collaborated. This year both Balvin and Bad Bunny, the Puerto Rican Latin trap sensation, will do solo sets at Coachella, set for April 12-14 and April 19-21 in Indio, California. And Spanish innovator Rosalia — who debuted in 2017 with a revisionist version of traditional flamenco infused with pop, R&B and electronic sounds — will play both Lollapalooza and Coachella. The decidedly Latin flair at major US festivals signals the circuit’s effort to embrace the 41 million people living in US who claim Spanish as their mother tongue. “Chicago, we’re coming to see you this summer,” tweeted Balvin as the announcement dropped. “Get ready to party.” — AFP

In this file photo taken on February 08, 2019, J Balvin attends the GRAMMY Gift Lounge during the 61st Annual GRAMMY Awards at Staples Center in Los Angeles, California.

In this file photo taken on December 6, 2018, US singer Ariana Grande attends Billboard’s 13th Annual Women In Music event at Pier 36 in New York City. — AFP photos

Poppy seed muffins with rich, full flavor – and less sugar

We wanted to make poppy seed muffins with rich, full flavor; fluffy, tender interiors; and golden crusts. We were amazed to find that our go-to recipe had a whopping 22 grams of sugar per muffin, so we hoped that our new recipe would work with a sugar content of only 11 grams. We turned to Sucanat, which we ground in a spice grinder to ensure that the tops of the finished muffins weren't speckled. Lemon zest seemed like a natural complement to the poppy seeds, but we could only add so much zest before the muffins started to taste soapy, and our muffins were still lacking flavor.

To fix this problem and to up the perceived sweetness without adding more sugar, we started by increasing the vanilla. This helped, but tasters still wanted more flavor, so we scoured the pantry for solutions. We found our answer in ground anise seeds, which had a sweet, subtle licorice flavor that rounded out the muffins perfectly.

Next, we needed to fix the texture of the muffins; they were a bit dense and tough. To create a finer crumb and a less chewy texture, we switched from all-purpose flour to cake flour. A combination of baking powder and baking soda ensured good rise and good browning, but we also increased the oven temperature and raised the oven rack to help achieve the perfect golden brown crust. You can skip grinding the Sucanat; however, the muffins will have a speckled appearance. Low-fat yogurt can be substituted for the whole-milk yogurt, but the muffins will be slightly drier.

ANISE AND POPPY SEED MUFFINS

Ingredients

Servings: 12

Start to finish: 1 hour

3/4 cup (4 ounces) Sucanat

8 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 8 pieces

1 1/2 cups plain whole-milk yogurt

2 large eggs

1 tablespoon vanilla extract

1 tablespoon grated lemon zest

2 3/4 cups (11 ounces) cake flour

3 tablespoons poppy seeds

2 teaspoons baking powder

3/4 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon ground anise seeds

3/4 teaspoon salt

Preparation

Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 425 F. Grease 12-cup muffin tin. Working in 3 batches, grind Sucanat in spice grinder until fine and powdery, about 1 minute. Melt 6 tablespoons butter in 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat until it begins to turn golden, about 2 minutes. Continue to cook, swirling pan constantly, until butter is dark golden brown and has nutty aroma, 1 to 3 minutes. Transfer browned butter to large bowl and stir in remaining 2 tablespoons butter until melted; let cool slightly.

Whisk yogurt, eggs, vanilla, and lemon zest into browned butter until smooth. In large bowl, whisk ground Sucanat, flour, poppy seeds, baking powder, baking soda, anise, and salt together. Using rubber spatula, stir in yogurt mixture until combined. Divide batter evenly among prepared muffin cups. Bake until golden brown and toothpick inserted in center of muffin comes out clean, 15 to 20 minutes, rotating muffin tin halfway through baking. Let muffins cool in tin for 10 minutes, then transfer to wire rack and let cool for 20 minutes before serving.

Nutrition information per serving:

276 calories; 94 calories from fat; 11 g fat (6 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 60 mg cholesterol; 350 mg sodium; 39 g carbohydrate; 1 g fiber; 13 g sugar; 5 g protein.



ANISE AND POPPY SEED MUFFINS

ROASTED ZUCCHINI NOODLES



Kids and adults alike will delight in making ‘zoodles’

A spiralizer turns carrots, beets, and squash into noodles (or “zoodles” when using zucchini). The steps below the recipe work with all these vegetables. For best results, use smaller zucchini, which have thinner skins and fewer seeds. The blade on a spiralizer is very sharp, so make sure to do this with an adult.

ROASTED ZUCCHINI NOODLES

Ingredients

Servings: 4

Start to finish: 55 minutes (Prep time: 15 minutes)

Prepare Ingredients:

4 zucchini (8 to 10 ounces each)
1 tablespoon extra-7/8virgin olive oil, plus extra for serving
1 garlic clove, peeled and minced
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil

Gather Cooking Equipment:

Chef's knife
Cutting board
Spiralizer
Kitchen shears
Ruler
Rimmed baking sheet
Oven mitts
Cooling rack
Tongs
Serving platter

Preparation

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 375 F. Use chef's knife to trim off ends of zucchini. Use spiralizer to cut zucchini into 1/8-inch-thick noodles. On cutting board, pull noodles straight and use kitchen shears to cut them into 12-inch lengths. Transfer noodles to rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle with oil and sprinkle with garlic, salt, and pepper. Toss noodles with your hands to combine and spread them into even layer.

Place baking sheet in oven and roast until zucchini is just softened, about 20 minutes. Use oven mitts to remove baking sheet from oven (ask an adult for help) and place on cooling rack. Use tongs to transfer zucchini to serving platter. Sprinkle cheese and basil over zucchini and drizzle with extra oil. Serve.

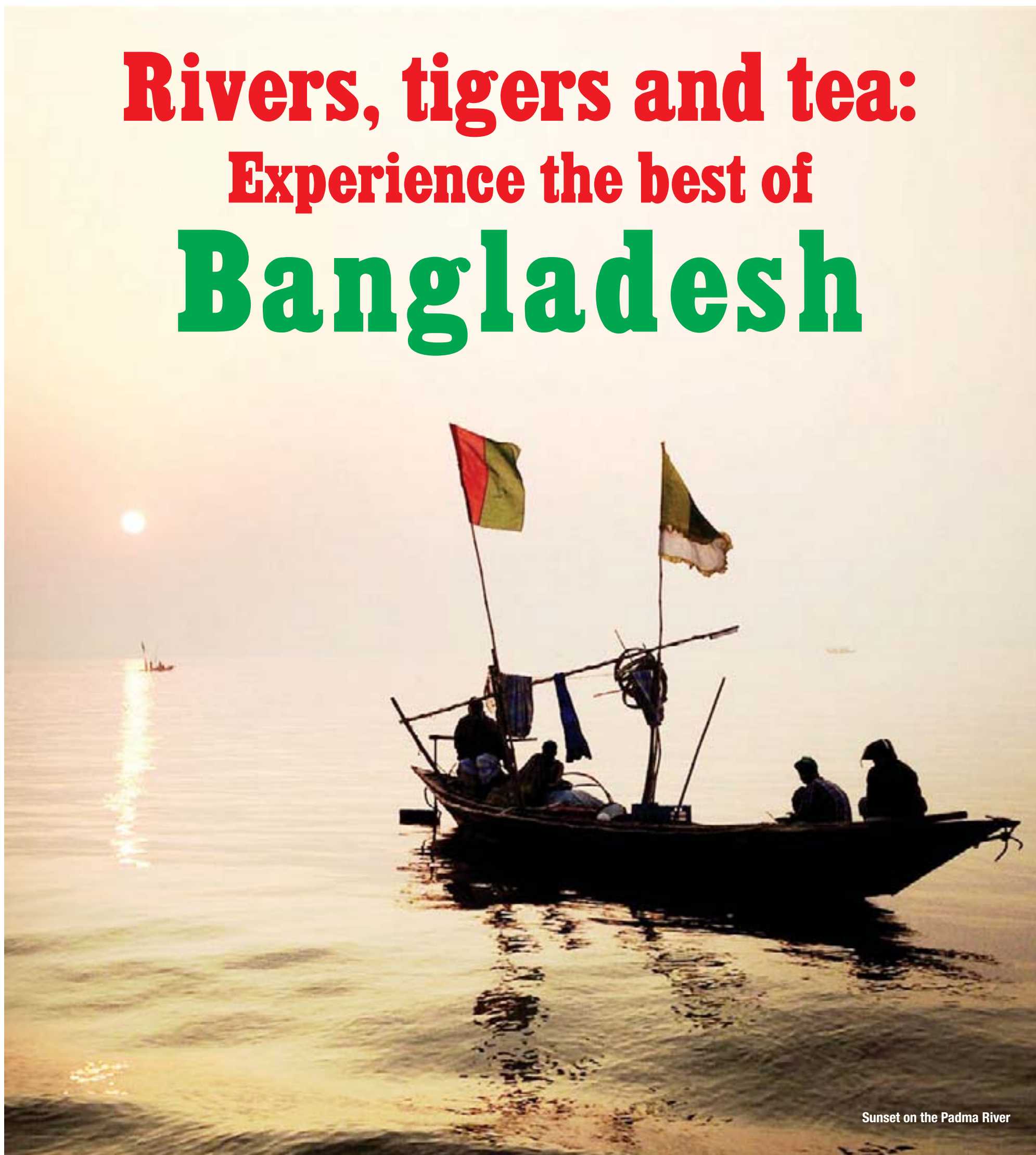
Making Zoodles:

Place the spiralizer on a flat counter or table and push down on the four corners until the suction cups are secured to the counter or table. Cut off ends of zucchini so it will fit on prongs. Secure zucchini between prongs and blade. Turn crank to spiralize zucchini and produce long noodles. Pull noodles straight on cutting board and use kitchen shears to cut noodles into 12-inch lengths.

Nutrition information per serving:

109 calories; 53 calories from fat; 6 g fat (2 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 4 mg cholesterol; 407 mg sodium; 11 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 7 g sugar; 5 g protein.

Rivers, tigers and tea: Experience the best of Bangladesh



Sunset on the Padma River



The best way to experience Bangladesh is by getting out on its waterways

A green emerald in South Asia's trove of tourist treasures, Bangladesh amply rewards intrepid travelers who are plucky enough to dive into its whirlpool of chaos, walk its uncharted roads and explore its rustic hinterlands. From the lush tropical coastline to its forested hills, from frenetic cities to serene tea plantations, this under-explored South Asian nation offers a rich sampling platter of the delights of the subcontinent.

Yet despite its myriad virtues, Bangladesh lies well off the mainstream tourist map, falling even beyond the reach of most visitors to neighboring India, despite easy border crossings between the two countries. This sets up Bangladesh as a great place for adventurers who don't mind skipping creature comforts in exchange for unique experiences. For those who fit the type, here are some of the best ways to experience this unique destination, where you may at times be the only traveler in town.

Get under Dhaka's skin

Once you've pushed your way through its exosphere of chaos, frenzy and pollution, Bangladesh's frenetic capital, Dhaka will reveal itself to you as a city with a smattering of fascinating neighborhoods, friendly people, eclectic culture and delicious cuisine. All you have to do is shed your inhibitions and lose yourself amid the millions of people walking its crowded streets. Take a morning stroll along the swarming ferry piers of Sadarghat, ride a rickshaw through the bustling markets of Old Dhaka, learn about Bangladesh's history and heritage at the National Museum, share a lunch table with strangers at the famed Star Hotel & Kebab and then shop for garments and souvenirs at classy boutiques such as Aarong and Jatra.

Ride a mighty river

No trip to Bangladesh is complete without a ride on the expansive Padma River (also called Meghna or Brahmaputra at different points along its course). One of South Asia's biggest rivers, the Padma measures more than 10km at its widest point, and the incredible experience of cruising on its boundless waters is best savored on a river journey from Dhaka to the outlying town of Barisal. As for means of transport, you can choose between the legendary Rocket, a much-adored paddle steamer service that dates back to the early 20th century, or a rush of hulking launches that ply the route every night from Dhaka's Sadarghat pier.

Sip a cuppa in Srimangal

The rolling hills around Srimangal, a sleepy town located in

Bangladesh's bucolic northeast, are home to several tea estates that produce a bold and aromatic form of regional tea. Extremely popular among locals, the brew is mostly served with milk and sugar, although some prefer it as a raw infusion flavored with spices such as ginger or cardamom. You can ask for a cup of this rejuvenating beverage at any tea stall lining Srimangal's streets. For a special serving of this local drink, schedule a stop in your day's excursion at Nilkantha Tea Cabin, where a signature seven-layer tea - each layer with a different color and taste - is served to awestruck tourists and local patrons.

Surf Cox's Bazar

While Bangladesh's most popular beach destination is no patch on the ultramarine waters of neighboring Thailand or the Indian Andaman Islands, Cox's Bazar has recently come to the attention of the world's surfing community. This 125km stretch of beach doesn't come near to rivaling the rolling barrels of Hawaii, Aus-

tralia or South Africa, but it does deliver waves, and a fledgling surfing culture - started by visiting Western surfers and subsequently picked up and propagated by local enthusiasts, both men and women - has been taking shape here over the past few years. Once in a while there's also the odd informal contest meant to encourage local surfers, where outsiders are free to participate in the fanfare. So come with your surfboard and dive in, or simply stand by on the sands and watch all the action on the waves. Either way, you'll find one more reason to love this fascinating country.

Spot tigers in the Sundarbans

Hemming the southern coastal fringes of Bangladesh, the Sundarbans are located along muddy estuarine tracts where some of the biggest subcontinental rivers drain into the Bay of Bengal. These mangrove jungles - the largest of their kind in the world - are home to copious amounts of wildlife, including some 100 Bengal tigers that roam the patches of ground between the water-



Embrace the chaos and crowds of Dhaka



Stop in at Srimangal's tea stalls to taste the famous seven-layer tea

ways. While the tigers are elusive to say the least, sightings are possible from time to time, so embarking on a one- or two-day boat safari through the delta's muddy channels is certainly worth considering. While you're peeking through your binoculars, don't forget to spy on the enormous salt-water crocodiles sunbathing on the banks or cheery porpoises diving in the waters around you.

Explore the Chittagong Hills

Far from the bustle of Bangladesh's frantic cities and towns, the pristine Chittagong Hill Tracts are a melting pot of the country's many indigenous tribal peoples, whose way of life remains almost unchanged across the centuries. While there are permits and other arrangements to be taken care of along the way, a trip to these antique hills is certainly worth enduring the red tape for as it will bring you up close to traditional Bengali culture and give you a rare chance to interact with Buddhist and animist tribal communities and sample their fantastic traditions, customs and cuisines. The settlements of Bandarban and Rangamati provide convenient inroads into the region, where you can arrange guides and tours into the area's many villages, marketplaces, lakes and rivers. (www.lonelyplanet.com)



Head to the Sundarbans for a chance to spy the elusive Bengal tiger



Hang ten or simply take a sunset stroll on the beach at Cox's Bazar



Bandarban's gleaming Dhatu Jadi

Comic

Word Search

90's Songs 8 - Word Search

X B Z H N O D I G G I T Y G R N B
R B W H E D I L S A Y E N U Q O B
A J R W T T Y D M K L A N Z M B E
E F U O A Z H A I B E A W A I O C
P I D M A N M G A K R M N X S D E
P N A R P R N V I O A Y I W S Y I
A A C L A A E A U N W Y V T I K P
S L P E C I R N B H O Z I M N N R
I L D U L S D O E E D T E K G O E
D Y G E A E R R U W Z I T Z U W T
J V B Y W I E N S N H D S O D S S
G N I H T Y N A A A D I A A N R A
U T G G N I H T Y R E V E K R V M
V V C E V E R L O N G W L E Y M S

ADIA
ANYTHING
ANYWHERE
CRAZY
DEAR MAMA
DISAPPEAR
DISARM
EVERLONG
EVERYTHING
FINALLY
JUMP AROUND
MASTERPIECE
MISSING
NO DIGGITY
NOBODY KNOWS
NOT TONIGHT
RUN-AROUND
SAY IT
SLIDE
SUKIYAKI
TIME
UNBELIEVABLE
WANNABE

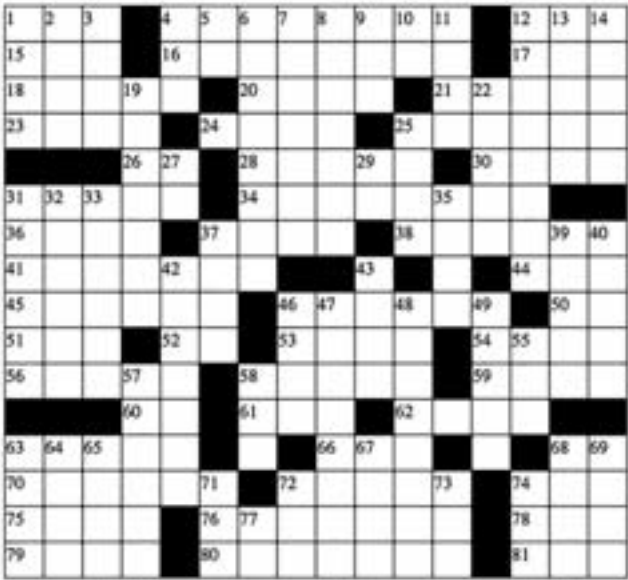
Yesterday's Solution

90's Songs 7 - Solution

E S L P E E R C W A B N V L T A X
A E S E N T S A V E T O N I G H T
Y M S E G K R E B M E C E D A W R
I A N T C N Y Q E W I B G P W U R
Z G S A R N A I O M R S P T N T G
V H T D E V I N L E L O W A Z D N
B S O O P L K R M A P L W E N X U
L I O H M I O R P G S A E O A G L
A L C W U I O U I O Y T R T S R A
C O L V J F U B N T W A K L M B T
K O O J N Q S H R G I T A I H L E
C F S I V L W A Z N I N X E S D L
A T E T H G I R L A S N R V A S Y
T M R J O N E S R R X O X S Y B C

ALRIGHT
ANGEL
BIG POPPA
BLACK CAT
CREEP
DECEMBER
FOOLISH GAMES
HERO
I KNOW
I SWEAR
INFORMER
JUMPER
LAST KISS
LATELY
LOUNGIN
MR. JONES
NO RAIN
RUNAWAY TRAIN
SAVE TONIGHT
TELL ME
TOO CLOSE
TWO PRINCES
WHO DAT

Crossword 2164



ACROSS

- 1. The shape of a raised edge of a more or less circular object.
- 4. Evergreen tree of New Zealand resembling the kawaka.
- 12. A master's degree in business.
- 15. A self-funded retirement plan that allows you to contribute a limited yearly sum toward your retirement.
- 16. Producing no fruit.
- 17. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- 18. Of or relating to or characteristic of Morocco or its people.
- 20. The back side of the neck.
- 21. Fruit (especially peach) whose flesh adheres strongly to the pit.
- 23. Relatively small fast-moving sloth.
- 24. (trademark) An antacid.
- 26. A metallic element of the rare earth group.
- 28. English Romantic poet (1795-1821).
- 30. A bachelor's degree in music.
- 31. Full of seeds.
- 34. A member of the North American Indian people of Oregon.
- 36. Of or being the lowest female voice.
- 38. An implement used to erase something.
- 41. A name for the Old Testament God as transliterated from the Hebrew YHVH.
- 44. Brief episode in which the brain gets insufficient blood supply.
- 45. Evergreen Indian shrub with vivid yellow flowers whose bark is used in tanning.

- 50. A metric unit of weight equal to one thousandth of a kilogram.
- 51. The force of workers available.
- 52. A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
- 53. Gull-like jaeger of northern seas.
- 54. A fencing sword similar to a foil but with a heavier blade.
- 56. Administer an oil or ointment to.
- 59. Something causes misery or death.
- 60. A radioactive transuranic element produced by bombarding plutonium with neutrons.
- 61. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
- 62. No longer having or seeming to have or expecting to have life.
- 63. A domed or vaulted recess or projection on a building especially the east end of a church.
- 66. Step on it.
- 70. A high-crowned black cap (usually made of felt or sheepskin) worn by men in Turkey and Iran and the Caucasus.
- 75. The United Nations agency concerned with civil aviation.
- 76. A genus of Paridae.
- 78. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- 79. A Chad language spoken south of Lake Chad.
- 80. A port and the capital of Guinea.
- 81. A light touch or stroke.

Daily SuDoku

		7		8			1				
3			8	6							4
6					2		7				
					9						2
			9				6				
4				1							
		1		3							9
2						1	5				7
		3				7		2			

DOWN

- 1. Tall New Zealand timber tree.
- 2. A theocratic republic in the Middle East in western Asia.
- 3. God of death.
- 4. Committee formed by a special-interest group to raise money for their favorite political candidates.
- 5. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
- 6. (Judaism) An eight-day Jewish holiday commemorating the rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem.
- 7. Of or relating to Aram or to its inhabitants or their culture or their language.
- 8. A city is east central Sweden north northwest of Stockholm.
- 9. Having a toe or toes of a specified kind.
- 10. A bivalent and trivalent metallic element of the rare earth group.
- 11. United States writer (born in Poland) who wrote in Yiddish (1880-1957).
- 12. The chief mast of a sailing vessel with two or more masts.
- 13. Of or relating to the African people who speak one of the Bantoid languages or to their culture.
- 14. An ancient city in southeastern Greece.
- 19. Located, suited for, or taking place in the open air.
- 22. A military dictatorship in North Africa on the Mediterranean.
- 25. A rare chronic progressive encephalitis caused by the measles virus and occurring primarily in children and young adults.
- 27. Minor or subordinate.
- 29. A hard gray lustrous metallic element that is highly corrosion-resistant.
- 32. Being one more than ten.

- 33. A colorless odorless gas used as fuel.
- 35. The capital and largest city of Mongolia.
- 37. Fallow deer.
- 39. German chemist who did research on high-speed chemical reactions (born in 1927).
- 40. Tall perennial herb of tropical Asia with dark green leaves.
- 42. Painted beauty and red admiral.
- 43. A doctor's degree in music.
- 46. A male monarch or emperor (especially of Russia prior to 1917).
- 47. A state in south central United States.
- 48. German publisher of a series of travel guidebooks (1801-1859).
- 49. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- 55. A number of sheets of paper fastened together along one edge.
- 57. Australian moundbird.
- 58. A device for creating a current of air by movement of a surface or surfaces.
- 64. Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America.
- 65. Block consisting of a thick piece of something.
- 67. A republic in the Middle East in western Asia.
- 68. A small cake leavened with yeast.
- 69. According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
- 71. Being one hundred more than two hundred.
- 72. (of light) Lacking in intensity or brightness.
- 73. The chance to speak.
- 74. An informal term for a father.
- 77. A trivalent metallic element of the rare earth group.

Yesterday's Solution

S	H	A	N		B	A	G	G	A	G	E		R	A	P
K	U	K	I		A	T	R	O	P	O	S		E	R	A
E	L	A	E	I	S		I	D	I	O	M		A	D	D
G	A	B	B	L	I	N	G		A	K		S	L	E	D
	A	U			A	A	R	O	N		K	A	M	B	A
A	B		H		D	I	P		B	E	L				
T	H	E	R	E	S	A		S	A	B	B	A	T	I	A
H	A	Y			C	F		C	L	A	D	O	D	E	
A	G	E	D		A	H	A	B		B		O	L	D	
R	A	D			M	A	R	A	C	A		K	N	E	E
			C	A		K	M		A	R	R	E	A	R	S
P	A	N	A	C	H	E			S	C	A	N			
A	D		L	E	A		P	A	C	A		A	I	D	E
P	A	P	A		O	S	A	K	A		A	F	F	I	X
A	N	A	S		M	E	B	A	R	A	L		F	R	I
L	A	T	H		A	P	A	N	A	G	E		Y	E	T

Yesterday's Solution

9	2	6	3	5	1	8	7	4
5	3	1	7	8	4	9	2	6
8	4	7	2	9	6	1	5	3
4	7	2	5	3	8	6	1	9
1	6	5	9	4	7	2	3	8
3	8	9	1	6	2	7	4	5
2	9	3	8	1	5	4	6	7
7	5	4	6	2	9	3	8	1
6	1	8	4	7	3	5	9	2

TV Listings

Friday, March 22, 2019

AM MOVIES
ACTION

01:40 The Hollow Point
03:35 Honeymoon From Hell
05:25 Cold Zone
07:10 The Hollow Point
09:00 Honeymoon From Hell
10:40 Cold Zone
12:20 Cold Moon
14:00 The Fate Of The Furious
16:15 Patriots Day
18:30 Carter And June
20:05 Harsh Times
22:05 Silencer
23:40 Jennifer Eight

ANIMAL PLANET HD

00:50 Into Alaska
01:45 North Woods Law
02:40 Monsters Inside Me
03:35 Shark Attack File
04:25 Into Alaska
05:15 North Woods Law
06:02 Mekong: Soul Of A River
06:49 Pit Bulls & Parolees
07:36 Escape To Chimp Eden
08:25 Whale Wars
09:15 Animal Cops Houston
10:10 Into Alaska
11:05 North Woods Law
12:00 Mekong: Soul Of A River
12:55 Pit Bulls & Parolees
13:50 Shark Attack File
14:45 Dr. Jeff: Rocky Mountain Vet
15:40 Extinct Or Alive
16:35 Monsters Inside Me
17:30 Whale Wars
18:25 Animal Cops Houston
19:20 Into The Shark Bite
20:15 China's Last Elephants
21:10 Amanda To The Rescue
22:05 Mekong: Soul Of A River
23:00 Monsters Inside Me
23:55 Pit Bulls & Parolees

BBC FIRST

00:10 Doctors
00:40 EastEnders
01:10 The Split
02:05 Inside No. 9
02:35 Class
03:20 Holby City
05:05 Death In Paradise
06:00 Doctors
06:30 EastEnders
07:00 Carters Get Rich
07:25 Friday Night Dinner
07:50 Call The Midwife
08:45 Death In Paradise
09:40 Father Brown
10:30 Doctors
11:00 Holby City
11:55 Holby City
12:50 Father Brown
13:40 New Tricks
14:35 New Tricks
15:30 EastEnders
16:00 Doctors
18:30 The Coroner
20:10 The Split
21:05 Line Of Duty
22:05 The Cry
23:05 Shakespeare & Hathaway: Private Investigators
23:50 Doctors

crime & investigation network

Crime & Investigation Network
00:00 Homicide Hunter
01:00 What The Killer Did Next
02:00 The Killing Season
03:50 Crimes That Shook Britain
04:45 The First 48
05:30 Live PD: Police Patrol
05:55 Police Patrol
06:15 The Eleven
07:00 Homicide Hunter
08:00 Live PD: Police Patrol
08:20 The First 48
09:05 What The Killer Did Next
09:50 Homicide Hunter
10:35 What The Killer Did Next

11:30 Nightmare In Suburbia
12:25 The First 48
13:20 I Killed My BFF
14:15 Police Patrol
15:10 It Takes A Killer
16:05 Homicide Hunter
17:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
18:00 The First 48
19:00 Police Patrol
19:30 Police Patrol
20:00 The Eleven
21:00 Homicide Hunter
22:00 Police Patrol
23:00 It Takes A Killer

COMEDY CENTRAL

00:25 Comedy Central Presents
Comedy 3alwagef
00:55 Broad City
01:40 Review
02:05 Takeshis Castle Thailand
02:30 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
03:00 Broad City
03:45 Are We There Yet
04:10 Comedy Central Presents
Comedy 3alwagef
04:40 Impractical Jokers
05:00 Are We There Yet
07:10 Lip Sync Battle
07:35 Lip Sync Battle
08:00 Ridiculousness Arabia
08:25 Takeshis Castle Thailand
08:55 Comedy Central Presents
Comedy 3alwagef
09:50 Menna W FINA
10:15 Friends
12:20 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
14:30 Disaster Date
15:45 Friends
18:00 Impractical Jokers
19:30 Ridiculousness Arabia
20:00 Takeshis Castle Thailand
20:30 Comedy Central Presents
Comedy 3alwagef
21:30 Menna W FINA
22:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
22:30 The Alternative Comedy Experience
23:30 This Is Not Happening

Discovery Family

00:30 Xploration Outer Space
01:20 Animal Airport
01:45 Beverly Hills Groomer
02:10 Adventure 8: Zoo Games
03:00 Treasure Quest: Snake Island
03:50 How It's Made
04:40 Weather Gone Viral
05:30 Xploration Outer Space
06:20 Kids Do The Craziest Things
07:00 Mysteries At The Museum
07:50 Treasure Quest: Snake Island
08:40 How It's Made
09:30 Kids Do The Craziest Things
10:20 Animal Airport
10:45 Beverly Hills Groomer
11:10 Adventure 8: Zoo Games
12:00 Mysteries At The Museum
12:50 Weather Gone Viral
13:40 Xploration Outer Space
14:30 How It's Made
15:20 Kids Do The Craziest Things
16:10 Xtreme Waterparks
17:00 Beverly Hills Groomer
17:50 Adventure 8: Zoo Games
18:40 Breaking Magic
19:30 Deception With Keith Barry
20:20 The Carbonaro Effect
21:10 Treasure Quest: Snake Island
22:00 How It's Made
22:50 Xtreme Waterparks
23:40 Deception With Keith Barry

ID

00:50 People Magazine Investigations
01:45 Dead Of Winter
02:40 Killing Time
03:35 Evil Stepmothers
04:30 Murder Comes To Town

05:25 Murder Calls
06:20 The Perfect Murder
07:10 I Almost Got Away With It
08:00 California Investigator
08:25 Disappeared
09:15 American Monster
10:10 Murder Calls
11:05 The Perfect Murder
12:00 The Perfect Murder
12:55 Disappeared
13:50 I Almost Got Away With It
14:45 Murder Calls
15:40 The Perfect Murder
16:35 Murder Comes To Town
17:30 Disappeared
18:25 American Monster
19:20 I Almost Got Away With It
20:15 Murder Calls
21:10 The Perfect Murder
22:05 American Monster
23:00 Dead Of Winter
23:55 Heart Of Darkness

Disney HD

00:10 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Alex & Co.
01:25 Alex & Co.
01:45 Disney Mickey Mouse
01:50 Evermoor Chronicles
02:15 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
03:05 Binny And The Ghost
03:55 Hank Zipzer
04:15 Disney Mickey Mouse
04:20 Hank Zipzer
04:45 Alex & Co.
05:35 Sabrina: Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
06:25 Binny And The Ghost
06:45 Disney Mickey Mouse
06:50 Rolling With The Ronks
07:00 Jessie
08:15 Bizaardvark
09:30 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
10:45 Liv And Maddie
12:00 Shake It Up
13:15 K.C. Undercover
14:30 Gotta Kick It Up
15:55 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
17:25 Raven's Home
18:40 A.N.T. Farm
19:55 Bunk'd
20:20 Descendants Wicked World
20:25 Bunk'd
20:50 Bunk'd
21:15 Stuck In The Middle
22:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
22:10 Stuck In The Middle
22:35 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
23:50 Lolirock

Disney Junior

00:00 PJ Masks
00:30 The Lion Guard
01:00 Sofia The First
01:25 Minnie's Bow-Toons
01:30 Henry Hugglemonster
02:00 PJ Masks
02:50 The Hive
03:00 Zou
03:30 Henry Hugglemonster
04:20 The Hive
04:40 Zou
05:25 The Hive
05:45 Henry Hugglemonster
06:30 Minnie's Bow-Toons
06:35 The Hive
06:45 PJ Masks
07:55 Minnie's Bow-Toons
08:00 Disney Muppet Babies
08:20 Paprika
08:30 Paprika
08:40 PJ Masks
09:00 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
09:15 Puppy Dog Pals
09:30 Vampirina
09:45 Fancy Nancy
10:00 Sofia The First
10:30 Elena Of Avalor
11:00 Puppy Dog Pals
12:00 Disney Muppet Babies
12:20 Paprika

12:30 Paprika
12:40 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
13:40 PJ Masks
14:40 Paprika
15:00 Claude
15:40 Vampirina
16:30 Paprika
17:00 Disney Muppet Babies
17:30 PJ Masks
17:55 Disney Junior Music Nursery Rhymes
18:00 Puppy Dog Pals
18:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
19:00 Fancy Nancy
19:30 Vampirina
20:00 PJ Masks
20:30 The Lion Guard
21:00 Sofia The First
21:25 Disney Junior Music Nursery Rhymes
21:30 Elena Of Avalor
22:00 Puppy Dog Pals
22:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
23:00 Fancy Nancy
23:30 Vampirina

Discovery Channel HD

00:15 Marooned With Ed Stafford
01:05 Impossible Engineering
01:50 Mythbusters Jr.
02:35 What On Earth?
03:20 Unique Rides With Will Castro
04:50 How Do They Do It?
05:35 Property Wars
06:00 Container Wars
06:20 Property Wars
06:45 Marooned With Ed Stafford
07:35 Deadliest Catch
08:20 Gold Rush
09:10 Alaska: The Last Frontier
09:55 Alaskan Bush People
10:45 How Do They Do It?
11:30 Unique Rides With Will Castro
13:05 Container Wars
13:30 Property Wars
13:55 Alaskan Bush People
14:40 Railroad Australia
15:30 Blue Hole
16:15 Street Outlaws: No Prep Kings
17:05 Alaska: The Last Frontier
17:50 Gold Rush
18:40 How Do They Do It?
19:25 Fast N' Loud
21:00 American Chopper
21:50 Street Outlaws: No Prep Kings
23:30 Deadliest Catch

XD

00:15 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
00:35 Booster
01:25 Counterfeit Cat
02:10 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
03:00 Booster
03:45 Dude That's My Ghost
04:35 Counterfeit Cat
05:00 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
05:29 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja
06:00 Marvel's Spider-Man
06:29 Marvel's Avengers: Secret Wars
07:00 Phineas And Ferb
08:00 Gravity Falls
08:00 Lab Rats
09:25 Lab Rats
09:50 Mighty Med
10:40 Kickin' It
11:30 Lab Rats Elite Force
12:20 Phineas And Ferb
12:35 Gravity Falls
13:00 Gravity Falls
13:29 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
14:29 Marvel's Avengers: Black Panther's Quest
15:00 Marvel's Spider-Man
15:31 Furiki Wheels
15:45 Furiki Wheels
16:00 Big City Greens

16:29 Space Chickens In Space
17:00 Milo Murphy's Law
17:29 DuckTales
18:00 Phineas And Ferb
18:29 Lab Rats
19:00 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
20:00 Big City Greens
20:29 Gravity Falls
21:29 Star Wars Resistance
22:00 Milo Murphy's Law
22:29 Furiki Wheels
23:00 Dude That's My Ghost
23:50 Randy Cunningham: 9th Grade Ninja

E! HD

00:00 Botched
01:00 Botched
02:00 E! News
03:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
04:00 Botched
08:00 E! News: Daily Pop
08:55 Botched
11:40 E! News
12:35 Very Cavallari
15:20 E! News: Daily Pop
16:15 Botched
19:00 E! News
20:00 Botched
23:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry

itv CHOICE

00:10 Who's Doing The Dishes?
01:00 Emmerdale
01:30 Coronation Street
02:30 Dinner Date
03:25 This Time Next Year
04:20 Gino's Italian Coastal Escape
05:15 Don't Tell The Bride
06:15 Who's Doing The Dishes?
07:10 Dinner Date
08:05 This Time Next Year
09:00 Gino's Italian Coastal Escape
09:25 Gino's Italian Coastal Escape
09:55 Don't Tell The Bride
10:55 Who's Doing The Dishes?
11:50 Dinner Date
12:45 Emmerdale
13:45 Coronation Street
14:15 Who's Doing The Dishes?
15:10 Dinner Date
16:00 Dancing On Ice
17:50 Don't Tell The Bride
18:50 Emmerdale
19:45 Coronation Street
20:10 Dinner Date
21:00 Dancing On Ice
22:50 Emmerdale
23:40 Coronation Street

HQ HD

00:30 America's Book Of Secrets
01:15 Ancient Aliens
02:00 Ancient Discoveries
02:45 Million Dollar Genius
03:30 UFO Hunters
04:15 Ancient Aliens
05:00 The Universe: Ancient Mysteries Solved
05:45 Weapons At War
06:30 America's Book Of Secrets
07:15 Ancient Aliens
08:00 Ancient Discoveries
08:45 Million Dollar Genius
09:30 UFO Hunters
10:15 Ancient Aliens
11:00 The Universe: Ancient Mysteries Solved
11:45 Weapons At War
12:30 America's Book Of Secrets
13:15 Ancient Aliens
14:00 Ancient Discoveries
14:45 Million Dollar Genius
15:30 UFO Hunters
16:15 Ancient Aliens
17:00 The Universe: Ancient Mysteries Solved
17:45 Weapons At War
18:30 America's Book Of Secrets
19:15 Ancient Aliens

20:00 Ancient Impossible
20:45 Million Dollar Genius
21:30 UFO Hunters
22:15 Ancient Aliens
23:00 Stan Lee's Superhumans
23:45 Weapons At War

HISTORY

00:20 Swamp People
01:05 Pawn Stars
01:30 Pawn Stars
01:50 American Pickers Best Of
02:35 Storage Wars
03:25 Brothers In Arms
04:15 River Hunters
05:05 Forged In Fire
06:00 Big Easy Motors
06:45 Swamp People
07:30 Pawn Stars
08:15 American Pickers Best Of
09:00 Storage Wars
09:45 River Hunters
10:30 Forged In Fire
11:15 American Pickers
15:00 Counting Cars
17:15 Car Nation
18:45 Counting Cars
19:30 WW2 Treasure Hunters
20:15 WW2 Treasure Hunters
21:00 Forged In Fire: Knife Or Death
21:50 Forged In Fire: Knife Or Death
22:40 Milwaukee Blacksmith
23:30 Car Nation

NAT GEO people HD

00:45 The Food Files
01:10 Carnival Eats
01:40 Miguel's Feasts
02:05 Chasing The Sun
02:35 Bangkok Airport
03:30 Fish Tank Kings
04:25 Route Awakening
05:20 A House Of Its Time
06:15 Poh & Co.
07:10 Miguel's Feasts
07:35 Chasing The Sun
08:05 Bangkok Airport
09:00 Fish Tank Kings
09:55 Route Awakening
10:50 A House Of Its Time
11:45 Poh & Co.
12:40 Miguel's Feasts
13:05 Chasing The Sun
13:35 Miguel's Feasts
14:00 Angelo's Outdoor Kitchen
14:30 Fish Tank Kings
15:25 Route Awakening
16:20 A House Of Its Time
17:15 Poh & Co.
18:10 Confucius Was A Foodie
19:05 Miguel's Feasts
19:30 Angelo's Outdoor Kitchen
20:00 Fish Tank Kings
21:00 Route Awakening
22:00 A House Of Its Time
22:55 Poh & Co.
23:50 Confucius Was A Foodie

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNEL HD

00:10 1917: One Year, Two Revolutions
01:00 I Wouldn't Go In There
02:00 Scam City
03:00 Going Deep With David Rees
04:00 1917: One Year, Two Revolutions
05:00 Ultimate Survival Alaska
06:00 4 Babies A Second
07:00 World's Weirdest
08:00 Surgery Ship
09:00 Ultimate Survival Alaska
10:00 Explorer
11:00 Scam City
12:00 Homestay China
13:00 4 Babies A Second
14:00 Surgery Ship
15:00 How To Win At Everything
16:00 Explorer
17:00 Lost Treasures Of Egypt
18:00 Hard Time: Locked Up
19:00 How To Win At Everything
20:00 Explorer
20:50 Lost Treasures Of Egypt

Stars



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Your birthday finds you not sure of what you really desire. You don't want to work or be with others at all. People get on your nerves and you don't want to be home molly coddling those you love. Your serious nature today could find you not very good at receiving wishes when friends and family call. Keep it to yourself as much as possible. Let your phone go to voice message until you want to take the time to call back. Make the best of this day and do something where you don't have to think. Rest your mind. If you like to watch animals go out in nature to do that. Nature is a soother. Generally, that's why fisherman fish.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

On this nice day you seem laid back to others at work. That is far from the truth though you communicate quite well with coworkers. The reality is most people that invade your space already have a strike against them because you're a little bit agitated just by them being close. Try to keep it under wraps as much as possible. Later you can take time to yourself and recoup. Don't let this irritation carry over at home or with loved ones. They know you and you can't hide your feelings, Aries. It's best to enjoy some time alone tonight catching up on television without having to plentifully converse with your lover or children. You have an excuse.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Yesterday is gone and it's a new day. You may wish you could live life over again in yesterday like "Groundhog Day." Today, you may wake up with opposition to all you say or do at home. It won't get better today but give yourself some time, it will. Frustration will be aggravating both at work and home. It'll seem as if you're striding in the proverbial walking-in-water situation. You, Taurus, will rethink all your efforts from yesterday and probably dismiss some of them by changing how you approach those efforts today. Homelife won't be much better. Find a place to sit and be alone while pretending you're reading a good book or watching television.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You care for others and you crave their attention as well because of a need that's bigger than you. Unhappiness at home may mean you need more attention now at work. You do your best to achieve improvements at work to get the kindness you feel you're missing at home. At home or work you could find yourself in a hateful confrontation which won't be resolved easily. You may find yourself unable to communicate with others as you're generally capable of doing, Gemini. This isn't your best day but you can be sure it will get better even if it takes a few days.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Changes around you if you're not the one making drive you to distraction now. You may be unable to keep your mind directed towards work today. Do the best you can. Something a neighbor has done or said is on your mind and not in a good way. Try to pay attention before saying anything at work or home. You want to be sure of yourself before speaking up, Cancer. Your energy is such that if you're wrong you've stirred a lot of attention to the issue and then it may really become your problem. Take your time to think, absorb and then see if you need to complain.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You're feeling stronger in every way but especially emotionally and mentally. You're right on top of your work situation and you realize just how much you're thought of by others, not just family and friends. That's what the last few days of introspection has accomplished for you. It wasn't just a selfish motivation either because you desire to help those you love as well, Leo. Now, you're ready and willing to work hard to achieve your goals in life. You also know that you deserve time to play as well and you deserve the love and respect you command. Be proud.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

This would be a wonderful day for a small vacation so that you could go to the movies or do something else you'd like more. Occupying your mind with something other than work is what you need. You're feeling frustrated and don't want to infect others. If you do go to work then try to do something that keeps you working alone if at all possible. Stay away from arguments especially if they become personal. Your opponent may not be armed as appropriately as you but you can't come out of this looking good either. Take time for you today.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

This is a wonderful time of wonderful things happening in your life and it's all because of you. You're open to new ideas and you research all that you're going to implement for your future success. Opportunities are there for the grabbing and you're doing just that. Be thoughtful in what you get yourself into though. You try to believe the best about everyone and what they bring you. Libra, take the time to think over the person bringing the prospect and the actual proposal as well. You don't want to have to look back and regret taking this situation for granted because you believed. All-in-all, this is a brilliant, joyful time for you.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Everything you've been doing lately has finally caught up with you. You been feeling as if you're in a fairy tale where you're the one getting all you desire and the work isn't even hard. It's true and you still are but now is the time to look over all that good stuff and be thankful. Say your prayers to the powers that be for everything you're achieving. Take some time to stop and smell the roses too. It's not all about working too hard to appreciate being alive. Allow your friends their time. Someone you love needs you now.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Oops, you're looking your life over with a larger magnifying glass. That thought about renewing your vows might not have been the best thing for you. A discussion with an older trusted family friend or part of the family might raise the idea you need to rethink some things. Just when you thought you had it made. Rose colored glasses are not as keen as they were yesterday. You're on top of the world except for you're not sure you're making the best decisions for you now. Worry isn't something you need to subscribe too now, Sagittarius. Instead, what is it you really desire? Answering that question will make up your mind.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Today may see you saying things that someone else takes offense to at work. If you think something won't work correctly then you're not afraid to speak up and tell them why you think it can't succeed. That's not good if it's someone you're work courting or your boss. Watch how you phrase things, Capricorn. You have a commanding look about you so your speech may be taken completely wrong. A need to be cuddled by family is part of this day's needs, perhaps because of what's happening at work. Good friends may help too.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Those at work will appreciate your need to take care of them now. Because of your own needs and experiences, you're able to sense and help with other people's requirements, especially those you're not particularly close to. The situation isn't your monkey nor your circus. Your assistance is done with passing ease but you leave the coworker with the thought that you cared enough to stop and help. Listening to and helping those at your workplace on serves to make you appreciate the items you have in your life more, Aquarius. This is a day of retrospection. You may want to go home to your puppy or kitty and chill tonight. Get your thoughts together.


Country Codes

Afghanistan	0093	Jordan	00962
Albania	00355	Kazakhstan	007
Algeria	00213	Kenya	00254
Andorra	00376	Kiribati	00686
Angola	00244	Kuwait	00965
Anguilla	001264	Kyrgyzstan	00996
Antiga	001268	Laos	00856
Argentina	0054	Latvia	00371
Armenia	00374	Lebanon	00961
Australia	0061	Liberia	00231
Austria	0043	Libya	00218
Bahamas	001242	Lithuania	00370
Bahrain	00973	Luxembourg	00352
Bangladesh	00880	Macau	00853
Barbados	001246	Macedonia	00389
Belarus	00375	Madagascar	00261
Belgium	0032	Majorca	0034
Belize	00501	Malawi	00265
Benin	00229	Malaysia	0060
Bermuda	001441	Maldives	00960
Bhutan	00975	Mali	00223
Bolivia	00591	Malta	00356
Bosnia	00387	Marshall Islands	00692
Botswana	00267	Martinique	00596
Brazil	0055	Mauritania	00222
Brunei	00673	Mauritius	00230
Bulgaria	00359	Mayotte	00269
Burkina	00226	Mexico	0052
Burundi	00257	Micronesia	00691
Cambodia	00855	Moldova	00373
Cameroon	00237	Monaco	00377
Canada	001	Mongolia	00976
Cape Verde	00238	Montserrat	001664
Cayman Islands	001345	Morocco	00212
Central African Republic	00236	Mozambique	00258
Chad	00235	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Chile	0056	Namibia	00264
China	0086	Nepal	00977
Colombia	0057	Netherlands (Holland)	0031
Comoros	00269	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Congo	00242	New Caledonia	00687
Cook Islands	00682	New Zealand	0064
Costa Rica	00506	Nicaragua	00505
Croatia	00385	Nigar	00227
Cuba	0053	Nigeria	00234
Cyprus	00357	Niue	00683
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Norfolk Island	00672
Czech Republic	00420	Northern Ireland (UK)	0044
Denmark	0045	North Korea	00850
Diego Garcia	00246	Norway	0047
Djibouti	00253	Oman	00968
Dominica	001767	Pakistan	0092
Dominican Republic	001809	Palau	00680
Ecuador	00593	Panama	00507
Egypt	0020	Papua New Guinea	00675
El Salvador	00503	Paraguay	00595
England (UK)	0044	Peru	0051
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Philippines	0063
Eritrea	00291	Poland	0048
Estonia	00372	Portugal	00351
Ethiopia	00251	Puerto Rico	001787
Falkland Islands	00500	Qatar	00974
Faroe Islands	00298	Romania	0040
Fiji	00679	Russian Federation	007
Finland	00358	Rwanda	00250
France	0033	Saint Helena	00290
French Guiana	00594	Saint Kitts	001869
French Polynesia	00689	Saint Lucia	001758
Gabon	00241	Saint Pierre	00508
Gambia	00220	Saint Vincent	001784
Georgia	00995	Samoa US	00684
Germany	0049	Samoa West	00685
Ghana	00233	San Marino	00378
Gibraltar	00350	Sao Tome	00239
Greece	0030	Saudi Arabia	00966
Greenland	00299	Scotland (UK)	0044
Grenada	001473	Senegal	00221
Guadeloupe	00590	Seychelles	00284
Guam	001671	Sierra Leone	00232
Guatemala	00502	Singapore	0065
Guinea	00224	Slovakia	00421
Guyana	00592	Slovenia	00386
Haiti	00509	Solomon Islands	00677
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Somalia	00252
Honduras	00504	South Africa	0027
Hong Kong	00852	South Korea	0082
Hungary	0036	Spain	0034
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Sri Lanka	0094
Iceland	00354	Sudan	00249
India	0091	Suriname	00597
Indian Ocean	00873	Swaziland	00268
Indonesia	0062	Sweden	0046
Iran	0098	Switzerland	0041
Iraq	00964	Syria	00963
Ireland	00353	Taiwan	00886
Italy	0039	Tanzania	00255
Ivory Coast	00225	Thailand	0066
Jamaica	001876	Toga	00228
Japan	0081	Tonga	00676


CLINIC PAGE




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- ◆ Member of the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery
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- ◆ Member of the European Laryngological Society

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- ◆ Treatment of Perianal Fistula & Complex Perianal Fistula (complications)
- ◆ VAAFT Procedure (Treatment of Fistula through Fistuloscope)
- ◆ Treatment of Intractable Bowel Symptoms
- ◆ Colonoscopy & Gastrosocopy
- ◆ Stomach Balloon Insertion & removal
- ◆ Bariatric Surgery - Lap Sleeve Gastrectomy
- ◆ Gallstones & Abdominal Hernias Surgery

◆ Colonic Hydrotherapy & Fecal Incontinence Treatment
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- ◆ Canadian Board of General Surgery
- ◆ Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada
- ◆ American Board of Colo - Rectal Surgery
- ◆ American Board of Surgical Critical Care




Dr. Abdullah Al Haddad
Surgery Department
Consultant General Surgery, Laparoscopic & Colo - Rectal Surgeon




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Email: aalhaddad@daralshifa.com


Dr. Ahmad Alaeddine
Head of Cardiology departmenta
at Dar Al Shifa hospital




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Kuwait Times Classifieds

Friday, March 22, 2019

Kuwait Times
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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Warm and Partly cloudy with light variable wind to light to moderate north easterly wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h with a chance for scattered rain.

BY NIGHT: Cool and Partly cloudy with light to moderate northerly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 24 km/h.

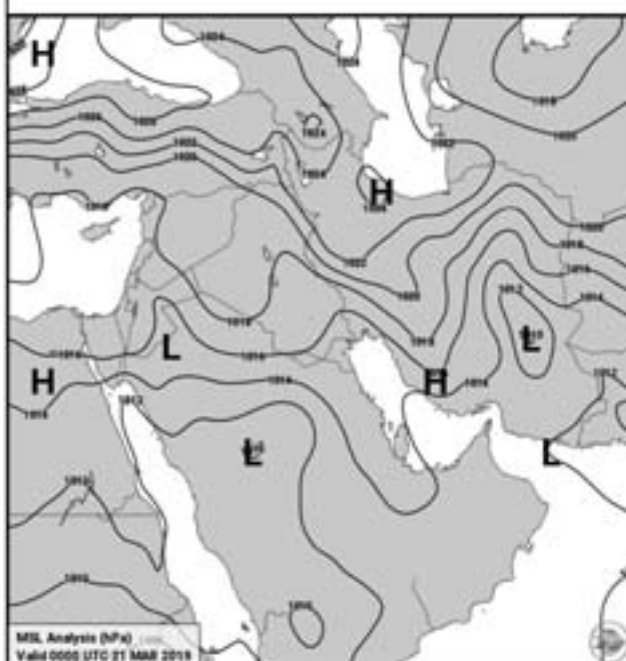
WEATHER WARNING

No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	26 °C	17 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	25 °C	12 °C
ABDALY	27 °C	11 °C
BUBYAN	--- °C	--- °C
JAHERA	27 °C	15 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	24 °C	14 °C
SALMIYAH	21 °C	17 °C
AHMADI	22 °C	18 °C
NUWAISIB	24 °C	15 °C
WAFRA	26 °C	12 °C
SALMY	27 °C	14 °C

SFC. CHART

21/03/2019 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	03/22	Warm and Partly cloudy	26 °C	13 °C	VRB-E	06 - 26 km/h
Saturday	03/23	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for scattered rain later on	26 °C	14 °C	VRB-SE	06 - 28 km/h
Sunday	03/24	Warm and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	25 °C	14 °C	SE-VRB	15 - 40 km/h
Monday	03/25	Warm and Cloudy to partly cloudy causing rising dust with a chance for rain that might be	25 °C	15 °C	SE-NE	20 - 50 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	04:32
Sunrise	05:51
Zuhr	11:55
Asr	15:23
Sunset	18:00
Isha	19:17

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	25 °C
MIN. Temp.	09 °C
MAX. RH	71 %
MIN. RH	20 %
MAX. Wind	SE 25 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

CHANGE OF NAME

I, VISHNU MANOJ (given name) holder of Indian Passport N7014140 do hereby change my name to VISHNU (given name) MANOJ (surname) for all purposes. I also undertake to effect the change in all my other public documents. (C 5504) 20-3-2019

I, Huzefa Lukmani, holder of Indian Passport No. M5452033 and Civil ID No. 288112902143 has changed my name from Hujefa to Huzefa Lukmani hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Huzefa Lukmani. (C 5502) 19-3-2019

Medapati Samelu S/o Medapati Rama Rao (old name) residing at 5-24, Kolmanpeta, Kumudavalli, West Godavari, Andhra Pradesh - 534210.

Solemnly declare that my name (previously called) Medapati Samelu (old name) changed as Medapati Raju (new name). (C 5501) 18-3-2019

FOR SALE

Mitsubishi Lancer Fortis - 2015, white color, excellent condition, KD 1650. Mob 50994848. (C 5505) 21-3-2019

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Christian, Marthomate Boy, 28/177cm, Engineer working in Kuwait, seeks suitable proposal from Marthoma, Orthodox or Jacobite, B-Tech, M-Tech or para-medical working in Kuwait or aboard. Interested may contact josevmathew23@gmail.com (C 5503) 20-3-2019

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Business

FRIDAY, MARCH 22, 2019

38 China tariffs may remain for 'substantial period'**39** For German carmakers, electric shift prompts belt-tightening**41** Cradle of Venezuela oil industry is a scene of desolation today

LONDON: The Bank of England said shifting expectations about the potential nature and timing of Britain's exit from the EU was causing volatility in asset prices. — AFP

BoE warns on 'cliff-edge uncertainties'

European equities wobble before Brexit summit

LONDON: The Bank of England yesterday expressed concerns that further "uncertainties" over a "cliff-edge" no-deal Brexit "could have a significant effect on spending" by businesses. The BoE decided to keep its main interest rate at 0.75 percent following a meeting at which policymakers discussed "the possibility of further cliff-edge uncertainties that could have a significant effect on spending as any new deadline approached" for Brexit.

The central bank said that doubts over Britain's exact departure date from the European Union have continued to generate volatility in UK asset prices, notably business investment.

Minutes of its latest meeting this week added: "Shifting expectations about the potential nature and timing of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union have continued to generate volatility in UK asset prices, particularly the sterling exchange rate."

Prime Minister Theresa May headed back to Brussels yesterday to beg for more time to deliver her Brexit plan, but EU leaders are likely to refuse her request for a three-month postponement.

The BoE yesterday added that according to its own findings, "around 80 percent of (UK-based) companies judged themselves ready for a no-deal, no-transition Brexit scenario". This compared with about 50 percent in January of its regular survey of about 300 businesses. Despite the increase, many of the companies surveyed "also reported that there were limits to the degree of readiness that was feasible in the face of the range of possible outcomes in that scenario."

"These included issues relating to tariffs, border frictions, exchange rate movements and recognition of certifications, which many

companies had noted were outside their control," the BoE minutes added. In a bid to soothe nerves, May's Conservative government last week said it would temporarily slash most import tariffs in the event of a no-deal Brexit. In addition, Britain will not apply customs checks on the border with Ireland, albeit temporarily.

The new tariffs regime is aimed at avoiding both a jump in prices of EU imports for consumers and any disruption of supply chains. It is intended to last up to one year pending negotiations on a more permanent system. Under the proposal, 87 percent of imports into Britain will be eligible for zero tariffs, compares with the current level of 80 percent.

Britain's economy is showing signs of holding up despite Brexit chaos, with unemployment at its lowest level in 44 years and wages growth outpacing inflation. Official data yesterday showed that UK retail sales edged up 0.4 percent in February from January. However, the pound is once more under pressure since May requested her delay on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, European stock markets mostly fell yesterday before a key Brexit summit in Brussels and an interest rate decision in London. Sentiment was partly hit after the Federal Reserve forecast overnight that it would not raise US borrowing costs this year—a shift from an earlier projection of two hikes—and cut its annual growth outlook.

Nearing midday, the London's benchmark FTSE 100 index rose 0.5 percent, buoyed by news that official UK retail sales rose 0.4 percent in February from the previous month.

Yet the pound, seen as a barometer for Britain's long-running

Brexit saga, remained on the backfoot as no-deal fears continued to fester. In eurozone early afternoon trade, the Paris CAC 40 stocks index shed 0.2 percent and Frankfurt's DAX 40 slid 0.5 percent, as uncertainty prevailed ahead of the hotly-anticipated Brexit summit.

British Prime Minister Theresa May was head back to Brussels Thursday on a last-gasp mission to beg EU leaders for more time to deliver a Brexit deal that was twice rejected by her own parliament.

She has written to EU President and summit host Donald Tusk to ask for the withdrawal date to be moved to June 30 from March 29.

Sands of time

"The latest EU summit will see the UK's request for a short Brexit delay voted on by other members. France is playing hard ball; Germany more relaxed," said Accendo Markets analyst Mike van Dulken.

"Expect more Westminster pontificating and blame-gaming. "All the while the sands of time fall towards the pre-existing 29 March Article 50 deadline for which, without EU approval for an extension or Commons approval of the prime minister's deal, the legal default remains a hard Brexit."

BoE's hands tied?

"Due to high Brexit uncertainty, the central bank is unlikely to make any policy changes today or offer any strong future guidance," said London Capital Group analyst Jasper Lawler. "The UK is just eight days away from a no deal Brexit and an extension to Article 50 still has not been—and may not be—granted. As a result, the BoE's hands remained firmly tied.—AFP

Business

China tariffs may remain for ‘substantial period’: Trump

Top US trade officials to visit Beijing March 28-29

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Wednesday that US tariffs on Chinese imports could remain in place for a “substantial period,” dampening hopes that a new trade agreement would see them lifted soon. Top American trade negotiators are due to travel to Beijing next week for a fresh round of talks, and officials have said they were in the final stages of negotiations on resolving the eight-month trade war with China.

Washington and Beijing are battling over the final shape of an agreement, with American officials demanding profound changes to Chinese industrial policy.

While recent comments that the talks are going well has fueled optimism, Trump seemed to dash hopes trade relations between the world’s two largest economies would return to normal.

“We are talking about leaving them for a substantial period of time,” Trump said of the tariffs. “We have to make sure that if we do the deal with China, that China lives by the deal.”

Trump again told reporters at the White House the talks with Beijing were “coming along nicely.”

“We are talking about leaving them for a substantial period of time”

But American officials have insisted that any agreement have teeth—including the ability to impose tariffs unilaterally should China begin backsliding on any commitments to end alleged unfair trade practices. Over the last eight months, the United States and China have slapped tariffs on more than \$360 billion in two-way goods trade, weighing on the manufacturing sectors in both countries.

On Friday, China’s rubber-stamp parliament approved a foreign investment law to strengthen protections for intellectual property—a central US grievance—but critics said the bill was rammed through without sufficient time for input from businesses.

‘A lot of concerns’

Beijing also has expressed willingness to increase purchases of American commodities such as energy and soybeans but analysts say they will be reluctant to accede to demands that could weaken the communist party’s hold on power—such as fully exposing state enterprises to market forces.

Trump initially said he expected to seal any



NANTONG: A worker watches a truck transferring imported sulfur at a port in Nantong in China’s eastern Jiangsu province. A US trade delegation headed by Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin will visit China on March 28-29 for the next round of negotiations, China’s commerce ministry said yesterday. —AFP

final bargain at a summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping later this month but that expectation has faded as momentum in the talks has slowed.

Despite Trump’s trade wars, the US trade deficit with China last year hit a record, as avid US consumers drew in foreign-made goods while weakened US sales of agricultural commodities weighed on American exports. Else-

where on Wednesday, the Federal Reserve cut its growth forecasts for the US and Chairman Jerome Powell told reporters the global economy had begun to slow, notably in China, where tariffs were one obstacle to faster growth.

“I would say tariffs may be a factor in China,” Powell said. “I don’t think they’re the main factor.” —Agencies

Iran vows to control prices, boost production

LONDON/GENEVA: Iranian leaders vowed yesterday to control soaring prices, bring stability to the national currency and create jobs as the nation marked the end of a year of economic crisis fueled by renewed US sanctions.

Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a new year speech that the Islamic Republic successfully resisted the US sanctions, and called on the government to boost national production to face enemy pressures. “In the face of severe, and according to them unprecedented, sanctions from America and Europe, the Iranian people showed a strong and powerful reaction both in the field of politics and economy,” Khamenei said in a pre-recorded speech broadcast on state television.

Khamenei said: “The main problem in the country is the economic problem ... that is partly rooted in mismanagement.”

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani defended his record in a separate message broadcast immediately after Khamenei’s, saying economic problems were primarily caused by US sanctions.

“The new year is a year to boost production and create jobs for our dear young people,” Rouhani said. “The new year is the year to control inflation, bring balance to the foreign currency market and expand friendship with neighboring countries.”

Rouhani called on the country’s political factions to end infighting and unite against foreign enemies. —Reuters

US jobless claims fall; mid-Atlantic factory activity rises

WASHINGTON: The number of Americans filing applications for unemployment benefits fell more than expected last week, pointing to still strong labor market conditions, though the pace of job growth has slowed after last year’s robust gains.

Other data yesterday showed a measure of factory activity in the mid-Atlantic region rebounding sharply this month after falling into negative territory in February for the first time in more than 2-1/2 years. But manufacturers were less upbeat about business conditions and capital spending over the next six months, supporting the view that the manufacturing sector is slowing in line with softening economic growth.

The Federal Reserve held interest rates steady on Wednesday and its policymakers abandoned projections for further rate increases this year, noting that “growth of economic activity has slowed from its solid rate in the fourth quarter.” Initial claims for state unemployment benefits dropped 9,000 to a seasonally adjusted 221,000 for the week ended March 16, the Labor Department said on Thursday. Data for the prior week was revised to show 1,000 more applications received than previously reported.

The Labor Department said no states were estimated. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast claims falling to 225,000 in the latest week. Claims have been drifting in the middle of their 200,000-253,000 range this year. The four-week moving average of initial claims, considered a better measure of labor market trends as it irons out week-to-

week volatility, rose 1,000 to 225,000 last week. —Reuters

US financial markets were little moved by the data as investors continued to digest the policy statement and macroeconomic projections released by the Fed on Wednesday.

Job growth slowing

The claims data covered the survey week for the nonfarm payrolls portion of March’s employment. The four-week average of claims fell 11,000 between the February and March survey periods, suggesting a pickup in job growth after hiring almost stalled last month. Nonfarm payrolls increased by only 20,000 jobs in February, the fewest since September 2017. The slowdown followed big gains in December and January. Average job growth has moderated to about 165,500 per month from 223,250 per month in 2018, reflecting a shortage of workers and softening economic growth as the stimulus from a \$1.5 trillion tax cut package fades.

A trade war between the United States and China, slowing global growth and uncertainty over Britain’s exit from the European Union are also hurting domestic economic activity. In a separate report yesterday, the Philadelphia Fed said its business conditions index jumped to 13.7 in March from -4.1 in February, which was the first negative reading since May 2016. The survey’s measure of new orders received by factories in the region, which covers eastern Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey and Delaware, also rebounded from negative territory in February.

But the survey’s six-month business conditions index fell to a reading of 21.8 this month from 31.3 in February. Its six-month capital expenditures index slipped to a reading of 19.5 in March from 31.7 in the prior month. These readings are in line with other surveys showing signs of slowing national factory activity. A report from the New York Fed last week showed a gauge of factory activity in New York state dropped to a two-year low in March. —Reuters

Business

For German carmakers, electric shift prompts belt-tightening

Years of lower margins and profits, cost cutting and job losses

MUNICH: German carmakers are increasingly turning to electric vehicles to master tough new emissions limits looming in the EU, but the shift away from internal combustion engines will entail years of lower margins and profits, cost cutting and job losses. Costly investments have been the refrain of boardrooms at Volkswagen, BMW and Mercedes-Benz maker Daimler in recent months, in a sector also under pressure from slowing markets, trade conflicts and Brexit. After new emissions tests for vehicles known as WLTP bit into profits last year, they have announced a series of cost-cutting drives. BMW said Wednesday it would seek to save 12 billion euros (\$13.6 billion) over the four years to 2022, but still book pre-tax profits “well below” last year’s level in 2019.

Reducing the breadth and complexity of its range is one way the Munich-based giant will squeeze its spending. Meanwhile VW said last week it would slash between 5,000 and 7,000 jobs at its flagship brand to juice profits. And Dieter Zetsche, chief executive Mercedes-Benz maker Daimler, said he would react to a “difficult year” with “countermeasures” to fatten the bottom line.

Levi’s raises \$623m ahead of NYSE debut

NEW YORK: US jeans company Levi Strauss & Co announced Wednesday strong pricing ahead of its Wall Street return, enabling it to raise a better-than-expected \$623 million.

The iconic brand, which was set to begin trading yesterday on the New York Stock Exchange, said it would initially price at \$17 a share, above the \$14 to \$16 per share range it had previously targeted. Strong demand for the shares means the IPO will raise \$623 million. First founded in 1853 in San Francisco as a wholesale dry goods business, Levi’s invented the blue jean 20 years later, a product that was initially worn by primarily by miners and cowboys before becoming ubiquitous in the 20th century. The brand has had its ups and downs since in terms of its cultural relevance, but has been seen as again rising under Chief Executive Charles Bergh, who joined Levi’s in September 2011 after a lengthy stint at Procter & Gamble. Most recently, Levi’s won attention when musical superstar Beyonce wore Levi’s cutoff shorts in an April 2017 performance at the Coachella music festival, a point highlighted in the company’s securities filing, which noted the garment was deemed the “ultimate Coachella clothing item” by People magazine.

US CEO sentiment falls amid slowing global growth

NEW YORK: Business sentiment among large US companies fell for the fourth straight quarter, according to a report on

‘Only way’
From 2020, tough new carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions rules with stiff financial penalties for infringers will enter force in the European Union, with a further tightening slated for 2030. To escape fines, carmakers are stepping up their efforts to boost electric sales in large markets like Germany, France and Britain. From admitting in 2015 to cheating emissions tests on 11 million vehicles worldwide, VW now aims for 40 percent of sales to be electric powered

by the end of the next decade. “Electric mobility is the only way to achieve environmental objectives,” chief executive Herbert Diess said last month.

Germany’s big beasts have fallen behind foreign insurgents like US-based Tesla, which currently dominates the high-end electric market.

They now fear that a combination of tough regulations, limited charging infrastructure and a lack of sufficient subsidies will hinder them reaching the volumes needed. “New competitors in the US and China are accelerating hugely,” Diess told employees in a speech Wednesday. “When I come back to Germany, I know that we’re not sufficiently prepared. That scares me,” he added.



BMW's CEO Harald Krueger with the German carmaker's Vision iNEXT concept car, an all-electric and highly automated vehicle.—AFP

Alternatives overlooked?

Bosses may have knuckled down and gotten to work, but they haven't spared from criticism the demands from politicians for reductions in pollution emissions. “The 2030 targets are a bet that electric vehicles will be a success,” BMW research chief Klaus Froehlich complained about the EU’s plan to slash new car emissions by 37.5 percent. And discord among the

car firms came to the fore this week when VW called for the VDA industry federation to make electric drive its priority for emissions reduction. Other manufacturers, as well as components suppliers like ZF, reacted angrily to the idea of tearing up the group’s openness to all alternatives for lowering greenhouse gas output—with some firms looking at hybrid cars, natural gas, hydrogen and even more efficient diesels.—AFP



In this file photo, people walk by a Manhattan Levi's clothing store in New York City. —AFP

“The Levi’s brand epitomizes classic, authentic American style and effortless cool,” the company said in its prospectus. Levi’s plans to use proceeds from the offering for general corporate purposes, as well as for potential acquisitions, the company said in the filing. Yesterday’s marks Levi’s return to the public markets after it exited in 1985 in a leveraged buyout, 14 years after it first went public—AFP

Wednesday that highlighted worries about slowing growth outside the United States. The economic outlook rating among US chief executives declined to 95.2 in the first quarter from 104.4 in the third quarter, according to the Business Roundtable.

Roundtable Chairman Jamie Dimon, the chief executive of JPMorgan Chase, said sentiment was dented by

weakness in the fourth quarter in overseas economies, including Germany and Japan.

Dimon also said Brexit uncertainty posed a near-term risk, adding that Britain’s travails over its impending divorce from the European Union had been a “negative for a while” and that “there’s a growing risk in 10 days that you’ll have a so-called ‘hard Brexit.’” —AFP

Tencent Q4 profit drops 32%, missing estimates

HONG KONG: Chinese internet giant Tencent said yesterday net profit plunged 32 percent in the fourth quarter in its sharpest quarterly decline as the company weathered tightened regulations on gaming.

Shenzhen-based Tencent said net profit came in at 14.23 billion yuan (\$2.13 billion) in the three months ending December 31, missing a Bloomberg average analyst estimate of 17.55 billion yuan.

Known for its ubiquitous WeChat social media and messaging program, Tencent felt the squeeze as China’s government effectively froze approvals of new game titles for months last year, officially due to youth gaming addiction concerns. The hiatus, and tighter restrictions on game-playing, saw a stunning amount lopped off of Tencent’s total market value—around a quarter of a trillion dollars—by the time the results of the preceding quarter were announced in November.

Shares in the Hong Kong-listed company fell 1.9 percent yesterday ahead of the report. They have risen 15.6 percent so far this year. But revenues were up 28 percent at 84.9 billion yuan in the fourth quarter, and rose 32 percent last year to 312.7 billion yuan driven in part by advertising.

The mobile game business grew 12 percent in the fourth quarter to 19 billion yuan and 24 percent last year to 77.8 billion yuan. Monthly active users of WeChat and Weixin climbed close to 1.1 billion.—AFP

Business

US Fed expects no rate hikes in 2019 amid global uncertainty

China trade war and Brexit impasse weigh

WASHINGTON: The Federal Reserve sent a strong signal the US economy is slowing, indicating Wednesday it will not raise the benchmark lending rate again this year amid a drop in spending and broader global uncertainty. It was an aggressive downshift that came as a shock to many economists, since as recently as September the Fed expected to raise rates three times in 2019.

"It may be some time before the outlook for jobs and inflation calls clearly for a change in policy," Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell told reporters following the announcement.

And he said global growth which had been a tailwind to the US economy, had begun to slow—notably in Europe and China where tariffs and Brexit are weighing.

The Fed's surprising change of direction follows the four rate increases last year, frequently in the face of vociferous antagonism from President Donald Trump, who called the central bank "crazy" for tightening monetary policy as the economy grew.

The change could prompt speculation that the most recent hike in December, implemented despite a Wall Street sell-off and signs of weakening eco-

nomics activity, was aimed at demonstrating the central bank's independence from Trump.

The shift in the closely-watched forecast released meant nine of the 17 members of the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee lowered their projection for this year.

But the forecast Wednesday also confirms the next move is still expected to be an increase in the key policy interest rate, though that is not now expected to come until sometime in 2020.

The explanation can be found in the stark change in language in the statement from FOMC, which voted unanimously to keep the key rate unchanged at 2.25 to 2.5 percent.

About-face

In its second meeting of the year, the committee

said "growth of economic activity has slowed from its solid rate in the fourth quarter," as household and business spending is expected to drop off and annual inflation has declined. In contrast, in January, the FOMC said economic activity was growing at a "strong rate" and household spending continued to "grow strongly."

Powell explained the about-face, saying that,

“Developments at home and around the world that bear close attention”

”



WASHINGTON, DC: Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell during a press briefing following a Federal Open Market Committee meeting on Wednesday in Washington, DC. —AFP

while fiscal stimulus boosted the economy in 2018, there had been "data arriving since September suggesting that growth is slowing somewhat more than expected." But while "developments at home and around the world that bear close attention," Powell told reporters the Fed's outlook "is a positive one."

The committee members forecast a median federal funds rate this year of 2.4 percent—the current

level-down from the 2.9 percent forecast in December, and 3.1 percent in September.

Central bankers also cut their median forecast for economic growth this year to 2.1 percent, from 2.3 percent in December. That is a sharp contrast to the expectation of more than three percent this year, forecast by the White House Council of Economic Advisers. —AFP

Norway hikes rate, bucking global trend

OSLO: Norway's central bank raised its key interest rate yesterday and indicated another could soon follow due to the strength of the Scandinavian country's economy, in contrast to a slowdown in much of the rest of the world.

The key rate was hiked by 0.25 points for the second time in six months, rising to 1.0 percent. "Our current assessment of the outlook and balance of risks suggests that the policy rate will most likely be increased further in the course of the next half-year," the bank's governor Oystein Olsen told a press conference. He added that "the way things look now" another increase in June was more likely than not.

The announcement surprised many economists and sent the Norwegian kroner surging by one percent against the euro. Analyst David Oxley of Capital Economics said the increase had been expected after policymakers signalled in January they would raise rates. "However, the more hawkish stance adopted by the bank, saying that the next hike will 'most likely' be in the second half of 2019, has caught the market on its toes," he said. Kristoffer Lomholt, an analyst at Danske Bank, called it a "hawkish surprise". There is a "higher likelihood of three than two hikes this year," he wrote on Twitter. The bank said the "upturn in the Norwegian economy appears to be stronger than anticipated earlier". Rising oil prices have propelled the economy of Norway, the biggest oil and gas producer in western Europe, while the outlook has recently been gloomy for many of its European peers. —AFP

A decade on, smartphone-like software finally heads to space

WASHINGTON: Once a traditional satellite is launched into space, its physical hardware and computer software stay mostly immutable for the rest of its existence as it orbits the Earth, even as the technology it serves on the ground continues to change.

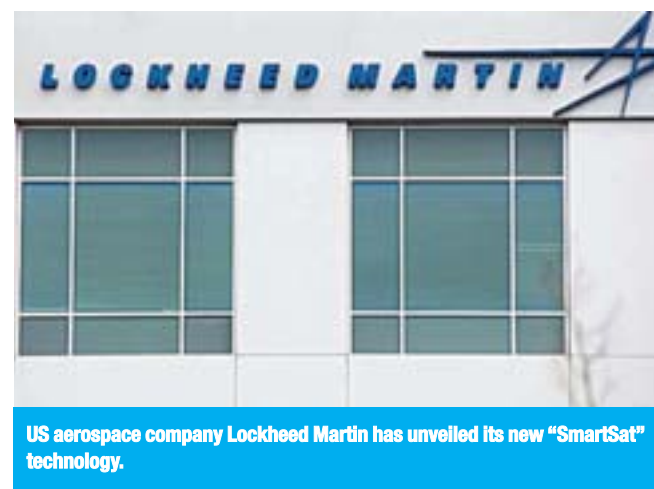
Just as some aerospace start-ups are developing technologies to repair, modify or refuel satellites to prolong their lives, some satellite manufacturers are looking at a complementary solution—hoping to install smartphone-like software with more computing power and capable of receiving updates within minutes instead of days or weeks.

US aerospace company Lockheed Martin presented its new "SmartSat" technology to journalists Wednesday near Washington. "SmartSat" software will hitch a ride aboard mini satellites called cubesats that they plan to launch within the next six months.

"Today's satellites that exist currently are durable, they're capable, they're precise, but once we launch them, they generally don't change much," Lockheed Martin's Maria Demaree explained. "We want the satellites of the future to operate more like smartphones."

Instead of computer programs with a single processor, like satellites have today, with "SmartSat," Lockheed Martin says they'll be bringing multi-core processing to space.

"That lets satellites process more data in orbit so they can beam down just the most critical and relevant infor-



US aerospace company Lockheed Martin has unveiled its new "SmartSat" technology.

mation-saving bandwidth costs and reducing the burden on ground station analysts, and ultimately opening the door for tomorrow's data centers in space," the company said in a statement. For example, according to the company, this technology could allow a commercial operator to more easily reprogram a communications satellite to switch to serving Eastern Europe instead of Western Europe, if necessary.

The US military might also be interested, though Lockheed has not yet confirmed whether they are a "SmartSat" client.

Why haven't aerospace organizations implemented such revolutionary technology before now?

Extreme conditions in space make everything more complicated. "The hardware is very susceptible to locking up or just completely burning out," said "SmartSat" program manager Adam Johnson. "So the hardware is now catching up to the capabilities that we see on the ground, such that it's more radiation-tolerant." —AFP

Business

Cradle of Venezuela oil industry is a scene of desolation today

Water, cooking gas and electricity are absent most of the time

MENE GRANDE, Venezuela: Greasy slicks continue to darken the ground in Mene Grande, a modest town where Venezuela's oil boom was born more than a century ago. But now the days of crude glory are gone, replaced by desolation.

The asphalt on the roads is worn down. Water, cooking gas and electricity are absent most of the time. Locals, who previously received generous oil-related salaries, have left the country because of the worst crisis their country has known. "We used to live like kings," recalled Henry, a 48-year-old former oil well worker who declined to give his last name.

"This was the biggest oil area in Venezuela... You stopped here and used to see a big number of barges working there. Now, all that is finished," he said, indicating Lake Maracaibo, a vast body of water in Venezuela's northwest. The region lived a bonanza that started 105 years ago when oil exploration started here, thanks to the discovery that Venezuela boasts the biggest proven reserves of oil in the world. Between 2004 and 2015, the black stuff brought in \$750 billion.

“Nobody has come to help us, not the municipality, nothing”

Unemployment

Henry lives in San Timoteo, a community near Mene Grande on the shore of the lake where houses sit upon stilts. They used to have a view of oil platforms belonging to state company PDVSA. The steady decline of the industry, due to under investment, an exodus of qualified engineers and corruption among the military bosses meant to manage the sector, has seen oil production slump from 3.2 million barrels per day in 2008 to less than 1 million in February.

Olivero Bracho, 46, is among the hundreds fired from the barges that would ferry them to the platforms. "There's nothing left. The operations have stopped. They got rid of the workers."

Bracho's two children left for Colombia, among the 2.7 million Venezuelans who have abandoned their country since 2015, according to UN figures. "Before, there were a lot of people working. People bought food. Now we don't even have basic items," he said.

San Timoteo is the most rundown part of Mene Grande's municipal region. Half the wooden pontoons that connect the houses on stilts have been washed away by rain.



Once the heart of Venezuela's oil boom, Mene Grande is now a zone of desolate abandon. —AFP

"Nobody has come to help us, not the municipality, nothing," Henry said. Residents have had to turn to collecting rainwater because supplies of drinking water have stopped. For washing, water is scooped up from the polluted, brackish lake. "We go to the shore to wash dishes and bathe," said Dinoria Estrada, visibly angry.

The few people who remain are without work, she said, adding that she herself relied on money sent by relatives abroad. Eduardo Bracho, another ex-oil worker and now a member of the local council and a supporter of President Nicolas Maduro's government, admits the situation has deteriorated. —AFP

Reliance sends fuel from India, Europe to Venezuela to skirt US sanctions

NEW DELHI/MEXICO CITY: India's Reliance Industries is selling fuels to Venezuela from India and Europe to sidestep sanctions that bar US-based companies from dealing with state-run PDVSA, according to trading sources and Refinitiv Eikon data.

Reliance had been supplying alkylate, diluent naphtha and other fuel to Venezuela through its US-based subsidiary before Washington in late January imposed sanctions aimed at curbing the OPEC member's oil exports and ousting Socialist President Nicolas Maduro.

At least three vessels chartered by the Indian conglomerate supplied refined products to Venezuela in recent weeks, and another vessel carrying gasoil is expected to set sail to the South American nation as well, according to the sources and data.

A Reliance spokesman wrote to Reuters in an email and said: "Reliance is and will remain in compliance with the sanctions and shall work with the concerned authorities."

He also said "the volume of products supplied to and crude oil imported from Venezuela have not increased." Reliance, an Indian conglomerate controlled by billionaire Mukesh Ambani, has significant exposure to the financial system of the United States, where it operates subsidiaries linked to its oil and telecom businesses, among others.

The Indian market is crucial for Venezuela's economy because it has historically been the second-largest cash-paying customer for the OPEC country's crude, behind the United States.

Additional sanctions against Venezuela are possible in the future,

as US President Donald Trump's administration has not yet tried to prevent companies based outside the United States from buying Venezuelan oil, a strategy known as "secondary sanctions."

Refinitiv Eikon trade data shows that Reliance shipped alkylate, a component for motor gasoline, to Venezuela on vessels Torm Mary and Torm Anabel in recent weeks. Those originated in India and passed through the Suez Canal.

It also shipped a gasoline cargo using tanker Torm Troilus to Venezuela and is preparing to send 35,000 tonnes of gasoil in a vessel called Vukovar to the South American nation.

"Reliance is also supplying some products from its Rotterdam storage," a source familiar with Reliance's operation said. PDVSA did not reply to a request for comment.

In a statement last week, Reliance said its US unit has completely stopped all business with PDVSA. Reliance also halted all supply of diluents including heavy naphtha to Venezuela and does not plan to resume such sales until sanctions are lifted, according to the release.

Venezuela has overall imported some 160,000 barrels per day of fuel and diluents for its extra heavy oil output since the US measures were imposed, according to PDVSA and Refinitiv data, below levels prior to the sanctions but still enough to supply gas stations and power plants.

Reliance is among the biggest buyers of Venezuelan oil, although the company has recently said it has not increased crude purchases from Venezuela. In 2012, Reliance signed a 15-year deal to buy between 300,000 to 400,000 bpd of heavy crude from PDVSA. Ship tracking data obtained by Reuters showed that Reliance's average purchases from Venezuela were less than 300,000 bpd in 2018 and in the first two months of this year.

Venezuela continues to supply at least some oil to India. A very large crude carrier (VLCC) is anchored off Venezuela's Jose port waiting to load oil bound for India, and at least six other vessels of the same size are underway to India's Sikka and Vadinar ports, according to the Refinitiv data.

PDVSA's second-largest customer in India is Nayara Energy, partially owned by Russian energy firm Rosneft, one of PDVSA's primary allies. —Reuters

Zimbabwe raises public workers pay by 29%

HARARE: Zimbabwe's public workers have accepted a 29 percent salary hike for the lowest paid employees, which the government says will cushion them against double-digit inflation, unions said yesterday, and likely averting a strike in the interim.

Civil servants in the southern African nation twice rejected a lower government wage offer in January but had been divided over a strike, which led to teachers briefly walking out of their jobs.

Zimbabwe is gripped by a severe US dollar crunch, causing shortages of fuel, food and medicine and dashing hopes among citizens that the economy will quickly recover after years of sputtering under Robert Mugabe, who was removed after a coup in 2017.

An agreement signed by the government and the top public workers' union Apex Council said "a cost of living adjustment of \$400 million (will) be effected across the board for all members of the public service with effect from 1 April." That means the lowest paid worker will now earn a monthly gross salary of \$570 from \$441, said an official from Apex Council, which represents 16 public sector unions.

Zimbabwe's central bank last month ditched a discredited 1:1 dollar peg for its surrogate bond notes and electronic dollars and merged them into a lower-value transitional currency called the RTGS dollar.

Public workers would also be able to import vehicles without paying import duty and the government will provide buses to transport the workers, the agreement said. —Reuters

Mariners win in extra time as Ichiro takes final bow

Ichiro's 27-year career ends with dramatic exit in eighth inning

TOKYO: Ichiro Suzuki took a final bow in the eighth inning and the Seattle Mariners worked overtime to send him out a winner, claiming a 5-4 victory in 12 innings to sweep the two-game set from the Oakland Athletics at Tokyo Dome yesterday.

Ichiro's storied 27-year career ended with a dramatic exit in the eighth inning. After taking his position in right field, Mariners manager Scott Servais pulled Ichiro to the delight of a raucous, sellout crowd that responded with an extended ovation as the worst-kept secret in the building was confirmed.

Ichiro officially announced his retirement from baseball yesterday evening in the Tokyo Dome, where emotional hugs and tears flowed from the top row of the stadium to the Seattle dugout. Each plate appearance and fielding opportunity was met with rousing applause.

The Mariners broke a 4-4 tie when Domingo Santana brought in the go-ahead run with one out and the bases loaded, scoring Dee Gordon with a sharp ground ball to Marcus Semien. Santana sprinted down the first base line to beat Jurickson Profar's relay and prevent a double play.

Mariners closer Hunter Strickland record the save for the second consecutive night for the Mariners (2-0) with a 1-2-3 bottom of the 12th. Santana again the hero, chasing down Profar's fly ball to left field and crashing against the wall in a successful effort to record the final out.

As the 45-year-old Suzuki left the field in the

eighth, every Mariners' player, coach and staffer was greeted with an embrace. Compatriot Yusei Kikuchi broke down in tears. The crowd erupted for the loudest ovation of the night as he lifted his cap and acknowledged the crowd before stepping into the dugout and sharing a moment with Mariners Hall of Famer Ken Griffey Jr.

A half-inning prior his last plate appearance nearly resulted in an infield base hit, just barely beaten by Marcus Semien's toss from short to the groans of disdain from the crowd. Tim Beckham, the go-ahead run, was stranded on second base.

Kikuchi became the first Japanese player to begin his career on home soil the same night Ichiro became the only Japanese-born MLB player to finish his in Japan.

The left-handed starting pitcher was spotted a 3-0 lead with Ryon Healy and Mitch Haniger home runs in the second and third innings. The rookie navigated through four harmless innings before Oakland slugger Khris Davis chased him with two outs in the fifth. Davis struck an RBI single, rendering Kikuchi ineligible for the decision. Oakland tacked on another run via a Jay Bruce handling error at first base the next at bat.

Marco Estrada went five innings on the other side, and striking out one in his Athletics debut and improving upon Mike Fiers' tough outing in the opener. He settled down after Seattle's power exhibit to retire the last seven batters he faced. Both bullpens faltered.



TOKYO: Seattle Mariners Ichiro Suzuki (C, #51) leaves the field in the bottom of eighth inning at the Major League Baseball Japan Opening Series in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

Bruce tacked on an insurance run in the top of the seventh with a sacrifice fly, and Davis responded in the bottom of the frame to tie it with a two-run single off Dan Altavilla, bringing home Semien and Matt Chapman.

Oakland's Blake Treinan and Seattle's Matt Festa took turn being bullpen heroes to hold the game scoreless through the ninth

and tenth innings.

Seattle's Zac Rosscup struck out Davis swinging on three pitches with the bases loaded in the bottom of the 11th. Ichiro ends his Major League career with 3,089 hits. In 2004 he set the single-season record for hits in a season with 262. He brought over 1,287 hits from Japan, totaling an astronomical 4,367 total hits in professional baseball. —Reuters

Correa homers in Astros' win

FLORIDA: Carlos Correa hit a go-ahead home run in the sixth inning and the Houston Astros went on to a 2-1 spring training victory over the New York Yankees at Kissimmee, Fla. Astros starter Wade Miley gave up one run on three hits over 4 2/3 innings as five Astros pitchers held the Yankees to four hits on the day. Gary Sanchez drove in the only run for the Yankees on a double in the first inning.

Braves 8, Blue Jays 7

Andy Wilkins hit a home run and drove in two runs while Charlie Culberson and Ronald Acuna Jr. each also drove in two as Atlanta won at Dunedin, Fla. Kevin Pillar and Teoscar Hernandez each hit a home run for Toronto.

Tigers 3, Phillies 1

Josh Harrison hit a home run and Spencer Turnbull pitched five scoreless innings with seven strikeouts as Detroit won at Clearwater, Fla. Bryce Harper had a single and scored the only run for Philadelphia on an Odubel Herrera ground ball.

Marlins 6, Cardinals 0

Neil Walker hit a home run and Pablo Lopez gave up just two hits over six scoreless innings as Florida won at Jupiter, Fla. Drew Robinson had two of the three St. Louis hits.

Pirates 6, Twins 5

Colin Moran had a pair of RBI singles as Pittsburgh scored all six runs over the final two innings for the victory at Fort Myers, Fla. Jonathan Schoop hit a home run for Minnesota. —Reuters

Five talking points in Super Rugby

SYDNEY: Five talking points ahead of this week's games in Super Rugby:

SAD TIME FOR SUNWOLVES

The Sunwolves will play under a heavy cloud when they face the Golden Lions in Singapore on Saturday, after it was widely touted that Super Rugby are about to announce the axing of Japan franchise for next season. Governing body SANZAAR (South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and Argentina Rugby) said it would make a statement on the "future of Super Rugby" today. And Sydney's Daily Telegraph said the Sunwolves would be sacrificed as the 15-team, globe-crossing tournament reverts to 14 sides and a round-robin format in 2020, ditching its unpopular conference system. A spokeswoman for the Tokyo-based team told AFP: "We are still waiting for Friday's official announcement and at this stage have no comment to make." But it could not come at a worse time, just six months before Japan hosts the Rugby World Cup.

DU TOIT BABY DASH

Outstanding Western Stormers forward Pieter-Steph du Toit is unlikely to play in all four games on an Australasia tour because his wife is expecting their first child. "When my wife phones to say the birth is imminent, I will catch the first available flight to South Africa," said the Springbok lock-cum-flanker. Cape Town-based columnist Mark Keohane has described 26-year-old Du Toit as "the best forward in world rugby at the moment". Stormers, who left South Africa after three straight wins, tackle the Wellington Hurricanes this Saturday, then the Auckland Blues, Queensland Reds and Melbourne Rebels.

TAHS LOOK TO 'HIT STRAPS'

NSW Waratahs fullback Israel Folau says his star-studded team haven't fully got going yet with tomorrow's clash against the competition-leading Canterbury Crusaders set to be a key test of their progress. The Tahs have won two and lost two and face the unbeaten Crusaders in Sydney in what will be an emotionally-charged contest following the Christchurch mosque killings. "As representative players within the side we'd be the first ones to put our hands up," Folau said of fellow Wallabies such as Bernard Foley and Kurtley Beale. "We feel like we obviously haven't hit our straps yet and there's still a lot of improvement to come." The Waratahs have dropped Karmichael Hunt with Wallaby Nick Phipps making his first starting appearance of the season.

TURF TURNOVER

The Waratahs will tread new ground when they run out for tomorrow's game at the Sydney Cricket Ground—the playing surface has been returfed. Ground staff had to replace 3,000 square metres of SCG grass after it was destroyed during the home win over the Queensland Reds two weeks ago. There was concern that the same could happen again. "The field was assessed this week by the New South Wales Rugby Union and SCG representatives as well as independent consultants, who deemed the field to meet Super Rugby standards," said NSW Rugby. The Tahs are playing at the SCG because their usual home venue, the Sydney Football Stadium next door, is being redeveloped.

SIMPLY THE BEST

South Africa-born Melbourne Rebels coach Dave Wessels says Super Rugby is the "premier rugby competition in the world when it comes to speed and skill". "I do not believe there is a team in Europe that could travel to New Zealand and beat the Canterbury Crusaders there. "Unless you play New Zealand teams in New Zealand and beat them you cannot claim to be in the best competition in the world." The Christchurch-based Crusaders have won the Super Rugby competition a record nine times and lead the combined standings after five rounds this season. —AFP

Sports

Defending champion Chen takes lead in men's short programme

Pairs crown taken by China's Sui Wenjing, Han Cong

TOKYO: Defending world champion Nathan Chen of the United States took a commanding lead in the men's short programme at the World Championships yesterday with a dynamic skate, while home favourite and Olympic champion Yuzuru Hanyu came in third.

Chen, 19 and juggling training with courses at Yale University, produced a series of clean, crisp quad jumps in his playful and energetic routine that brought a rousing reaction from the audience at Japan's Saitama Super Arena.

"I felt great going up in the air, in the air, felt great and coming down," said Chen, a three-time U.S. champion who took 107.40 points for a season-best score, outstripping compatriot Jason Brown by more than 10 points.

"At the same time I am really happy with how I skated today. It's not a reflection of any other skaters, but I'm just happy with the way I skated." Brown, 24, was a surprise second with a fluid, clean performance that bucked current trends in men's skating by not including even one quad jump.

"It feels amazing," said Brown, who switched coaches this season to join Hanyu and Russian skater Evgenia Medvedeva under Canadian Brian Orser and whose eyes widened when his score, 96.81, came up.

"For my free skating I have the same goals that I had before, I just want to give it a try and I would like to put out another personal best." Japanese

idol Hanyu, who returned to the ice after a four-month break from competition due to an ankle injury, performed a compelling but flawed skate that saw him double his planned quad Salchow.

"I couldn't concentrate. After I missed my first jump, my mind went blind. I guess I was a bit rushed for the first jump," the 24-year-old said. Hanyu staged a comeback for the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics after another ankle injury that kept him from practicing jumps until just before the Games, and fans are hoping for a similar miracle this time.

"I have a lot of experience in this type of environment despite not competing for the last few months, and I am not happy about the fact I couldn't perform at my best for the short programme. What I can do from here is to fix my mistakes and rest well," he said.

Earlier yesterday, China's Olympic silver medalists Sui Wenjing and Han Cong took the pairs skating crown after a breathtaking free skate. Despite a season blighted by injury, the 2017 world champions skated a lyrical, moving programme for a season's best 155.60 (234.84 combined), drawing a packed crowd to its feet with their clean jumps and gorgeous lifts.

"This has been a difficult year for us, we've had injuries and other issues," said Sui, who laughed as Han pumped his fists at the end of the routine. "But our coaches and team gave us support that we

are you doing? Stuff like that I have to talk to her about." The 21-year-old U.S.-based Japanese player has taken the tennis world by storm, winning the last two Grand Slams and amassing \$10.8 million in prize money while Mari, one year older, tries to claw her way up the rankings with \$58,000 in career earnings.

While Naomi now holds sway over her older sister, that was not always the case. "Up until I was 15 she was 6-0ing me, it was ridiculous," the Australian and US Open champion said. "In the win-loss record she is up by a million or something."

Naomi gets a first-round bye while Mari starts her campaign against another wildcard in American Whitney Osuigwe. On opposite sides of the draw, the only way the sisters could meet in Miami would be in an all-Osaka final.

Even if Mari's stay ends up being short, however, Naomi is enjoying having her sister by her side. "It's nice because you can give each other advice especially if you have played the opponent," Naomi said. "I really enjoy having her around, most of the time we don't play the same tournaments."

"For me I don't really talk to that many people and she is sort of the nicer one in this relationship." Mari Osaka's focus will be getting past the first round and advancing any further would be considered a wild success but Naomi will have loftier objectives. "I actually drove past this (stadium) a lot when I was a kid," she said. "I grew up watching all these great players winning it so just to come from being a kid in the audience to being the one holding the trophy would mean a lot." —Reuters



SAITAMA: (From L to R) Russia's Vladimir Morozov, Evgenia Tarasova, China's Wenjing Sui, Cong Han and Russia's Natalia Zabiiako, Alexander Enbert pose on the podium during the medal ceremony after Pairs free Program during the world figure skating championships in Japanese city of Saitama yesterday. —AFP

were able to turn into strength."

Russians filled out the rest of the podium with second place going to Evgenia Tarasova and Vladimir Morozov after a regal but mistake-marred

programme that included the latter putting his hand to the ice in the wake of their Triple toe loop. The World Championships continue at the arena north of Tokyo until March 23. —Reuters

Osaka sister act primed for Miami Open spotlight

MIAMI: Serena and Venus Williams usually get top billing at the Miami Open but this year there is another sister act vying for the spotlight with world number one Naomi Osaka showing older sibling Mari the ropes.

The Williams sisters have hoisted the Miami trophy 11 times between them and all those victories were celebrated at Crandon Park in Key Biscayne.

But this year the tournament has moved to the suburbs and Hard Rock Stadium is Osaka country with Naomi and Mari growing up three miles away and learning to play tennis almost in the shadow of the Hard Rock home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins, who are part-owned by the Williams sisters.

Naomi will be joined in the draw by her 338th-ranked sibling who needed a wildcard to get a place in the tournament. "It is a bit weird that I have to give her advice and she is my older sister," Naomi told reporters on Wednesday. "But she has been doing like newbie mistakes. "Yesterday it rained out all day but she came here at 11 o'clock and her match was the fourth on. "I mean, like, what

Rain again spoils Miami Open party

MIAMI: Rain again spoiled the Miami Open party wiping out the evening session on Wednesday and adding to what has been a soggy and dejecting kickoff to a tournament looking for a new start.

A move from the cramped Crandon Park on picturesque Key Biscayne to the wide open spaces at Hard Rock Stadium was hoped to provide the Miami Open with a bright future. But so far dark storm clouds have cast a wet shadow over proceedings.

Prior to the start of the tournament, officials had boasted a 25 percent jump in ticket sales but the stands have been mostly empty through two days with only one of four sessions completed.

Organisers have now been left with a backlog of matches to schedule and sending out refunds. Canadian teen sensation Bianca Andreescu, who claimed a stunning victory at Indian Wells on Sunday, was to be the headliner on the opening day but never made it onto the 13,800-seat stadium court to face Romania's Irina-Camelia Begu.

Following a ceremonial ribbon cutting

earlier in the day under sunny skies involving Serena Williams, Roger Federer and world number ones Naomi Osaka and Novak Djokovic, action got underway with three-time Miami champion Victoria Azarenka defeating Dominika Cibulkova 6-2 3-6 6-4 to christen the venue.

All of the 29-year-old Belarusian's titles were celebrated at Crandon Park but the move to Miami suburbs did not have any effect on Azarenka as the twice Australian Open champion pounded 41 winners past her Slovak opponent.

"I think the stadium is beautiful. I think the logistics here work out pretty well," said Azarenka, a former world number one. "I feel the expansion of the tournament was, first of all, really necessary."

"There is a lot more room. There is a lot better facilities. So I'm pretty happy." Before the rain began 17-year-old American hope Amanda Anisimova gave the small crowd something to cheer about as she romped into the second round with 6-4 6-3 decision over Germany's Andrea Petkovic.

Before Andreescu grabbed the spotlight Anisimova had appeared to be the teenager to watch after she started 2019 with a run to the quarter-finals in Auckland and a fourth round appearance at the Australian Open. —Reuters

Sports

Vasilevskiy sets Lightning saves mark in OT win over Capitals

Jets stay hot as Hellebuyck blanks Ducks

WASHINGTON: Victor Hedman scored 3:01 into overtime, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made a franchise-record and career-high 54 saves as the visiting Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Washington Capitals for the second time in five days, 5-4 on Wednesday night. The old Lightning record for saves was 48, set by Ben Bishop in Jan. 19, 2014, and matched by Vasilevskiy on Dec. 13, 2018. Vasilevskiy was stellar at times, but he allowed Washington's Evgeny Kuznetsov to tie the game with 52.6 seconds left in regulation. The Lightning, though, prevailed for their sixth straight win-one game after clinching the Presidents' Trophy with a victory over the Arizona Coyotes on Monday. Nikita Kucherov, the NHL leader with 119 points, scored twice during Tampa Bay's four-goal second period. Despite recording a franchise-high 58 shots, to Tampa Bay's 28, Washington had its five-game home winning snapped and could not avenge a 6-3 road loss to the Lightning on Saturday.

MAPLE LEAFS 4, SABRES 2

Auston Matthews and John Tavares each scored a goal and added an assist, and visiting Toronto held on to defeat Buffalo. Mitch Marner and Zach Hyman also scored for the Maple Leafs, who won for only the second time in six games. Garret Sparks made 22 saves for the Maple Leafs, who swept the four-game season series between the teams. Casey Mittelstadt and Alexander Nylander scored for the Sabres, who have lost eight of their past nine games (1-7-1). Carter Hutton was much busier than his counterpart, stopping 42 of 45 shots in Buffalo's goal.

CANUCKS 7, SENATORS 4

Tanner Pearson and Bo Horvat both scored twice in three-point games while Loui Eriksson collected one goal and three assists as host Vancouver earned its third consecutive win in beating Ottawa. Goalie Jacob Markstrom needed to make only 21 saves for Vancouver, which is on a 4-0-1 run and four points out of a playoff spot with eight games remaining in the regular season. Max Veronneau, the prized product of Princeton University who signed with the Senators on March 12, put Ottawa on the board with his first career goal at 8:54 of the final frame. He was playing in his third NHL game. Anders Nilsson stopped 33 shots for Ottawa.

JETS 3, DUCKS 0

Mark Scheifele scored an early goal, and goaltender Connor Hellebuyck made 29 saves as visiting Winnipeg earned a victory over Anaheim to get some breathing room atop the Central Division. Kyle Connor and Nikolaj Ehlers added third-period goals for the Jets (44-25-4, 92 points), who are now three points ahead of the Nashville Predators in the division thanks to their four-game winning streak. The Jets' magic number for clinching a playoff spot was reduced to five points. The Jets held off the Ducks despite playing without defensemen Nathan Beaulieu, Dustin Byfuglien and Josh Morrissey. Winnipeg defenseman Joe Morrow did return Wednesday for his first game since Feb. 14 after recovering from a lower-body injury. —Reuters



BUFFALO: Igor Ozhiganov #92 of the Toronto Maple Leafs in action during an NHL game. —AFP

Jamaica's Campbell told he had 'died' after collapse in NY

LONDON: Jamaican distance runner Kemoy Campbell, who collapsed during the men's 3,000m at last month's Millrose Games, was told by doctors he had "died" on the track, the 28-year-old said. Campbell, who collapsed while acting as a pacesetter, was given medical treatment on site and later taken by a stretcher for further treatment. He spent 17 days in a hospital.

"I have no recollection of it. The doctors said my heart stopped and I basically died. It was a scary moment for me," Campbell, who underwent surgery to implant an internal defibrillator, told the BBC.

"When I woke up it was Monday morning (two days after the race) and I was in hospital. I didn't know where I was and how I got there. It was scary to know I missed almost a whole two days and couldn't recall what happened."

Campbell said that his doctors have not been able to diagnose his condition after weeks of testing but he is determined to return to the track. "In my mind I should be back on the track. Doctors say I should take some time off then do some tests, then maybe I can start slowly and build back up. If I can't, it'll be the end of my career," Campbell added. —Reuters

Illness hits Aussies camp ahead of Pakistan series

SHARJAH: Australia all-rounder Glenn Maxwell may be rested from the first one-day international against Pakistan as the tourists recover from a stomach bug that has hit the team in the United Arab Emirates.

Maxwell missed training on Wednesday, two days ahead of today's opener in Sharjah. Spinner Nathan Lyon also missed training on Tuesday with illness but joined his team mates in

Williamson, Kerr win big at NZ's Cricket Awards

AUCKLAND: New Zealand captain Kane Williamson and women's all-rounder Amelia Kerr picked up national player-of-the-year awards at a ceremony in Auckland yesterday. Williamson, who led the Black Caps across all

their Wednesday session and is a good chance to be picked in a dual spinning assault with wrist spinner Adam Zampa.

"The stats from here all suggest that spin takes a bigger impact. I'll expect them to spin," captain Aaron Finch said in comments published by Cricket Australia's website (cricket.com.au).

"We even saw yesterday the training wickets looked how we expect the middle to play. You're never quite sure though, once there's a bit of traffic on it they start to slow up pretty quick and spin a bit.

"I think that will be a feature, especially the two games in Sharjah."

Paceman Nathan Coulter-Nile re-joined the squad for the five-match series against Pakistan after missing the final three ODIs against India to fly home to Perth for the birth of his second child. After trailing India 2-0, Australia won the next three games in succession against Virat

Kohli's side to claim their first series victory in the format in over two years and enjoy a timely confidence boost ahead of the World Cup.

Coulter-Nile, who is in the frame for the global showpiece while seamers Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc struggle with injuries, said there was a good mood around the camp despite fierce competition for spots on the World Cup squad.

"Everyone's performing, that's why we're winning but even when someone has a bad day, they're really supportive of other blokes who have had a good day," he said.

"It's fantastic to see. I don't think it's a conscious effort that anyone makes, just think it's good mates supporting each other.

"I don't think anybody goes out there thinking, 'I'm not going to worry about selection'. It's just the way everyone is, they're all just good people." —Reuters

three formats, won the Sir Richard Hadlee Medal for the men's player of the year and was also named their best test player after scoring 801 runs in the season at a remarkable average of 89.

In the limited overs formats, Ross Taylor, who became New Zealand's leading run scorer in one-day internationals (ODIs) last month with 8,026 runs, was named the ODI player of the year while Colin Munro won the Twenty20 gong.

Kerr, 18, was crowned the women's ODI

player of the year for scoring 415 runs at an average of 59, which included a world record knock of 232 not out against Ireland last June in a game where she also took five wickets for 17 runs. Kerr also picked up the Phyl Blackler Cup for women's domestic bowling while Williamson and fast bowler Trent Boult picked up the awards for first-class batting and bowling, respectively. Sophie Devine, who has also played hockey for New Zealand, was named the women's T20 player of the year. —Reuters

Sports

Grizzlies top Rockets in OT despite Harden's 57

Raptors blow lead but top Thunder in OT

MEMPHIS: Jonas Valanciunas' offensive rebound and free throw with 0.1 second left in overtime helped the host Memphis Grizzlies topple the Houston Rockets 126-125 on Wednesday. Valanciunas paired a career-high 33 points with 15 rebounds and teamed with Mike Conley (35 points, eight assists) to help Memphis fend off James Harden and the rallying Rockets. Valanciunas corralled a miss by Conley before absorbing a foul from Houston center Clint Capela on the game's deciding play. That followed an MVP-caliber stretch from Harden, who scored 18 of his game-high 57 points in the fourth quarter before adding eight points during a 28-second stretch in overtime. Memphis averted a four-game season series sweep against Houston, which lost for just the third time since the All-Star break. Former Rockets forward Chandler Parsons drilled two 3-pointers in overtime to keep the Grizzlies in control despite Harden's efforts.

76ERS 118, CELTICS 115

Joel Embiid collected 37 points and a career-high 22 rebounds to go along with a late key block on Kyrie Irving as host Philadelphia averted a season sweep by Boston. Jimmy Butler scored 15 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter for the 76ers, who have won six in a row overall. Irving scored 16 of his 36 points in the first quarter for the Celtics, who fell short against Philadelphia for just the third time in the teams' past 20 regular-season meetings. Al Horford scored 22 points and Terry Rozier added 20 points off the bench for Boston, which saw guard Marcus Smart receive a flagrant-2 foul and an immediate ejection less than a minute into the third quarter following a two-handed shove into the back of Embiid.

RAPTORS 123, THUNDER 114 (OT)

Pascal Siakam scored 33 points and grabbed 13 rebounds to lead Toronto to an overtime win at Oklahoma City. The Raptors dominated the extra session, outscoring the Thunder 13-4 after letting a 19-point, second-half lead slip away. Oklahoma City didn't score in the extra period until 31.5 seconds remained. Kawhi Leonard scored five of his 22 points in overtime, and Fred VanVleet finished with 23 points for the Raptors.

Russell Westbrook, returning from a one-game suspension and coming off a 2-for-16 shooting performance Saturday in a loss to the Golden State Warriors, helped lift the Thunder with 42 points and 16-of-29 shooting, including 5-of-10 accuracy from behind the 3-point arc.

CAVALIERS 107, BUCKS 102

Collin Sexton scored 25 points, and Jordan Clarkson added 23 off the bench to lead host Cleveland over short-handed Milwaukee. Coming into the game, Sexton had been the first rookie to score at least 23 points in six consecutive games since Tim Duncan did it twice for the San Antonio Spurs in 1998. Sexton now has accomplished the feat in seven straight games.

Milwaukee dressed only nine players and was without Giannis Antetokounmpo and Nikola Mirotic. Antetokounmpo missed his second straight game with an ankle injury. The Bucks announced Wednesday that Mirotic will be out two to four weeks with a thumb injury. Khris Middleton led Milwaukee with 26 points.

HEAT 110, SPURS 105

Goran Dragic scored 22 points off the bench, and Dwyane Wade had a big basket and a steal in the final minutes as visiting Miami outlasted San Antonio to snap Spurs' nine-game winning streak.



PHILADELPHIA: Tobias Harris #33 of the Philadelphia 76ers shoots the ball against the Boston Celtics on Wednesday at the Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. — AFP

After trailing by as many as 18 in the third quarter and by 13 with 9:50 to play, San Antonio charged back, pulling within 106-103 with 2:05 left. With Miami on top 108-105, Wade stole the ball from DeRozan with 9.1 seconds left. Kelly Olynyk then converted a pair of free throws to cement the win for the Heat. Dion Waiters scored 18 points for the Heat, who hold a 1 1/2-game lead on the Orlando Magic for the Eastern Conference's final playoff spot. Patty Mills, Marco Belinelli and Aldridge scored 17 points each for the Spurs.

MAGIC 119, PELICANS 96

Orlando led from start to finish, pounding visiting New Orleans for its third consecutive win. Evan Fournier scored 22 points for the Magic, and Aaron Gordon had 20. Nikola Vucevic contributed 15 points and 17 rebounds. Frank Jackson was the only Pelicans starter to score in double figures, netting 14 points. Reserve Stan-

ley Johnson scored a team-high 18 points off the bench. Pelicans star forward Anthony Davis did not play due to a family matter.

BULLS 126, WIZARDS 120 (OT)

Kris Dunn atoned for a late miss in regulation with a pair of 3-pointers in overtime, and Lauri Markkanen added a back-breaking trey with 32.3 seconds remaining to send Chicago to victory over visiting Washington. The loss assured the Wizards (30-42) of a losing season and cost them a key game in their desperate quest to move up from 11th place in the Eastern Conference standings. Markkanen, the game's leading scorer with 32 points, also collected a game-high 13 rebounds. Dunn had 26 points and 13 assists for the Bulls, who won their second straight after a five-game losing streak. Jabari Parker scored 28 points for the Wizards against his former team. — Reuters

US teen phenom Bhatia makes PGA debut at Valspar

MIAMI: US teen golf prodigy Akshay Bhatia makes his PGA Tour debut at the Valspar Championship with plans to turn professional later this year after a groundbreaking amateur career. The lanky 17-year-old left-hander from North Carolina starts in the last group off the 10th tee at the Innisbrook Copperhead course in Palm Harbor, Florida, thanks to a sponsor's exemption.

Bhatia, who intends to skip college for his shot at the pro ranks, has already practiced with Spanish star Jon Rahm and chatted with top-ranked Dustin Johnson this week. "It's cool because I'm slowly building relation-

ships out here and for the future," Bhatia said in a posting on the PGA website. "It's going to be great just to lean on them a little bit."

A mutual friend set up his practice opportunity with Rahm, who made his jump to the pros at the ripe old age of 21 in 2016. "I just asked him some stuff about what his experiences was when he was playing in his first PGA Tour event and just got to know him a little bit," Bhatia said. "Hopefully in the future, I'll be talking to him more."

Bhatia, who wears thick-rimmed glasses, took a silver medal at last year's Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires, helped the 2018 US team win the Junior Ryder Cup over Europe and won the 2017 and 2018 Boys Junior PGA Championship.

In 2017, he won by three strokes, shooting a course-record 61 and breaking the old 72-hole tournament record by five strokes. Last year he holed a 40-foot chip for eagle to win by a shot. "I have so much self-belief in what I do," said Bhatia. "I'm stepping up and performing at the level I need to perform. I feel like I have a really good plan and I'm ready to do it." — AFP

Ex-champion Fraser, Elvira take lead in Kuala Lumpur

KUALA LUMPUR: Australian Marcus Fraser and Spaniard Nacho Elvira fired matching 65s in hot and humid conditions yesterday to share the joint lead on the opening day of the Maybank Championship.

The pair hold a one shot advantage over the following trio of Jazz Janewattananond, Angelo Que and Matthias Schwab at the Saujana Golf and Country Club in Kuala Lumpur. Big-hitting Belgian Thomas Pieters was lurking two strokes behind on 67, while four-time Major winner Ernie Els finished the day on 68.

Former champion Fraser, who clinched the inaugural edition in 2016, fired eight birdies including an amazing 20-foot putt at the par-3 seventh hole to share the lead. "I'm definitely a part-time

golfer these days. It's nice to go out on the golf course and it doesn't mean as much as it used to," he said.

"I was more surprised than anyone going out there and shooting seven-under," Fraser added. Elvira kept pace with Fraser thanks to a good start which included four birdies in his first eight holes. "I'm happy with the way things are going, happy to be turning around my golf game a little bit," Elvira said.

Que was heading for the top the leaderboard after an impressive nine birdies in his first 11 holes, but consecutive double bogeys on holes 15 and 16 derailed his advantage. "I thought I was dreaming when I got to nine-under after 11 holes. But these things happen especially when you play well," he said.

Defending champion Shubhankar Sharma finished the day on tied-41st after only managing a one-under-par 71. Padraig Harrington, making a first appearance this year after his nomination as new Ryder Cup captain, finished tied-26th with a 70. The 156 players competing are expected to brace themselves for unpredictable weather conditions on Friday, when scorching conditions and light rain are forecast. The \$3 million event is co-sanctioned by the European and Asian tours. — AFP

Sports

Champions Cameroon among 21 teams seeking Cup of Nations places

Gabon must win in Bujumbura to prevent Burundi creating history

JOHANNESBURG: Defending champions Cameroon are among 21 countries hoping to fill one of 10 places up for grabs this weekend in the final 2019 Africa Cup of Nations qualifiers. The Indomitable Lions will be among the 24 finalists in Egypt this June provided they avoid defeat at home against the Comoros in Yaounde. Other hopefuls include South Africa and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang-captained Gabon while Burundi, the Gambia, Lesotho and the Comoros dream of qualifying for the first time. AFP Sport assesses the eight groups where places are on the line ahead of the first Cup of Nations to feature 24 teams and the first in the modern era to be staged in mid-year.

Group B

Cameroon coach and former Dutch star Clarence Seedorf has lamented a poor goal return—three in five qualifiers—and he will lack suspended Karl Toko Ekambi. The Villarreal striker, who scored twice in La Liga last weekend, is suspended and an injury rules out fellow attacker Vincent Aboubakar. Only a win will suffice for the Comoros and they will lack suspended El Fardou Ben Nabouhane, their chief source of goals.

Group C

Gabon must win in Bujumbura to prevent Burundi creating history and the return of Arsenal star Aubameyang is a timely boost for the underperforming Panthers. Last year, he refused to visit South Sudan because of unhappiness with the condition of the chartered plane and injury ruled him out of the next qualifier, a home loss to Mali. Aubameyang managed only one goal in other qualifiers while his Burundi equivalent, Abdul Razak Fiston, has netted six times.

Group D

Benin, Togo and the Gambia have varying chances of joining already-qualified Algeria at the biennial African football showcase. The Gambians face a near-impossible task as they would have to win in Algeria and hope Benin and Togo draw 48 hours later. A likelier scenario is Benin and Togo slugging it out in Cotonou with the home team needing a draw while the visitors, who may include veteran Emmanuel Adebayor, must win.

Group E

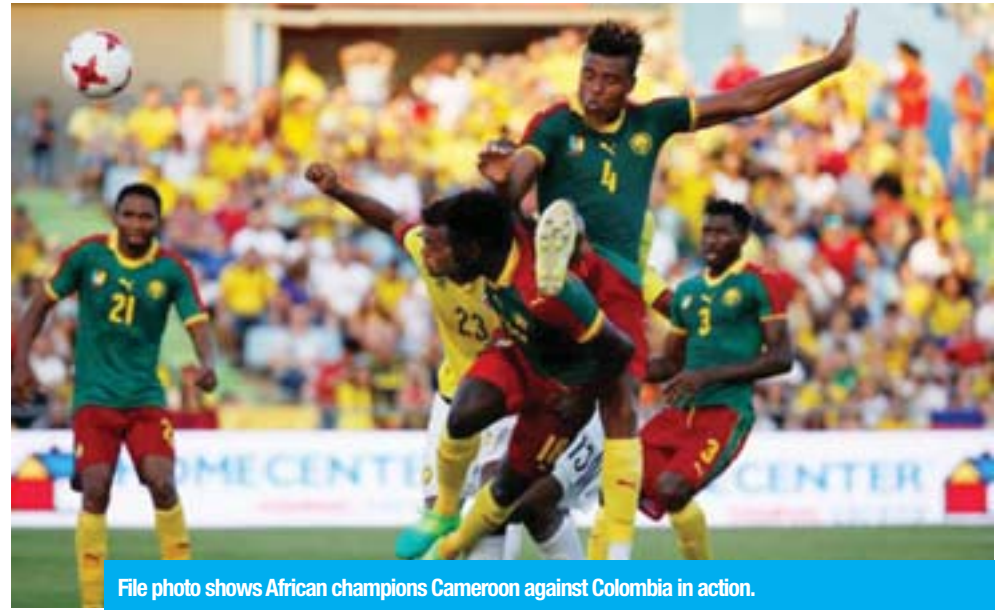
Three-time champions Nigeria are already through, leaving perennial underachievers South Africa and Libya to scrap for second place. A draw will suffice for South Africa, who started with a shock away win over Nigeria before a draw in the Seychelles against a team including a pastry chef set them back. Workmanlike Libya have to win and a stunning midweek win for their Olympic team over Nigeria has boosted morale.

Group G

Leaders Zimbabwe, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and bottom-place Congo Brazzaville are all contenders for two places. Zimbabwe and DR Congo have home advantage over generally poor travellers Congo and Liberia respectively and victories will ensure qualification. Khama Billiat is set to be an attacking threat for Zimbabwe while the Congolese hope the pace of Yannick Bolasie and stealth of Cedric Bakambu can cause damage.

Group I

Angola hold a two-point advantage over Burkina Faso in an intriguing two-team chase to join first-time qualifiers Mauritania. The An-



File photo shows African champions Cameroon against Colombia in action.

golans, whose winger Geraldo can unlock the tightest defences, are away to poorly performing Botswana and a win guarantees qualification. But if they slip, 2017 Cup of Nations bronze medallists Burkina Faso can squeeze through by winning at home against Mauritania.

Group K

Traditional African football minnows Guinea-Bissau can make back-to-back Cup of Nations appearances provided they do not lose at home against Mozambique. Namibia, away to already-eliminated Zambia, will also go to Egypt provided Guinea-Bissau do not lose. The section was expected to be won by 2012 champions

Zambia, but three losses eliminated the Chipolopolo (Copper Bullets) and cost Belgian coach Sven Vandenbroeck his job.

Group L

Uganda have booked their passage to the finals with an unbeaten record and outstanding veteran goalkeeper Denis Onyango has kept five clean sheets. Lesotho lie second despite only one win and three goals from five outings and victory in Cape Verde will take the Crocodiles to the finals for the first time. If Cape Verde triumph, they will qualify unless unpredictable Tanzania obtain maximum points at home to Uganda in an east Africa showdown. — AFP

Le Sommer, Renard give holders Lyon first-leg edge over Wolfsburg

PARIS: Reigning champions Lyon beat two-time former winners Wolfsburg 2-1 in the Champions League quarter-finals first leg on Wednesday. France forward Eugenie Le Sommer and club captain Wendie Renard scored in the first half for the home side at the Groupama Stadium before Nilla Fischer clawed one back for the Germans in final 45 minutes.

“We would have liked to close things up in the second half but they put us under a lot of pressure,” Le Sommer told Canal+. “As it stands we are through but we have to play the second leg with better intent than we had in the second half,” the 157-time France international added.

Lyon’s Amandine Henry wasted the best of the early chances as she sliced her sixth minute effort wide after Ada Hegerberg’s shot was parried to her feet. Attacker Le Sommer

opened the scoring five minutes later.

She intercepted a sloppy Claudia Neto backpass and beat goalkeeper Almuth Schult for an easy tap-in for her 14th goal of the campaign. Centre back Renard doubled the French side’s advantage rising highest to head home Amel Majri’s corner after 18 minutes.

Le Sommer missed an opportunity to double her tally for the evening just before the break. Ballon d’Or winner Hegerberg fed the French forward in the box but Le Sommer’s powerful volley hit the bar.

Wales midfielder Jess Fishlock could have stretched the advantage on 55 minutes but her strike at the backpost found the side-netting following Henry’s deep cross. The two teams met in last season’s final with Lyon winning after extra time and after the break on Wednesday, Wolfsburg again showed they will not be beaten easily. —AFP

Libya stun Nigeria in Olympic Games qualifier

JOHANNESBURG: Libya stunned former gold medallists Nigeria 2-0 Wednesday in the first leg of a 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games second round qualifier. Montenegro-based Zakaria Alharaish scored after six and 69 minutes in a match moved from Libya to Ben Guerdane in neighbouring Tunisia for security reasons.

Nigeria suffered a major blow just before half-time when goalkeeper Adamu Abubakar was sent off for handling outside the box. The teams meet again on Monday in Asaba with Nigeria, the 1996 Atlanta Olympics champions, seeking to avoid a shock early exit.

Olympic qualifiers are restricted to under-23 footballers with three over-age players permit-

ted at recent finals. The Democratic Republic of Congo, a strong football nation but with a poor age-limit competitions record, built a 2-0 home lead over Morocco in Kinshasa thanks to Jackson Muleka.

The striker from the top Congolese club, TP Mazembe, put the home side ahead just before half-time and netted again midway through the second half. DR Congo have never qualified for an Olympics football tournament while Morocco have achieved the feat seven times, most recently for the 2012 London Games.

Sudan were another country to build a 2-0 first-leg lead at home, against highly rated Kenya in Omdurman, with in-form Waleed Bakhet bagging a brace. Bakhet has played a pivotal role in Al Hilal reaching the CAF Confederation Cup quarter-finals, scoring six goals. He struck after 33 and 60 minutes, leaving Kenya needing to score at least twice in Nairobi when the teams meet again on Tuesday. Guinea edged Senegal 2-1 in a showdown between western African neighbours with Morlaye Sylla snatching the winning goal three minutes into the second half in Conakry. Jules Keita had converted a Guinean penalty after 34 minutes and Ibrahima Ndiaye equalised four minutes later with a potentially crucial away goal for the Senegalese. —AFP

Germany's new-look team make promising start with Serbia draw

Goretzka on target for Germany, Serbian Pavkov sent off

WOLFSBURG: Germany's new-look team made a promising return to the international stage with a 1-1 draw against Serbia in a friendly on Wednesday, showing signs of improvement following a disastrous 2018.

The Germans, knocked out of the World Cup in the group stage and relegated in the Nations League last year, had only one player from their 2014 World Cup victory in the starting line-up and their oldest outfield player was aged 24.

More aggressive and quicker than in recent games, with Kai Havertz, Julian Brandt and Leroy Sane playing behind forward Timo Werner, the hosts needed only three minutes to get a shot on target with Havertz firing the ball at Serbia keeper Marko Dmitrovic following a quick passing move.

Coach Joachim Loew sent world champions Mats Hummels, Jerome Boateng and Thomas Mueller into international retirement in a surprise decision last week as his team prepare to launch their Euro 2020 qualification campaign against the Netherlands on Sunday.

Serbia went forward after 11 minutes and their first corner bounced off the back of two players to land perfectly for Luka Jovic to head in for his first international goal. The 21-year-old, who has scored 22 goals in 35 appearances

for Eintracht Frankfurt this season, is likely to be among the biggest transfer targets this summer, with Real Madrid and Barcelona among clubs reportedly interested.

Werner twice went close to an equaliser before Serbia, who won promotion in the Nations League after an undefeated run in their group, wasted a chance when Adem Ljajic fired a shot over the bar.

But the Germans kept their foot firmly on the gas and wasted several chances in the second half before substitute Leon Goretzka grabbed a deserved equaliser in the 69th minute.

"In the first half the automation in this new team, playing together for the first time, did not function that well," Loew told reporters. "In the second half the team sent a very good signal that we can increase pressure and we can increase the tempo. We had a lot of chances and we missed the final touch a bit. That is also part of the learning experience.

"Overall, I am very satisfied with the mentality, the pressure we created." Serbia, who had Dmitrovic to thank for hanging on to the draw as the keeper made several saves to deny the Germans a second goal, were left with 10 players when Milan Pavkov was sent off for a reckless challenge on Sane.



WOLFSBURG: Germany's defender Marcel Halstenberg (C) controls the ball during the friendly football match Germany v Serbia in Wolfsburg, western Germany on Wednesday. —AFP

The Manchester City winger was taken off but Loew said his injury was not too serious and he would be fit for Sunday. "It was a vi-

cious foul. Sane was lucky and got away with not getting hurt but such fouls can break bones." — Reuters

Youthful talent gives England a bright future: Henderson

LONDON: Jordan Henderson says England are ready to fulfil the growing expectations around their vibrant young team as the Euro 2020 qualifying campaign starts with the Czech Republic's visit to Wembley today.

Gareth Southgate's squad are back together for the first time in 2019, with the Czechs their first test before a trip to Montenegro for the second qualifier on Monday. For the first time in years, there is a sense England can emerge as one of the main contenders for international football's top prizes.

After reaching the World Cup semi-finals for the first time since 1990, England rounded off a memorable 2018 by defeating Spain and Croatia to reach this year's inaugural Nations League finals. While that stands as impressive progress for England after decades of underachievement, Liverpool midfielder Henderson is confident the best is still to come for Southgate's men.

With promising teenagers Jadon Sancho and Callum Hudson-Odoi and 20-year-old Declan Rice joining an England squad already bolstered by the rise of Harry Kane, Raheem Sterling, Marcus Rashford and Dele Alli, among others, Henderson is enjoying the fresh feel to a group that plays without fear.

Sancho is unlocking his potential with Borussia Dortmund after leaving Manchester City, while Hudson-Odoi is a hot property despite still awaiting his first Premier League start with Chelsea. Two more youngsters, Chelsea's Ruben Loftus-Cheek and Liverpool's Trent Alexander-Arnold, were also in the original squad but have dropped out injured. Another of Henderson's Liverpool teammates, Joe Gomez, has won six England caps but is recovering from a broken leg.

"It is good, those younger players have so much talent. It's good for England because I can see in a few years we are going to have big, big players," he said. "Young players who are maybe only starting now who are going to be more experienced and even better in a few years.

"The future is bright really with all the young players coming through and how well they are doing, that's really good for England. "It's up to me to try and help them when they come here and perform and feel comfortable around the lads and the squad to go out in a game and do what they do for their clubs."

Southgate's job has been aided by the rapid progress of the young English players under the astute guidance of Jurgen Klopp at Liverpool, Pep Guardiola with Manchester City and Mauricio Pochettino at Tottenham.

In the past, club allegiances have created damaging divisions in the England squad, but Henderson insists the camaraderie is now strong enough to withstand that pressure. "I'm good friends with Raheem as you know. I played with him at Liverpool and speak with him regularly. When I first came in this week we had a bit of banter. But your focus has got to change," he said.

"We're teammates at the end of the day, and what's important to us now is the next two England games. "In the past it might have been a little bit different but I feel this group of players now is very together. And things like that don't really happen."

England will be expected to qualify for Euro 2020 with few alarms as they aim to make an impact at next year's tournament, which includes several games at Wembley. But Henderson warned that England's recent rise makes them a prize scalp for underdog opponents like the Czech Republic and Montenegro.

"Expectation will change and things like that, but that is good for us, as long as we know what we want to do and achieve as a group that will be really important," he said. "But from the outside and from other teams, whenever they play England they are always going to want to win and be right at it really so we need to make sure that we are as well." — AFP

Juve opt for Asian pre-season amid Ronaldo US rape claims: Report

MILAN: Cristiano Ronaldo's Juventus will play the pre-season International Champions Cup in Asia and not in the United States amid the Portugal star's rape investigation there, the New York Times has reported.

Most of the matches take place in the United States but organisers are planning to play Juventus' elsewhere amid Ronaldo's legal case, eliminating the risk of the Portuguese star being detained by authorities in the US as part of their investigations, the newspaper reported.

Juventus have confirmed their participation in the event with the official programme to be unveiled on March 27. Juventus' games will "most likely be in China and Singapore", where they will be joined by Premier League teams Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur, the New York Times said.

Ronaldo, 34, has denied allegations made by former model Kathryn Mayorga that he sexually assaulted her in Las Vegas in 2009. Las Vegas police asked Ronaldo to submit a DNA sample in January as part of their investigation into rape allegations made against him. Contacted by AFP, a spokeswoman for Juventus said that "going east to Asia was normal after spending recent pre-seasons in the United States". Juventus signed the five-time Ballon d'Or winner for 100 million euros (\$117 million) last summer from Real Madrid and pay him a 31-million-euro annual salary.

The team are on track for an eighth consecutive Italian league title, while his hat-trick against Atletico Madrid sent them through to the Champions League quarter-finals. Ronaldo, meanwhile, rejoined his Portugal team-mates this week ahead of Euro 2020 qualifying, as they begin their title defence, following a nine-month absence from the national team. —AFP

Sport Times

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SAITAMA: China's Wenjing Sui and Cong Han pose on the podium during the medal ceremony after Pairs free Program during the world figure skating championships in Japanese city of Saitama yesterday. — AFP

Defending champion Chen takes lead in men's short programme

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