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Amir tells speaker Assembly will stay amid political crisis

Defense minister's letter to be debated in the Assembly



By B Izzak

KUWAIT: As the country appears to be sliding into a political crisis following a public clash between the ministers of defense and interior, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday said he was informed by HH the Amir that the Assembly is staying. Ghanem told reporters that a letter sent by Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah over the outcome of an investigation conducted by the ministry over alleged graft will be placed on the agenda of the Assembly's next session for a possible debate.

In an unprecedented spat in public, the defense minister said he referred an alleged

KD 240 million corruption case to the public prosecution and sent the names of former defense minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, who is currently interior minister, and five top army officials. The interior minister responded by issuing a public statement categorically denying any involvement in the alleged embezzlement in the army fund. Sheikh Nasser also said that the Cabinet resigned on Thursday over the embezzlement case and not as mentioned by the Cabinet.

The public prosecution yesterday reportedly sent the alleged corruption case to the special ministers' tribunal for a trial, which means that the tribunal will summon the interior minister to question him. A number of lawmakers yesterday signed a motion calling

to ask the state Audit Bureau and the Anti-Corruption Authority to investigate the letter of the defense minister. The Anti-Corruption Authority said yesterday it was ready to receive complaints against corruption.

The speaker said that a majority of MPs are neutral in the ongoing row, adding that the country's situation is under control. The liberal Kuwait Democratic Forum called for comprehensive political changes and that the formation of the next government must be based on a clear reform program. The Islamic Constitutional Movement called for allowing the judiciary and supervisory bodies to examine all accusations made in connection with the alleged corruption in the army fund.

Aramco declares \$1.71tn valuation in blockbuster IPO

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia yesterday put a value of up to \$1.71 trillion on energy giant Aramco in what could be the world's biggest IPO, but missed Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's initial target of \$2 trillion. Aramco said it would sell 1.5 percent of the company in a blockbuster initial public offering worth \$24-25.6 billion, scaling down Saudi Arabia's original plan to sell up to five percent of the firm. "The base offer size will be 1.5 percent of the company's outstanding shares," the state-owned energy giant said as it began taking bids from investors in a price range of 30-32 Saudi riyals per share (\$8-8.5).

The much-delayed offering, a cornerstone of de facto ruler Prince Mohammed's ambitious plan to diversify the oil-reliant economy, could exceed the world's biggest listing - the \$25 billion float of Chinese retail giant Alibaba in 2014. Aramco had initially been expected to list on two exchanges, with a first flotation of two percent on the kingdom's Tadawul bourse, followed by a further three percent on an overseas exchange.

But the firm has said there are no current plans for an international stock sale and the IPO seems to be banking on local demand, with one-third of the offering reserved for Saudi retail investors. Aramco kicked off its investor road show yesterday, but a source close to the company told AFP it will not be marketing the shares overseas, including the United States, as originally planned. The source did not offer an explanation but analysts said it was because the listing was not compatible with US regulatory requirements. Aramco has also shied away from plans to list on foreign exchanges such as New York owing to litigation risks.

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Khamenei backs petrol price hike

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader yesterday threw his support behind a decision to hike petrol prices, a move that sparked nationwide unrest in which he said "some lost their lives". Ayatollah Ali Khamenei blamed "hooligans" for damaging property and said "all the centers of the world's wickedness against us have cheered" the street protests. A policeman was killed in the western city of Kermanshah in a clash with armed "rioters", the second confirmed death since protests erupted across Iran on Friday.

Several people were also wounded and dozens arrested in two days of demonstrations that saw motorists block highways and others attack and set fire

to public property. In a speech aired on state television, Khamenei said "some lost their lives and some centers were damaged". The protests flared hours after it was announced that the price of petrol would be raised by 50 percent for the first 60 liters (16 gallons) and by 300 percent for anything above that each month.

It is a rise many consumers can ill afford, given that Iran's economy has been battered since May last year when President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the US from a 2015 nuclear agreement and reimposed crippling sanctions. The rial has plummeted, inflation is running at more than 40 percent and the International Monetary Fund expects Iran's economy to contract by 9.5 percent this year and stagnate in 2020.

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TEHRAN: A man holds a smartphone connected to a Wi-Fi network without Internet access at an office in the Iranian capital yesterday. — AFP

'Terminator' storms to victory in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO: Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who spearheaded the brutal crushing of Tamil Tigers a decade ago, stormed to power yesterday but promised to be a president for all Sri Lanka's races and religions after a divisive election. Seven months after Islamist extremist attacks that killed 269 people, Rajapaksa was elected on Saturday on the back of a nationalist campaign promising security and to crush religious extremism in the Buddhist-majority country.

However, Rajapaksa's triumph will alarm Sri Lanka's Tamil and Muslim

minorities as well as activists, journalists and possibly some in the international community following the 2005-15 presidency of his older brother Mahinda Rajapaksa. Yesterday, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, 70, thanked all voters in an election that heightened ethnic and religious tensions in a country that only a decade ago emerged from a brutal civil war that cost 100,000 lives.

"I am conscious that I am also the president of those who used the vote against me," he said as he was formally declared the hands-down winner with 52.25 percent of the vote. "It is my duty to serve all Sri Lankans without race or religious discrimination," he said. "I promise to discharge my duties in a fair manner." Election results showed minority Tamil and Muslim communities voting overwhelmingly for the ruling party

Continued on Page 24



COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's President-elect Gotabaya Rajapaksa waves at supporters as he leaves the election commission office yesterday. — AFP

Strikes resume in Iraq to bolster anti-govt protests

BAGHDAD: Iraqis flooded the streets of the capital and southern cities yesterday in a general strike that bolstered the weeks-long movement demanding a government overhaul. Sit-ins have become the go-to tactic for the rallies that erupted in early October in rage over corruption, a lack of jobs and an out-of-touch political class. They have resisted efforts by security forces to snuff them out and yesterday, thousands came out across the country after activists called for a general strike.

In the southern hotspots of Kut, Najaf, Diwaniyah and Nasiriyah, schools and government offices were shut as swelling crowds hit the streets. Protesters cut roads in the oil-rich port city of Basra by burning tyres and in Hillah, south of Baghdad, students and other activists massed in front of the provincial headquarters. "We'll keep up our protest and general strike with all Iraqis until we force the government to resign," said Hassan Al-Tufan, a lawyer and activist.

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BASRA: Anti-government protesters draped in Iraqi national flags walk into clouds of smoke from burning tyres during a demonstration in this southern city yesterday. — AFP

Lebanon tycoon forgoes PM job under pressure

BEIRUT: Lebanon slipped deeper into political crisis yesterday after the withdrawal of a top candidate for prime minister narrowed the chances of creating a government needed to enact urgent reforms. Mohammad Safadi, a former finance minister, withdrew his candidacy late on Saturday, saying it was too hard to form a "harmonious" government with broad political support.

Safadi was the first candidate who had appeared to win some consensus among Lebanon's fractious sectarian-based parties since Hariri quit as prime minister on Oct. 29, pushed out by sweeping protests against the ruling elite. Faced by the worst financial strains since a 1975-1990 civil war, Lebanon has pledged urgent reforms it hopes will convince donors to disburse some \$11 billion pledged last year.

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Exclusive Interview

Government lacks real program by which it can operate: Kuwait Democratic Forum

Group calls for elected Cabinet, electoral reform as keys to end political stalemate



Ali Al-Awadhi speaks to Kuwait Times.

Kuwait Democratic Forum's political program:

- Calling for an elected Cabinet, made up of elected parliament members.
- Reforming the electoral law by amending the one-man-one-vote system.
- Restoring the parliament's legislative and monitoring role.
- Rejecting the liquidation of the public sector.



Abdulgafoor Hajjeh speaks to Kuwait Times.

Interviewed by Jamie Etheridge and Ahmad Jabr

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Democratic Forum (KDF) is a leftist political organization established on March 1, 1991. It is separate from the National Democratic Alliance, which serves as an umbrella group for secular political movements in Kuwait. KDF exited this umbrella in 2008, when it became its own political organization with its own agenda and goals. KDF last ran candidates in the February 2012 parliamentary polls, and chose not to participate in the three elections that followed.

In a sit-down conversation, Ali Hussain Al-Awadhi, Secretary General of the KDF, and Abdulgafoor Hajjeh, Director of Communications, spoke about the forum's view of the current political situation and their proposed solutions for the political stalemate, among other topics. The following are excerpts from the interview:

Kuwait Times: What is your political program?

Ali Al-Awadhi: It emerges from the general political situation, which is based on struggles between political poles within the authority inside Kuwait, which creates a state of continued political crisis. We are asking for an elected government according to the constitution. Meaning, the Cabinet's formation should include elected parliament members.

This should be the basis for the Cabinet's formation - to include the largest number of MPs possible in order for it to be closer to the popular or parliamentary form of government. What is happening, however, is the complete opposite. Usually one MP is selected to comply with constitutional norms. This is a key obstacle.

Secondly, we ask for amending the one-man-one-vote system. This is one of our key demands. Thirdly, restoring the parliament's real legislative and monitoring role. This is absent today in the parliament, which is more government-friendly, or in some cases, includes members loyal to some political poles in the authority and government. This was even noticed in the most recent grillings too.

Our vision also has an economic aspect. The forum rejects liquidation of the public sector, or privatization of public services. In addition, we call for creating alternative sources of income. Oil is a non-renewable resource, so we demand finding other sources of income that can include oil-based industries. These are the two main aspects that characterize the forum's stance, in addition to other topics such as education, health, etc.

KT: What kind of change in the election system are you looking for?

Awadhi: We want the list system, where 10 candidates are included in a list and citizens can vote for up to 10 candidates on the list. Each electoral district should have two representatives - the ticket has to have two candidates, so each electoral district should have a ticket that elects the same number of people. Kuwait has five voting districts, so each district elects 10 deputies. Each citizen should be able to choose 10 people, and that grouping should be allowed to formulate a list of 10 deputies and people can vote for the list.

Public sector's privatization

KT: You mentioned that the forum rejects privatization of the public sector. Can you elaborate?

Abdulgafoor Hajjeh: We do not reject all forms of privatization. What we reject is the government's attempt to liquidate the public sector. For example, the government is talking about privatizing the Ministry of Electricity and Water. This is a public interest.

KT: The government's argument is that privatization helps make services more efficient.

Hajjeh: This is an issue of mismanagement, not an issue of inefficiency. If there was good management and good governance, there would be no need to privatize. We have a good example in Europe, where most of the public services are provided by the government. How come it works there and it doesn't work here? So the argument that privatizing the public sector to achieve efficiency is debunked.

KT: But in that case, in Europe they have taxes which pay for public services. Does that mean that KDF supports the concept of taxes in Kuwait? Like income taxes, for instance?

Awadhi: We reject taxes in general, unless they come in the form of corporate income tax. If it should be imposed, it should start with corporations, and should be progressive tax based on income (income brackets). Meanwhile, we completely reject value added tax (VAT), because it would affect regular citizens.

Hajjeh: Also, since the government withholds natural resources and manages oil itself, this is equivalent to taxation. How come you want to tax people's incomes,

when you're providing their income? There is no need for that.

KT: In this case, what you have is a government saying that we have to make plans and start working now for a time when we cannot rely on oil revenues. We have to privatize and grow the private economy.

Hajjeh: Privatization is not the solution. It would create a situation where citizens who already take money from the government would be giving money back to the government, so it won't change anything. We call for an export-based economy, more than one that depends on privatization.

Privatization is not a substitute for an export-based economy. Instead of privatizing the public sector and imposing taxes, policymakers should plan for introduc-

addresses. Can you elaborate?

Awadhi: The biggest problem in the government's structure is that it is based on the political quota system, divided between a group of poles within the [ruling] family (patronage system). Each pole has his own team of ministers and loyal members of parliament. That's one problem.

Two, 'buying' loyalties in parliament on tribal and sectarian bases to maintain the continuation of the government. However, this system is too frail to withstand political crises, which often leads the Cabinet to break apart very easily.

Therefore, the best solution for the government's structure is to have a prime minister with a real program for change and political reform. Without this



KUWAIT: Ali Hussain Al-Awadhi, Secretary General of the KDF (right) and Abdulgafoor Hajjeh, Director of Communications.—Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

ing exportable goods, including foodstuff, intellectual property and oil-based manufactured goods which we can make in Kuwait. What the government has been doing since the discovery of oil in the 1930s is that they have not even tried to create a manufacturing base for oil. So instead of becoming an export-based economy, we became a rentier economy. So how come privatizing the public sector is a solution for that?

KT: But the point is that oil itself is finite, so the government is saying let us explore other sources of income.

Hajjeh: It's true, but it's finite in Kuwait. If you have a manufacturing base in Kuwait, you can eventually import oil from other countries and manufacture it here, so you can jumpstart your oil manufacturing now where you can eventually import oil from other countries to produce it in Kuwait.

KT: But if we're talking about Kuwait as a manufacturing base, how can Kuwait compete with countries like China or India in terms of manufacturing labor?

Hajjeh: From an economic standpoint, these countries are becoming uncompetitive as their income brackets start to increase. Not to the level of Kuwait - at least for now, but if you take a look at China, their manufacturing base is decreasing because the economy is growing enough to grow the middle class.

Furthermore, we are not talking about small products, but things that require more technical knowledge to produce, which do not require cheap labor. In the long run, there won't be cheap labor because most of their work will become automated. So if the government's argument is that we should not start manufacturing here because of the lack of cheap labor, cheap labor will likely be eliminated in the next 10 years. We want something to be more technical, so our people that have oil and minds can produce those things. We want a greater manufacturing base on the high end, because this is what will work in the long run.

Government's structure

KT: You mentioned the structure of the government as one of the main topics that your platform

way of thinking, we cannot have a Cabinet capable of reforming government management in Kuwait. This is the problem that hinders all attempts at achieving development. Even with regards to the New Kuwait 2035 vision, till now the government is incapable of comprehending or implementing the ideas mentioned by His Highness the Amir. In short, the Cabinet's problem is that it lacks a real program by which it can operate.

KT: Are you calling for an elected Cabinet with an elected prime minister?

Awadhi: Yes. Otherwise, the prime minister can be from the ruling family, but the remaining ministers should be from elected parliament members. For example, in the UK, the party that wins elections forms the government. This is an advanced phase of parliamentary work. In Kuwait, we need to improve parliamentary work to reach that stage. We might not reach there

in one or two years, but with improving the election system and recognizing political parties, we can reach the elected Cabinet state. The Kuwaiti constitution does not oppose the presence of an elected Cabinet. In fact, it stipulates that the Cabinet's formation should include elected parliament members, and to open the door for MPs to enter the Cabinet,

which is completely the opposite of what's happening today. This prevents the Cabinet from having popular strength.

Hajjeh: We call for incremental improvement of the political structure of Kuwait, reaching an elected Cabinet. We do not necessarily call for an elected Cabinet right now, but we want an incremental approach to the political structure to reach the maturity that can make implementing an elected government possible.

KT: What are the steps to achieve that?

Awadhi: First, the Cabinet should comprise of parliament members. Second, there should be a clear law to legalize, recognize and organize political parties. Third, amending the election law and adopt the list system. These are the steps we believe are important to reach an elected prime minister status.

KT: Can you give us a timeline for this?

Awadhi: Ten to 15 years for this to be implemented, especially since the social culture depends on social and personal relationships that dominate political work. This period would help change the culture from being more socially oriented to becoming more politically oriented.

KT: What issue do you anticipate will precipitate the dissolution of parliament? Grillings?

Hajjeh: Actually, yes. Historically speaking, the last term of parliament has always been turbulent and featured a lot of grillings, and let's say, perceived political instability, because this is where populist rhetoric becomes more prevalent. You see people talking about writing off loans, grilling the prime minister, the housing issue, etc.

KT: This parliament has already served three years, and it is in its last term. So it is remarkably stable compared to previous parliaments.

Hajjeh: Yes, but can this stability be maintained? This is the issue. Because everyone is talking about a change in government.

KT: In that case, where do you stand regarding the upcoming elections?

Awadhi: Our official stance since 2012 is not to participate in parliamentary elections or the Cabinet's formation. Until now, we are maintaining the same stance, unless something new emerges or positive change happens that make us participate in elections.

KT: What would be an example on that positive change?

Awadhi: Electoral reform. Reform of the election system should come from parliament, not the government. If parliament issues a law that changes the electoral system, including the constituencies, voting system, etc, then it might make us participate in elections. But as long as the electoral system stays the same, then we maintain our stance of not participating.

KT: What other kind of voting system changes are you looking for?

Hajjeh: The change must come from parliament - any change as long as it comes from the National Assembly.

KT: But if the parliament is dissolved to have elections within two months, that does not leave enough time to change the electoral system in parliament.

Hajjeh: When we said earlier that elections could be held within two months, those are just speculations - it might happen or not. But for us to participate, change has to come from parliament. Even if it was an unfavorable change for us, as long as it comes from parliament, we are OK with it. If this does not happen, then we will maintain our position of not participating.

KT: Then why the effort now to publicize your political platform?

Awadhi: To send a specific message that we are present as a political organization, and this is our program through which we attempt to educate the public regarding many of the current issues and where we stand from them, in an attempt to achieve change from outside the parliament or government - one that happens through public pressure that could force this change through peaceful means.

Bedoons' issue

KT: What is your stance on the bedoons issue?

Awadhi: We support a just solution for this case, according to official data in the government's possession. The Central Agency for Illegal Residents' Affairs possesses full information, and according to official statements, there are categories among bedoons who are deserving of obtaining Kuwaiti citizenship. The first step should start with granting citizenship to those under these categories as a first stage to solve this problem.

In the meantime, basic human rights of education, healthcare, employment, etc should be granted to all bedoons. There are proposals discussed in parliament on this issue, including one submitted by Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. These proposals should be carefully studied until a just and humane solution is reached.

KT: You participated in an anti-corruption rally that took place recently in Irada Square, and you mentioned that as a key aspect of your platform. Do you want to speak on that?

Awadhi: What happened at Irada Square is this: There is a case of public frustration on the deterioration of public services and corruption. This public frustration has been ongoing for a while. Meanwhile, former MP Saleh Al-Mulla launched a Twitter campaign, which received a strong response, leading to organizing the sit-in. We at the forum support any serious movement to stop this deterioration in the form of peaceful action.

Local

Kuwait's Amir receives top state officials at Bayan Palace

Crown Prince receives parliament speaker, senior officials



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

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

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem at Bayan Palace. His Highness the Crown Prince also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Furthermore, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf hosted Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh. — KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah.

Kuwait PM receives Islamic banking official, Sierra Leone FM

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Chairman of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Dr Bandar Al-Hajjar and the accompanying delegation. Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Acting Minister of Finance Mariam Al-Aqeel, head of the Prime Minister's Diwan Sheikhha Etimad Al-Sabah, and Finance Ministry Undersecretary Saleh Al-Sarawi attended the meeting.

His Highness the Prime Minister also received Sierra Leone's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Nabeela Tunis. Tunis handed in a letter from the President of Sierra Leone Julius Maada Bio addressed to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The letter from Bio expressed joy over the successful medical checkups undertaken by His Highness the Amir. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, head of the Africa department at the Foreign Ministry Ambassador Hamad Al-Mash'aan, and Ambassador of Kuwait to Senegal and non-resident Ambassador to Sierra Leone Saleh Al-Saqobi attended the meeting. — KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Chairman of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Dr Bandar Al-Hajjar. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Sierra Leone's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Nabeela Tunis.

Kuwaiti envoy hands letter from Amir to Yemeni President

RIYADH: Kuwaiti Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Sabah delivered, late Saturday, a letter on ways to bolster relations from His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Yemeni President Abdrabbuh Hadi. In a statement to the press, Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Sabah said that the letter also touched on the 'Riyadh Accord' between the legitimate Yemeni government and the transitional council, a deal built upon an initiative by

the leadership of Saudi Arabia. "The 'Riyadh Accord' is aimed at uniting Yemenis and reaching a solution to the conflict in their country," affirmed the Ambassador, adding that the State of Kuwait will continue to support efforts for stability and peace in Yemen. Meanwhile, President Hadi commended Kuwait's effort in resolving the situation in Yemen, relaying his greetings to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — KUNA

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A thunderstorm puts on a lightning display as it passes over Kuwait City. — Photo by Hamad Al-Suhayyeb (KUNA)

CAIT partners with Microsoft to upskill Kuwait's government sector workforce

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KUWAIT: Microsoft announced a partnership with the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT) to launch the Kuwait Digital Transformation Enterprise Skilling Program - a bold initiative that will empower government employees to achieve more by enhancing their skillsets in technologies such as cloud, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things.

The Program was announced at the seventh edition of the Kuwait eGovernment Forum (EGOV7), held under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister of Kuwait. With a theme of 'Smart Government Trends,' the event shed light on the most influential technology phenomena across global smart government initiatives, namely cloud computing, artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT) and mobility.

"Our deep belief in the goals of the Kuwait Vision 2035 is imperative for us to do our utmost to accelerate digital transformation and promote sustainable growth," said Haya Al-Wadani, Director General, Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT). "This requires focusing on our current skills and abilities, therefore, one of the most important objectives of the Central Agency for Information Technology is to develop the skills and abilities of government employees in the field of information technology. This initiative comes in collaboration with one of our key partners, Microsoft, to build national capacities and meet the requirements of our digital transformation plan."

"We will work closely with Microsoft through this initiative of excellence in digital transformation, to train national cadres in all government agencies in the use of technology, and contribute to the creation of new skills to match the pace of current development - and contribute to the realization of Kuwait Vision 2035," she added.

The Digital Transformation Enterprise Skilling Program will include a range of courses that cover fundamentals such as artificial intelligence, cloud migration, the development of applications and the modernization of IT infrastructures. In the first phase, Microsoft will train more than 650 government employees over an eight-month period, empowering them to harness the power of the intelligent cloud and deliver meaningful contributions to the pursuit of Kuwait Vision 2035.

"Microsoft's work with CAIT on this initiative is an extension of our commitment to Kuwait and encourage lifelong learning," said Alaeddine Karim, Country Manager, Microsoft Kuwait. "We passionately believe in the necessity of skilling, upskilling and reskilling to fill professional gaps within economies so that they can grow and thrive. We look forward to working closely with CAIT in this area and equip the government sector's workforce with the right skills to accelerate digital transformation for the government of Kuwait."

Microsoft's participation at EGOV7 brings the message of "Trust, Transform and Innovate". The company's booth showcased digitally transformative technologies such as artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things that governments can use to deliver economic ambitions, nurture entrepreneurship, and boost job creation and private sector innovation.

At EGOV7, Microsoft also showcased the "Office of the Future" through an array of Surface devices, and launched the versatile and powerful Surface Hub 2S for the Kuwait market. In addition, Ali Haddad, Government Sector Manager, Microsoft Kuwait, delivered a keynote address on smart government trends, and how Microsoft technologies are being used to deliver such innovations across Kuwait. Ali also stressed on the role of innovation and digital skilling as a core component for leaders to succeed in their digital transformation journeys.

"Governments in today's digital, connected world can engage citizens, empower employees, optimize operations and reinvent the delivery of government services," Karim added. "They have the opportunity to modernize the workplace and optimize costs; the Microsoft intelligent cloud is at the core of this. CAIT and the Government of Kuwait have worked tirelessly to realize the goals of Vision 2035, and we will continue to work with them to empower them to achieve more."

As part of its commitment to foster entrepreneurship in Kuwait and diversify the economic landscape, Microsoft also hosted a startup, KickWin at its booth during EGOV7. Built on the Microsoft Cloud, KickWin has developed a football event management application for football lovers to organize matches and tournaments in local areas and build communities in an easy, trouble-free, and seamless way.

Local

Expats working in the public sector dropped to 123,000

Zero expat manpower in three state departments

By A Saleh and Agencies

KUWAIT: Recent Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) reports showed that there are zero expats amongst the workforce of Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP), the public authority for the Holy Quran and sunnah publication and propagation and the community development center.

The statistics published by Al-Qabas daily yesterday also showed that the total number of expats working for government bodies dropped from 127,000 to 123,000 in 2019, with the presence of only one expat employee in the international organizations' liaison office, another at the Municipal Council, three at Boursa Kuwait and eight in the citizens' service agency.

Further statistics showed the numbers of expat employees working in 89 government bodies - 531 work for the public authority for the disabled (35 percent of its workforce), 4,425 work for the Kuwait Flour Mills and Bakeries Company compared to only 145 citizens, and 2,000 expats work for Kuwait Oil Company.

Statistics also showed that the number of citizens working for foreign embassies in Kuwait is low, with a total of 2,422 employees, while the total number of expat employees working for Kuwait Airways is 5,953 out of a total workforce of 6,835 employees. In addition, statistics showed 278 out of the total workforce of 348 working for Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences are expats. There are also 4,028 expats working in the

awqaf ministry, 1,201 in the council of ministers, 586 working in the ministry of social affairs and 330 working for the parliament. Meanwhile, the report showed that the least number of expat employees worked for the oil ministry with only seven expat employees, one at the Arab Center for Educational Technologies, 11 at the vocational training institute and 23 in the Kuwait National Fund For Small And Medium Enterprise Development.

On the other hand, the highest number of expat employees work for the health ministry - 33,926 employees, followed by the education ministry with 27,545, defense ministry with 17,990, interior ministry with 7,284, ministry of services with 108, commerce ministry with 116, the finance ministry with 148, the foreign ministry with 347, the housing authority with 450, public works ministry with 515, Amiri Diwan with 839, information ministry with 1,138, justice ministry with 1,138 and electricity and water ministry with 1,177 employees. The report also showed very low numbers of expats in various government authorities, with only 66 in the manpower authority, 24 in the competition protection authority, 44 in the anti-corruption authority, 74 in the food and nutrition authority, 63 in the

Capital Markets Authority, 35 in Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority, 63 in Kuwait Oil Tankers Company, 38 in the national security department, 419 in the Crown Prince Diwan, 112 in Kuwait Investment Authority, 151 in the Central Bank, 37 in the Credit Bank and 171 in Kuwait Ports Authority.

KNPC revenues

A recent report by Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) showed that by the end of the fiscal year ending March 31, 2019, the company's total revenues increased this year to reach KD 9.242 billion, an increase of KD 2.01 billion compared to the previous year. The report also showed that net losses were

KD 213.115 million compared to net profits of KD 134.6 million in the previous year. The report indicated the losses were due to compensation paid to retirees and employees shifting to sister oil companies, namely Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC).

Moreover, the report showed the total workforce of the company is 6,319, an increase of 167 employees compared to the previous year, without any change in the company's budget. In addition, the report explained

that the total number of citizens working for the company is 5,517 (87.31 percent of the total manpower), an increase of 158 citizens compared to the previous year. Arabs working for the company are 119, in addition to 683 employees of various other nationalities.

The report stressed that KNPC tested 225 newly graduated engineers applying to work for KPC and its subsidiary companies, including 85 applying to KNPC. The report added that 203 refinery operators and chemical industry technicians were appointed.

KD 136,000 citation

Ahmadi municipality inspectors inspected projects in the southern areas to make sure safety and storage licenses there are valid. In this regard, the acting safety manager at the office Khaled Al-Ajmi said the tour resulted in filing a citation of KD 136,000 for unauthorized use of government property and issuing 12 warning notices for dumping construction debris on streets.

KD 10.7 million

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry yesterday announced spending KD 10.7 million on subsidizing supply and construction goods for citizens in October. A press release the ministry issued explained that KD 6.1 million of the aforementioned sum was spent on subsidizing food supplies including infant formula and other food items, while KD 4.6 million was spent on subsidizing construction materials.



Municipality files KD 136,000 citation

Kuwait's FM meets Sierra Leonean counterpart



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Sierra Leone Nabeela Tunis. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met yesterday with Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Sierra Leone Nabeela Tunis. The meeting tackled bilateral

relations and ways of enhancing them in all fields, in addition to the latest regional and international developments. Following the meeting, several agreements were signed between the two countries in technical education and vocational training, and an agree-



Kuwait and Sierra Leone sign an agreement.

ment to establish a joint committee for cooperation, as they were signed by Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah. A loan agreement for the development of water and sanitation services and the rehabilitation of the water environment in the capital

Freetown was also signed by Deputy Director General for Operations of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development Marwan Al-Ghanem. The meeting was attended by number of senior officials at the Foreign Ministry. —KUNA

Kuwait calls for respecting Somalia's sovereignty

NEW YORK: Kuwait on Saturday reiterated calling for the respect of the sovereignty and political independence and unity of Somalia. This came during a speech delivered by Kuwait UN permanent delegation member, Advisor Nawaf Al-Ahmad in a meeting of the Security Council on Somalia. Ahmad called on the international community to continue providing political and material support to the Somali federal government to enable it rebuild and stabilize the state. He welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 2498, which extends sanctions against Somalia for a year, noting that this extension reflected the importance of continuing to support Somalia at this important stage in its history, hoping that the coming period would see progress in monitoring the implementation of the sanctions measures. Ahmad also praised efforts exerted by the Somali federal government to create conditions for holding general elections by 2020-2021, calling on all Somali parties to overcome obstacles that undermine the achievement of political, economic and security integration. — KUNA

Four fire stations battle tire blaze



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The public relations and information department at the Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) said firemen from occupational Jahra, Ardiya, Tahreer and backup fire stations put out a fire in tires in Rehaya. No injuries were reported, and an investigation commenced as soon as the fire was out to find out the cause of the blaze.

Rain season

Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) Director General Lt Gen Khalid Rakan Al-Mekrad met leaders and directors of the firefighting sector at the directorate to discuss fire stations' preparations and workers for the rainy season.



KUWAIT: Officials observe as workers pave a street with 'rubber asphalt' yesterday. — KUNA photo

Tires used to make 'rubber asphalt' in Kuwait

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) yesterday experimentally paved a street with 'rubber asphalt', one of the environmental solutions to the problem of used tires and to improve streets' quality and efficiency. This happened in a ceremony attended by KISR Director Dr Samira Ahmed Al-Sayyed Omar and in collaboration with United Gulf Construction Company (UGCC). Dr Suad Al-Bahar, the project manager, said this project is part of KISR's 8th strategic plan and will help prevent loose gravel and damage to various vehicles and maintain good quality roads. Dr Zeuyad Zaghreb, the construction program scientific advisor, said the second phase of the project had already started with an experimental paving of a 3,550 sq m segment of the roads surrounding KISR buildings.

KD 1.1 million in aid
The Patients Fund Society Chairman

Dr Mohammed Al-Sharhan said the total aid paid to cancer patients since January is KD 1.1 million, while pharmaceutical companies paid KD 1.8 million of the actual cost of the patients' treatment. Sharhan added that 419 cancer patients applied requesting aid in the same period and they were all accepted, as the society spares no effort to help needy patients meeting its conditions. "We pay KD 340,000 monthly to help patients with various diseases," Sharhan noted, urging benevolent people to donate more to help the society annually serve over 22,000 patients at an estimated cost of KD 5 million a year.

Parking area

The Capital committee at the Municipal Council yesterday approved a proposal by member Abdul Salam Al-Radi to re-organize the parking area opposite a shopping mall in block 3 in Garnata. The committee also discussed several topics that had been on the agenda from previous meetings.



St Mark's closed as water again invades Venice, rain lashes Italy

Australian accused of starting bushfire to protect his cannabis crop

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LONDON: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II (C), with (Left to right) Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex, Sophie, Countess of Wessex, Birgitte, Duchess of Gloucester, Sir Tim Laurence, Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, Princess Anne, Princess Royal, Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, Prince Andrew, Duke of York, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, Meghan, Duchess of Sussex and Carrie Symonds attend the annual Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall. —AFP

Prince Andrew sparks backlash after interview

Disastrous PR stunt was 'like watching a man in quicksand'

LONDON: Britain's Prince Andrew provoked a backlash yesterday following an extraordinary TV interview in which he denied having sex with an alleged victim of the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, as public relations experts branded the hour-long exchange "disastrous". Queen Elizabeth II's second son was lambasted from all quarters for his lack of judgment and empathy with the victims, his extraordinary defense that he was at a high street pizza restaurant, never sweated and claim that he only stayed at the sex offender's home because he was 'too honorable'.

The unprecedented interview was the first time Andrew has answered questions about Virginia Robert's allegations. It was a PR gamble intended to clear his name but in attempting to justify his relationship with Epstein, Andrew appeared yesterday to have opened himself up to even greater criticism. Roberts, now Giuffre, claims she was forced to have sex with the royal on three occasions — in London in 2001 when she was 17, in New York and on Epstein's private Caribbean island.

PR consultant Mark Borkowski said the exchanges were "like watching a man in quicksand" and that he had "never

seen anything so disastrous". Meanwhile media lawyer Mark Stephens, who represented James Hewitt after his alleged affair with Princess Diana, called the interview "a catastrophic error".

No regrets

"(He) seemed unconcerned by the seriousness of the matter, laughing and smiling at several points during the interview... and expressed no regrets or concern about Epstein's victims," added The Guardian. "Not one single word of remorse," screamed the front page of the Mail on Sunday following the interview on the BBC's Newsnight program on Saturday evening.

Andrew, 59, who is eighth in line to the throne, has been dogged for years by criticism of his links to Epstein, who was found dead in a New York jail in August. Giuffre, who alleges that Epstein abused her for years and farmed her out to his wealthy friends, first made her allegations against Prince Andrew, who has repeatedly denied them, in a 2015 US civil court deposition and has repeated them in more recent TV interviews.

"I can absolutely categorically tell you it never happened," Andrew said referring to her claim that they had sex, adding he

had "no recollection" of having met her. The prince told interviewer Emily Maitlis he was in fact "at home with the children" on the March 2001 night in question, after earlier taking his daughter Princess Beatrice to a pizza restaurant.

He denied they had shared a sweaty dance at a London nightclub on the basis he cannot sweat due to a condition related to having fought in the 1982 Falklands War. And he said a picture showing him with his arm around Giuffre, with Epstein's friend Ghislaine Maxwell in the background, was "a photograph of a photograph of a photograph", hinting that it could have been doctored. Epstein, a US multi-millionaire, pleaded guilty in 2008 to procuring a girl under the age of 18 for prostitution and served 13 months in a US prison before being released on probation.

A coroner ruled that he committed suicide by hanging while awaiting trial on federal charges he trafficked girls as young as 14 for sex. Nonetheless Andrew, who had hosted Epstein at Windsor Castle, and remained in contact after he was convicted, expressed little regret for the friendship, telling Maitlis it had "seriously beneficial outcomes" unrelated to the controversies.

'Convenient place to stay'

Jack Scarola, a lawyer for Giuffre, told The Times on Saturday Andrew should "submit to an interview under oath with the investigating authorities" in the US who continue to probe the Epstein scandal. Andrew said he would "in the right circumstances" but added he was "bound by what my legal advice is".

The prince also faced uncomfortable questions over staying with Epstein at his Manhattan townhouse shortly after his release from prison, when he was captured on video waving goodbye to a woman at the front door. A witness has described seeing Andrew getting a foot massage from a young Russian woman there. He repeatedly insisted he was "not close" to the disgraced financier and that his home was simply "a convenient place to stay".

Andrew also claimed he spent several days there to end their friendship face-to-face — in an "honorable" way — but ultimately conceded it was "the wrong thing to do". "It was not something that was becoming of a member of the royal family and we try and uphold the highest standards and practices and I let the side down," he said. —AFP

Violence in protests 'absolute tragedy': NATO Iraq chief

BAGHDAD: The violence surrounding waves of anti-government protests across Iraq has been "an absolute tragedy", NATO's Iraq chief said yesterday at the close of his year-long mandate. More than 330 people have died since October 1 in rallies in Baghdad and cities across the south calling for an overhaul of the current government, making them Iraq's deadliest demonstrations in decades.

"While the events of the last six weeks are an absolute tragedy, NATO continues to urge restraint to the government of Iraq," said Canadian Major General Dany Fortin, the outgoing commander of NATO's Iraq mission. The year-old operation advises and trains Iraqi troops at three military schools, but Fortin said it did not have a mandate to train forces in crowd control. Iraqi security forces have come under fierce criticism in recent weeks over their use of live rounds, machine gun fire and tear gas in response to protests.

They have been accused of firing tear gas canisters at point-blank range, leading to "gruesome" deaths and injuries when canisters pierce protesters' skulls or lungs. Iraq's security forces include traditional military troops and federal police, as well as the Hashed Al-Shaabi paramilitary network, whose various factions have been ordered to integrate into the state structure. The military had "atrophied" following a bloody fight to defeat Islamic State group jihadists, said Fortin, describing efforts to reform it as "a generational issue".

"That takes 20 to 30 years. You're not going to see change in one year," he said. Iraq's army was dissolved after the United States-led invasion of 2003 that toppled then-dictator Saddam Hussein. The US then spent more than a decade helping restructure the military and the rest of Iraq's state institutions. US, European, NATO and other forces are still deployed across Iraq to train security forces.

Fortin said NATO's operations had suffered "setbacks" in recent months, including from the protests and escalating US-Iran tensions. Iraq has been trapped between its top two allies Tehran and Washington, who have long been at odds over the former's nuclear ambitions. The alliance's chief, Jens Stoltenberg, told AFP in September that Tehran had been "destabilizing" the region. Fortin will be replaced at the end of November by Major-General Jennie Carignan, who will lead roughly 580 personnel, including from non-NATO partners such as Australia, Sweden and Finland. —AFP

Tens of thousands protest in Georgia demanding snap polls

TBILISI: Tens of thousands of opposition supporters rallied in Georgia yesterday, demanding the government's resignation and early parliamentary polls after the increasingly unpopular ruling party backtracked on promised electoral reforms. In the biggest anti-government rally in years, protesters demonstrated outside the parliament building on the capital Tbilisi's main thoroughfare.

AFP journalists estimated the crowd at more than 20,000. Demanding the government's resignation and snap parliamentary polls, the crowd waved Georgian and European Union flags, lit coloured flares and held up a giant banner with the anti-Ivanishvili slogan "All Against One". The mounting public anger heaped pressure on the ruling Georgian Dream party, led by powerful oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, which has ruled out holding early polls. "We demand the government step down, a provisional cabinet be appointed and early parliamentary polls be held under a proportional system," Nika Melia, one of the leaders of Georgia's main opposition force, the United National Movement party, told AFP at the rally.

"We also demand the liberation of political prisoners," said Melia, who spent time under house arrest over his role in anti-government protests in the summer and is barred from addressing rallies. Protesters locked the

parliament's gates with padlocks, saying no lawmakers would be allowed to enter the building. The interior ministry warned in a statement that "attempts to storm or blockade administrative buildings will be immediately prevented." Pro-opposition Mtavari TV channel aired footage of the deployment of large numbers of riot police armed with guns of a type that fire rubber bullets inside the parliament building.

'Oligarchic rule'

Opposition parties had called for the protest after forming an unprecedented united front against Georgian Dream, whose MPs last week voted down legislation to hold parliamentary elections next year under a new proportional voting system. The opposition accused Ivanishvili of orchestrating the bill's failure. Protesters say the ruling party unfairly benefits from the current voting system under which it won nearly 77 percent of seats in the last parliamentary elections in 2016 despite garnering only 48.7 percent of the vote.

Those polls were denounced by opposition parties as rigged. "We are here to put an end to Ivanishvili's oligarchic rule. His puppet government must go," one of the protesters, 66-year-old linguistics professor Mzia Todua, told AFP. Another protester, student Kote Dzidzigiuri, 19, said: "We demand electoral reform so that Georgians can elect a parliament they will have trust in." At a protest on Thursday, some 10,000 people rallied in Tbilisi, vowing to hold "permanent mass protests" until their demands for snap polls were met.

Ivanishvili, Georgia's richest man, had announced "large-scale political reform" under pressure following mass street protests in June and July during which 240 people were injured in a police crackdown and two



TBILISI: Georgian opposition supporters wave Georgian and European flags as they protest outside the parliament. —AFP

peaceful protesters — one a teenaged girl — lost an eye. Georgian Dream, in power since 2012, has seen its popularity plummet amid widespread discontent over its failure to address economic stagnation and perceived backsliding on its commitment to democracy.

Critics have accused Ivanishvili, who is widely believed to be calling the shots in Georgia, of persecuting political opponents, suffocating critical media, and creating a corrupt political system where his private interests dominate government decision-making. Several opposition leaders — mainly from exiled president Mikheil Saakashvili's United National Movement — have been jailed since Ivanishvili came to power in what rights activists have denounced as political witch-hunt. Senior managers at the two main TV channels critical of Ivanishvili's government are facing criminal charges that they have denounced as trumped-up and aimed at silencing dissent. —AFP

International

Trump aide curbed access to Ukraine call, fearing fallout

'I recommended to them that we restrict access to the package'

WASHINGTON: A top US official restricted access to the summary of Donald Trump's Ukraine call that triggered an impeachment probe, fearing it would damage the president, testimony released Saturday showed. White House Ukraine expert Timothy Morrison told House investigators he knew immediately how sensitive the call was when he heard Trump press Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky to investigate former US vice president Joe Biden.

Morrison said in his October 31 deposition that he had asked National Security Council lawyers to review the call because he thought it would be "damaging" if it leaked. "I recommended to them that we restrict access to the package... that we did not need quite so many people to have access to the package," said Morrison, who left the NSC a day before testifying.

The conversation, which took place on July 25 while the White House was withholding military aid to Ukraine, is central to the House impeachment inquiry into Trump. Democrats leading the probe say the call summary shows the president abused his office by bullying a vulnerable ally into interfering on his behalf in the 2020 US election.

The investigation threatens to make Trump the third US president to be impeached, although the Republican-controlled Senate would need to convict him to remove him from office. "The testimony released today shows that President Trump's July 25 phone call with Ukrainian President Zelensky immediately set off alarm bells throughout the White House," Adam Schiff, the congressman leading the inquiry, said in a statement released jointly with other senior Democrats.

'Unusual and inappropriate'

Morrison said however the summary had been placed on a highly classified system due to a "mistake" by White House staff — casting doubt on allegations that it was squirreled away as part of a deliberate cover-up. He also broke with other witnesses who have

spoken out against the call, telling House investigators he heard nothing wrong.

House investigators also released testimony Saturday from Jennifer Williams, an aide to Vice President Mike Pence, who told lawmakers Trump's push for Ukraine to open investigations was "unusual and inappropriate." Williams listened in on the July 25 call and said the requests appeared to have been made to further Trump's "personal political agenda" rather than US foreign policy goals.

"I guess for me it shed some light on possible other motivations behind a security assistance hold," she added. The depositions were made public as another official arrived on Capitol Hill to answer questions on the White House's withholding of nearly \$400 million in congressionally allocated military aid for Ukraine.

Mark Sandy was the first staffer from the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to testify, rejecting a Trump administration directive not to cooperate. OMB acting director Russell Vought and acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney, who still has the title of OMB director, defied congressional subpoenas to appear. Previous witnesses have testified that the money was delayed as part of a wider extortion plot to extract a public announcement from Zelensky that Biden was being investigated.

Smear campaign

The White House says Trump delayed the cash because of broad concerns over Ukrainian corruption but Mulvaney undermined this defense when he told reporters in October that there was indeed a "quid pro quo" of aid for investigations. "That's why we held up the money," he said. "Get over it." Sandy told investigators he did not know why the assistance was held up but added that he had never seen such a move during his career at the agency, according to The Washington Post.



WASHINGTON DC: Former US Ambassador to the Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch leaves after her testimony before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence as part of the impeachment enquiry into US President Donald Trump. —AFP

Sandy's deposition caps a blockbuster week on Capitol Hill, in which the House of Representatives staged the first public hearings in the probe. On Friday Marie Yovanovitch, a 33-year diplomatic veteran ousted by Trump, accused the president's aides of undermining US foreign policy in Ukraine. The ambassador testified that she was subjected to a "painful" smear campaign before being abruptly pulled from Kiev.

Trump was accused of witness intimidation, a crime

punishable by up to 20 years in federal prison for normal citizens, after he launched an extraordinary real-time Twitter attack during her testimony. The public impeachment hearings kicked off Wednesday with testimony by two senior diplomats including the current top envoy to Ukraine, William Taylor. The gray-haired former Army officer and veteran diplomat testified that he was told by an aide that Trump cared more about the probe than he did about Ukraine. —AFP

Warren takes risk with ad blasting billionaires

NEW YORK: Elizabeth Warren, one of the leading Democratic presidential candidates, has stepped up her assault on billionaires — a rallying cry popular with her base, but one that could stymie her efforts to garner wider support among US voters. The 70-year-old US senator from Massachusetts on Thursday unveiled a new ad in an appearance on CNBC, a business news network that often criticizes her, in which she takes on the ultra-rich.

The one-minute campaign ad shows clips of several leading businessmen criticizing her plans for a wealth tax and predicting economic ruin if she is elected to succeed Donald Trump, a billionaire himself. "The vilification of billionaires makes no sense to me. It's bull," says investor and hedge fund manager Leon Cooperman, one of the men targeted in the ad. After he speaks, a note appears on screen — "charged with insider trading."

"I'm most scared by Elizabeth Warren," chimes in Silicon Valley investor Peter Thiel, who is identified on screen as a "Facebook board member and major Trump donor." Then the viewer sees Warren at a campaign rally, challenging America's most wealthy to pay up to help reduce income inequality in America. "Pitch in two cents so everybody else gets a chance to make it!"

she says to cheers from the crowd. The ad marks a new phase in the White House strategy of Warren, who has put her fight against the rich at the heart of her campaign. "All of this is a publicity stunt," said Capri Cafaro, an executive in residence at American University's School of Public Affairs and a former Democratic member of the Ohio state senate. "She's showing that she has the toughest talk when it comes to taking on the billionaires and standing up for working families," she told AFP.

'Billionaire tears'

In her campaign, Warren often fluctuates between using irony and outright scorn for those she doesn't like. When Cooperman blasted Warren as "disgraceful," the Wall Street foe's campaign Twitter account fired back: "ok billionaire" — a twist on the "ok boomer" meme that has gone viral among those fed up with their elders. When Bill Gates expressed concern that he would have to pay \$100 billion under her wealth tax, her team launched a tax calculator for billionaires on her website, and she offered to meet the Microsoft founder and philanthropist to explain her policy platform. When one clicks on the tax calculator, you can enter your net worth and get a rough estimate. If you're Gates, Cooperman or former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, there are dedicated links that automatically inputs net worth. For Gates, it's \$107 billion. Bloomberg is meanwhile mulling his own presidential bid. Warren is also selling anti-billionaire swag on her site. One mug has the mocking phrase "Billionaire tears." Buttons promoting the wealth tax — which would be a two percent levy on fortunes exceeding \$50 million — say



NEW HAMPSHIRE: In this file photo taken on November 11, 2019 Democratic presidential hopeful Senator Elizabeth Warren speaks at Exeter High School during a campaign stop town hall in Exeter. —AFP

"two cents" and show two pennies.

Cooperman is always ready to take a swing at Warren, but he's not the only one. Former Goldman Sachs chief Lloyd Blankfein — who also appears in the campaign ad — said he was surprised by being included, and noted: "Maybe tribalism is just in her DNA." JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon lamented that Warren was "vilifying" the rich, telling CNBC: "I think we should applaud successful people."

Mark Cuban, who owns the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, accused the senator of "misleading the public" with proposals that he suggested would not work, criticizing in particular her Medicare for All health plan. Amid all the swirling contro-

versy and tit-for-tat attacks, will Warren's strategy pay off? After running neck-and-neck with former vice president Joe Biden in several opinion polls, earning more than 20 percent support in some surveys, a Reuters-Ipsos poll published Friday showed her trailing off at 13 percent, behind Biden and fellow Senator Bernie Sanders at 19 percent each.

According to Cafaro, some voters already skeptical about Warren's many policy plans could be turned off by her harsh words for the rich. "But if you're someone that does feel that billionaires need to pay their fair share, this is going to make you even more firmly committed to her candidacy," the analyst added. —AFP

UN rights chief warns Bolivia crisis could 'go out of control'

LA PAZ: Four more people have died in protests in Bolivia, an international monitor reported Saturday, as the UN rights chief warned that excessive force by police could see unrest "spin out of control." Fierce clashes between security forces and supporters of ex-president Evo Morales have rocked the country since Tuesday, when Senator Jeanine Anez declared herself the country's interim leader.

Morales resigned and fled to Mexico after losing the support of Bolivia's security forces following weeks of protests over his disputed re-election. The latest toll takes the total number killed in the political crisis to 23, according to the Washington-based Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which also recorded 122 injured since Friday. It raises to nine the number of people killed in clashes with security forces on Friday outside the central city of Cochabamba, a Morales political stronghold.

Thousands of coca growers had tried to reach the city to join a protest against Anez but they were blocked by riot police, who stopped them from crossing a bridge and dispersed the crowd after dark with the support of the army. Five protesters were initially reported dead in the confrontation. Interim cabinet chief Jerjes Justiniano was unable to confirm the higher toll when speaking to reporters on Saturday.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michele Bachelet said those deaths appeared to have resulted from "disproportionate" force by police and the armed forces. "This is an extremely dangerous development as, far from quelling the violence, it is likely to make it much worse," she added.

"I am really concerned that the situation in Bolivia could spin out of control if the authorities do not handle it sensitively and in accordance with international norms and standards governing the use of force." Anez issued a decree on Thursday that authorized the military to participate in maintaining order and exempted the armed forces from criminal responsibility. Morales, 60, said on Twitter that the measure gave "carte blanche and impunity to massacre people."

Weeks of protest

Unrest in Bolivia first erupted when Morales — the country's first indigenous



SACABA: A relative mourns by the coffin of a supporter of Bolivian ex-President Evo Morales killed during clashes with the police. —AFP

president — was accused of rigging the results of October 20 polls to gain re-election for a fourth term. He eventually resigned and fled the country after losing the support of Bolivia's security forces following weeks of protests, but said this week we was willing to return to bring peace to Bolivia.

But Anez said her predecessor would have to face charges if he returned, telling journalists that there were "many

allegations of corruption" during his tenure. Anez, the former deputy senate speaker, took over the top job to avoid a power vacuum — a move endorsed by the Constitutional Court. Bachelet said Saturday that the country was "split and people on both sides of the political divide are extremely angry." Tensions had risen in the wake of "widespread arrests and detentions," she added. —AFP

Louisiana re-elects Democratic governor in setback for Trump

WASHINGTON: Louisiana re-elected its Democratic governor Saturday in a fresh blow to US President Donald Trump, who campaigned heavily in the state amid the ongoing impeachment investigation into his conduct as president. The setback comes during one of the most fraught weeks in Trump's presidency as the House of Representatives staged the probe's first public hearings.

It also follows Trump's three visits to the state to stump for Republican challenger Eddie Rispone, a Louisiana businessman. US media declared incumbent Governor John Bel Edwards the winner by a narrow margin, with 51.3 percent of the vote. Rispone ended the night with 48.7 percent, according to the New York Times. For Trump, who won Louisiana by 20 percentage points in 2016, Rispone's defeat marks an embarrassing drubbing, especially for a president who has frequently boasted that his star power is enough to propel Republicans to victory around the country.

A similar campaign on behalf of Kentucky's Republican Governor Matt Bevin flopped last week, with Democrat Andy Beshear winning after a nail-biting contest. Edwards said in his victory speech that "our shared love for Louisiana is always more important than the partisan differences that sometimes divide us." "And as for the president: God bless his heart," he said, drawing cheers and laughter. —AFP

Military justice ready to hold troops accountable: Pentagon

BANGKOK: US Defense Secretary Mark Esper expressed confidence yesterday in the US military justice system's ability to hold troops to account, two days after President Donald Trump pardoned two Army officers accused of war crimes in Afghanistan. Trump also restored the rank of a Navy SEAL platoon commander who was demoted for actions in Iraq. Asked how he would reassure countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq in the wake of the pardons, Esper said: "We have a very effective military justice system." "I have great faith in the military justice system," Esper told reporters during a trip to Bangkok, in his first remarks about the issue since Trump issued the pardons. Critics have said Trump's pardons would undermine military justice and send a message that battlefield atrocities would be tolerated.

Trump intervened in the cases of three men: First Lieutenant Clint Lorange, Major Mathew Golsteyn and Chief Petty Officer Edward Gallagher of the Navy SEALs. In 2013, prosecutors accused Lorange of illegally ordering the fatal shootings of two men on motorcycles while on patrol in Afghanistan's Kandahar province. He was found guilty of two counts of murder. Last year, Golsteyn, an Army Green Beret, was charged with murdering an Afghan man during a 2010 deployment to Afghanistan.

Gallagher, a decorated SEAL team platoon leader, was accused of committing various war crimes while deployed in Iraq in 2017. In July, a military jury acquitted him of murdering a captured Islamic State fighter by stabbing the wounded prisoner in the neck, but it convicted him of illegally posing with the detainee's corpse. That had led to his rank being reduced. Esper said US forces "are trained from day one about the laws of armed conflict and how to conduct themselves during wartime" and stressed they will behave accordingly. "If they don't, then the United States military will take action in accordance (with the Uniform Code of Military Justice) to make sure that they are held accountable," he said. —Reuters

International

St Mark's closed as water again invades Venice, rain lashes Italy

Boards are being installed on the swollen river's banks

VENICE: Venice's St Mark's Square was closed yesterday as the historic city suffered its third major flooding in less than a week, while rain lashing the rest of Italy prompted warnings in Florence and Pisa. Venice's latest "acqua alta", or high water, hit 150 centimeters (just under five feet) yesterday, lower than Tuesday's 187 centimeters — the highest level in half a century — but still dangerous.

"The water has stopped rising," tweeted mayor Luigi Brugnaro, who has estimated damage so far from the invading salt water at over one billion euros (dollars). "High of 150 centimeters... Venice is working to restart," Brugnaro said after the sea water swamped the already devastated city where authorities have declared a state of emergency. To the south, Tuscany president Enrico Rossi tweeted a warning of a "flood wave" on the Arno and said boards were being installed on the swollen river's banks in Pisa "as a precautionary measure".

The Italian army tweeted photos of paratroopers helping to bolster river defenses in Pisa, with authorities monitoring the same river in Florence after heavy rain made it rise dramatically overnight. Arno flooding devastated Renaissance jewel Florence in 1966, killing around 100 people and destroying thousands of priceless works of art. Civil protection units in Florence advised citizens "not to stand near the Arno's riverbanks". Firefighters tweeted footage of a hovercraft being deployed to rescue stranded citizens in southern Tuscany's Grosseto province.

Brief respite

The renewed threat from exceptionally high tides in Venice came after a brief respite on Saturday. Emergency workers removed temporary walkways from St Mark's Square as the water started to rise on Sunday, with only police and soldiers visible at

around midday. The top tourist site had already been shut for several hours on Friday as strong storms and winds battered the region, leaving it submerged by sea surges.

Churches, shops and homes have also been inundated in the Renaissance city, a UNESCO World Heritage site. A massive infrastructure project called MOSE has been under way since 2003 to protect the city, but the multi-billion euro project has been plagued by cost overruns, corruption scandals and delays.

"We weren't expecting the high waters to be so exceptionally high," said Guido Fulgenzi, who had planned to open his cafe on St Mark's square this week. "We're paying the price" for the MOSE project not being completed, he said, sloshing around in his flooded kitchen and pointing to Tuesday's high water mark on the wall. The crisis has prompted the government to release 20 million euros (\$22 million) in funds to tackle the devastation. Culture Minister Dario Franceschini has warned that the task of repairing the city, where more than 50 churches have suffered damage, will be huge.

Hotel reservations cancelled

Residents whose houses have been hit are eligible for up to 5,000 euros in immediate government aid, while restaurant and shop owners can receive up to 20,000 euros and apply for more later. Most of the city's cash machines were no longer working, making life even more difficult for tourists and Venetians. "We didn't expect there to be so much water, now we're soaked!" said French tourist Magali Mariolou, visiting Venice for her wedding anniversary. "We'll come back another year when it's a bit drier. The boots are heavy, they're full of water!"

Older residents who remember the infamous "acqua



VENICE: A man carries his luggage in the flooded street near Rialto bridge in Venice, during "acqua alta", or high water, of 160 centimeters. —AFP

alta" of 1966, when the water rose to 1.94 meters, say they have not seen such frequent flooding before. Hotels reported cancelled reservations, some as far ahead as December, following the widespread diffusion of images of Venice underwater. Tuesday's high waters submerged around 80 percent of the city, officials said.

Many, including Venice's mayor, have blamed the disaster on global warming and warned that the country prone to natural disasters must wake up to the risks posed by ever more volatile seasons. The Serenissima, as the floating city is called, is home to 50,000 residents but receives 36 million visitors each year. —AFP

Thousands march in Greek annual anti-junta demo

ATHENS: Thousands of Greeks took part in demonstrations yesterday to mark the anniversary of a 1973 anti-junta uprising, with police bracing for trouble after a series of raids on anarchists. This year the protest looks set to be dominated by opposition to the new conservative government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis, elected in July on a pledge to strengthen law and order. Over 10,000 people marched in Athens, police said, in remembrance of dozens of people who died in the 1973 military crackdown on a student uprising at the Athens Polytechnic. At least 6,000 people demonstrated in Thessaloniki.

The annual march regularly descends into violence and some 5,000 officers were mobilized in Athens for the day, backed by drones, a helicopter and water cannon, police said. Several youths were arrested after Molotov fire-bombs and stones were found on a roof in the bohemian district of Exarchia, in an apparent plan to ambush riot police passing below.

The demonstration marks the 46th anniversary of the student uprising. At least 24 people were killed in the crackdown, an event generally considered to have broken the US-backed junta's grip on power and helped the restoration of democracy. The bloodstained flag that flew over the Polytechnic's iron gate, which was crushed by a tank that night, is traditionally carried at the head of the demonstration in the capital. Separate demonstrations are being held in Greece's other major cities. Athens mayor Kostas Bakoyannis urged respect for the city. "On this anniversary, let's send out the right message. A shared message about memory. We should not obscure the essence which is the struggle of youth for democracy. On this anniversary, let's show respect toward the city," he said in a Facebook message on Friday.

In recent years, demonstrators have used the anniversary to voice opposition to US "imperialism", and the harsh austerity measures imposed on Greece by international creditors after the global financial crisis. Mitsotakis's administration has come under fire over a flurry of police operations against anarchist squats and demonstrators. —AFP

Two planes collide at Frankfurt airport

FRANKFURT: An Air Namibia plane collided with a Korean Air jet after landing at Frankfurt airport on Saturday evening, officials said, adding that no one was injured. Both aircraft were damaged in what Air Namibia yesterday called "a minor accident". A spokeswoman for Frankfurt airport said the incident happened at around 6:00 pm (1700 GMT) on Saturday. She said no one was injured and the reasons for the crash remain unclear.

"The left wing of an Air Namibia plane collided with the horizontal stabilizer of Korean Air flight KE905 as it was waiting on the taxiway after landing," Korean Air said in a statement. The Korean Air plane was carrying 241 passengers and 40 crew at the time, it said. "We confirm that no passengers and crew were hurt," Air Namibia added in its own statement. Korea Air said its Seoul-bound return flight was delayed by 21 hours as a result, adding that affected passengers had been offered accommodation. A replacement aircraft was set to take off yesterday afternoon.

Air Namibia said it had likewise offered accommodation to 244 passengers due to travel from Frankfurt to Windhoek, as the airline looked for alternative flights. Germany's Federal Bureau of Aircraft Accident Investigation (BFU) has opened an investigation into the cause of the collision. The damage to the two jets was still being assessed, a BFU spokesman said. —AFP

No more preferences for EU migrants after Brexit

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservatives said yesterday they would end preferential treatment for European Union migrants from January 2021 if they win an election next month. The level of immigration and concerns over the pressure this puts on public services was a major driver behind the 2016 referendum vote to leave the EU.

Setting out details of their post-Brexit immigration policy ahead of a Dec 12 election, the Conservatives said EU nationals would typically have to wait five years before they could access welfare payments, compared with the current three months. "As we come out of the EU we have a new opportunity for fairness and to make sure all those who

come here are treated the same. We will make our immigration system equal," Johnson said in a statement.

The Conservatives also said they would increase the international health surcharge paid by migrants to access Britain's National Health Service to 625 pounds (\$800) from 400 pounds from next year, and extend it to all foreign workers. This would include EU migrants after free movement ends in January 2021, the party said, adding that they expected the move to raise more than 500 million pounds a year.

The Conservatives said the vast majority of migrants would need a job offer to come to Britain to work regardless of where they are from in the world, with exceptions including highly skilled scientists and those who want to start a business. Johnson's predecessors, David Cameron and Theresa May, came under fire for failing to meet a pledge to reduce annual net migration to less than 100,000. It was more than double that in the latest official figures released in August.

The Conservatives have pledged to introduce a points-based system for post-Brexit immigration. "We are not going to fix on an arbitrary target," Foreign

Opposition reports mass violations in Belarus polls

MINSK: Belarusians voted in parliamentary polls yesterday with opposition observers claiming mass violations despite strongman President Alexander Lukashenko's efforts to reach out to the West. Lukashenko — who has been dubbed "Europe's last dictator" — has ruled the ex-

Soviet nation since 1994 and overseen a series of elections that international observers have deemed unfair.

Voters were yesterday electing the 110 MPs of the House of Representatives, the lower chamber in what the opposition calls a rubber-stamp parliament. Those critical of Lukashenko faced little choice at the ballot box, with the main opposition leaders and the only two current opposition MPs barred from standing. An election monitoring campaign organized by opposition parties reported 524 violations by the afternoon, mostly officials inflating voter numbers at polling stations as compared to observers' counts. Rights activists monitoring the vote complained observers were thrown out, banned from taking

chemicals holding. Babis has denied any wrongdoing and his ANO (YES) party still tops opinion polls with around 30 percent support despite the controversy. He is also tagged as an agent in secret police files from the 1980s, something he has vociferously denied.

'Democracy in danger?'

People living in a house overlooking the rally strung a banner saying "Truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred", the motto of former Czech President Vaclav Havel, a former anti-communist dissident playwright. Kristyna Kovarova, a 20-year-old student from the southern village of Malenice, said she had come "to fight for democracy."

"I think democracy is in danger because there are many people trying to twist it and set their own rules, but that's not right," she said. "I really don't like our prime minister's lies," said protester Josef Plandor, who travelled from the eastern village of Zasova. "His huge conflict of interest, his lies, fraud, there's too much of that. He's not an honest man," said the 43-year-old forestry worker, adding that he was "sure" Babis would never quit.

The Million Moments for Democracy movement, which organized the protest, called on Babis to either resolve his conflict of interest or step down. The 65-year-old Slovak-born politician was charged last year in connection with a two million euro (\$2.25 million) EU subsidy scam, but in September a Prague prosecutor cleared him.



LONDON: Protestors participate in an anti-Boris Johnson demonstration in Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson's constituency Uxbridge. —AFP

Secretary Dominic Raab told BBC TV, when asked by how much the Conservatives would reduce immigration. "What we will do is make sure that the

government and parliament has got control over immigration so we get the advantages, the benefits ... and we also control the costs and the pressures." —Reuters

photographs and had their view blocked. Alaksej Janukevich, deputy head of the Belarus National Front opposition party, told AFP he believed the authorities had chosen "the familiar scenario of falsifications". According to the authorities, more than 35 percent of the 6.8 million electorate voted ahead of polling day through absentee ballots.

After casting his vote, Lukashenko told journalists "Of course I am concerned how the elections will be viewed in the West," but added: "I'm not accustomed to fret about this." Confirming he will stand in presidential polls in summer 2020, he said: "If society doesn't like how the president organises this (vote), they can choose a fresh one next year. —AFP



PRAGUE: People attend a protest against Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis on eve of Velvet Revolution anniversary. —AFP

Student strike

Babis, the fifth wealthiest Czech according to Forbes, leads the centrist populist ANO movement in a minority coalition government with the left-wing Social Democrats, propped up by the Communist Party in parliament. ANO took office after winning the 2017 general election campaigning on an anti-corruption ticket in the EU and NATO country of 10.6 million plagued by graft.

On November 17, 1989, Communist

police brutally crushed a students' march, sparking a student strike and the creation of an opposition movement which then negotiated the Communist Party's departure from politics. In late December 1989, Havel, then the opposition leader, was elected president of Czechoslovakia, which went on to peacefully split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. The neighbors joined NATO and the EU, with Bratislava also joining the eurozone in 2009. —AFP

International

Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Sri Lanka's 'Terminator' is now president

40,000 Tamil civilians are alleged to have been killed

COLOMBO: Gotabaya Rajapaksa, 70, set to be Sri Lanka's new president, was the de facto military chief who crushed Tamil guerrillas a decade ago, making him a revered figure among the Sinhalese majority and the powerful Buddhist clergy. Dubbed the "Terminator" by his own family, the 70-year-old retired lieutenant-colonel secured victory in the election by promising to fight corruption and make Sri Lanka safe seven months after Islamist extremist attacks killed 269 people.

Under his brother Mahinda Rajapaksa's presidency from 2005-15, as defense secretary "Gota" is accused of allowing death squads that bumped off critics, rivals, journalists and others. According to press watchdog Reporters Without Borders, in the "dark decade" of the Rajapaksas' previous time in office, at least 14 journalists "were murdered in connection with their work". Rajapaksa "presided over a national security apparatus which was really quite deadly. Anyone who dissented was disappeared", analyst Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu told AFP before the election. He denies the charges.

While the grey-haired president-elect has no experience in politics, he made up for it by campaigning with the more charismatic Mahinda, who is now set to become prime minister. Asked tough questions at his only public press conference during the three-month campaign, he turned to Mahinda for answers and was ridiculed by opponents. He also brushed aside questions about war crimes during the final offensive of the Tamil war, during which some 40,000 Tamil civilians are alleged to have been killed.

"Why are you talking all the time on the past? Ask (about) the future," he asked. "I am trying to become the president of the future Sri Lanka. So if you concentrate on the future, it is better." He is on bail facing prosecution for allegedly siphoning state cash to build a monument for his parents when his brother was

president. Gotabaya has denied allegations that he received millions of dollars by way of kickbacks from a second-hand aircraft purchase from Ukraine in 2007. He has not been indicted, but police are investigating the purchase.

He also faces a civil suit in the United States for allegedly ordering the torture of a Tamil man and several others when he was in power. Another civil action against him in a US court in connection with the death of an anti-establishment newspaper editor in Sri Lanka in 2009 was rejected on the basis that Gotabaya had "foreign official immunity".

Passport probe

Rajapaksa reportedly had dual US-Sri Lanka citizenship, which should have precluded him from running for election, but he says he renounced US nationality this year so he could enter the race. Rajapaksa's nationality is still being investigated by a local magistrate, but following his victory, the case — as well as others — are set to be frozen until his five-year term ends.

The brutal end to the civil war alarmed many in the international community, with some leaders boycotting a Commonwealth summit that Mahinda hosted in 2013 and the United States and the European Union cutting aid. Also of concern to the West was that when the Rajapaksas were last in power, Sri Lanka borrowed heavily from China, which offered Colombo diplomatic protection in international forums over its rights record.

Many of the China-funded infrastructure projects have been mired in corruption allegations and have turned into white elephants, including a new airport in the south devoid of any airlines. The borrowing spree also led to a ballooning of Sri Lanka's debts. Sri Lanka was forced in 2017 to hand Beijing a 99-year lease on the port of Hambantota after being unable to



COLOMBO: Supporters of Sri Lanka's President-elect Gotabaya Rajapaksa shout slogans as he leaves the election commission office. — AFP

service a \$1.4-billion Chinese loan, alarming Western countries and also traditional ally India. In 2014 Sri Lanka also allowed two Chinese submarines to dock in Colombo. The Chinese "at the end of the day facili-

tated the mismanagement of the Rajapaksas", Saravanamuttu said. The brothers "spent and spent without giving any consideration to how it has to be paid back", he said. — AFP



MANILA: This file photo taken on October 18, 2019 shows Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte speaking during a joint press conference with his Indian counterpart at the Malacanang Palace. — AFP

Life taking a 'toll on my health': Duterte

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has admitted that life is taking its "toll on my health", as speculation swirls over the 74-year-old's prolonged absences from the public eye. Duterte cut short a trip to Japan last month because he was suffering from "unbearable pain" in his spine after a recent motorcycle accident, and has not spoken publicly for two weeks.

The accident came just 10 days after he revealed in early October that he has myasthenia gravis, an autoimmune disease that causes muscle weakness and can result in drooping eyelids and blurred vision. "If you ask me... 'Are you in the best of health?' Of course not," Duterte told GMA News television in an interview on Friday. "All of the ailments, I have them because I am already old... Life has

begun to take its toll on my health," said Duterte. The recent incidents have intensified speculation about his capacity to lead, although his spokesman Salvador Panelo has repeatedly said there is no need to issue medical bulletins on the president's health. Duterte has opted to work from his hometown Davao City, on the southern island of Mindanao, over the past week to get some rest, his spokesman has said. The oldest Philippine leader elected, Duterte last week passed on the running of his signature anti-narcotics crackdown that has claimed thousands of lives to Vice-President Leni Robredo, an arch-critic.

Duterte has not given public remarks since he attended a regional summit in Thailand that ended on November 4, shortly after he cut short his trip to Japan, having attended the enthronement ceremony of Emperor Naruhito with the aid of a cane. Duterte had also previously said he suffers from migraines and Buerger's disease, which is characterized by inflammation of blood vessels, usually due to smoking. The Philippine constitution requires the handover of power to the vice president if the leader cannot perform his duties due to disability, resignation, or death. — AFP

US, S Korea postpone joint drills in 'act of goodwill'

BANGKOK: The US and South Korea will postpone joint air drills in an "act of goodwill" towards the nuclear-armed North, US Defense Secretary Mark Esper said yesterday, after months of deadlocked diplomacy with Pyongyang. North Korea has long protested joint military drills, which it condemns as preparations for invasion, and has set Washington an end-of-year deadline to come up with a new offer in deadlocked negotiations on its weapons programs.

The US and South Korea last year cancelled several joint drills in the wake of the Singapore summit between President Donald Trump and the North's leader Kim Jong Un, but were due to carry out a combined air exercise later this month. The joint air drills will now be postponed, Esper said, days after hinting that the option was on the table. "We have made this decision as an act of goodwill to contribute to an environment conducive to diplomacy and the advancement of peace," he told reporters on the sidelines of a meeting of defense ministers in Thailand's capital.

He urged Pyongyang to return to negotiations and "demonstrate the same goodwill as it considers decisions on conducting training, exercises and testing". Esper said the decision to delay the drills was not a concession but an effort to create "some more space" for diplomats to strike an agreement. His South Korean counterpart Jeong Kyong-doo said there was no timetable for resuming the exercises.

"It will be a part of our ongoing consultation and we will decide through that close coordination between the two sides," Jeong said. Pyongyang has carried out a series of missile tests in recent months, including one launched at sea which it said was fired from a submarine — a potential strategic game-changer. It has repeatedly demanded that the combined exercise be scrapped, and recently said holding the drills would be an "undisguised breach" of the Singapore summit declaration.

Negotiations have stalled since the follow-up Hanoi summit between Kim and Trump broke up in February, with disagreement over sanctions relief and what the North would be willing to give up in return. Working-level talks restarted in Sweden in October only to break down quickly, with the North blaming the US for not giving up its "old attitude". Pyongyang welcomed reports that the joint drills would be postponed in a statement by an unnamed foreign ministry spokesman, published in state media outlet KCNA.

But the spokesman also lashed the US for its "hostile policy" towards North Korea and blamed Washington for a recent UN meeting that criticized human rights violations under the isolated regime. "The US has no intention to sincerely work with us towards the settlement of issues. Therefore, we have no willingness to meet," the official said, according to the KCNA report.

'Work together'

Esper was in Bangkok after meeting with South Korean officials during a two-day trip to Seoul. There he urged the South to drop its plan to end a military intelligence sharing agreement with Japan, which Washington considers vital to security co-operation in the face of the North and ultimately China. In the latest manifestation of the neighbours' dispute over wartime history, Seoul announced in August it would terminate the pact, saying it did not serve national interests. The agreement expires at midnight on November 22.

Yesterday Esper called for both countries to "work together" to overcome their differences. "The only people that benefit from friction between Seoul and Tokyo are Pyongyang and Beijing," he said. Seoul and Tokyo are both major US allies, democracies and market economies faced with an overbearing China and the wayward North. But their relationship continues to be heavily affected by Japan's colonial rule of the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945. — AFP

Russia says India delaying signing helicopters deal

DUBAI: The head of Russian Helicopters said yesterday that India was delaying the signing of a firm agreement for purchasing 200 helicopters despite providing all information. Chief Executive Andrey Boginsky also said it would benefit India if the planned order for over 100 rotorcraft for the Indian Navy could be combined with the 200 India is looking to buy for the Army. Russian Helicopters is owned by state-owned Russian conglomerate Rostec.

India and Russia signed a deal in 2015 under Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' program for the supply of 200 Russian KA 226T helicopters, with Russia to deliver 60 and the remaining to be assembled and manufactured in India. The two countries also have held preliminary talks for the supply of over 100 of the KA 226-T helicopters for the Indian Navy, Boginsky said. "We have done significant successful work and provided all information to India's ministry of defense, unfortunately there is no efficient and quick way from the Indian side," he told Reuters at the Dubai Air Show.

"We can't understand the reasons for the delay." On the order for the Indian Navy, Boginsky said India would benefit from combining both orders to gain more value in enhancing its capabilities. "The main winner will be India if both orders are joined," he said, adding Russian Helicopters was awaiting a formal request of an order from the Indian Navy.

Civilian helicopters account for about 30-35% of Russian Helicopters' total sales while the remaining 65-70% are military choppers. The civilian-military sales ratio is expected to remain the same in the next three years but total sales volumes could increase as Russian Helicopters brings to the market its expanded range of choppers, said Boginsky.

The company is in talks with international customers including some in the Middle East for sale of its new Mi-38 helicopters, he said, declining to elaborate. The new VRT-500 helicopters, with the first flight scheduled for 2021, has seen strong interest from India and some Middle East countries, he said, adding a deal for the VRT-500 will be signed at the ongoing Dubai expo. "There is strong interest from Indian companies to assemble (VRT 500) in India," he said. Russian Helicopters plans to sell 1000 of the VRT-500s by 2035, he said. — Reuters

Burkina Faso army says 32 'terrorists' killed in operations

OUAGADOUGOU: The Burkina Faso army said yesterday it had killed 32 "terrorists" in two operations in the north of the country after an attack on a patrol. One soldier was killed in the operations, which come less than a month after



BLUE MOUNTAIN: Firefighters monitor bush fires at the Woodford residential area. — AFP

Australian accused of starting bushfire to protect his cannabis

SYDNEY: An Australian man has been accused of deliberately lighting a fire to protect his cannabis crop, sparking an out-of-control bushfire as blazes rage along the country's east coast. Four people have been killed and more than 300 homes destroyed in devastating bushfires that have razed more than one million hectares (2.5 million acres) along the eastern seaboard in just over a week.

Police said a 51-year-old man appeared before a local court on Saturday charged with intentionally lighting a fire at Ebor in New South Wales state in an attempt to protect his cannabis crop. The alleged bungled attempt on Thursday at backburning—a practice used by firefighters to clear the undergrowth that fuels fires—quickly spread the flames and the man did not try to extinguish the blaze, according to police.

37 people were killed in an ambush on a convoy transporting employees of a Canadian mining company.

The army said 24 people were killed in the first operation on Friday and a further eight in a second on Saturday. The first operation in Yorsala in Loroum province saw a number of women who "had been held and used by the terrorists as sex slaves" freed. Arms, ammunition and other materials were also recovered in the second operation on the outskirts of Bourzanga in Bam province, the army statement added. The impoverished and politically fragile Sahel country has been struggling to quell a rising jihadist revolt that has claimed hundreds of lives since early 2015.

The attacks — typically hit-and-run raids on villages,

The Ebor fire is about 10,000 hectares in size—and is still burning three days later. Authorities believe arsonists are behind several other bushfires across badly-hit New South Wales as well as in neighboring Queensland, and have appealed to the public for information leading to more arrests. Yesterday, there were 130 fires burning across the two states, large swathes of which have already been ravaged by a crippling drought.

New South Wales firefighters undertook backburning as temperatures dipped on Saturday night, ahead of an expected deterioration in fire conditions early next week. Parts of Queensland were facing "extreme fire danger" as high temperatures and low humidity were forecast to combine with storms to create challenging conditions for firefighters.

Bushfire-prone Australia has experienced a horrific start to its fire season, which scientists say is beginning earlier and becoming more extreme as a result of climate change, which is raising temperatures and sapping moisture from the environment. Growing calls to curb fossil fuels and drastically cut greenhouse gas emissions are being ignored by the country's conservative government, which is eager to protect its highly lucrative mining industry. — AFP

road mines and suicide bombings — have claimed nearly 700 lives across the country since early 2015, according to an AFP toll. Almost 500,000 people have also been forced to flee their homes. The attacks have been claimed by a range of jihadist groups, including Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. The country's badly equipped, poorly trained and underfunded security forces have been unable to stem the violence, which has intensified throughout 2019 to become almost daily. The Sahel region, including Burkina Faso's neighbours Mali and Niger, has been afflicted by the violence despite the presence of the regional G5 Sahel force as well as French and US troops. — AFP

Analysis

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In 2020 race, who is Obama's political heir?

Some vying for the Democratic presidential nomination are loud and proud about their friendship with him. Others claim ideological kinship. And still others are taking distance from his record to stand out. But one thing is for sure: Barack Obama is not saying anything - well, much of anything. The 58-year-old former president, who left power nearly three years ago with his popularity soaring, is quietly watching to see who in his party will duke it out with Donald Trump on Nov 3, 2020.

Beyond his positions on healthcare or immigration or education, numerous White House hopefuls have made reference to Obama's style - a certain class in the way he exercised his power that is in stark contrast to the attitude of the billionaire Republican who succeeded him. With less than three months to go before the first Democrats make their choice in the Iowa caucuses, the race is still entirely up in the air.

The next Democratic primary debate is set for Wednesday in Atlanta with 10 candidates on the stage and eager to score points - Joe Biden, Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Pete Buttigieg, Kamala Harris, Cory Booker, Amy Klobuchar, Tulsi Gabbard, Andrew Yang and Tom Steyer. At this point, it's impossible to predict who will ultimately claim the party's nomination. And the list of those who dream of wresting the Oval Office from Trump just keeps getting longer.

Billionaire former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg is once again flirting with a run, and former Massachusetts governor Deval Patrick threw his hat in the ring this week. The late entrance by Patrick, one of the first black governors in US history who is close to Obama, fueled speculation about the doubts that the ex-president may have about the ability of the candidates already in the race, including his vice president Biden, to take out Trump.

'My friend Barack'

Many of the questions indeed focus on Biden, who has been saddled with the moniker "Sleepy Joe" by Trump. While he remains one of the favorites, observers fear the 76-year-old from Delaware cannot go the distance. On the campaign trail, Biden never misses a chance to highlight his close relationship with his "friend Barack", and their eight years in power.

Biden is no stranger to campaign politics, and when he launched his latest White House bid, he underscored the fact that he had specifically asked Obama not to back him from the outset... even though the former president had never indicated he would do so. "President Obama has no plans to weigh in on the primary at this point - preferring instead to let the candidates make their cases directly to voters," a source close to the former president told AFP.

But the 44th president of the United States has, unsurprisingly, ideas about how his party should approach the election to ensure that Trump is limited to just one term in office. Little by little, he is positioning himself. In remarks Friday night to donors at the Democracy Alliance in Washington, he offered a few hints about how he sees the upcoming battle for 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

'Tested' candidate

While he insisted on the need for new ideas from the party about reducing income inequality and other key issues, he issued a very clear warning about the temptation to take a sharp turn to the political left. "Even as we push the envelope and we are bold in our vision, we also have to be rooted in reality," he said. "The average American doesn't think we have to completely tear down the system and remake it," he added, noting that the United States was "a country that is less revolutionary than it is interested in improvement".

He called on the party faithful - and by extension, its presidential candidates - to be mindful that Democrats, independents and even moderate Republicans "are not driven by the same views that are reflected on certain, you know, left-leaning Twitter feeds, or the activist wing of our party". He did not name names, but Warren and Sanders - who have called for nothing short of a "political revolution - certainly come to mind.

Obama appeared to want to reassure the many Democrats who fear that the crowded primary will end up being counterproductive, given that the incumbent Trump is all ready to run with a massive campaign war chest. "For those who get stressed about robust primaries, I just have to remind you that I had a very robust primary," he said, recalling his at times acrimonious 2008 battle with Hillary Clinton. "I'm confident that at the end of the process, we will have a candidate that has been tested." — AFP

All articles appearing on this page are the personal opinion of the writers. Kuwait Times takes no responsibility for views expressed therein.



Othman Cheikh Idris, a 60-year-old Sudanese farmer, uses a hoe during an interview with AFP in an agricultural field in Khartoum's district of Jureif Gharb on Nov 11, 2019. — AFP

Sudanese hope Ethiopian dam ends Blue Nile floods

The Blue Nile is a renegade river, according to Sudanese farmer Osman Idris, its unpredictable flooding swallows crops and houses as it crashes through Sudan from Ethiopia on its way to Egypt. "Tonight, the level of water will be low," said Idris, a resident of Jureif Gharb, a small village on the bank of the Blue Nile outside Khartoum. "Tomorrow, it will swallow all the houses... It's a renegade river, it rises so fast," said the 60-year-old, dressed in a traditional Sudanese robe.

For Idris, Ethiopia's construction of a controversial dam on the Blue Nile is a dream come true, as it promises to regulate the floods that inundate Sudan every rainy season. This year alone, flash flooding has killed more than 60 and injured dozens in Sudan. The Blue Nile joins the White Nile in Khartoum and supplies the overwhelming majority of the Nile's water, which runs through Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea.

Construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam began in 2012, but since then Egypt has sounded the alarm that the project would severely reduce its water supplies. Egypt depends on the Nile for about 90 percent of its irrigation and drinking water, and says it has "historic rights" to the river guaranteed by treaties from 1929 and 1959. It sees the project as an existential threat, fearing Ethiopia's rapid construction of the dam might lead to water and

food scarcity for millions of Egyptians.

More cash crops

After several rounds of talks failed to resolve the issue, a new dialogue between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan was mediated by the United States in Washington earlier this month. The three delegations agreed to resolve the dispute by Jan 15, with ministerial-level talks being held this week in Addis Ababa. Ethiopia insists the \$4 billion hydroelectric barrage is essential for its economic growth given that most of its population still lives without electricity. And in Sudan, farmers hope the dam will provide predictable flow. Over the years, farmers like Idris who own farms along the Nile have been forced to change their crops due to flood devastation and tons of deposited silt. Brickmakers fire blocks of mud in riverside kilns, producing smoke harmful to crops. "I had to shift from cultivating fruits and vegetables to animal feed," Idris told AFP.

Being reliant on flooding for irrigation means only one harvest per year and limits the kind of crops that can be grown. If the river's flow were regulated, more intensive agriculture could be practiced, Idris said. "We can plant crops through the year. It will be better for the environment and for marketing our products, which means more income for us," Idris said.

Ekram Dagash, a professor at Khartoum's Al-Zaiem Al-Azhari University, agreed that Sudan stands to gain from the dam, which will maintain water levels and block unwanted silt. "Ethiopia is building the dam for one reason only, to produce electricity and export it, not only to neighboring countries but to the whole African continent," she told AFP.

Worried brickmakers

But one group of Sudanese are concerned about the dam: Brickmakers, who depend on the silt for their livelihood. Dozens of small kilns line the river, providing an income for hundreds of brickmakers like Yakoub Noreen. "If the dam is built, this won't arrive," the 40-year-old said of the silt he was standing in, as he pressed wet clay into a mold. Nearby, workers stacked bricks into a kiln belching thick smoke. Later they will be sold for 1,500 Sudanese pounds (\$32) per 1,000 bricks, Noreen said.

Professor Dagash said workers can be compensated and provided alternative livelihoods if brickworks close, adding that benefits from the dam outweighed such losses. Vast areas of land would open up for agriculture as well as industrial projects, she said. "The dam will provide Sudan with low cost electricity... and low cost electricity means more growth," she said. — AFP

He, she, they: Americans and the choice of gender pronoun

A few years ago Emily Gardner, who identifies as "more feminine than not", instructed family members of a new preference to be referred to as "they" rather than "she". The 23-year-old represents a growing trend among progressive Americans, who are claiming a right to choose their own pronoun, regardless of their sex at birth. It is a battle playing out on business cards, in email signatures and on social networks, where many people are identifying their preferred pronoun outright.

And "they" is gaining ground as the pronoun of choice by "non-binary" people who identify neither as male or female. The Philadelphia bookstore that employs Gardner is on board, with a sign taped to the counter reads: "Please do not assume staffers' pronouns, ask."

'Not something new'

"Non-binary people have existed forever. It's not

something new, not a trend, it's just who we are," said Pidgeon Pagonis, a Chicago artist who goes by the pronoun "they". "When people don't respect my pronouns I coil up inside. I don't feel good" said Pagonis, who launched the apparel brand "Too Cute To Be Binary."

Gender-neutral pronouns, long confined to the LGBTQ community, "are becoming increasingly popular, including beyond big cities," said sociologist Carla Pfeffer. "The rise of social media means that cultural transformations can happen faster and disseminate more broadly than in earlier eras," Pfeffer said. It also helps that non-binary people are enjoying increased representation on television and in pop culture, such as British artist Sam Smith, who recently revealed a preference for "they/them" pronouns "after a lifetime of being at war with my gender."

However use of "they" is not trending in all quarters and can give rise to mockery, with critics denouncing it as politically correct overkill. "At a Starbucks this morning & the baristas had their approved gender pronouns," pro-Trump conservative activist Charlie Kirk recently tweeted. "We are creating a society of people waiting to be offended," he said.

'It makes me angry'

Mallory Cross, whose hair is cut short, said "I think I'm aware of how I look like and how people read me, I'm very masculine". "When I make such an effort to look

that way and people call me 'ma'am' or hold the door it makes me angry," Cross said. In New York, a "gender-neutral" boutique clothing store called The Phluid Project sells skirts, caps and shoes with large heels, encouraging customers "to go beyond binaries."

The US financial capital in particular has embraced this mindset, offering a new neutral category that people can use to amend the gender on their birth certificates since January. Merriam-Webster dictionary meanwhile recently added the word "they" as a non-binary pronoun that can refer to just one person. And Apple has added "neutral" emojis that don't distinguish between genders to the latest version of its operating system.

As the trend catches on, a growing number of binary people are even displaying the pronouns "she/her" or "him/he" on social media accounts and elsewhere as a sign of solidarity. Elizabeth Warren, one of the front-runners in the crowded 2020 US Democratic primary field, last month became the sixth candidate to add her pronoun, which corresponds to her birth sex, on her social media.

"Every person deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, and that starts with using correct pronouns. I'm Elizabeth. My pronouns are she/her/hers," she wrote on Twitter. Candidate Pete Buttigieg, who is gay, has specified that he is a "he/him" and heterosexual candidates Julian Castro, Cory Booker, Kamala Harris and Tom Steyer have also indicated their pronouns. — AFP

How Russia's foster children are saving dying villages

In a small room with a blackboard and lace curtains, first-grader Danya listens as his teacher explains the concept of vowels and consonants. In this village school with 36 pupils, he is one of 13 foster children. "Adoption is how the school and the village have survived," says headmaster Gennady Chistyakov who like most Russians uses the term adoption to refer to foster care. "If it weren't for the children, we would be shut."

Foster children have become a lifeline not only for Chistyakov's village of Brodi, about 500 km north of Moscow, but for countless other rural communities. They are facing a slow death from unemployment and precipitous population decline, followed by closures of schools and clinics. "People leave with their children, leading the schools to shut, and leaving only retirees," says Vera Galindabayeva, a sociologist at the Russian Academy of Sciences who studies the fostering phenomenon. "Eventually such villages disappear."

In areas of chronic unemployment like Novgorod, the rural region between Moscow and Saint Petersburg where Brodi is located, the compensation that comes with fostering a child is considerable, at nearly 6,000 rubles a month (\$93).

22,000 rural schools shut

Residents in some villages have hit on a solution - to foster a large number of children at the same time. This way, they can prevent the local school from closing, keep-

ing an important institution running with salaried staff. Galindabayeva estimates that hundreds of schools have managed to escape "optimization" - the euphemism used by the Russian government for shutting down health and education facilities when they are deemed unnecessary.

Russia's population has fallen by more than five million since 1991, a demographic crisis aggravated by the economically painful breakup of the Soviet Union. Despite initiatives launched in recent years, such as financial incentives for having a child earlier or having more than one, the population still decreased in the first six months of 2019 by another 68,000. Some large cities, especially Moscow, are swelling, but the demographic collapse has hit Russian villages hard. Of 26,000 schools shut in the last two decades, 22,000 were in rural areas.

The Moshensky district, which includes the village of Brodi, once had 15 schools. Now it is down to three. With its sounds of children playing, Brodi stands in sharp contrast to the surrounding ghost towns full of empty homes. Headmaster Chistyakov says this is thanks to the mass fostering effort. "If the school is open, the village continues to live," he says. "Meanwhile, the state supports people who take care of the orphans," and they are not desperate to move away in search of a job.

The arrangement also benefits children who would otherwise grow up in state institutions. Often abandoned by alcoholic parents, children emerge from Russian orphanages "in a state of emotional deprivation," says Irina Kudryavtseva, an education official in the local administration.

Teacher shortage

Since 1998, Brodi history teacher Ekaterina Solovyova has fostered 11 children with her husband, a sports instructor. "On my birthday, my house is packed," she says, flipping proudly through the family photo album. The Solovyovs are currently raising seven-year-old Danya and



A picture taken on Oct 17, 2019 shows history teacher Ekaterina Solovyova and her adopted children in their house in the village of Brodi, about 500 km north of Moscow. — AFP

three other foster children aged up to 17 as well as their own youngest son.

Solovyova, 52, says having a large family is a way of life, vehemently denying it is a cold-hearted strategy to save her job at the school. "They are all my children," she says. But while Brodi has survived the demographic crisis, it is facing another challenge: The lack of a new generation of teachers. "There are no young teachers in villages. The schools will keep working until the current teachers retire," predicts sociologist Galindabayeva.

This points to the root of the problem. "There is no employment, so the young leave," says Chistyakov, the headmaster. The Solovyov family is proof of the trend: Three of their own children, as well as seven they fostered, have left the village to live and work far away. — AFP

Business

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13 Many pitfalls in reform of West Africa's CFA franc



13 Ever-expanding Google enters battle for cloud gaming market



14 Afghan pomegranate growers squeezed as fruit prices drop



RIYADH: A billboard displaying an advert for Aramco is pictured in the Saudi capital Riyadh. From robots to sniffer drones, Saudi Aramco has ramped up spending on technological innovation while its rivals cut back amid soft oil prices, but the energy giant risks losing its edge after its much-anticipated IPO. —AFP

Saudis snap up stakes in 'crown jewel'

'No voice is louder than that of Aramco IPO, the largest IPO on earth'

RIYADH: "No voice is louder than that of the Aramco IPO, the largest IPO on earth," declared Ahmed Al-Arfaj, a Saudi Arabian TV talk show host, drumming up demand for what could be the world's biggest initial public offering. State oil giant Saudi Aramco began its repeatedly delayed share sale yesterday, offering retail investors and institutions a stake in the world's most profitable company through a listing on Riyadh's Tadawul bourse.

Saudis clamoring to own part of the world's top oil exporter can go online or to local banks, which have extended working hours to meet high expected demand during a sale process that runs until Nov. 28. Retail investors will be sold up to 0.5% of Aramco, about \$8.5 billion worth of shares, in the IPO, which values the company at \$1.6 trillion to \$1.7 trillion.

Roadside billboards and shopping mall adverts have trailed the listing for weeks, hailing "Saudi Aramco, soon on Tadawul". On social media, in cafes and at family gatherings across the country, it has dominated conversations. Abdullah AlFaqeh, a 29-year-old dentist in Riyadh, said he began sav-

ing up once de facto Saudi ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced the IPO plans nearly four years ago.

"I will invest in the company for the long term," he told Reuters. "I will get bonus shares, and with the profits I will buy more shares. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." The marketing blitz contrasts with the other bumper share sale this month, the secondary listing of Chinese retail titan Alibaba in Hong Kong, a city gripped by protests. Alibaba is not expected to carry out an advertising campaign for what will be Hong Kong's first paperless listing.

Lending boom

In Saudi Arabia, retail investors will be entitled to one bonus Aramco share for every 10 they buy if they hold on to their stock for at least 180 days. Up to 5 million people are expected to participate, local media reports. Tens of thousands of Saudis were seeking to invest on behalf of all their dependents, to increase the number of shares they can buy, two bankers told Reuters.

Saudi banks are also marketing loans, with some offering four times the usual limits, two other financial sources said, adding that they are able to do so as they will hold the stock on behalf of clients so have it as security. A 37-year-old government employee who declined to be named said his bank offered him an interest-free loan repayable within three weeks, but that he planned to use his savings instead.

Riyadh oil rush

Aramco said yesterday it plans to sell 1.5% of its shares or about 3 billion shares, at an indicative price range of 30 to 32 riyals, valuing the IPO at as much as 96 billion riyals (\$25.6 billion) at the top end of the range. It could beat Alibaba's record \$25 billion IPO in 2014. A member of the kingdom's highest religious body, the Council of Senior Scholars, said during a weekly Friday radio show that investing in Aramco was permissible. "It (Aramco) is a pillar of the Saudi economy," Sheikh Abdullah Al-Mutlaq told a caller asking about the offering. "I think even the scholars, we will participate in it."

The government has been pushing rich Saudis to invest with cash held abroad, with many viewing it as an opportunity to show their patriotism after a September attack on Aramco facilities that struck at the heart of the kingdom's energy industry. Washington and Riyadh blamed regional rival Iran for the attacks, which temporarily cut more than 5% of global oil supply. Tehran has denied any involvement. "Participating in the Aramco IPO is a national duty for whoever can afford it," Saudi columnist Anwar Aboalela tweeted.

Another Twitter user, Meshal Althaidy, described Crown Prince Mohammed's push to take Aramco public - the centerpiece of a reform agenda aimed at weaning the economy off oil - as "a fierce battle" that Saudis should support. Although some locals think the government is wrong to relinquish even partial control of Aramco, the prospect of holding shares is hard to resist. "Aramco will be a winning horse," said Uber driver Abu Mohsen. "I will subscribe only because of the expected gains but I remain against the sale, especially to foreigners." —Reuters

Saudi Aramco: The oil colossus

RIYADH: Saudi Aramco set a price range for its blockbuster listing that implies the oil giant is worth between \$1.6 trillion and \$1.7 trillion, below the \$2 trillion Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman previously targeted. Below are key facts about Aramco:

History

Explorers from the Rockefeller family's Standard Oil Company struck oil in Saudi Arabia in 1938. The venture became known as the Arabia American Oil Company and crude oil production hit 500,000 barrels per day in 1949. By 1980, the Saudi government had bought out all the original shareholders and owned 100% of the company. Eight years later, the Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Saudi Aramco) was officially established. Aramco has fuelled decades of prosperity in Saudi Arabia. The kingdom is the de facto leader of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC, helping engineer price moves on world oil markets. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman wants to diversify the Saudi economy away from oil. Announcing plans for an Aramco IPO in 2016, he said the kingdom must end its "oil addiction" to ensure it was no longer at the mercy of commodity price volatility.

Oil reserves

Aramco had 260.2 billion barrels of oil equivalent in 2017, larger than the combined reserves of Exxon Mobil Corp, Chevron Corp, Royal Dutch Shell Plc, BP Plc and Total SA.

The reserves have an estimated life of 54 years.

Oil production

The company produced 10.3 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude last year, touting the lowest production cost in the world, at \$2.80 a barrel, according to company documents. It also produced 1.1 million barrels of natural gas liquids and 8.9 billion standard cubic feet per day of natural gas.

Oil exports

Almost three-quarters of Aramco's crude exports, about 5.2 million bpd, were delivered to customers in Asia last year, where it believes demand will grow faster than elsewhere in the world. Its Asian buyers include China, India, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Its crude deliveries to North America reached more than 1 million bpd last year; to Europe, 864,000 bpd.

Oil refining

To diversify its oil business, Aramco is expanding in refining and petrochemicals with the aim of almost tripling its chemicals production to 34 million tons per year by 2030 and raising its global refining capacity to 8-10 million bpd from more than 5 million bpd. The company produces, refines and exports oil from Saudi Arabia, but also has refining operations across the globe.

Aramco's US oil refining subsidiary Motiva Enterprises owns the 607,000 bpd Port Arthur refinery in Texas, the largest in the United States. In 2017 the company announced plans for \$18 billion in investments in its operations in the Americas over five years. Aramco is also expanding its oil refining and downstream capacity, particularly in rapidly growing countries such as China and India. Aramco had a net



RIYADH: Visitors stop at the Aramco exhibition section at the Misk Global Forum on innovation and technology held in the Saudi capital Riyadh. —AFP

refining capacity of 3.1 million barrels per day in 2018.

Scale

The state-owned firm is the world's largest oil producer, pumping 10% of the world's supply, and the most profitable company with its half-year net profit rising 12% to \$46.9 billion. Last year, Aramco made an annual net profit of \$111 billion, over a third bigger than the combined net income of the five "super majors" Exxon Mobil, Shell, BP, Chevron and Total. With 76,000 employees in 2018, Aramco has energy industry operations, research facilities and offices scattered across the globe, in Asia, Europe and the Americas. It has country offices in Beijing, New Delhi, Singapore, New York, London, Houston and elsewhere. —Reuters

Zara founder builds real estate empire

MADRID: Spanish billionaire Amancio Ortega, the founder of clothing giant Zara, has built up a global real estate empire that includes offices used by Facebook and Amazon in Seattle and large swathes of London's Oxford Street. Diversifying his fashion fortune to preserve his sizeable wealth, the value of the real estate portfolio owned by Ortega's investment holding Pontegadea Inversiones stood at around 10 billion euros (\$11 billion) at the end of last year.

Pontegadea collects almost all of the dividends which Ortega earns - 1.6 billion euros in 2019 - and then re-invests the money in real estate, a spokesman for the holding firm said. The 83-year-old stepped down as chairman of Inditex, the owner of Zara, in 2011 but he still owns 59 percent of the world's biggest fashion retailer, which also owns other popular fashion brands like Massimo Dutti and Bershka. He is currently the world's sixth richest person, according to Forbes.

His latest major real estate purchases came earlier this month when Pontegadea bought an office building used by Facebook in Seattle for \$415 million (376 million euros) as well as the "Troy Block" complex in the same city which houses part of Amazon's headquarters for \$740 million. It is "normal" for entrepreneurs with a lot of capital to set up an investment fund to manage the cash to "diversify and preserve" the fortune by building a "refuge" from stock market fluctuations, Juan Carlos Amaro, a professor of finance at the Esade business school in Barcelona, told AFP. —AFP

Business

NBK Money Market Report

Safe haven assets soar on global growth concerns

KUWAIT: The geopolitical atmosphere as of the late has cooled down substantially thanks to improved prospects on the trade war dilemma and the possibility of a hard Brexit outcome has become far-fetched. However, last week safe haven assets were in demand due to global growth worries and the lack of headlines from the US-China trade amplified concerns. The UK and German economies barely avoided a recession.

In Q3, Japan's economy grew by 0.2% per annum, down from 1.8% witnessed in the previous quarter. Data out of China also disappointed after retail sales, industrial output and investment data were weaker than anticipated. Looking at safe havens, the top performer was the Swiss franc gaining 0.79% against the USD in weekly terms. The Japanese yen wasn't far behind appreciating by 0.43%. In the commodities complex, the safe haven yellow metal (gold) rose 0.58% in the past five days.

As safe havens performed well, higher beta commodity currencies were trading in the red zone. The Australian dollar was on a consecutive decline throughout the week, shedding 0.55% of its value to the USD. It was evident that risk taking receded last week causing US government bond yields to take on a downward path. On Thursday alone, the 10-year Treasury yield fell by about 6 basis points to 1.82%. That's 15 basis points lower than the recent highs. On the other hand, Wall Street has largely ignored those concerns, with the Dow Jones and S&P 500 indices continuing to hold near record highs.

The US dollar has come under renewed and quite moderate selling pressure. The decline in US Treasury yields and the strengthening of the GBP, CHF and JPY all had a hand in driving the dollar lower. The dollar lost upside traction in the second half of the week in response to the re-emergence of trade concerns amidst the utter absence of fresh developments. The DXY is currently trading at 98.001, down by 0.33% for the week.

US inflationary pressures

The monthly US inflation readings surprised to the upside, however the annual rate remained somewhat muted. American consumer prices (CPI) slightly accelerated in October from 1.7% y/y to 1.8% y/y, while the core reading fell from 2.4% to 2.3%. The CPI data is well below last year's peak of nearly 3%. The FED's

preferred inflation indicator (Core PCE) rose 1.7% on an annual basis in September and has fallen short of its 2% target this year.

Chief Jerome Powell stated in testimony to Congress that the Federal Reserve is unlikely to alter interest rates anytime soon so long as the economy remains on its present path. Powell warned that challenges remain, such as weakness abroad, trade tensions and low inflation. Markets are currently not pricing in any significant chance for an interest rate cut for the next six months, especially with trade tensions receding and US economic data in a fairly positive state.

Europe & UK

No Recession, but most definitely a very weak economy - Europe's power house (Germany) has barely avoided a recession in the third quarter thanks to GDP rising by 0.1% q/q. The rise drove the annual rate to 0.5% from 0.3% in Q2. The positive news is that Germany has again avoided a technical recession. Placing that aside however, the economy is evidently in a soft spot with the industrial recession having continued in Q3. Fortunately though, the services sector has been doing the heavy lifting in the economy.

Latest indicators have delivered tentative signs of optimism that the German economy is close to the worst point and could begin to pick up gradually in 2020. The most recent ZEW survey, trade, and factory orders reports have all surprised to the upside. The global manufacturing PMI bottomed in July, reinforcing the case that the global industrial weakness is beginning to ease.

However, the improving euro-zone data flow has not been sufficient to encourage a stronger euro for the time being. The central bank's solid commitment to maintain looser monetary policy for longer continues to dampen upside potential for the euro. The Institute for Economic Research lowered its projections for German growth in 2019 from 0.8% to 0.5%.

British data frail across the board

The British economy has avoided a technical recession in the third quarter as growth came in at 0.3% from a -0.2% seen in Q2. A technical recession is defined as two successive quarters of negative growth. Despite a recession being avoided, economic growth has become uncomfortably slow. On

Rates -17th November, 2019

| Currencies | Previous Week Levels | | | | This Week's Expected Range | | 3-Month Forward |
|------------|----------------------|--------|--------|--------|----------------------------|---------|-----------------|
| | Open | Low | High | Close | Minimum | Maximum | |
| EUR | 1.1022 | 1.0987 | 1.1057 | 1.1050 | 1.0850 | 1.1150 | 1.1123 |
| GBP | 1.2793 | 1.2783 | 1.2919 | 1.2905 | 1.2700 | 1.3010 | 1.2942 |
| JPY | 109.24 | 108.23 | 109.29 | 108.73 | 106.65 | 110.75 | 108.11 |
| CHF | 0.9972 | 0.9868 | 0.9949 | 0.9897 | 0.9705 | 1.0095 | 0.9832 |

an annual basis, the third quarter GDP slackened to 1% from 1.3%, the lowest momentum since 2010. The monthly GDP data publicized that growth contracted for the second successive month in September with momentum clearly slowing down as we head into year end. It's pretty evident that fundamental growth is soft, while the central bank expects a weak fourth quarter. The Bank has noticed that there is swelling evidence of abating demand for labor with employment falling in the latest three months and an expectation that pay growth will soon slow down further. On the labor front, the employment sector has been the highlight of the UK economy since the Brexit referendum.

However, last week the Office for National Statistics provided evidence that the labor market lost momentum in the third quarter due to Brexit uncertainty. The number of individuals in employment plunged by 58,000 compared with the previous three months, marking the largest fall in four years. Number of job vacancies fell by 11K, the biggest quarterly decline since 2009. Hence, fewer vacancies reduce the pressure on wage growth, which has already cooled down from 3.9% to 3.6% in Q3.

Looking at price growth, consumer prices deflated to its lowest level in three years last month; the drop was mainly due to falling energy prices. The CPI figure revealed that prices last month were 1.5% higher than the same period last year and fell from

1.7% seen in September. Core inflation, which excludes volatile prices such as those of food and energy, was unchanged at 1.7%.

Overall, the GDP figures suggest that the economy failed to regain much momentum after the Q2 contraction. The economy is now expanding below its estimate of potential growth. The loss of growth momentum argues in favor of building disinflationary pressures, which could pave the way for the BoE to lower interest rates next year. As for the past monetary policy meeting, two voting members already voted to lower the Bank Rate.

Therefore, more officials could join the bearish club as the negative atmosphere resides. The Sterling pound traded in a positive manner last week, despite frail economic data across the board. Since the Brexit referendum, economic fundamentals have taken a back seat, while politics has been the main market mover. The GBP ended the week near the 1.29 level and gained 0.88% versus the dollar in the past five trading sessions.

The Sterling's positivity reflects increasing optimism that the Conservative Party could win a majority at the upcoming election. Bloomberg has reported that the chance of a Conservative majority has increased by 10% to 50% since last month. The latest opinion polls released last week continue to indicate that the Tories hold a significant lead over the Labor Party of around 10-12%.

NBK gives Al Shabab customers a chance to win Honda HR-V



Ali Hussain

Mobile Banking App and enjoy the convenient and easy services that it provides, enabling them to complete their transactions quickly at the click of a button without the need to visit their nearest branch. NBK Mobile Banking App is ideal to manage their accounts anytime, anywhere."

Hussain concluded: "We are constantly developing the NBK Mobile Banking App to ensure the services align with the fast-paced lifestyle of our young customers as we promise to continue introducing unique campaigns especially tailored for them." The draw is the second one held by NBK for Al Shabab Account holders. The first draw was held during the NBK Mega Day on September 27th on a Honda Civic with all its features.

The Bank constantly updates the NBK Mobile Banking App to offer a safe and secure way for customers to conduct transactions such as opening accounts, applying for loans, credit card limit increase, advanced payment features like e-Payments to enable online payment for purchases and NBK Quick Pay for fast and easy transfers, managing the accounts and cards while travelling, checking the NBK Miles and NBK Rewards Points, activating dormant accounts, establishing standing orders, finding the nearest branch, ATM or CDM in Kuwait, requesting an account statement or new checkbook, and many more services that make using NBK Mobile Banking App the perfect companion in Kuwait and when travelling.

KUWAIT: Continuously rewarding customers of its youth segment, Al Shabab Package, through a series of exclusive offers and benefits that satisfy their unique lifestyles, National Bank of Kuwait is giving them the opportunity to win a Honda HR-V car when using the NBK Mobile Banking App. Al Shabab customers receive one chance to enter the draw that will be held in January 2020 for every banking transaction completed on the NBK Mobile Banking App, and a one-time entry when updating their mobile number and email through the app.

As for Al Shabab customers who transfer their student allowance to their NBK Account, they will receive two chances instead of one to enter the draw for every banking transaction completed on the NBK Mobile Banking App, as well as when updating their mobile number and email through the app.

Each customer will have a limit of 15 entries per month into the draw, combining transactions completed and updates to the mobile number and email through NBK Mobile Banking App. Speaking of the campaign, Ali Hussain, Executive Manager, Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait said: "We are committed at NBK to satisfy the needs and aspirations of our young customers through unique campaigns, and this draw will only require from our customers to download and make transactions with NBK Mobile Banking."

He added: "We aimed through this campaign to encourage our Al Shabab customers to use the NBK

Al Arabiya News Channel discusses business strategy with Huawei Chairman

KUWAIT: The Middle East is a pioneer in the ICT field today and remains a very important market for Huawei globally, the company's Chairman of the Board of Directors, Liang Hua, recently confirmed in an exclusive interview with senior business presenter Lara Habib from Al Arabiya News Channel at the company headquarters in Shenzhen, China. The executive went into depth about the company's history in the Middle East, the brand's investment strategy for the coming year, and how Huawei is confronting some of the latest developments since the US Entity List ban.

"The Middle East has always been among the pioneers in terms of network construction and is among the world's first wave of 5G adopters," Hua states. "The Middle East has also taken ICT infrastructure investment and construction very seriously. In particular, the region's large number of young people and widespread Internet adoption provide a strong impetus for carriers to build 5G networks. These investments will empower other industries like oil and gas, healthcare, tourism, and smart cities."

In terms of its own development, Hua was adamant that while the US Entity List ban has affected the business to a degree, it is often the US companies that miss out. "We hope that Huawei can be removed from the Entity List. However, thus far the Entity List has not significantly impacted us. Actually, it has had a larger impact on US suppliers," says Hua. The Chairman notes that Huawei began developing its business continuity management system a long time ago. This

system was originally designed to ensure Huawei could cope with unforeseen impacts on its supply chain. "Several years ago, we realized that the US attacks against Huawei were increasing in intensity. Therefore, we were not caught unprepared by the US Entity List. That being said, if the US government does allow US suppliers to supply us, we will gladly continue working with them," says Hua.

The Chairman added that while the US has been pressuring other countries to ban Huawei products, in reality, many telecom carriers from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Latin America have chosen Huawei to build their 5G networks. Moreover, Huawei has found alternatives for US chips and components for its core products, ensuring these products are no longer affected by the US Entity List ban.

"As a result of such planning, Huawei has maintained 'robust operations with good financial results', according to Hua, with global revenues increasing by 24.4% year-on-year during the first three quarters of 2019. "Our top priorities are to ensure that our internal operations and management continue as usual, and that we produce better products and deliver better services to our customers," declares Hua. To that end, the company is doubling down on a full portfolio of 5G solutions for network planning, design, construction, and operations, as well as 5G devices like smartphones.

Hua noted that the Huawei R&D investment is set to reach almost USD\$17.4 billion this year. The company is able to achieve rapid R&D results in part due to its Employee Stock Ownership Plan, according to Hua. With this plan, all Huawei company shares are owned by employees, which Hua says enables Huawei to focus on the company's long-term business development rather than seeking short-term gains.

Locally, Hua says the company is prioritizing investments in its future. "The Middle East is a very important market for Huawei. We have worked very well with our customers in the region. Huawei is really in the Middle East, for the Middle East," asserts Hua. "We are working hard to make continuous contributions to the region and feel that we have an important role to play. We want to leverage cutting-edge digital technology to bridge the digital divide, bring more convenience to people's lives, and drive economic growth in the Middle East."

EXCHANGE RATES

| AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO. | | | BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL | | |
|-------------------------------|---------|--|------------------------------|----------|----------|
| EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES | | | CURRENCY | BUY | SELL |
| US Dollar Transfer | 304.400 | | British Pound | 0.386336 | 0.400236 |
| Euro | 339.860 | | Czech Korune | 0.005133 | 0.014433 |
| Sterling Pound | 396.180 | | Danish Krone | 0.040940 | 0.045940 |
| Canadian dollar | 232.190 | | Euro | 0.329500 | 0.343200 |
| Turkish lira | 53.880 | | Georgian Lari | 0.121480 | 0.121480 |
| Swiss Franc | 311.410 | | Hungarian | 0.001147 | 0.001337 |
| US Dollar Buying | 296.950 | | Norwegian Krone | 0.029484 | 0.034684 |
| ASIAN COUNTRIES | | | Romanian Leu | 0.065231 | 0.082081 |
| Japanese Yen | 2.800 | | Russian ruble | 0.004783 | 0.004783 |
| Indian Rupees | 4.245 | | Slovakia | 0.009099 | 0.019099 |
| Pakistani Rupees | 1.976 | | Swedish Krona | 0.027551 | 0.032551 |
| Sri Lankan Rupees | 1.684 | | Swiss Franc | 0.301544 | 0.312544 |
| Nepali Rupees | 2.647 | | Australasia | | |
| Singapore Dollar | 225.480 | | Australian Dollar | 0.199731 | 0.211731 |
| Hongkong Dollar | 38.894 | | New Zealand Dollar | 0.189127 | 0.198627 |
| Bangladesh Taka | 3.542 | | America | | |
| Philippine Peso | 6.020 | | Canadian Dollar | 0.225076 | 0.234076 |
| Thai Baht | 10.108 | | US Dollars | 0.300300 | 0.305600 |
| Malaysian ringgit | 77.852 | | US Dollars Mint | 0.300800 | 0.305600 |
| GCC COUNTRIES | | | Asia | | |
| Saudi Riyal | 81.227 | | Bangladesh Taka | 0.003000 | 0.003801 |
| Qatari Riyal | 83.661 | | Arab | | |
| Omani Riyal | 791.163 | | Bahraini Dinar | 0.801277 | 0.809335 |
| Bahraini Dinar | 808.820 | | Egyptian Pound | 0.018636 | 0.021377 |
| UAE Dirham | 82.931 | | Iranian Riyal | 0.000084 | 0.000086 |
| ARAB COUNTRIES | | | Jordanian Dinar | 0.423351 | 0.432351 |
| Egyptian Pound - Cash | 21.400 | | Kuwaiti Dinar | 1.000000 | 1.000000 |
| Egyptian Pound - Transfer | 18.902 | | Lebanese Pound | 0.000153 | 0.000253 |
| | | | Moroccan Dirhams | 0.021374 | 0.045374 |
| | | | Omani Riyal | 0.785919 | 0.793818 |
| | | | Qatar Riyal | 0.082955 | 0.083789 |
| | | | Saudi Riyal | 0.080087 | 0.081387 |
| | | | Syrian Pound | 0.001290 | 0.001510 |
| | | | Tunisian Dinar | 0.102600 | 0.110600 |
| | | | Turkish Lira | 0.046187 | 0.056032 |
| | | | UAE Dirhams | 0.082300 | 0.083126 |
| | | | Yemeni Riyal | 0.000989 | 0.001069 |

Business

Ever-expanding Google enters battle for cloud gaming market

Internet giant hopes to break into the global video game industry

SAN FRANCISCO: Ever-expanding Google becomes a gaming company tomorrow with the launch of its Stadia cloud service that lets people play console-quality video games on a web browser or smartphone. The internet giant hopes to break into the global video game industry expected to top \$150 billion this year, with cloud technology that could broaden audiences attracted by rich new features as well as ease of access with no more need for consoles.

But analysts say Stadia's outlook is uncertain as its faces rivals such as PlayStation Now in an emerging and highly-competitive market. Stadia plays into a trend in which content-ranging from blockbuster films to work projects-lives in the cloud and is accessible from any device. "All of these new services are merely pointing out that we don't need sophisticated hardware in the home to access entertainment," said Wedbush Securities equity research managing director Michael Pachter.

Google last month sold out of "Founder's Edition" kits, which are priced at \$129. Each kit contains a Stadia controller and a pendant-shaped Chromecast Ultra wireless connection device that plugs into television sets. Stadia games are playable using Google Chrome web browser software on computers. It also works with Google-made Pixel smartphones from the second-generation

onward, and on televisions. Stadia Pro subscriptions, priced at \$10 a month in the US, will be available in 14 countries in North America and Europe.

All in the game

But analysts say Stadia could wind up as another "bet" that Google walks away from if it fails to live up to expectations. "Stadia will live or die by its content," said Ovum senior analyst George Jijiashvili. "The announced 12 launch titles are underwhelming." Subscribers will be able to buy games that will be hosted at Google data-centers, but some free games will be available to subscribers, starting with "Destiny 2: The Collection." Stadia on smartphones will work with WiFi connections rather than rely on mobile telecom services.

Being able to play without lags or interruptions is paramount to gamers, and flawed internet connections could cause frustration. Internet speed will also determine how rich in-game graphics can be. Some promised features such as integration with YouTube will not be in place at launch. "Stadia appears to be rushed out the door before fully ready and, worryingly, Google is risking falling short on its promises," Jijiashvili said.

"These shortcomings however would be easily overlooked if Google can deliver a very reliable and high-quality game stream-

ing service." Google appears committed to doing just that, according to Ubisoft senior vice president of partnerships Chris Early. The French video game giant has been working with Google and its games are among titles coming to the service. "From what I have seen, their plans are too deep; they are too good, and they are too invested," Early said. "They are not calling it quits any time soon."

He expects a long launch period during which Google will beef up Stadia. "If there is a one-day problem at launch, it isn't the end of the world; it isn't even close," he said, stressing the potential for Stadia to let people play without investing in consoles. But Pachter questioned whether subscriptions were the right approach. "The right model is pay as you go or pay for the game and play unlimited without a subscription," Pachter said. "Amazon will try one of those and will win the streaming wars." Amazon has game studios but no online game service.

Battle brewing

US technology veteran Microsoft has been testing a Project xCloud online game platform. "Next year, we'll bring Project xCloud to Windows PCs, and are collaborating with a broad set of partners to make game streaming available on other devices as well," Microsoft corporate vice president



COLOGNE: Visitors play the cloud-game based 'Doom' at the stand of Google Stadia during the Video games trade fair Gamescom in Cologne, western Germany. — AFP

Kareem Choudhry said in an online post. Sony Interactive Entertainment last month slashed the price of its PlayStation Now cloud video game service by about half in the US to \$10 monthly.

Japan-based Sony also boosted the library of games that PlayStation Now users can access through its consoles or on personal computers powered by Windows soft-

ware. Sony and Microsoft are also poised to release next-generation video game consoles next year. "While we expect dedicated consoles to eventually lose relevance in the face of cloud gaming services, there's no guarantee that it will be Google's service rather than Sony and Microsoft's—that catalyzes this trend," said Ovum senior analyst Matthew Bailey.—AFP

A hands-on look at Google's Stadia cloud game service

PARIS: Gamers were counting down to tomorrow's launch of Google's feature-rich, on-demand offering Stadia. But is its bang as big as its much-advertised buck? AFP had a chance to gain a first impression at the web behemoth's Paris office in advance of the launch as Google bids to raise the bar to new ultra high-definition heights in a gambit to win greater heft in a global video game industry worth an estimated \$135 billion.

A screen problem forced the Google team to scale back resolution to high-definition television quality while sampling four of the 12 games that will be available at launch. Notwithstanding the glitch, the graphic quality certainly stood out. According to estimates by the US tech giant the computing power under the hood is ample enough to allow players not to worry about technical limitations of their own hardware causing lags or snaps in the action.

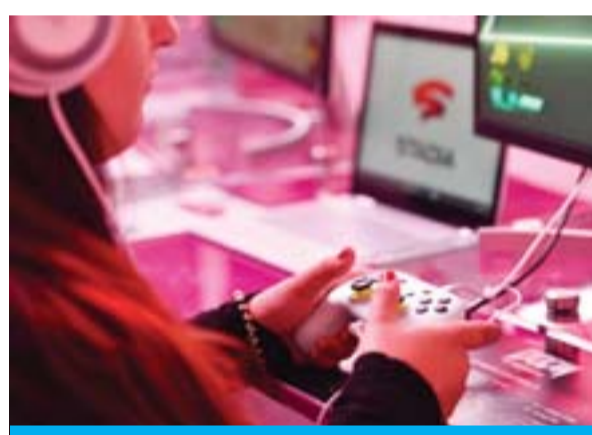
The depth of field, design finesse and color rendition all stood out for the showcasing of games from Mortal Combat, Destiny 2, Shadow of the Tomb Raider as well as Gylt, an original production exclusively for Stadia

from Spanish studio Tequila Works. Image fluidity was also up to the mark. While Google's Chromecast Ultra device must be plugged into a TV for Stadia sessions, a custom Stadia controller connects via WiFi directly to Google servers where game software is hosted. In essence, screens are just windows for viewing in-game activity being handled at data centers.

In usage terms, it's on par with using a home console in terms of seamless on-screen response to joystick movements - although beyond that Stadia is touting much shorter boot-up times. Whereas it can take some hours to install a purchased game on a console, Stadia gets to the starting line in seconds. Even a small-scale test run using few servers could not erase all question marks, a key one being the quality and stability of the connection once there is the expected onrush of competitors firing up on November 18 and thereafter.

Does commute compute?

Another unknown is the extent to which one can play away from one's own home on a variety of media. Stadia is promising to allow gamers the possibility of starting off a session on one's television and then switching to a smartphone during, for example, a commute. That functionality will not immediately be available although it may be possible to switch between media provided one uses a Google Pixel or a computer — and connects using WiFi to make sure game play data moves quickly and reliably over the internet. A roaming option is envisaged but when it will be available is not yet clear.



COLOGNE: A visitor plays a cloud-game at the stand of Google Stadia during the Video games trade fair Gamescom in Cologne, western Germany. — AFP

In addition, a corded connection is for the time being required to connect the controller to a computer or smartphone with TV gaming the only wireless option immediately. Another issue with Stadia's current configuration is its limited catalogue. Just 12 games are available to date — a drop in the ocean compared with PC or console title offerings. A keen gamer seeking out very high graphic quality and almost no fluidity lag or downscaling will have to cough up for the privilege, with a 4K-capable TV, a top drawer smartphone and a high-speed internet connection.—AFP

Egypt to cut prices of subsidized staples

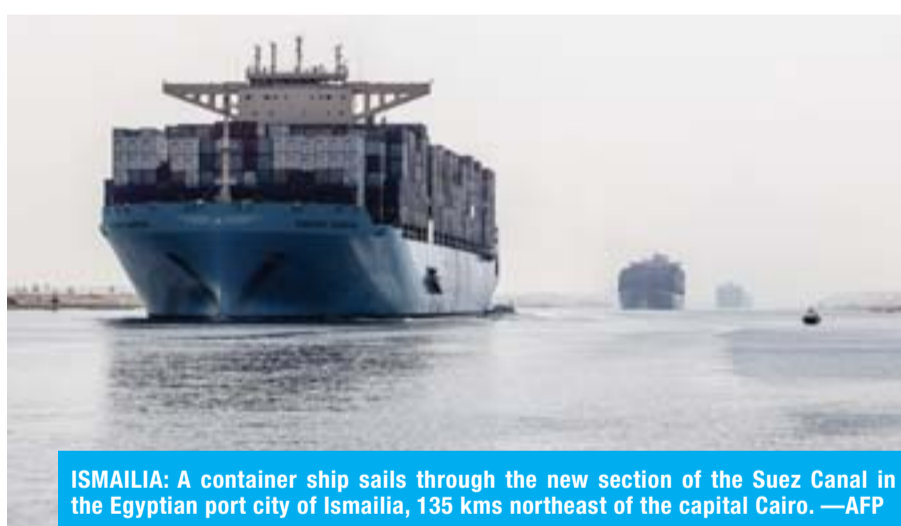
CAIRO: Egypt is to reduce the prices of subsidized food staples from next month, the supply ministry spokesman said, as the country's economy shows signs of recovery. "Prices of cooking oil, sugar, rice and flour will be reduced starting the first of December," said spokesman Ahmed Kamal. He said the measures aimed to make goods available "in suitable quantities and prices".

Last month, the government reinstated 1.8 million Egyptians to a food subsidy program as instructed by President Abdel Fatah El-Sisi. Also in October, fuel prices were cut by 25 piastres (0.015 US cents) a liter following several rounds of price hikes under a tough austerity program that triggered popular discontent. The measures came after

rare and small-scale protests in September calling for Sisi's removal after an exiled Egyptian businessman accused the president and top military brass of corruption.

Harsh austerity measures introduced by Sisi's government since he took office in 2014 have hit poor and middle-class Egyptians. Nearly one in three Egyptians lives below the poverty line, according to official figures released in July. The tough reforms including subsidy cuts and a devaluation of the local currency were tied to a three-year \$12-billion bailout loan from the International Monetary Fund secured in 2016.

The IMF loan was disbursed in full earlier this year, in a boost for the econ-



ISMAILIA: A container ship sails through the new section of the Suez Canal in the Egyptian port city of Ismailia, 135 kms northeast of the capital Cairo. —AFP

omy. Egypt's economy was sent into a downward spiral by the 2011 uprising that toppled longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak and has also been hit by jihadist attacks that damaged its vital

tourism sector. But the official statistics agency said inflation fell to its lowest level in nearly a decade last month, easing to 2.4 percent compared with 17.5 percent a year earlier.—AFP

5 things to know about CFA franc

ABIDJAN: The CFA franc, a seven-decade-old currency shared by more than a dozen states in West Africa, has found itself in the spotlight over calls for it to be scrapped. Here is a factfile:

Colonial origins

The CFA franc is used by 14 nations in western and central Africa. Their 155 million people account for 14 percent of Africa's population and 12 percent of its GDP, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The CFA—its initials come from the French words for African Financial Community—was launched on December 26, 1945 as a "franc of the French colonies of Africa." The money then morphed into two geographic variants, for western Africa and central Africa.

The first comprises eight countries in the West African Monetary Union—Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo—

whose Dakar-based issuing authority is the Central Bank of the West African States. The other is the Central African Economic and Monetary Union, comprising Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Republic of Congo. Its issuing authority is the Cameroon-based Bank of the Central African States.

European link

The currency's value was moored to the euro after its introduction two decades ago, at a fixed rate of 655.96 CFA francs to one euro. The Bank of France holds half of the currency's total reserves, but France does not make money on its deposits stewardship, annually paying a ceiling interest rate of 0.75 percent to member states. The arrangement guarantees unlimited convertibility of CFA francs into euros and facilitates inter-zone transfers. CFA notes and coins are printed and minted at a Bank of France facility in the southern town of Chamalières. Both regional African banks that supervise the CFA variants have established price stability as their overriding objective.

For and against

Detractors blast the CFA franc as a "post-colonial"

arrangement which prevents countries from exercising sovereignty over their currency, or which enables France to maintain influence in Africa. Supporters praise it for aiding monetary stability because of its indirect peg to the euro. Amid ever louder calls for reform, Paris says it is open to discussions. Options range from a symbolic name change to pegging the CFA against a basket of currencies including the euro, the US dollar and Chinese yuan, thus taking Africa's main trade partners into account. Some voices are urging the transfer of CFA reserves to other institutions and an end to strict monetary policy in order to spur development and job creation.

Swap it for an 'eco'?

The 15 member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have agreed to adopt a single currency, the "eco", as early as next year. As the eight members of the West African Monetary Union are members of ECOWAS, the West African CFA franc would then disappear. Many analysts suspect the "eco" plan is over-ambitious. They cite disparities in the nations' respective economies and their budget capacities, as well as the many technical challenges of launching a new currency.—AFP

Many pitfalls in reform of CFA franc

PARIS: Calls to overhaul the West African CFA franc, a currency tied to the euro and historically rooted in French colonial rule, raise a host of thorny problems, analysts say. Eight countries use the euro-pegged West African CFA franc, which enjoys unlimited convertibility with the euro. This is brought about by the countries depositing 50 percent of their reserves with the Bank of France, which guarantees payments into euros even if a CFA member state cannot cover import payments.

The link to France and the euro provides an important measure of financial stability - but is politically sensitive in countries that have been independent from France for nearly six decades. Earlier this year the 15 member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) agreed to adopt a single currency, the "eco", as early as next year. As ECOWAS includes the eight members of West African Monetary Union (WAMU), the eco would supplant the CFA franc for those countries.

But prospects of earlier changes to the region's currency dramatically surfaced this month when Benin leader Patrice Talon said the WAMU states planned to pull their reserves from the Bank of France. "We are all agreed, unanimously, that we should put an end to this model," Talon told French broadcasters RFI and France 24 on November 14. He said there was a "psychological problem" with the CFA franc rather than a "technical" problem.

Fixed rate reduces risk

Ruben Nizard, an economist with export insurance firm Coface who focuses on Africa, sounded a loud note of caution. "Withdrawing exchange reserves (from French supervision) would call into question one of the pillars of the franc zone," notably the convertibility guarantee offered by Paris, Nizard said. If the guarantee is scrapped, this would open the door to questioning the franc's fixed exchange rate, of 655.96 CFA to the euro. "Fixing the rate reduces the exchange risk for investors and exporters — that's a great benefit," Nizard said.

But critics of the CFA franc in its current form complain that the peg with the euro puts the economies of the CFA franc zone in a straitjacket. They are tied to the euro-zone's monetary policy, which is unsuited to their needs, they argue. "It requires our central banks to follow very restrictive monetary policies," said Demba Moussa Dembele, a Senegalese economist and director of the Forum for African Alternatives think tank. "The priority of African economies is not the fight against inflation — they need investment and jobs."

But there are other factors in the debate, beyond management of monetary and economic policies. "Changing the location of where reserves are held is above all a political and symbolic issue," said Noel Magloire Ndoba, a Congolese economist, consultant and former dean of Brazzaville's Faculty of Economic Sciences. "Why not deposit these reserves with an African central bank? We are in the 21st century, Africa must take over management of its own central bank and currency," Ndoba argued.

Currency basket?

By severing the chain to the euro, West African countries would then be able to link the CFA franc to a basket of currencies, which would better suit the region's exporters, Ndoba said. "We need to move to fixing it against a basket of currencies, the euro, the dollar, the yuan, which corresponds to Africa's trade partners - Europe, the United States and China," he said.

Despite the unity proclaimed by Benin's president about pulling their reserves, it is unclear if all WAMU states are ready to make the move. Ivory Coast, the leading economy among the eight countries that use the West African CFA franc, has refused to comment. Withdrawing the reserves would appear a prerequisite for the "eco" to ever get off the ground.—AFP

Business

West Africa boot camp seeks artificial intelligence fix for climate-hit farmers

New app diagnoses problem and recommends treatment

DAKAR: Data analyst Fabrice Sonzahi enrolled in a course on artificial intelligence (AI) in Dakar, hoping to help struggling farmers improve crop yields in his home country of Ivory Coast. He is part of an inaugural batch of students at a new AI programming school in Senegal, one of the first in West Africa. Its mission is to train local people in using data to solve pressing issues like the impact of climate change on crops.

The Dakar Institute of Technology (DIT), which opened in September, is running its first 10-week boot camp with nine students in partnership with French AI school VIVA-DATA. "I am convinced that by analyzing data we can give (farmers) better solutions," said Sonzahi, 30. He plans to

bring his AI skills to Ivorian startup ATA Solution, which advises farmers on how to maximize scarce resources like land and water. The company already collects data such as soil PH, temperature and moisture levels, said Sonzahi, who works with the startup as an analyst.

With AI, that data could be processed to show exactly when and where farmers should add water or fertilizer, and help strengthen their understanding of crop losses, he said. Data scientists across the continent are beginning to experiment with machine learning as a tool to help farmers cope with increasingly erratic weather, from modeling the fastest route to market, to detecting problems in fields with drones.

In Cameroon, a new mobile phone app called Agrix Tech allows farmers to photograph a leaf affected by blight and then, using AI, diagnoses the problem and recommends treatment. A project launched in Kenya this year also uses AI to crunch big data and give smallholder farmers recommendations such as when to plant, in a bid to avert food shortages, according to French technology firm Cagemi.

But knowledge of AI and training opportunities are slim, especially in West Africa where fixes for crop failure are sorely needed, said DIT director Nicolas Poussielgue. West African countries are among those hardest-hit by climate change, according to scientists, with populations

that depend largely on agriculture losing their livelihoods due to worsening floods and droughts. "For models of climate change, the basic calculations use physics. Now you can add AI, which lets you have better results to know what is going to happen and where," said Poussielgue.

DIT plans to launch a bachelor's degree in big data and a master's in AI in 2020, each with 25 students, he added. Not all the boot-camp participants are focused on agriculture, but it is one of the key areas in which AI has the potential to make a difference in West Africa, besides health and education, he said. "The idea of the school is to have students who will create their own startups and products," said Poussielgue. — Reuters

LuLu Exchange wins Brand of the Year at World Branding Awards

KUWAIT: With over 180 branches in the UAE alone, LuLu Exchange is one of the most trusted names in the non-banking financial sector, offering global money transfer, foreign exchange and salary administration. At the 2019 World Branding Awards held at The State Apartments, Kensington Palace, London, LuLu Exchange was honored with the Brand of the Year Award in the Finance category.

Speaking at the award ceremony, LuLu Exchange CEO Adeb Ahamed remarked, "It is a huge privilege for LuLu Exchange to be officially recognized at the renowned World Branding Awards. We will continue investing in our core values of Trust, Talent and Relationships to maintain our market position and impeccable reputation among customers, employees, and shareholders alike."

Bestowed by the prestigious World Branding Forum at its most current lavish annual gala, the Brand of the Year is a coveted industry award that recognizes exceptional achievement in branding across several categories. Judges select winners through a combination of in-house analysis, and online and market research-based evaluation.

For LuLu Exchange, the Finance category award celebrates their pioneering efforts in branding for innovative financial services offered around the world. The company's excellent reputation also played a pivotal role in securing this honor with public online voting accounting for 30% of the judges' scoring. Ahamed added, "Our reputation is built on successfully bringing together consistency and innovation - so we look forward to continuing this winning streak in future editions of awards of this magnitude."

Established in 2008, LuLu Financial Group has its global headquarters in Abu Dhabi and operates more than 180+ branches across Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, India, Bangladesh, Philippines, Seychelles and Hong Kong.



Afghan pomegranate growers squeezed as prices drop

KANDAHAR: Pomegranate farmers in southern Afghanistan—where growing the juicy fruit is an important alternative to opium poppy production—say they are feeling the squeeze this year, with business blighted by chilly weather, pests and export woes. The prized crimson fruit, globally renowned for its reputed health benefits, is a point of pride for Afghan farmers, particularly in Kandahar province, where luscious pomegranates the size of small melons dangle from trees.

Every autumn, Afghans start drinking pomegranate juice as the fruit bursts into season. Vendors pile carts high with gravity-defying pomegranate pyramids and offer fresh-squeezed beverages. But some Kandahar farmers say a fungal infection and destructive insects are taking a bite out of this season's harvest, and they accuse neighboring Pakistan of new tariffs that are hurting the export market.

Haji Abdul Manan, who has been growing fruit in southern Kandahar for about 30 years, said a springtime cold snap damaged pomegranate flowers, impacting about 40 percent of his crop. Problems also came from "lice, flies and a fungal disease," he added, likening a type of greenfly to a natural disaster that had ruined more than 100 of the orb-shaped fruits daily. "It is the duty of the Afghan government to spray all the gardens in Kandahar and to protect the pomegranates from diseases, but the government is not doing anything," Manan complained. Apart from its sweet flavor, fans point to pomegranates' purported health benefits including high levels of vitamin C and antioxidants that are said to help protect the body. "Kandahar's pome-

granates are the world's best for flavor, color, and several times Kandahar's pomegranates came first in competitions abroad," Nasrullah Zaheer, the head of Kandahar's chamber of commerce said. In Kandahar, a medium-sized pomegranate goes for the equivalent of about 15 US cents, but by the time the fruit reach Kabul they cost about three times that.

Tariffs?

Zaheer and several other farmers claimed Pakistan has this year imposed hefty tariffs on pomegranate imports which, despite a drop in yield in some parts of Afghanistan, has led to an oversupply in the domestic market and sharp price drops. "It is not fair to increase it," Zaheer said. "That is why it is the traders are facing harm."

But the Pakistan embassy in Kabul denied such a drastic measure had been taken, saying Pakistan had raised duties only slightly because "Afghan exporters consistently understate the value of pomegranates and fruits". Muhammad Hafeez, a fruit and vegetable seller at a market in Islamabad, said pomegranate supply from Kandahar had not been impacted. "The supply is in bulk and the quality is good," Hafeez said.

Abdul Baqi Beena, deputy director of the Kandahar chamber of commerce, said about 40,000 to 50,000 tons of pomegranates were exported annually, including to India, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. For years, Afghanistan and international donors tried to wean farmers from growing opium poppies by encouraging alternatives such as fruit crops. But those efforts often failed as drug smugglers offered lucrative prices that normally far exceed the income from traditional agriculture. The US Agency for International Development previously supported the farming of high-value crops, including pomegranates, as an alternative to opium production, but in recent years has shifted its focus to helping build export markets and supporting Afghan farmers that way. — AFP

KIB records KD 12.8 million net profits

KUWAIT: Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah, Chairman of Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced that the Bank reported a net profit attributable to shareholders of around KD 12.8 million and earnings per share (EPS) of 13.18 fils at the end of the nine months of 2019 while registering total operating income of around KD 51.8 million.

KIB's total assets increased by KD 353 million or (17%) to reach KD 2.43 billion compared to almost KD 2.08 billion for the same period of last year. The growth in total assets was a result of a growth in the overall financing portfolio of KD 205 million to reach almost KD 1.75 billion, which is an increase of 13% compared to KD 1.54 billion for the same period of last year. Moreover, Depositors' account increased by almost KD 73 million or (almost 6%) to reach almost KD 1.38 billion as of 30 September 2019 compared to KD 1.30 billion for the same period of last year.

Al-Jarrah added that the distributions to depositors' accounts registered annualized return at the end of the third quarter of 2019 on Al Boushra (KD) three-year deposits of 3.7% and Arzaq (KD) deposit of 3.5%. Similarly, the savings investment account (KD) achieved an annualized return of 2.1% per annum for the third quarter

Al-Tijari announces winners of Al Najma & 'Salary & Cash on Top' campaign

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank conducted the weekly draws on Al Najma Account and the draw on the "Salary and Cash on Top" campaign. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Abdullah Al-Harbi. The results of the draw were as follows: (1) Al Najma weekly account - the prize of 5,000/- Kuwaiti Dinars and was for the share of Abdullah Marshad Al-Marshad. (2) The "Salary & Cash on Top campaign" prize of 1,000/- Kuwaiti Dinars and was for the share of Ghaydaa Jassim Al-Sabti.

The Bank stated that the account prizes this year is featured by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that Al-Najma Account will offer weekly prize of KD 5,000/-, monthly prize of KD 20,000/- and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000. Al Najma Account can be opened by depositing KD 100, and customer should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 to be eligible to enter all draws on Al-Najma Account prizes.

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

As regarding "Salary & Cash on Top" campaign designated for Kuwaiti and expatriate employees as well as the retirees and which is valid until 31

December 2019 and the mechanism of joining this campaign for availing its benefits, the Bank explained that Kuwaiti employees with a salary of KD 500 & above whether newly recruited or in service can transfer their salary to the Bank and avail the benefits of this campaign by getting instant cash gift of KD 250 or an interest free loan 5 times the salary up to KD 10,000, add to this they will automatically enter the weekly draw on KD 1,000.

As for the expatriate customers categorized under Premier Banking Account with a salary KD of 1,700 and above, they will get instant cash gift. The retirees with pension KD 1,000 & above will also get an instant cash gift of KD 150 when transferring their pension to the Bank and automatically enter the weekly draw on a prize of KD 1,000 and avail the benefits of this campaign designated for Kuwaiti and expatriate employees working in private & public sector as well as the retirees. Further, the campaign provides customers with the opportunity to get additional benefits and take advantage of the advanced & unrivalled services & products the Bank provides to its customers to meet their needs and expectations.

Customers can obtain further information on Al-Najma Account by either calling the Service Center or by visiting the Bank's website www.CBK.com and they can also visit their nearest CBK branch where the Bank staff will be ready to serve them and respond to their queries. Furthermore all details & information related to the latest offers & services launched by the Bank is also available on the Bank's social sites.



Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah, Chairman of Kuwait International Bank



Raed Jawad Bukhamseen

of 2019, with a quarterly profit distribution reflecting the Bank's performance.

Profits were credited to depositors' accounts upon announcement of the financial results. Al-Jarrah also pointed out that, as a result of its current strategy, KIB continues to grow year after year. The Bank also aims at improving its customer service as well as meeting the changing needs of its customers by adopting the latest digital solutions that are easily accessible at any time and place.

He noted that this growth will help the Bank in achieving its strategic objectives, cementing its long-standing



Empower your driving experience with INFINITI Q50

KUWAIT: Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babbain Co (AABC), the sole authorized dealer of Infiniti vehicles in the State of Kuwait, inspires its customers to choose from a variety of engines and feel the exhilaration and thrill of driving with the award-winning Q50. Starting at only KD 9,500, the Q50 is driver centric, powerfully elegant coupled with a striking performance and is available with 2.0-liter 208HP turbo-charged engine.

INFINITI's 2.0 Litre Turbo Direct Injection engine delivers 208HP at 5,500 rpm with 350 Nm peak torque from 1,250 rpm. The Infiniti Q50 is also available at 3.0 Litre Turbo generating 300 HP. The INFINITI Q50's fuel efficient engine is designed to offer enhanced performance while maintaining high levels of efficiency. The steering wheel is sleeker and more performance based than ever, ensuring flawless drivability that triggers the senses. The Q50 delivers a confidence-inspiring and personalized experience behind the wheel, which epitomizes INFINITI's dedication to developing innovative driving technologies.

The INFINITI Q50's engine is designed to offer enhanced performance while maintaining high levels of efficiency and consists of four grades: Luxe, Sport, and Blue Sport which comes with four packages: wood trim, sunroof, sensory and pro-active. The driver enjoys a totally in-control experience in the high-back, high-bolster seats that are designed to lower the load on the spine and support the shoulders. The exterior comes with flowing sculptural lines and

strong, muscular proportions, representing a daring visual expression of the car's performance.

2.0-liter Q50 models are equipped with a vehicle speed-sensitive hydraulic electronic rack-and-pinion power steering system as standard. Moreover, to enjoy a grand experience, the vehicle contains the exclusive Bose's Center Point 2.0 software, the Q50's audio system enables listeners to enjoy a surround-sound experience from any stereo source. It has been specifically engineered to meet the unique demands of reproducing surround sound in the sedan.

LED headlights, employing 'light guide technology' to spread light evenly on the road ahead, are designed to emulate the shape of the human eye. The car's aggressive stance gives a greater impression of stability and in-control driving potential. The Q50 enables owners to access a Vehicle Health Report, providing a monthly overview of the car's status regarding ABS, airbags, brakes, engine, oil pressure, and tire pressure.

In Touch then alerts the driver if any action or servicing is required. This year, the 2019 INFINITI Q50 sport sedan was named a winner in the Luxury Mid-Size Sedan segment in the 2019 Vincentric Best Value in America (tm) awards. Infiniti Al Babbain encourages its customers to explore the advantages of the exclusive deal and the exceptional model by visiting the designated showroom located in Al Rai.



What's On



VIVA inaugurates store at Kuwait International Airport - T1

VIVA, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers and enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, and a subsidiary of STC Group, has inaugurated its revamped store at Kuwait International Airport - T1 in presence of the CEO of VIVA Eng Maziad Nasser Al Harbi, the Vice President - Operations of UPAC Eng Hamad Malallah and executives. The opening of this branch comes under the umbrella of VIVA's new expansion strategy featuring latest customer service innovations.

The branch features VIVA's latest solutions for digital services and entertainment through VIVA Digital Branch solution, 5G station experience and gaming zone. Moreover, the branch will serve all passengers traveling through the airport, and VIVA's agents will be available 24/7 to assist customers and respond to their inquiries.

VIVA Digital Branch solution meets with the

desires of shifting from a transactional mindset to the ones that put customer servicing and advisory functions first. It enables VIVA to provide a true experience with the right mix between a physical branch and advanced technology. It offers many services including checking balance, recharging line, paying bills and replacing SIM card. It redefines the role of the branch in the digital age where customer experience is paramount.

By applying this value-added digital banking technology, VIVA will create authenticated, frictionless customer journeys and turn traditional branches to technologically fully equipped branches. The increase in customer base requires continuous revamping of VIVA's stores and other channels to keep up with the customers' requirements and ensure their needs are fulfilled, and provide them with the best services and products according to the latest and best standards in the world of technology.



Al Mulla Int'l Exchange announces iPhone winners

Contemplating to buy a new iPhone Pro Max? Do a remittance from Al Mulla Exchange instead. If you are an Al Mulla Exchange online customer who transfers money through Al Mulla Exchange App or website, you will get a chance to win the latest iPhone 11. The promotion is for online customers who have a chance to win an iPhone every week. The grand prize is iPhone Pro Max, an Apple watch and Air pods.

As of November 12, six iPhone 11 Pro Max were given to Somasundaram Valliappan, Waleed Ahmed Al Rashidi, Saif Nasser Khamees Al Ajmi, Maria Jinky Fernandez,



Zahabiya K Shergarhwala and Haneen Sulaiman Ali Al Otabibi. The promotion will select winners every week. There are no coupons to be filled. All successful online transactions done through Al Mulla Exchange App or website enter automatically into the draw. The remaining draw dates are on Nov 19 and 26 and the grand prize will be announced on December 3, 2019.

The draw is in part of a campaign to reward loyal Al Mulla Exchange customers who use the app and online services. Al Mulla Exchange was the first to launch the

remittance app in Kuwait. The online portal and app are packed with a lot of features including foreign currency delivery, which allows customers to have their foreign currency of choice to be delivered to a place of their choice, place orders for receiving alerts when market rate matches desired rate, get personalized rates based on history and pattern of transactions, add new beneficiaries of choice, send money even when outside of Kuwait. In addition to the above, with the latest feature, the customer also gets to know the delivery of funds to the account.

Economic factors behind Horeca Kuwait development

Leaders Group Company for Consultancy and development's general manager, Nabila Al-Anjeri stressed that there are several economic factors behind the development of Horeca Kuwait, which is due to launch its 9th cycle at Mishref International Fair Ground in the period of January 20-22, 2020. As head of the organizing committee, Al-Anjeri explained that the economic factors include:

- 1- The exhibition's focus on three major economic factors including food and beverage industries, the hotels, restaurants and aviation sector and the logistic services sector.
- 2- The constantly increasing market value of the above sectors as Kuwait is currently witnessing the highest food industries annual growth rate in GCC states with 9.6 per cent. She added that despite regional tension, new billions worth hotel projects are being built in Kuwait in addition to increasing Kuwait airport capacity to around 25 million passengers.
- 3- Horeca Kuwait has made its own outstanding place on regional exhibitions map, which earned Kuwait international reputation.

Moreover, Al-Anjeri stressed that in collaboration with the Hospitality Service Company, Leaders Group man-



aged to lay the foundation for strong ties with hospitality manufacturers in Kuwait and succeed in providing first of its logistic and technical services. Further, Al-Anjeri expiated demand for tourism and hospitality services to increase in Kuwait with the few coming years in view of the increase of per capita income, the strength of Kuwait's economy, growth of investment spending rates to KD 53 billion, developing the private sector, reducing hurdles and involving both public and private sectors in certain projects through the PPP agency.



Kuwait Kids TV introduced a new addition to its programs, and broadcasted the first weekly Kids News in the Arab World, which includes world news, in addition to weather, sports and entertainment. The episode was presented by a group of talented children Bader Al-Muzaiel, Aknan Al-Mansouri, Rakan Al-Qabandi, Dalal Al-Adl, Jana Al-Failakawi, and Hamad Al-Nouri was the director. The idea was the brain child of Dr Nermin Al-Houti, who is an associate professor at the theatrical art and critique at the Higher Institute for theatrical arts. Al-Houti wrote to the Information Minister in January who welcomed the idea, and the general supervisor of the Kids TV Sultan Al-Maimouni was asked to bring the idea to reality. Dr Nermin Al-Houti heads the preparation team of this children's newscast.

ICSK Senior organizes Gyanotsav

On November 7, 2019, The Indian Community School (ICSK) Senior, sculpted out a pedagogic pageant named "Gyanotsav" in the senior school campus. This mega event was a wholesome display of zeal, artistry and expertise of the young talents of ICSK Senior. Observing the 150th birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi, the elemental essence of Gyanotsav-2019, was Gandhian principles and academia. The Chief Guest for this mega event was the Ambassador of Canada to Kuwait Louis Pierre Emond.

The other special dignitaries were Roma Khetrapal, the award winning author from Los Angeles and the ex-alumni of ICSK, the esteemed members of the Board of Trustees of ICSK, honorable Chairman Shaik Abdul Rahiman, honorable Secretary Azharuddin Amer Mohammed and honorable Joint

Secretary Agnelo Antonio Sebastio Fernandes, R Ajith Kumar-Principal of United Indian School, Dr Achutan Madhav - Principal of Jabriya Indian School and Johnny Kunnil, Ramesh [CEO, ONCOST] were the other guests. The inaugural ceremony got the ball rolling with the Islamic prayer followed by the Kuwait, Canadian and Indian national anthems sung by the ICSK Senior school choir, Swaranjali.

Dr V Binumon, Principal and Senior Administrator of ICSK Senior, extended a warm welcome to the chief guest and other notable dignitaries. The mega event was inaugurated by lighting of the lamp by Louis Pierre Emond. Dr V Binumon, Principal along with Susan Rajesh, Vice Principal and Mini Shaji Deputy Vice Principal, ICSK Senior accompanied the chief guest to the dais. A video presentation was displayed in the inaugural ceremony highlighting the bilateral relations between India and Canada that left the audience enlightened. The Canadian ambassador inspired and motivated the entire crowd while he addressed the gathering. The spectators were left enraptured by the beautiful rendition of a song sung by Swaranjali written by Gandhiji.



KAICO sponsors French Alp' Fest in Kuwait

Kuwait Automotive Imports Company WLL (KAICO - AlShaya AlSagar), the distributor of Michelin tires recently sponsored the 1st Alp' Fest at the Radisson Blu Hotel on October 27 and 28. The high profile event was inaugurated by the mayor of the French City of Evian-les-Bains, Josiane Lei who was accompanied by a delegation of rep-

resentatives of the French Alpine Savoie region.

At this two-day event, where French cuisine and touristic attraction of the Alps region were showcased, KAICO had the opportunity to display the latest Michelin tires door to door onsite service trucks along with actual tires. Ashish Tandon, General Manager at KAICO said: "At KAICO - AlShaya AlSagar, we have had a very fruitful partnership with two iconic French brands - Michelin tires and Peugeot. Our French connection made sponsoring this event a natural fitment."

Sadiq Ali, Divisional Manager for tires and lubes in KAICO also added, "KAICO - AlShaya AlSagar is the first company in Kuwait to start a door to door service for tires, and now with five mobile service trucks for Michelin tires, Energizer Battery and Mobil Oil."

Notice

The TIES Center cordially invites you to our Tafseer class (Divine Wisdom from the Last Testament) on November 18, at 7 pm. In this class, we will focus on verses 1 and 2 of Surat Al-Mujadilah (She who argued). We will discuss some types of divorce that were prevalent during the Ignorance Period (Jahiliyya), their

implications, and how Islam abrogated them. We will also learn about Khawlah bin Tha'la's complaint, how and why Allah (SWT) supported her from on high, and what Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliph, said about her. Finally, we will discuss how women, without protests and strikes, got their sacred rights in Islam, and explore various aspects of those intrinsic rights. Come and learn more about the Book of Allah (SWT) in a serene, friendly and encouraging environment.

Health & Science

Cricketers' mental health thrown into the spotlight

SYDNEY: Mental wellbeing as much as physical health is emerging as a key challenge for modern-day cricketers - with relentless schedules, intense public scrutiny and the fear of failure weighing heavily. The issue has been thrust into the spotlight in Australia, where three top players recently stepped aside for mental health reasons, with administrators scrambling to get on top of the problem.

Glenn Maxwell, one of the world's best short-format players, set the tone late last month by taking time away after "experiencing some difficulties with regards to his mental health". Will Pucovski - who had already taken two breaks to deal with similar issues - and Nic Maddinson followed suit, just a week ahead of the first Test of the Australian summer against Pakistan.

The specifics of their cases are not known publicly, but Ben Oliver, Cricket Australia's head of national teams, said there were a number of factors he had noted, generally, since beginning his job this year. "One of the early observations I've had in the role is the intense scrutiny and the relentless schedule that exists around cricket," he told SEN sports radio. "From that perspective, there is an absolute need for us to invest time, energy, resources into understanding the challenges that exist for players and staff around mental health in that context, and making sure we do everything we can."

Test fast bowler Mitchell Starc attributed part of the blame on the modern players' gruelling schedule, with some top stars away from home for months at a time, putting strains on families and taxing friendships. "You have your pressures around cricket, the schedules are pretty ridiculous these days," said Starc, who is promoting the "Movember" initiative, where moustaches are grown dur-

ing November to highlight issues affecting men like mental health. "The positive thing is that guys are feeling perhaps more comfortable, if you like, to be open and honest with how they're feeling," he added.

"In the past guys might have just kicked on and tried to get through things and it could have built up to something worse." Robert Craddock, a respected cricket writer for News Corp. newspapers, noted that the sport was also very mentally challenging. "Cricket may not be a physical contact sport but its mental challenges, with so much waiting time, are much tougher than they look," he wrote in a column Friday. "Most batsmen fail most of the time so the mental demands can be taxing."

'Silence not the answer'

It is not just an Australian issue. Ex-England captain Marcus Trescothick quit a tour of India in 2006 and England opener Jonathan Trott left the 2013 Ashes series in Australia after one Test, with both later revealing they had struggled with stress and anxiety. Superstar India skipper Virat Kohli said this week that he too had suffered and applauded someone of Maxwell's stature going public. "It has set the right example for cricketers around the world that if you're not in the best frame of mind you try, and try and try, but as human beings you reach a tipping point at some stage or the other," he said ahead of India's first Test against Bangladesh in Indore.

"And you need time away from the game. Not to say you give up, but just to gain more clarity," Kohli said he went through a difficult period during India's 2014 tour of England when runs dried up and he could not find anyone to confide in. "I didn't know what to do, what to say to



LUCKNOW: Afghanistan's batsman Karim Janat plays a shot during the second T20 international cricket match of a three-match series between Afghanistan and West Indies at Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow on November 16, 2019. — AFP

anyone, and how to speak and how to communicate," he said. The problem for authorities is knowing what measures to introduce to best help players with their mental wellbeing. Alex Kountouris, Cricket Australia's sports science and sports medicine manager, said the organization was working hard to understand the causes better. "There

is much society still needs to learn in relation to mental health, but we know enough to say with great certainty that silence is not the answer," he said. "Cricket Australia has committed to being open about the challenges faced in managing mental health. We are putting player wellbeing first and supporting them unconditionally." — AFP

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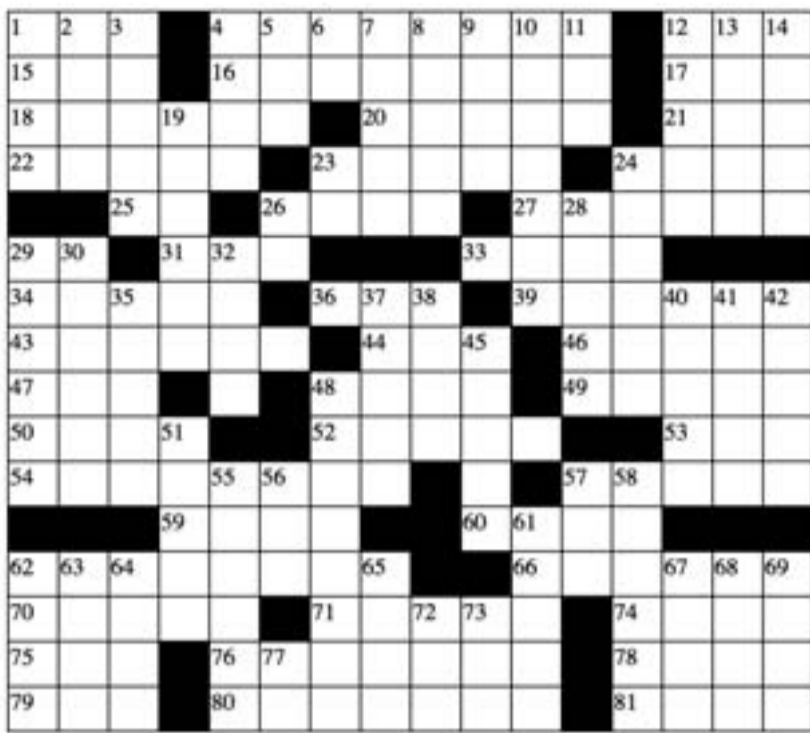
Scope of clinical Practice.

- Bariatric surgeries.
- Gallbladder stones surgeries.
- Abdominal wall and hernia surgeries.
- G.I. surgeries.
- Thyroid and para - thyroid surgeries.
- Anal surgeries.

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Stars

CROSSWORD 2362



ACROSS

1. Any of various primates with short tails or no tail at all.
4. Marked by great carelessness.
12. An enlarged and muscular saclike organ of the alimentary canal.
15. A logarithmic unit of sound intensity equal to 10 decibels.
16. Any general reduction in vitality and strength of body and mind resulting from a debilitating chronic disease.
17. A strong emotion.
18. A high-crowned black cap (usually made of felt or sheepskin) worn by men in Turkey and Iran and the Caucasus.
20. Place in a line or arrange so as to be parallel.
21. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
22. Goddess of fate.
25. A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
27. Any isomeric saturated hydrocarbon found in petroleum and used as a fuel and solvent.
29. 1/1000 gram.
31. An awkward and inexperienced youth.
33. A river that rises in western New Mexico and flows westward through southern Arizona to become a tributary of the Colorado River.
34. A long flexible steel coil for dislodging stoppages in curved pipes.
36. Any of several small ungulate mammals of Africa and Asia with rodent-like incisors and feet with hooflike toes.
39. A native of ancient Troy.
43. Member of an international gang of Jamaican criminals who sell drugs and violence.
44. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
46. A member of the extinct Algonquian people formerly living in northern Indiana and southern Michigan.
47. Step on it.
49. (medieval) A large heavy oblong shield protecting the whole body.
50. A particular geographical region of indefinite boundary (usually serving some special purpose or distinguished by its people or culture or geography).
52. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
53. An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
54. An ambitious and aspiring young person.
59. The sixth month of the civil year.
60. (Old Testament) The eldest son of Isaac who would have inherited the Covenant that God made with Abraham and that Abraham passed on to Isaac.
62. Small tadpole-shaped cold-water fishes with pelvic fins forming a sucker.
66. An indication of approved or superior status.
70. The capital and largest city of Yemen.
71. The capital and largest city of Bangladesh.
74. A strip of land projecting into a body of water.
75. Standard time in the 8th time zone west of Greenwich, reckoned at the 120th meridian west.
76. (British) A restaurant where tea and light meals are available.
78. A Loloish language.
79. The organ of sight ('peeper' is an informal term for 'eye').

DOWN

80. An anticonvulsant drug (trade names Emeside and Zaronin) used to treat petit mal epilepsy.
81. An accidental hole that allows something (fluid or light etc.) to enter or escape.
1. The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
2. Of a period of maximal use or demand or activity.
3. The twelfth month of the civil year.
4. Any of a number of fishes of the family Carangidae.
5. Resinlike substance secreted by certain lac insects.
6. A radioactive element of the actinide series.
7. (physical chemistry) A distinct state of matter in a system.
8. Time during which some action is awaited.
9. The upper angle between an axis and an offshoot such as a branch or leafstalk.
10. Curved in two directions (like the letter S).
11. Imperial dynasty that ruled China (most of the time) from 206 BC to 221 and expanded its boundaries and developed its bureaucracy.
12. A crown-like jewelled headdress worn by women on formal occasions.
13. Relating to or concerned with a city or densely populated area.
14. English economist noted for his studies of international trade and finance (born in 1907).
19. Situated in a particular spot or position.
23. A soft heavy toxic malleable metallic element.
24. Type genus of the Otaridae.
26. A Russian river.
28. A device (used by carpenters) that holds things firmly together v 1.
30. A great waterfall on the border between Brazil and Paraguay.
32. In or relating to or obtained from urine.
35. Similar to the color of fresh grass.
37. Be in accord.
38. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
40. English navigator who explored the Arctic while searching for the Northwest Passage (1550-1605).
41. Any organic compound containing the group -CONH2.
42. The seventh month of the civil year.
45. Lower in esteem.
48. Bubble shells.
51. Squash bugs.
55. (biology) Of unlike parts or organs.
56. The cry made by sheep.
57. A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
58. Of or relating to or toward the cheek.
61. Erect leafless flower stalk growing directly from the ground as in a tulip.
63. Posing no difficulty.
64. (prefix) In front of or before in space.
65. A girl or young woman who is unmarried.
67. The lean flesh of a fish similar to cod.
68. An ancient Hebrew unit of dry measure equal to about a bushel.
69. Hard strong durable yellowish-brown wood of teak trees.
72. The 22nd letter of the Greek alphabet.
73. Payment due by the recipient on delivery.
77. The square of a body of any size of type.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

An old friend you haven't seen in a long time could suddenly reappear. You'll be surprised by this person's achievements. This meeting or the circumstances surrounding it could mark a turning point for you. Perhaps this person inspires you, or people you meet through him or her make a difference to you. This is going to be a strange, significant day. Make the most of it!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

A sudden but fortunate change of job circumstances could take place today. Perhaps you suddenly get promoted or transferred. Perhaps an important piece of information comes your way that leads to advancement. Technology and data exchange could also play a role in events. Friends or colleagues may be involved. Whichever way you look at it, this could be an auspicious day.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Your mind will expand today. You'll feel like there's a ton of information crammed into your head that needs processing. Regarding big projects, try to finish them as quickly as you can. The best policy is to pace yourself. If you wait until the last minute to finish, the quality of your work will suffer. Make a plan and maybe even a timeline. Set small deadlines as you go along.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

An unexpected sum of money could cause chaos in your home, but it's an exciting, pleasant sort of pandemonium! Perhaps this makes it possible for you to make some necessary changes or buy some new equipment, furniture, or appliances. Phone some friends and give them the good news. You might want to host a celebration!



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Information received today might make it possible for you to change your job, residence, or at least the way you think or operate. You might feel nervous at the prospect, but you'll pull it off all right. Don't be afraid to go with the flow and make changes. This is only one hurdle in the course of your personal development.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

An increase in your technical skills could bring you a new job or an increase in income. You may have felt a bit nervous and stressed lately, but this should balance out now. You feel focused and you're aiming carefully toward your goals. You'll succeed if you keep going as you are.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

If you aren't romantically involved, expect that status to change today. You could meet more than one attractive person! A new person could come into your life or an old friend could suddenly seem more appealing than you thought. If you're involved, expect the energy around your partner to change. He or she could seem happier, funnier, stronger, so much so that you fall in love all over again.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Idealism and some intriguing mystical revelations could make you want to spread your ideas. You may want to invite some friends over to talk. For the most part, people will be interested in anything you say. Don't force the issue on those with doubts. They'll have to make up their own minds and will do it in their own time.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

The hopes and goals of a group with which you're associated inspire you. You might make personal sacrifices in order to assure their success. These sacrifices are temporary, for you'll share in the group's good fortune. Personal success is also in the stars, but it may require disruptive change. Go with the flow and don't let self-doubt hold you back.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Sudden, unexpected success could result in an equally unexpected raise. Friends may have pointed you in the direction that put you in the right place at the right time. Don't be surprised if this catapults you into entirely different life circumstances. Make the most of this break. Don't rest on your laurels or your success could disappear as fast as it came.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

A rush of optimism and enthusiasm could propel you into a more positive frame of mind, and you could accomplish wonders. Your circumstances may be turned upside down. A move is possible, as is a change in your work. Don't cling to the shore - flow with the current. Success and good fortune are on the way as long as you let them happen!



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Sudden insights and revelations could enable you to make some long-desired changes. A lucky break might bring an unexpected sum of money your way. Unusual dreams could amuse you during the night. Keep track of them as they might contain messages that can help you accomplish whatever you want to do. This is a day of fortunate developments and pleasant surprises.

Wordsearch Puzzle

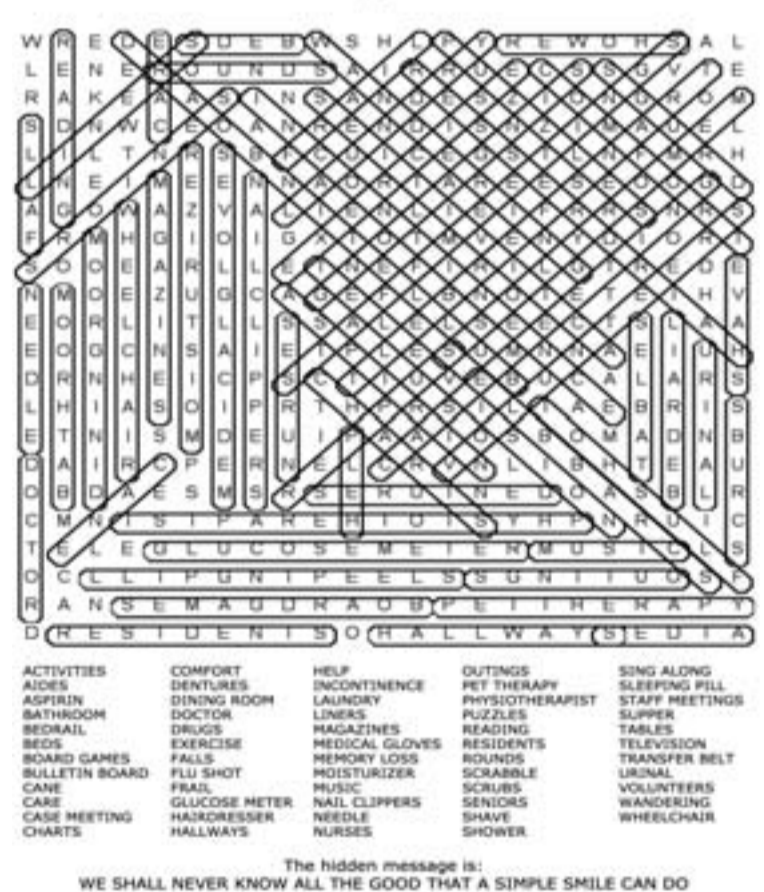
Nursing Home 2

Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 47 letters spell a Benjamin Franklin quotation.

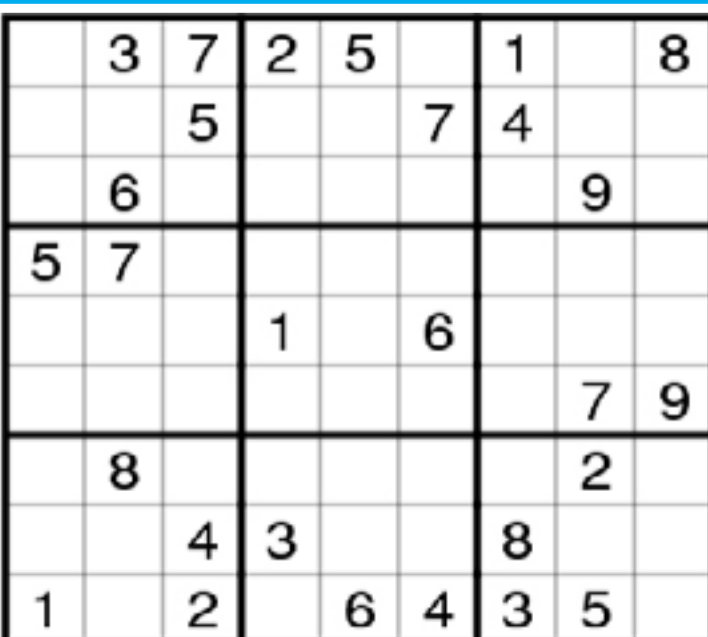


Yesterday's Solution

Nursing Home 1



Daily SuDoku



medium

Yesterday's Solution



hard

Lifestyle

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2019



Giant panda Bei Bei is seen at the Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington, DC. — AFP photos

Bye bye Bei Bei: Washington bids farewell to last panda cub

He was born in Washington and took his first steps in the US capital, but at age four, it's time to head "home"—to China. Bei Bei, the last young panda living at the National Zoo, will leave Washington tomorrow aboard a specially outfitted FedEx plane, as planned even before he took his first breath. Such are the strict rules of "panda diplomacy." In front of the zoo's panda enclosure on a chilly day, schoolchildren in winter coats and hats line up to say farewell, many of them with signs reading "Bye bye Bei Bei."

The National Zoo—a branch of the venerable Smithsonian, the world's largest museum and research complex—has organized a week of events to celebrate the departure of Bei Bei, which means "precious, treasure" in Mandarin. Kids can write postcards for the panda, which will go with him to China, watch zookeepers offer him special treats, attend Q&A sessions with zoo personnel or just watch him play. Through it all, Bei Bei... munches on bamboo.

Marty Dearie is one of Bei Bei's keepers. He saw the male cub born in August 2015 on the "panda cam"—which is trained on the zoo's pandas around the clock. Bei Bei, who now weighs a healthy 250 pounds, lives with his parents, dad Tian Tian and mom Mei Xiang. "Our job has been to get him prepared for the trip to China from the moment he was born," Dearie told AFP.

"We knew that was coming—it's part of the loan agreement."

China's "panda diplomacy" has evolved over the years. At one point in time, Beijing gave pandas to friendly nations, but now that the animals are considered "vulnerable" to extinction by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, China lends pandas to zoos around the world. Once a panda reaches the age of four, he or she is repatriated to breed with other animals at sanctuaries in China. Bei Bei's siblings, brother Tai Shan and sister Bao Bao, have already been returned to China.

Tian Tian and Mei Xiang will remain at the National Zoo until at least December 2020, when a new deal would need to be negotiated. Even though the conditions were always set in stone, Dearie is still heartbroken to see Bei Bei go. "I'm a very emotional person, I can admit to that," he said. "I'm sure on the day of the move for Bei Bei, I'll be in some tears."

Honey and sugarcane

Moving a giant panda to another continent is no easy task. For several weeks, Bei Bei's keepers have been training him to sit in the crate in which he will travel to China on the nonstop 16-hour flight from Washington to Chengdu. "At this point, we were able to close both doors and he sits in there com-



fortably," says Dearie. A keeper and a veterinarian will make the trip with Bei Bei. The National Zoo staff will prepare a special stash of treats for him—like most giant pandas, he eats constantly.

"We'll probably be taking 15 or 20 kilos of bamboo with him at least. He'll also get apples, sweet potatoes, carrots. We'll probably take some sugarcane. There might be

honey, biscuits," Dearie explains. FedEx is paying for the flight and the special outfitting of the Boeing 777 — called the "Panda Express" for the occasion. "Bei Bei and his 'luggage' will be the only shipment on the aircraft," said FedEx spokeswoman Rae Lyn Rushing.

Both the public and his keepers have been enthralled with Bei Bei from the get-

go: from his first steps, to an operation in 2016 to remove a lemon-sized chewed-up mass of bamboo from his intestines, to his upcoming departure. Bei Bei's name was revealed at a ceremony in 2015 presided over by then US first lady Michelle Obama and Peng Liyuan, the wife of current Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Such baptisms are now a ritual at other zoos around the world—France's first lady Brigitte Macron attended a similar ceremony with Chinese officials at the Beauval zoo when cub Yuan Meng was named. Beyond being universally adored, pandas have become an "extremely successful" policy tool for China, according to Liselotte Odgaard, a visiting senior fellow at the Hudson Institute think tank who specializes in US-China-Europe relations.

"Especially at the moment when you hear so many negative stories about China," and Washington is in the middle of a trade war with Beijing, "they use the panda as a sort of counter-move to that, and to sort of make the general public think well of China," Odgaard explained. "It's a symbol of China's history, its benevolence, its generosity." Of course, it's also a lucrative policy tool—zoos pay China millions of dollars a year for their pandas, which bring in hordes of visitors. It's a regular "panda business," Odgaard says. — AFP



Lifestyle | Features

Huppert spurs on aspiring actresses at Myanmar film fest

Award-winning French actress Isabelle Huppert urged Myanmar women wanting to make it in the world of cinema to go for it, as she added star power to Yangon's MEMORY! film festival. The Golden Globe winner and Oscar nominee took to the red carpet at Friday's opening night held at the city's recently-restored and oldest cinema. Bats wheeled round the downtown, colonial-era theatre as Huppert's 1995 movie "La Ceremonie" kicked off the 10-day event.

Huppert, whose more than 120 films include "Elle" and "The Piano Teacher", said she was unfazed when a power cut—a common occurrence in the city—briefly interrupted the movie. "They warned me these things might happen," she told AFP in an exclusive interview Saturday. The actress, who has eight of her films showing at the festival, described how all her movies speak about the "feminine condition" and what it means to be a woman fighting to survive.

"I would say I've always been a feminist without knowing it," she said, urging Myanmar women wanting to get into cinema to go ahead and believe in themselves.

"You have to overcome so many obstacles in life that you mustn't create them yourself." This is the seventh edition of the MEMORY! film festival, which this year boasts some 70 movies in its bid to bring worldwide and regional cinema to Myanmar's public.

As the country gears up to celebrate a century of filmmaking next year, the event also features screenings of painstakingly-restored Myanmar classics. Huppert preferred not to dwell on the controversy shaking the French film industry over fresh allegations of abuse against French-Polish director Roman Polanski—but said she thinks people should not boycott his latest movie.

A French photographer became the latest woman to accuse the 86-year-old of rape days before his award-winning movie, "An Officer and a Spy", opened in French cinemas. Polanski has fiercely denied the accusations and has threatened to sue. Asked what France's film industry could do to treat women better, Huppert said it should start by giving them equal wages. "It's the same in every field. Women have always suffered discrimination." — AFP



French actress Isabelle Huppert, center, and Myanmar actress Swe Zin Htike, center left, stand on stage with others during the opening ceremony of the Memory! International Film Heritage Festival, in Yangon. — AFP

Scorsese praises 'magical' De Niro-Pacino bond



US-Italian filmmaker Martin Scorsese arrives for the AFI Tribute to Martin Scorsese at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood. — AFP

Director Martin Scorsese on Friday praised the "magical" relationship between Robert De Niro and Al Pacino in the trio's new gangster epic "The Irishman." The legendary filmmaker has made headlines over the past month with his trenchant criticism of modern-day Hollywood superhero movies as "not cinema." But at an American Film Institute tribute event in Los Angeles, Scorsese preferred to discuss the long-standing collaborations of his own generation.

"What we see in the film is their relationship as actors, as friends over the past 40, 45 years," he said. "There's something magical that happens there." The nostalgic mob movie, released on Netflix on November 27, sees a former mafia hitman (De Niro) reflect on his violent life, including his relationship with a disappeared union leader (Pacino). De Niro and Pacino co-starred separately in "The Godfather: Part II" (1974), before memorably sharing the screen in 1995's neo-noir classic "Heat."

Scorsese said trust between filmmakers was essential, before quipping that they also "have to have some talent." "The Irishman" is Scorsese's ninth film as director with De Niro, whom he has known since they were both sixteen. The director said he had been reluctant to join with De Niro on another gangster movie after hits such as "Goodfellas" and "Casino" unless they could "go deeper." But they joined forces again after finding the missing ingredient.

"It turned out just to be-us. We're 75, 76 years old now. You look back and you think about the things you did in your life, or the things you wish you wouldn't have." "It was about time, it was about us looking back on our whole lives in the 60s and the 70s, and Hollywood and in cinema. And so that issue of time stayed with us," he added. The film, which runs to three-and-a-half hours and cost a reported \$160 million to make, is currently on a limited theatrical run.

It has been a decade in the making, and is seen as a favorite in a rapidly looming Oscars race. The movie uses a new technology to digitally "de-age" its stars on screen. Oscar-winner Scorsese, 76, was honored at the American Film Institute's AFI Fest, which runs in Los Angeles until November 21. — AFP

New 'Star Wars' title from EA set to be big draw this holiday season

Electronic Arts Inc launched "Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order" on Friday, garnering strong reviews for its flagship action-adventure series that is crucial to its holiday sales, after the videogame publisher shelved "NBA Live" game. The latest title, which scored 83% on Metacritic earlier in the day, follows the story of one of the last surviving Jedi as he attempts to rebuild the order. In fiscal 2020, EA expects to sell 6 million to 8 million units of the latest title.

Fextralife, a Twitch streamer with channels views of over 400 million, said the title is a step in the right direction. "There is a bit too much Uncharted in the game, and I was hoping for more of an action ARPG, akin to Dark Souls," the gaming group said. The game's official gameplay trailer garnered over 4 million views on YouTube. The previous titles - "Star Wars: Battlefront I" launched in 2015 and "Star Wars: Battlefront II" in 2017 - have sold over 33 million copies combined, EA had said in October.

Jeff Cohen, analyst with Stephens, expects sales of the latest title to hit 8 million units, given the upcoming movie release. The ninth film in the series, "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" will hit the theaters by the end of December. "The Mandalorian", a web series set in the Star Wars universe, was also launched earlier this week on Disney+. EA, which had previously canceled four "NBA Live" console titles in its popular basketball series, missed market expectation for 2020 adjusted revenue forecast in October.

"Pushing out NBA 20 also will clearly impact sales," Elazar Advisor analyst, Chaim Seigel, said. "Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order" is the biggest single-player focused game coming out at the end of the year. "It has elements of Tomb Raider like environmental puzzles, a God of War style emotional story design and even Batman inspired fluid combat," Samuel Franklin, founder of gaming recommendation website Games Finder said. According to Cowen analysts, the sales for latest Star Wars title could grow to 11 million units on consoles, estimating that every incremental million unit will add about 7 cents to earnings per share. — Reuters

Breathtaking murals spread social consciousness, awareness in Jordan



Painting breathtaking murals in the streets and public places have become a vehicle to spread social consciousness and awareness through the Kingdom of Jordan. Street artists assembled through several Jordanian cities, namely the capital Amman, to spray paint the walls with messages of social relevance in an attempt to encourage citizens to do good and spread hope all over the country. — KUNA



Oscar-winner Mo'Nique sues Netflix for pay discrimination

Oscar-winning actress Mo'Nique on Thursday filed a pay discrimination lawsuit against Netflix, alleging the streaming giant offered her less money than it did to white and male performers because she is a black woman. Mo'Nique, also a singer and comedian, said in the lawsuit that a proposed \$500,000 fee from Netflix in 2018 to make a stand-up comedy special was a "discriminatory low-ball offer." "I had a choice to make: I could accept what I felt was pay discrimination or I could stand up for those who came before me and those who will come after me," she said in an Instagram post. "I chose to stand up."

Netflix strongly denied the allegation. "We care deeply about inclusion, equity, and diversity and take any accusations of discrimination very seriously," a spokesperson told AFP. "We believe our opening offer to Mo'Nique was fair, which is why we will be fighting this lawsuit." Mo'Nique, 51, whose real name is Monique Hicks, won the best supporting actress Academy Award for her portrayal of an abusive mother in 2009's "Precious." That same year she began hosting her own talk show. It was cancelled in 2011.

Her last film was 2016's "Almost Christmas," according to IMDB. The lawsuit, filed at a Los Angeles court Thursday, said the offer "perpetuated the pay gap suffered by black women." "There apparently is a ceiling when it comes to Netflix's willingness to pay talent of certain demographics, namely, black women," it said. The document referred to higher offers reportedly made to male comedians by Netflix, including Jerry Seinfeld, Eddie Murphy and Ricky Gervais. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Iraqi youths donning the red jumpsuits and Dali masks of the Spanish Netflix hit series *La Casa de Papel* (Money Heist), prepare to perform a video clip in Arabic using the music of the famous Italian resistance song 'Bella Ciao' in the northern city of Mosul. — AFP photos



From Mosul to Baghdad, a song of Iraqi solidarity and resistance

While Baghdad anti-regime protesters have clashed with riot police, their supporters in Mosul are using art to fight for change, with a new take on the resistance anthem "Bella Ciao". In a viral music video clip, the World War II-era Italian anti-fascist song has been tweaked to "Blaya Chara" - meaning "no way out" in Iraqi dialect. It captures the fatalistic sentiment many young Iraqis hold towards their violence-torn homeland.

"I don't have heating, not a cent to spend. Why would I even study if there's no way out?" sings one gaunt performer, huddled under a blanket in a gutted building. Others in the video, which has scored hundreds of thousands of hits despite frequent internet blackouts, hold up signs that read "Justice for our martyrs" and "I want my rights." Like activists elsewhere, they borrow from popular culture, donning the red jumpsuits and Dali masks of the Spanish Netflix hit series *La Casa de Papel* (Money Heist), which has revived the Italian classic.

Much of Iraq, especially Baghdad and the Shiite-majority south, has been gripped by a wave of street protests since October 1, decrying a lack of jobs, poor public services and endemic corruption. But in Mosul, a mostly-Sunni city recaptured from the Islamic State jihadist group two years ago, social and political pressures have kept demonstrators from coming out in large numbers. "The song is an artistic message of solidarity from Mosul to the protesters to say: our hearts are with you," said 25-year-old Abdulrahman al-Rubaye, the clip's director.

Creative resistance

The video opens with a despondent mechanic played by Mohammed Bakri, 26, who heads the team of 14 performers that produced the song. "We bought costumes, painted our own masks and filmed in the streets or in our own homes," said the father-of-two who founded the performance troupe in 2016. He has dreamed of taking to the streets to demonstrate like his compatriots in Baghdad and the south, but told AFP that "our situation in Mosul is exceptional and we can't protest".

Sunni communities in the country's north and west have indeed stayed clear of the protest movement, despite the desperate state of public services there after years of war and neglect. IS swept through their hometowns in 2014 and the three-year battle to oust the jihadists left neighborhoods and public infrastructure in ruins. But residents say any street protests would be met with accusations that they are sympathetic to IS, which could lead to a counter-terrorism charge punishable by death.

Or, they fear, they could be painted as fans of Saddam Hussein, the brutal ex-dictator deposed in the US-led invasion of 2003 which paved the way for the current political system. Authorities in Baghdad have already cast the protests as a nefarious conspiracy seeking to bring "chaos" to Iraq. Without the street as an option, Bakri turned to the screen.

"With art, we can support the movement our own way. I think that this way, we can speak in the name of all Iraqis," he told AFP. The team was able to produce the video in a mere 12 hours and upload it just before



authorities cut off the internet.

Not afraid anymore

For Jihan Mazouri, a 23-year-old student and actress, her role in the film was "the least she could do" to back peaceful protesters further south. Her character, dressed in a black robe and veil covering half her face, desperately pulls handfuls of tissues as she sings about "a future with no way out". "People have died or gotten hurt in these peaceful protests, so whatever we do is incomparable to their huge national sacrifices," she said.

After the success of the first video, Mazouri and the rest of the team decided to see the beating heart of Baghdad's protests with their own eyes. They travelled to the protest epicen-

tre, the capital's Tahrir (Liberation) Square, where they performed a classic Arabic ballad by Lebanese diva Fayrouz. But, in another creative twist, their version is an ode to the now-famous tuk-tuks, three-wheeled rickshaws that have ferried wounded protesters to field clinics or delivered food and water to those occupying Tahrir.

Well over 300 people have lost their lives to bullets and often lethal tear gas canisters, and activists say they are being threatened, kidnapped and assaulted. In Mosul, Rubaye, the director, said Iraqis are becoming more brave. "People have confidence in themselves and we are not silent about what happens to us," he said. "We are not afraid anymore." — AFP

Exiled K-pop star backed by court after draft-dodging

A K-pop singer who was deported and barred from South Korea for avoiding conscription by becoming a US citizen should be allowed to return after 17 years in exile, a court ruled Friday. Steve Yoo was a hugely popular chart-topping singer in the 1990s, but that changed when he became a naturalized American shortly before he was to be called up for military service in 2002, automatically forfeiting his South Korean nationality and with it the obligation to serve.

Every able-bodied South Korean man is required to spend nearly two years in the military, often in remote areas along the border with the nuclear-armed North. Service is widely unpopular but regarded as an essential duty, and Yoo's move triggered widespread outrage. He was rapidly deported to the US - he had spent much of his teenage years in California - and has been refused South Korean visas ever since.

Four years ago he sued to challenge the denials and after losing twice in lower courts and mounting an appeal to the Supreme Court, the Seoul High Court ruled Friday that it "retracts the refusal to issue a visa". The decision paves the way for the former star to return to the South, but the foreign ministry said it plans to appeal, and "work closely with the nation's justice ministry and military manpower administration" in the process. Yoo has apologized repeatedly but a survey this year showed that almost 70 percent of South Koreans believe he should continue to be banned.

It "took many, many years to finally realize I could not please everyone," Yoo wrote on his Instagram last month. Koreans' enduring resentment of him stems from his former star status, said CedarBough Saeji, a specialist in Asian languages and cultures at Indiana University Bloomington. Celebrities "live their life in the limelight", she told AFP. "Yoo was popular with men, too, for his tough and cool image. He was a real role model for young men. When he decided to turn his back on his duty as a Korean man it seemed to the public like he had taken their love and returned it not with continued idol-worthy behaviour, but with a slap in the face."

Losing teeth

Previous court rulings in Yoo's case have said his return would "demoralize" troops and induce teenagers to evade conscription. Decades after the end of the 1950-53 Korean War, for many young Korean men military service is an unwanted and deeply resented intrusion that interferes with their studies and career. Refusing to serve is a crime in the country, which is still technically at war with the North. It can lead to imprisonment and stigma that can affect social standing and employment prospects.

But some South Koreans have taken extreme measures to avoid conscription, including a dozen music students who were caught last year deliberately putting on weight before their medical exam, hoping to be declared too heavy for service. Others have undergone unnecessary surgery, including extracting their own teeth. And like Yoo, some - including adult children of powerful lawmakers - have taken foreign citizenships. — AFP

Electronic music festival rocks Tunisian desert

A two-day electronic music festival got underway Saturday in the southern Tunisian desert where the original *Star Wars* movie was filmed, drawing thousands of fans and star DJs. As the sun set over the lunar-like landscape of the Sahara desert in Tozeur region near the Algerian border, people danced on dunes in the town of Nefta under heavy police protection. Tunisia's tourism sector - which accounts for around seven percent of GDP - was left reeling by jihadist attacks in 2015 on a museum and a tourist resort that left dozens dead, including 59 foreigners.

But the sector has since rebounded on the back of improved security, with an expected record total of nine million people visiting the Mediterranean country in 2019, according to industry officials. "I adore such festivals in France but here in the desert and in the midst of this landscape it is magical," said Melissa Fleury, a 22-



People dance at the electronic music festival 'Les Dunes Electroniques' at Ong Jmel, near the town of Nefta in western Tunisia, where the original *Star Wars* film was shot. — AFP photos

year-old who travelled from France to attend. The festival was first launched in 2014 but was put on hold the following year after the deadly attacks. It is organized by a Franco-Tunisian hotelier with backing from the Tunisian tourism ministry.



This year the festival named "Les Dunes Electroniques" - has drawn around 20 musicians, including award-winning Swiss-Chilean DJ Luciano. Six thousand concert goers are expected to attend the festival which will run until Sunday. Fans are being treated to 30 hours of non-stop electronic music from across the globe, including traditional Tunisian rhythms, according to organizers. The Tozeur region of southwest Tunisia where the festival is taking place served as a set for Anakin Skywalker's village Mos Espa in the *Star Wars* films. — AFP



A dee-jay plays at the electronic music festival 'Les Dunes Electroniques'.

BIEBER'S SONGWRITER: LGBT+ SCHOOL BULLYING STRIKES WRONG NOTE

Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, Gwen Stefani. The chart-topping names come thick and fast as Justin Tranter recalls the medley of global hits the US singer-songwriter has written for a roll call of pop stars. As co-writer of Bieber's mega-hit "Sorry", at one point in 2016, Tranter had three songs in the top 10 of the Billboard Hot 100 of best-selling hits in the United States. "It was so surreal, I can't really explain it," Tranter said in a phone interview with the Thomson Reuters Foundation from Los Angeles.

Yet it has been a long journey to reach the pinnacle of the music business, Tranter said. And not always easy. "In 2016, I was 35, and I know that is young, but in the music or entertainment business, it's pretty late. "People, they start counting you out. So for me to finally find that success and to find it in such a crazy big way, it was almost so

overwhelming that it's hard to explain." Sunday marks another landmark for Tranter.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California will present the songwriter with its Bill of Rights award, the first time such an accolade has gone to a gender non-conforming person - or someone who does not dress or act according to gender stereotypes. For Tranter, 39, who uses the pronouns 'they' and 'them', being gender non-conforming has always been part of life - even before the term became more widespread.

As a founding member of Semi Precious Weapons, a rock band that achieved some success in the nothingsies, Tranter's stage look was "full make-up, 5-o'clock shadow and 6-inch heels". It was a look some heterosexual music executives found hard to handle. "I faced blatant homophobia and transphobia... on the streets all the time," Tranter said. "But in the business it was presented as because, 'We care about you; we are trying to help you succeed.'"

"Which is kind of hard to hear that the only way you will succeed is if you be something that you are not." Lady Gaga was a huge fan, as was British supermodel Kate Moss, but the band's success began to falter, and Tranter came close to leaving the music business altogether. Being "luckily and delusionally positive", Tranter narrowly avoided a switch to shop work and stuck with songs.

A hit written for band Fall Out Boy - "Centuries" - opened doors and Tranter now works regularly with chart-

topping stars Selena Gomez and Britney Spears. Tranter feels at home writing for women.

"I can relate to the feminine strength and the feminine power. But I don't know what it's like to walk down the street as a woman; I have my own experience, which has been met with lots of positives and negatives." And the negatives began early.

As a child, Tranter had hair ripped out on the school bus and was assaulted at high school. "In the middle of class, two kids counted down from 10 and when they got to zero, they stabbed me in the neck with two very sharp pencils." Tranter was the one who ended up in detention. "The vice principal said to me I should think about what I'm doing to cause this, and that the detention might help me with that," Tranter said.

"So basically telling me to stop being so feminine or so gay - whatever word she would have chosen, that's what I felt she was saying to me." Tranter recently performed at Spirit Day, an event organized by US LGBT+ media monitoring organization GLAAD to highlight bullying of gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender young people.

"Over 80 percent of LGBTQ students experience bullying," Tranter said, looking back on the difficulties of youth. "How life changing Spirit Day would have been to me; to know that during those situations when I was being blamed for my bullying, that there were people out there that supported me, would have changed my entire life in an instance." — Reuters



Walls covered with graffiti are seen in Lebanon's capital Beirut. — AFP photos

Protest graffiti fills Beirut's posh downtown



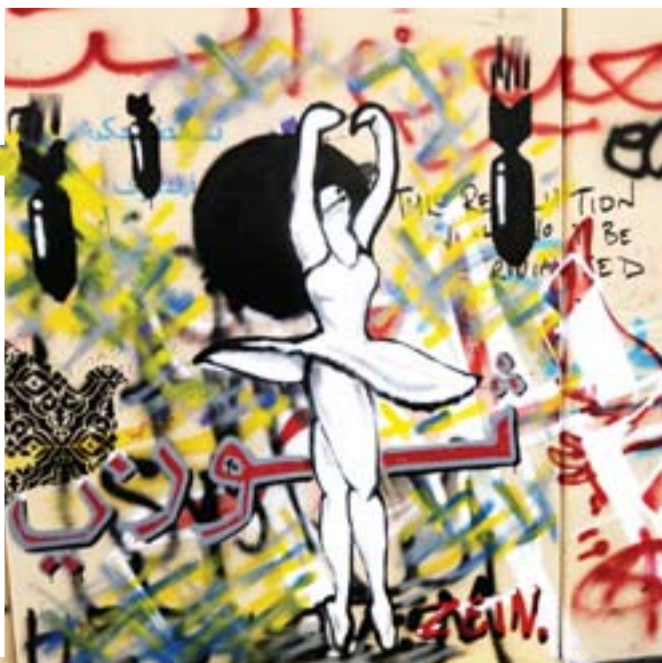
A majestic phoenix spreads its wings as Hayat Nazer adds a splash of color to a Beirut wall. As Lebanon's uprising enters its second month, graffiti has enveloped the capital's posh downtown. Since October 17, the chanting of tens of thousands of Lebanese denouncing the political elite have shaken the normally staid district around two Beirut squares—Martyrs' and Riad Al Solh.

Nazer, a 32-year-old artist, is one of the protesters who would not normally frequent the area, famed for luxury boutiques and elegant buildings. But the unprecedented protests also offered her a first experience with street art. "I decided to go out in the street to be inspired by the people," she said during a cigarette break, standing next to pots of red, green and yellow paint.

Then she turned to place the final brushstroke on the mythical bird emerging from a burning forest—a reference to the fires that ravaged Lebanon's mountains shortly before the protests began. "The phoenix reminds us that the Lebanese shouldn't lose hope. When we fall, we need to rise up and fly to freedom, to claim our rights," she said.

Icon of capitalism

The long concrete barrier Nazer was painting protects a United Nations building, but has been named the "wall of the revolution" for the graffiti adorning it. A ballerina pirouettes under shells, accompanied by the slogan "Rise up". Further down, a big purple hand flashes a V for victory. On nearby buildings, various causes are championed with spray-painted and stenciled slogans: "Our revolution is feminist"; "LGBT rights, love is



not a crime"; and "We will burn your palaces".

Political leaders are lampooned in caricature, including outgoing Prime Minister Saad Hariri, longstanding parliament speaker Nabih Berri, and central bank governor Riad Salameh. The contrast is striking compared with the nearby opulence of a district that was controversially rebuilt after being ravaged during the 1975-1990 civil war. Today a Rolex clock tower stands in front of a parliament cordoned off by security forces. Working-class souks have been replaced by a modern commercial centre, home to banks and French luxury brands.

The reconstruction of the district, famed for its stone buildings in neo-Venetian and neo-Moorish style, was led by Solidere, the real estate company of billionaire former prime minister Rafiq Hariri. Its detractors say the project killed the soul of a formerly vibrant neighborhood in order to attract Gulf investment and wealthy tourists. "This city has become an icon of capitalism," said artist and rights activist Selim Mawad. He jumped onto a plastic barricade to retouch a mural of stylized bulls alongside the slogan: "What is the future of our revolution?"

Personal liberation

Lebanon's uprising-like protests elsewhere in the Middle East and Latin America—is both political and social. "It's also about personal liberation, which is the foundation of a revolution," Mawad said. He sees symbolism in graffiti. "People say, 'I can't touch this building, I can't live there, so I'll leave my mark on it,'" the paint-spattered artist told AFP. One day, assailants attacked the protesters in the area where Mawad was painting his mural. He was beaten and his bicycle stolen.

"Give back the stolen money—and don't forget the bike," he later painted next to a picture of a bull brandishing a red bicycle. He hopes the paintings will be preserved. "It's the memory of an uprising. If they erase them, we will forget."



Nearby, Rida Mawla left a meeting and decided to take a walk in the city centre, something he said he never previously did. "I'm starting to feel like downtown is a bit more like me," the business consultant said. "In theory it's the place where everyone should meet, but the ruling class has taken possession of it," he said. He pointed out his favorite graffiti, a big black tag scrawled on a wall: "Beirut has spoken". — AFP



Classifieds

Monday, November 18, 2019



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STATE OF KUWAIT DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



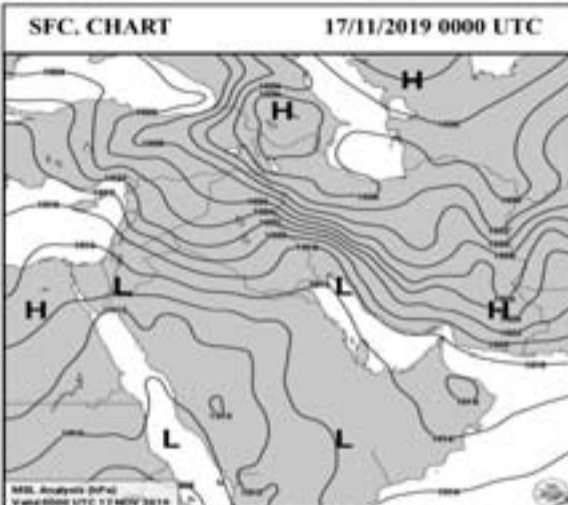
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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Partly cloudy to cloudy with moderate to fresh north easterly wind to south easterly wind, with speed of 20 - 50 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

BY NIGHT: Partly cloudy to cloudy with moderate to fresh south easterly wind changing to north easterly wind, with speed of 20 - 45 km/h with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times.

| WEATHER WARNING | | | Thunder Rain | |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|--|--|
| STATION | MAX. EXP. | MIN. REC. | SFC. CHART 17/11/2019 0000 UTC | |
| KUWAIT CITY | 24 °C | 22 °C |  | |
| KUWAIT AIRPORT | 23 °C | 18 °C | | |
| ABDALY | 24 °C | 15 °C | | |
| BUBYAN | - °C | - °C | | |
| JAHLA | 25 °C | 20 °C | | |
| FAILAKA ISLAND | - °C | - °C | | |
| SALMIYAH | 24 °C | 23 °C | | |
| AHMADI | 25 °C | 24 °C | | |
| NUWASIB | 26 °C | 18 °C | | |
| WAFRA | 25 °C | 17 °C | | |
| SALMY | 26 °C | 18 °C | | |

| DAY | DATE | WEATHER | MAX. Temp. | MIN. Temp. | Wind Direction | Wind Speed |
|-----------|-------|--|------------|------------|----------------|--------------|
| Monday | 11/18 | Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times | 21 °C | 16 °C | NE | 15 - 40 km/h |
| Tuesday | 11/19 | Partly cloudy | 20 °C | 14 °C | NE | 15 - 38 km/h |
| Wednesday | 11/20 | Sunny | 20 °C | 10 °C | NW | 15 - 35 km/h |
| Thursday | 11/21 | Sunny | 21 °C | 08 °C | NW-VRB | 06 - 28 km/h |

| Prayer | Time |
|---------|-------|
| Fajr | 04:51 |
| Sunrise | 06:13 |
| Zuhr | 11:33 |
| Asr | 14:32 |
| Sunset | 16:52 |
| Isha | 18:12 |

| | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| MAX. Temp. | 28 °C |
| MIN. Temp. | 13 °C |
| MAX. RH | 72 % |
| MIN. RH | 31 % |
| MAX. Wind | SE 25 km/h |
| TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR. | 0 mm |

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 |
| Khalidiya | 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 |

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|----------------------|--------------|
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| Wataniya Airways | 22 066 536 |
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| American Airlines | 22087425 |
| Jet Airways | 22924455 |
| FlyDubai | 22414400 |
| Qatar Airways | 22423888 |
| KLM | 22425747 |
| Royal Jordanian | 22418064/5/6 |
| British Airways | 22425635 |
| Air France | 22430224 |
| Emirates | 22921555 |
| Air India | 22456700 |
| Air India EXPRESS | 22438185/4 |
| Sri Lanka Airlines | 22424444 |
| Egypt Air | 22421578 |
| Swiss Air | 22421516 |
| Saudia | 22426306 |
| Middle East Airlines | 22423073 |
| Lufthansa | 22422493 |
| PIA | 22421044 |
| Bangladesh Airlines | 22452977/8 |
| Indian Airlines | 22456700 |



Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)

DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

| Arrival Flights on Monday 18/11/2019 | | | | Departure Flights on Monday 18/11/2019 | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------|-------------------|-------|--|------|-------------|-------|
| Airlines | Flt | Route | Time | Airlines | Flt | Route | Time |
| FEG | 441 | Asyut | 00:05 | JZR | 212 | Jeddah | 13:45 |
| IGO | 1757 | Kochi | 00:10 | UAE | 877 | Dubai | 14:00 |
| JZR | 1338 | Al Najaf | 00:10 | KAC | 672 | Dubai | 14:00 |
| THY | 772 | Istanbul | 00:20 | ZAV | 4131 | Dubai | 14:00 |
| JZR | 254 | Amman | 00:20 | GNE | 231 | Riyadh | 14:10 |
| KAC | 102 | London | 00:50 | KFA | 221 | Bahrain | 14:15 |
| DLH | 625 | Dammam | 00:50 | FDB | 059 | Dubai | 14:20 |
| KAC | 504 | Beirut | 01:00 | QTR | 1078 | Doha | 14:25 |
| JZR | 734 | Cairo | 01:00 | KAC | 364 | Colombo | 14:35 |
| JZR | 722 | Alexandria | 01:00 | KAC | 286 | Dhaka | 14:35 |
| RJA | 642 | Amman | 01:20 | JZR | 222 | Riyadh | 14:45 |
| UAE | 853 | Dubai | 01:40 | SVA | 500 | Jeddah | 14:45 |
| KLM | 446 | Bahrain | 01:45 | KAC | 304 | Mumbai | 14:45 |
| ETH | 620 | Addis Ababa | 02:15 | KAC | 562 | Amman | 14:50 |
| QTR | 1086 | Doha | 02:40 | KAC | 618 | Doha | 14:50 |
| PGT | 860 | Istanbul | 02:50 | JZR | 152 | Mashhad | 14:55 |
| GFA | 211 | Bahrain | 02:50 | KAC | 788 | Jeddah | 14:55 |
| JZR | 502 | Lahore | 02:55 | KAC | 118 | New York | 15:00 |
| ETD | 305 | Abu Dhabi | 03:05 | KAC | 516 | Tehran | 15:00 |
| OMA | 643 | Muscat | 03:05 | KNE | 529 | Jeddah | 15:05 |
| JZR | 406 | Kochi | 03:05 | KAC | 412 | Bangkok | 15:10 |
| MSR | 612 | Cairo | 03:15 | ETD | 303 | Abu Dhabi | 15:15 |
| KAC | 418 | Manila | 03:20 | OMA | 645 | Muscat | 15:20 |
| QTR | 1076 | Doha | 03:30 | ABY | 127 | Sharjah | 15:35 |
| OHY | 352 | Istanbul | 04:00 | UAE | 857 | Dubai | 15:45 |
| KAC | 382 | Delhi | 04:05 | JZR | 1336 | Al Najaf | 15:50 |
| IGO | 1751 | Chennai | 04:10 | KAC | 546 | Cairo | 16:05 |
| KAC | 346 | Ahmedabad | 04:15 | JZR | 732 | Cairo | 16:10 |
| DHX | 170 | Bahrain | 04:25 | FDB | 051 | Dubai | 16:10 |
| KAC | 784 | Jeddah | 04:25 | QTR | 1072 | Doha | 16:15 |
| JZR | 404 | Hyderabad | 04:50 | KAC | 502 | Beirut | 16:15 |
| IGO | 1759 | Delhi | 05:10 | SAW | 705 | Damascus | 17:00 |
| THY | 770 | Istanbul | 05:20 | JZR | 116 | Doha | 17:05 |
| JZR | 402 | Mumbai | 05:25 | SVA | 510 | Riyadh | 17:10 |
| KAC | 352 | Kochi | 05:25 | GFA | 215 | Bahrain | 17:30 |
| KAC | 344 | Chennai | 05:30 | JZR | 214 | Jeddah | 17:35 |
| KAC | 552 | Cairo | 05:45 | JZR | 124 | Dubai | 17:40 |
| JZR | 112 | Doha | 05:50 | JZR | 104 | Bahrain | 18:00 |
| BAW | 157 | London | 06:10 | JZR | 1339 | Al Najaf | 18:05 |
| KAC | 702 | Asyut | 06:10 | KAC | 158 | Istanbul | 18:10 |
| KAC | 284 | Dhaka | 06:15 | QTR | 1080 | Doha | 18:10 |
| JZR | 714 | Sohag | 06:20 | JZR | 302 | Istanbul | 18:20 |
| KAC | 678 | Dubai | 06:40 | MSR | 875 | Cairo | 18:30 |
| KAC | 204 | Lahore | 06:45 | UAE | 875 | Dubai | 19:05 |
| KAC | 302 | Mumbai | 07:05 | RJA | 640 | Amman | 19:05 |
| IGO | 1766 | Mumbai | 07:10 | GFA | 217 | Bahrain | 19:05 |
| RBG | 211 | Luxor | 07:25 | ABY | 123 | Sharjah | 19:20 |
| FDB | 053 | Dubai | 07:50 | KAC | 744 | Dammam | 19:25 |
| QTR | 1084 | Doha | 08:00 | KAC | 616 | Bahrain | 19:40 |
| MSC | 401 | Alexandria | 08:00 | KAC | 674 | Dubai | 19:45 |
| KAC | 384 | Delhi | 08:10 | KAC | 776 | Riyadh | 19:45 |
| IRA | 601 | Tehran | 08:10 | FDB | 057 | Dubai | 19:50 |
| JZR | 102 | Bahrain | 08:15 | JZR | 1340 | Al Najaf | 20:00 |
| UAE | 855 | Dubai | 08:25 | KNE | 381 | Taif | 20:00 |
| ETD | 9873 | Tbilisi | 08:25 | OMA | 647 | Muscat | 20:05 |
| ETD | 301 | Abu Dhabi | 08:50 | NIA | 1501 | Asyut | 20:10 |
| OMA | 641 | Muscat | 09:00 | DLH | 624 | Frankfurt | 20:10 |
| ABY | 125 | Sharjah | 09:00 | MEA | 402 | Beirut | 20:15 |
| KAC | 334 | Trivandrum | 09:00 | KAC | 620 | Doha | 20:30 |
| GFA | 209 | Bahrain | 09:05 | KAC | 174 | Munich | 20:30 |
| QTR | 1070 | Doha | 09:20 | QTR | 1088 | Doha | 20:40 |
| GOW | 061 | CNN | 09:30 | JAV | 621 | Amman | 20:45 |
| IGO | 1753 | Ahmedabad | 09:40 | RBG | 219 | Sohag | 20:55 |
| FDB | 055 | Dubai | 09:40 | KLM | 445 | Amsterdam | 21:00 |
| SAW | 703 | Damascus | 10:00 | IAW | 157A | Al Najaf | 21:00 |
| AXB | 889 | Mangalore/Bahrain | 10:20 | ETD | 307 | Abu Dhabi | 21:15 |
| GFA | 213 | Bahrain | 10:40 | UAE | 859 | Dubai | 21:15 |
| AXB | 395 | Kozhikode | 10:40 | ALK | 229 | Colombo | 21:15 |
| MEA | 404 | Beirut | 10:55 | KAC | 168 | Paris | 21:20 |
| QTR | 1074 | Doha | 11:00 | THY | 764 | Istanbul | 21:30 |
| THY | 1282 | Trabzon | 11:05 | KAC | 164 | MXP | 21:40 |
| NIA | 1401 | Sohag | 11:35 | KAC | 622 | Doha | 21:50 |
| JZR | 122 | Dubai | 11:45 | GFA | 219 | Bahrain | 21:50 |
| AXB | 789 | CNN/Bahrain | 12:10 | KAC | 564 | Amman | 21:55 |
| SAW | 701 | Damascus | 12:30 | QTR | 1082 | Doha | 22:05 |
| RBG | 553 | Alexandria | 12:30 | ETD | 309 | Abu Dhabi | 22:05 |
| THY | 766 | Istanbul | 12:30 | IAW | 157B | Al Najaf | 22:15 |
| JZR | 1334 | Al Najaf | 12:35 | KAC | 786 | Jeddah | 22:20 |
| UAE | 871 | Dubai | 12:45 | SVA | 514 | Riyadh | 22:25 |
| KAC | 742 | Dammam | 12:55 | AIC | 975 | Chennai/Goa | 22:25 |
| KAC | 774 | Riyadh | 13:35 | SVA | 502 | Jeddah | 22:45 |
| | | | | JZR | 128 | Dubai | 22:50 |
| | | | | MSC | 411 | Asyut | 23:15 |
| | | | | | 614 | Cairo | 23:30 |



An Iraqi protester wearing a face bandana and waving a national flag poses near burning tyres blocking a road during a demonstration in the southern city of Basra yesterday, as protesters cut off roads and activists called for a general strike. — AFP

Strikes resume in Iraq to bolster...

Continued from Page 1

In Baghdad hundreds of students skipped class to gather in Tahrir (Liberation) Square, the beating heart of the protest movement. "No politics, no parties, this is a student awakening!" read one banner carried by young Iraqis with rucksacks. They waved the Iraqi tricolor, marching north from Tahrir to the nearby Khallani Square.

Security forces had pulled back from their positions along that street early Saturday and demonstrators spilled out into those neighborhoods and onto the nearby Al-Sinek bridge. They immediately set up tents on a first segment of the bridge, facing off against riot police stationed behind two layers of

thick concrete blast walls. Just beyond those barriers was the embassy of neighboring Iran, which protesters have criticized for propping up the government they want to bring down.

"We students are here to help the other protesters, and we won't retreat a single step," said a teenager wearing thick black-framed glasses. Speaking anonymously because he said he had been threatened for his involvement in the anti-government movement, he said hundreds of teenagers had skipped class. Nearby, a volunteer medic in plastic surgeons' gloves urged laborers across Iraq to join the strike. "Everyone should have a time set aside to take part in the protest," he said.

The government has proposed a laundry list of reforms in recent weeks but demonstrators have brushed them off as too little, too late in a country ranked the 12th most corrupt in the world by Transparency International. "These steps, these reforms are just an opiate for the masses. Nothing more, nothing less," another protester said yesterday. Pointing across the river to the area where parliament, the premier's office and other key buildings are, he insisted the protesters wanted "new faces". — AFP

The government has reportedly pressed wealthy Saudi business families and institutions to invest, and many nationalists have labelled it a patriotic duty. Among those considering a sizeable investment is Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal, a billionaire tycoon who was held in Riyadh's palatial Ritz-Carlton hotel in 2017 during a crackdown on corruption, Bloomberg News reported.

Last week senior cleric Abdullah Al-Mutlaq sought to drum up support for the IPO among ordinary Saudis, saying in a local television program that it was permissible in Islam and even religious scholars were likely to participate. Even for the domestic listing though, there are reports the firm is struggling to attract foreign institutional investors, amid an uncertain outlook for the energy sector and questions over company disclosures and governance.

In its prospectus released last week, the company listed a variety of risks ranging from the possibility of anti-trust legislation to terrorist attacks and geopolitical tensions in a region dominated by Saudi-Iran rivalry. One striking element was a warning that global oil demand may peak within the next 20 years, citing a forecast from industry consultant IHS Markit. It also acknowledged that climate change concerns could reduce demand for hydrocarbons. — AFP

from those stoking the protests.

Some of the worst violence was in the central city of Sirjan, where acting governor Mohammad Mahmoudabadi said a civilian was killed and fuel stations were among the public property attacked and damaged. In Kermanshah, a policeman died yesterday, a day after a "confrontation with a number of rioters and thugs", the provincial police chief told IRNA. In Tehran on Saturday, protesters were seen shouting slogans and burning tyres on a street. Similar scenes were witnessed in the cities of Shiraz, Isfahan and Bushehr, where security forces fired tear gas and water cannon at demonstrators.

Forty "disruptors" were arrested in the central city of Yazd after clashing with police, the province's public prosecutor told ISNA on Sunday. Most were not locals, he added. Police said security forces would "not hesitate to confront those disrupting peace and security and will identify the ringleaders and field forces and confront them". The intelligence ministry said those behind the unrest "have been identified" and that measures would be taken against them, according to ISNA.

Access to the Internet has been restricted since the demonstrations broke out. Netblocks, an Internet monitoring website, said late Saturday the country was in the grip of a shutdown. "Confirmed: Iran is now in the midst of a near-total national Internet shutdown; realtime network data show connectivity at 7% of ordinary levels after twelve hours of progressive network disconnections," it said on Twitter. — AFP

Lebanon tycoon forgoes PM job...

Continued from Page 1

The unrest has kept banks shut for most of the last month. They have imposed controls on transfers abroad and US dollar withdrawals, and the pegged Lebanese pound is under pressure on an informal market. Safadi became the presumed frontrunner for prime minister after a meeting between Hariri, a Sunni politician, and Shiite groups Hezbollah and Amal, according to political sources and Lebanese media, but no political force later endorsed him.

Lebanon's prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim, according to its sectarian power-sharing system. Protesters who have filled the streets since Oct 17 hit out at the choice of Safadi, a prominent businessman and longtime politician they said was part of the elite they sought to oust. Later yesterday, large crowds of anti-government protesters waving Lebanese flags poured back into streets across the country, chanting for revolution in rallies to mark a month since the start of the uprising and keep up pressure.

"We are in a deadlock now. I don't know when it will move again. It is not easy," said a senior political source. "The financial situation doesn't tolerate any delay." A second political source described efforts to form a new government as "back to square one". Reflecting the brittle political climate, President Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) accused Hariri of failing to rally support for Safadi's bid in order to undermine his candidacy and keep the job for himself.

"Saad (Al-Hariri) is delaying things with the goal of

burning all the names and emerging as the saviour," said a source familiar with the FPM's view. A statement by Hariri's office rejected the FPM assertion as an irresponsible attempt to "score points" despite Lebanon's "major national crisis".

But in a statement Safadi later blamed Hariri for not keeping "promises on the basis of which I accepted to be named prime minister of the next government". He did not say what the promises were, but added: "There was nothing left for me to do but announce my withdrawal."

Safadi's withdrawal leaves the powerful, Iran-backed Hezbollah and its allies with even fewer options unless they push for a close Sunni ally, a scenario that would likely reduce the chances of Lebanon winning international support. Hezbollah is classified as a terrorist group by the United States.

Hezbollah and Amal, along with Aoun, a Maronite Christian, have sought for Hariri to return as premier while including both technocrats and politicians in a new cabinet. But Hariri, aligned with Gulf Arabs and the West, has said he will only return as prime minister if he can form a cabinet composed of specialists who can attract international support.

Global ratings agency S&P flashed the latest warning on Lebanon's debt-saddled economy on Friday, lowering its foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings deeper into junk territory to 'CCC/C' from 'B-/B'. S&P cited rising pressure on central bank foreign currency reserves and diminished depositor confidence amid bank closures and curbs by the commercial banks on hard currency movements.

Lebanon's bank staff said they would continue a nationwide strike today that has kept banks shut. The strike is over safety fears as depositors demand access to their money. Union members are set to meet today to discuss a security plan to keep branches safe. — AFP

'Terminator' storms to victory

Continued from Page 1

candidate Sajith Premadasa who came a distant second with 41.99 percent.

Mahinda Rajapaksa, with Gotabaya - nicknamed "Terminator" by his own family - effectively running the security forces, ended a 37-year civil war with Tamil separatists. His decade in power was also marked by alleged rights abuses, murky extra-judicial killings and closer ties with China. "I didn't sleep all night," said student Devni, 22, one of around 30 people who gathered outside Rajapaksa's Colombo residence. "I am so excited, he is the president we need."

Premadasa, 52, of the ruling party, conceded the race and congratulated Rajapaksa and urged him to implement his manifesto promising tax cuts, free food rations and subsidies to farmers. Rajapaksa is due to be sworn in today at the ancient north-central Buddhist pilgrim city of Anuradhapura. Turnout in Saturday's vote was 83.7 percent.

Saturday's poll was the first popularity test of the United National Party (UNP) government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe who is under pressure from his cabinet colleagues to step down. Wickremesinghe's administration failed to prevent the April attacks despite prior and detailed intelligence warnings from India, according to a parliamentary investigation. Yesterday, three cabinet members resigned - including Finance Minister Mangala Samaraweera.

Premadasa is the son of assassinated ex-president Ranasinghe Premadasa who fell victim to a Tamil rebel suicide bomber in May 1993. But Gotabaya is adored by the Sinhalese majority and the powerful Buddhist clergy for how he and Mahinda ended the war in 2009, when 40,000 Tamil civilians allegedly perished at the hands of the army. Under his brother, Gotabaya was defense secretary and effectively ran the security forces, allegedly overseeing "death squads" that bumped off rivals, journalists and others. He denies the allegations.

This makes the brothers detested and feared among many Tamils, who make up 15 percent of the population. Some in the Muslim community - who make up 10 percent - are also fearful of Gotabaya, having faced days of mob violence in the wake of the April attacks. Under Mahinda, Sri Lanka also borrowed heavily from China for infrastructure projects and even allowed two Chinese submarines to dock in Colombo in 2014, alarming Western countries as well as India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted yesterday that India looked forward to "deepening the close and fraternal ties... and for peace, prosperity as well as security in our region". The projects ballooned Sri Lanka's debts and many turned into white elephants - such as an airport in the south devoid of airlines - mired in corruption allegations.

Unlike in 2015 when there were bomb attacks and shootings, this election was relatively peaceful by the standards of Sri Lanka's fiery politics. The only major incident was on Saturday when gunmen fired at two vehicles in a convoy of at least 100 buses taking Muslim voters to cast ballots. Two people were injured. According to the Election Commission the contest was, however, the worst ever for hate speech and misinformation. - AFP

Khamenei backs petrol price...

Continued from Page 1

The petrol pricing plan was agreed by the High Council of Economic Coordination made up of the president, parliament speaker and judiciary chief. Khamenei said that "I am not an expert and there are different opinions but I had said that if the heads of the three branches make a decision I will support it. "The heads of the branches made a decision with the backing of expert opinion and naturally it must be implemented," he said. "Some people would definitely get upset over this decision... but damaging and setting fire (to property) is not something (normal) people would do. It is hooligans."

Following his speech, parliament cancelled a motion to reverse the price hike, semi-official news agency ISNA reported. Khamenei also pointed at opponents abroad in what he called "the centers of the world's wickedness". These included the Pahlavi royal family ousted in the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the People's Mujahedeen of Iran (MEK) group, which Iran considers a "terrorist" cult. "What I am asking is that no one help these criminals," Khamenei said, calling on people to distance themselves

Sports



A group photo of Gulf Bank team

Gulf Bank congratulates winners of 'Gulf Bank 642 Marathon'

KUWAIT: In celebration of the widespread success of this year's Gulf Bank 642 Marathon, Gulf Bank organized an awards ceremony honoring the top three winners from each race category. The ceremony took place at Al Shaheed Park in the presence of Gulf Bank CEO, Tony Daher, and the Director General of the Public Authority for Sport, Dr Humoud Flaiteh Al-Shimmari, along with representatives of the Ministry of Interior and marathon sponsors.

Attendees of the ceremony were treated to short video highlights from the race, followed by a speech by Ahmed Al Majed, CEO of Pro-Vision Sports Management, and an entertaining show put on by children's dance and gymnastics club, Gymnasia.

In recognition of their hard-earned achievements, the top three winners were then awarded across each race category: the 5K Family Fun Walk/Run, the 10K Souq Run, the 21K Half Marathon, and the 42K Full Marathon. Tony Daher, Gulf Bank CEO, then concluded the ceremony, thanking all sponsors and partners of the marathon for partnering in this year's success.

For the fifth year in a row, Gulf Bank held the Gulf Bank 642 Marathon in partnership with Pro-Vision Sports Management. This year's marathon witnessed over 2,200 international participants, including athletes and professional runners who came from all over the world to participate in Kuwait's only AbbottWMM-accredited marathon. The AbbottWMM Wanda Age Group World Rankings is a global age group marathon ranking system. Runners who participated in the Gulf Bank 642 Marathon 2019 will get a chance to qualify for the age group ranking program, earning points according to their age, time and gender, aligned with the following age groups for men and women: 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-69, 70-74, 75-79, 80+.

Commenting on this year's Gulf Bank 642 Marathon, Ahmad Al Amir, Assistant General Manager for External Communications at Gulf Bank, said: "This year's Gulf Bank 642 Marathon was an unprecedented success, with over 9,300 people from more than 100 different nationalities participating, including over 2,200 international participants. It gives us great pride that year after year,

| GULF BANK 642 MARATHON WINNERS FEMALES | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------|--|
| 5 KM | | 10 KM | |
| 1 st | Oksana Raita | 0:19:00.2 | |
| 2 nd | Dorra Al Shouei | 0:19:03.3 | |
| 3 rd | Asmaa Mahmoud | 0:21:44.1 | |
| 21 KM | | 42 KM | |
| 1 st | Valentyna Kiliarska | 1:19:22.5 | |
| 2 nd | Kateryna Karmanenko | 1:19:56.1 | |
| 3 rd | Renata Hoppova | 1:31:13.7 | |
| 1 st | Marta Heribato | 0:34:32.5 | |
| 2 nd | Mercy Wanjiru | 0:35:47.7 | |
| 3 rd | Olesia Didovodiuk | 0:36:02.3 | |
| 1 st | Pauline Wangui | 2:44:05.8 | |
| 2 nd | Elizabeth Chepkonan Rumakol | 2:48:36.0 | |
| 3 rd | Faith Kiptoo | 3:02:25.8 | |

| GULF BANK 642 MARATHON WINNERS MALES | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------|--|
| 5 KM | | 10 KM | |
| 1 st | Roman Romanenko | 0:15:26.0 | |
| 2 nd | Ahmed Bakry | 0:15:44.6 | |
| 3 rd | Pavlo Veretskyi | 0:15:55.6 | |
| 21 KM | | 42 KM | |
| 1 st | Philip Ekwom | 1:06:41.51 | |
| 2 nd | Matviichuk Oleksandr | 1:07:27.0 | |
| 3 rd | Dmytro Didovodiuk | 1:07:27.9 | |
| 1 st | Willy Mnangat | 0:29:52.7 | |
| 2 nd | Vasyl Koval | 0:30:27.4 | |
| 3 rd | Dmitro Siruk | 0:30:30.9 | |
| 1 st | Reuben Kemboi | 2:20:08.6 | |
| 2 nd | Stephen Kipkoech Kibiwot | 2:24:37.3 | |
| 3 rd | Wilson Kirwa | 2:24:39.5 | |

Gulf Bank has been at the forefront of one of the biggest community events Kuwait has seen, and one which has truly put our country on the map for international sporting events. We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the marathon's success, and would like to extend a special thanks to the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, Kuwait Municipality, Public Authority for Sport, and all our volunteers. We thank everyone for their continued cooperation, and we look forward to sharing in even more successes together next year.

The Gulf Bank 642 Marathon kicked off at 7:30 AM on Saturday morning at Souq Sharq, and took runners through beautiful landmarks across Kuwait. Participants made their way along Gulf Road, jogging past the Grand Mosque and Souq Al Mubarakiya, where local vendors cheered on participants and added to the incredible atmosphere of the day. Depending on the distance category, runners continued on their respective running paths, jogging past a variety of Kuwait's beautiful landmarks, from the Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Cultural Center to the Kuwait Towers, before crossing the finish line.

Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a



Gulf Bank CEO Tony Daher and the Director General of the Public Authority for Sport Dr Humoud Flaiteh Al-Shimmari.

robust corporate social responsibility program. Every year, Gulf Bank extends its support to local youth initiatives, proudly advocating for women empowerment, sustainability, health and fitness, and building on the legacy of Kuwait's heritage and history. This

year, Gulf Bank 642 Marathon partnered with Kuwait Red Crescent Society to bring medical aid to those who are unable to afford medical treatment, providing support in covering the provision of medical devices including pacemakers, cochlear devices,

hearing aids, electric wheelchairs, and stents. For more information regarding the Gulf Bank 642 Marathon, and to view the marathon winners' names, please visit www.gulfbank642marathon.com or check out the Instagram account @GulfBank642.



Gulf Bank CEO Mr Tony Daher and GBK's Communications Department.



Awarding winners at the Marathon

Sports

Isles rally past Flyers in shootout to extend point streak to 14 games

Blackhawks rip Predators to continue climb

PHILADELPHIA: Mathew Barzal scored in both the third period and the shootout, as the New York Islanders overcame a three-goal deficit and extended their point streak to 14 games with a 4-3 victory over the host Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday. Jordan Eberle opened the shootout by beating Brian Elliott between the pads, before Barzal followed suit in the second round. Thomas Greiss preserved the win with a poke-check on Flyers captain Claude Giroux as the Islanders improved to 13-0-1 in their last 14 contests. Anthony Beauvillier recorded his second straight two-goal performance, and Greiss finished with 28 saves for the Islanders, who have defeated Philadelphia on two occasions this season. Sean Couturier, Oskar Lindblom and defenseman Ivan Provorov each collected a goal and an assist, and Elliott turned aside 33 shots for the Flyers, who have lost three in a row (0-1-2).

BLACKHAWKS 7, PREDATORS 2

Patrick Kane had a goal and an assist, Alex Nylander scored twice in the third period and Robin Lehner stopped 39 of 41 shots to lift visiting Chicago to a rout of Nashville. Erik Gustafsson, Dominik Kubalik, Brent Seabrook and David Kampf also scored for the Blackhawks, who climbed above the .500 mark for the first time this season while improving to 5-1-1 in their past seven games. Predators goaltender Pekka Rinne struggled throughout an abbreviated outing. The veteran allowed four goals on 14 shots in 31:39 of ice time. He was pulled after Kampf scored to give Chicago a 4-0 advantage with 8:21 remaining in the second period.

AVALANCHE 5, CANUCKS 4 (OT)

Nathan MacKinnon scored twice, including the winner 27 seconds into overtime, and had an assist as Colorado won at Vancouver. Andre Burakovsky, Nazem Kadri and Pierre-Edouard Bellemare also scored for the Avalanche (12-6-2), who won for the fourth time in their past five games. Cale Makar had four assists, giving the rookie blue-liner 22 points in 20 games. Goaltender Antoine Bibeau made 28 saves to win his first NHL start in nearly three years. Adam Gaudette scored two power-play goals, and Alexander Edler and Brock Boeser each tallied in the final three minutes, as the Canucks pulled their goalie for an extra skater to erase a 4-2 deficit. Goaltender Thatcher Demko stopped 18 of 23 shots, as Vancouver dropped to 1-4-2 in its past seven games.

CAPITALS 3, BRUINS 2 (SO)

Jakub Vrana scored in the fifth round of a shootout to lead visiting Washington past Boston. T.J. Oshie tied the game with the goalie pulled and 59 seconds remaining in the third period to force overtime, and Travis Boyd also tallied as the Capitals won for the eighth time in their last 10 games. Braden Holtby had 21 saves. Charlie Coyle and David Pastrnak scored for the Bruins, who suffered their fifth loss in their last six games (1-2-3). Jaroslav Halak shined in net with 42 stops for Boston, which was playing without top-line center Patrice Bergeron, who sustained a lower-body injury Friday night.

STARS 5, OILERS 4 (OT)

Jamie Benn snapped a 15-game goalless drought, scoring at 1:14 of overtime to complete Dallas' comeback from a two-goal deficit in the third period and defeat host Edmonton. Jason Dickinson, Miro Heiskanen, Blake Comeau and Tyler Seguin also scored for the Stars (11-8-2), who extended their streak of games with at least one point to eight (7-0-1). Goaltender Anton Khudobin stopped 18 of 19 shots after replacing Ben Bishop in the

second period. Edmonton's Leon Draisaitl, the league's leading scorer, had a goal and an assist to extend his points streak to 12 games, during which he's had 10 goals and 17 assists. Connor McDavid, who is second in the NHL in scoring, had three assists for the Oilers to extend his points streak to seven games (eight goals, nine assists).

HURRICANES 4, WILD 3 (OT)

Andrei Svechnikov scored 1:33 into overtime to give Carolina a win over Minnesota in St. Paul. Svechnikov's snap-shot from the right circle beat Wild goalie Devan Dubnyk for his ninth goal of the season. The game-winning tally gives Svechnikov seven points (three goals, four assists) over his last four games. Dubnyk has given up four or more goals in six of his 14 games this season. The Hurricanes extended their winning streak to three games overall and have won consecutive games in overtime. The extra period has been good to Carolina this season, as the Hurricanes have a 5-0-1 record in shootouts and overtime.

SHARKS 4, RED WINGS 3 (SO)

Kevin Labanc scored the lone goal in the shootout after netting one goal and two assists in regulation of San Jose's sixth straight victory with a win over visiting Detroit. Sharks goalie Martin Jones stopped 25 shots, including five in overtime, as well as the final two Red Wings he faced in the shootout in a back-and-forth affair. Logan Couture netted three assists in the win. Jimmy Howard made 16 saves for the Red Wings, who are 3-0-2 in their last five games following a 1-11-1 stretch.

JETS 4, LIGHTNING 3

Jack Roslovic scored the tiebreaking goal in the second period and Nikolaj Ehlers added another goal just 21 seconds as surging Winnipeg won at Tampa Bay. Mathieu Perreault scored in the first period while Kyle Connor collected an empty-netter late in the third for the Jets, who have won four of five and have earned points in seven of their last eight games (6-1-1). Goalie Connor Hellebuyck made 31 saves. Victor Hedman scored late in the first period and Steven Stamkos and Anthony Cirelli scored during a rally in the waning moments of the third for the Lightning, which had its three-game winning streak snapped. Stamkos' goal was the 400th of his career.

DUCKS 4, BLUES 1

Derek Grant scored his first career hat trick to lead visiting Anaheim over St. Louis, snapping the Ducks' five-game winless streak and the Blues nine-game points streak. Ryan Getzlaf also scored, and John Gibson stopped 37 of 38 shots for the Ducks, who started their four-game road trip on a positive note. Vince Dunn scored for the Blues — who suffered just their fourth regulation loss in 21 games — and Jordan Binnington made 21 saves.

PENGUINS 6, MAPLE LEAFS 1

Dominik Kahun scored twice, and Bryan Rust added a goal and two assists as Pittsburgh clobbered visiting Toronto. Jake Guentzel and Evgeni Malkin each had a goal and an assist, and Jared McCann also scored in a high-paced game for the Penguins, who are 5-2-2 in their past nine games. Goaltender Tristan Jarry made 32 saves. Jason Spezza scored for Toronto, which lost its fifth straight. Auston Matthews had his six-game point streak snapped.

Australia ban Pattinson from Pakistan Test for 'personal abuse'

SYDNEY: Australia fast bowler James Pattinson was suspended yesterday for player abuse, ruling him out of the first Test against Pakistan this week with skipper Tim Paine saying he had let down the team. The paceman was found guilty of breaching Cricket Australia's code of conduct during Victoria's Sheffield Shield game against Queensland last week.

O'Shea resigns as Italy rugby coach

MILAN: Conor O'Shea has resigned from his role as Italy head coach with immediate effect, the Italian rugby federation announced on Saturday. The 49-year-old Irishman's contract had been due to run through to the end of May 2020.

"We have started a process and generated a new, well-founded hope, but I also believe that the end of the Rugby World Cup represents the best time for everyone to make changes in view of the new cycle," said O'Shea.

"I loved every minute I spent in Italy and I really believe in what we have done and how it can be achieved in the years to come." The former London Irish and Harlequins director of rugby has been linked with a role in the English RFU as this year's World Cup finalists build towards the 2023 tournament in France.

"We are saddened by Conor's decision not to complete the journey as contractually intended," said Italian Rugby Federation president Alfredo Gavazzi. "We thank him for the commitment and passion which he has shown in his role over these years and we wish him the best professional successes."

Italy failed to progress past the pool stage in the World Cup in Japan. They beat Namibia (47-22) and Canada (48-7) but their match against New Zealand was called off because of a typhoon and they suffered a heavy 49-3 defeat to eventual champions South Africa.

Nevertheless, the 35-times capped former Ireland fullback had been expected to remain at the helm until after the 2020 Six Nations. O'Shea, who led Harlequins to the Premiership title in 2012, replaced Jacques Brunel on the Italy bench on a four-year contract back in March 2016.

But despite his successes with London Irish and Harlequins he failed to turn around the fortunes of Italian rugby, and never won a match in the Six Nations. The last Italian victory in the tournament was against Scotland in Edinburgh in February 2015, while at home the Azzurri have not won since March 2013, when they beat Ireland in Rome.

The highlight of O'Shea's reign was a historic 20-18 success against South Africa in Florence in November 2016. The defeat was a low point for the Springboks who rebounded to win their third World Cup trophy. "I sincerely hope to have left Italian rugby in a better position," continued O'Shea.

"I built friendships and made experi-



VANCOUVER: Goalie Thatcher Demko No 35 of the Vancouver Canucks watches a shot hit the back of the net as Tyler Myers No 57 of the Vancouver Canucks and JT Compher No 37 of the Colorado Avalanche battle in front of the net during NHL action at Rogers Arena in Vancouver, Canada. —AFP

KINGS 4, GOLDEN KNIGHTS 3

Jeff Carter, playing in his 1,000th NHL game, scored the go-ahead goal with 7:18 left and Los Angeles topped visiting Vegas for its season-high third straight win. Drew Doughty had a goal and an assist, Blake Lizotte scored a short-handed goal, Nikolai Prokhorin scored his first NHL goal, and Jonathan Quick made 28 saves for the Kings. Max Pacioretty and William Karlsson each had a goal and an assist, Jonathan Marchessault also scored, and Malcolm Subban had 21 saves for the Golden Knights, who have lost five in a row (0-4-1) to match the longest losing streak in their three-year history.

COYOTES 3, FLAMES 0

Darcy Kuemper saved 37 shots for his eighth shutout with Arizona, and Derek Stepan and Carl Soderberg scored less than two minutes apart in the second period of a win over Calgary in Glendale, Ariz. Lawson Crouse added an empty-net goal with seven seconds to play, as the Coyotes won for the third time in the past four games and picked up their first home win since Nov 2. Kuemper, in his 200th career NHL game, was the central figure in a major fight with 12 seconds left in the second period. Two Flames players cross-checked Arizona's Jason Demers while he was down on the ice, and Kuemper rushed to the aid of his teammate by hauling down Calgary's Matthew Tkachuk. The two went at it while other players skinned nearby, and in the end, five players total were assessed 14 minutes penalties.

DEVILS 4, CANADIENS 3 (OT)

Kyle Palmieri scored 90 seconds into overtime for visiting New Jersey, which stormed back from a two-goal deficit to earn a chaotic win over Montreal. The Devils trailed 3-1 in the waning seconds of the second period and nearly fell behind in the final minute of the third period, but Phillip Danault's goal for Montreal was waved off on review when it was determined he made a kicking

motion as he was sprawled in the cage. Palmieri, who hadn't scored since collecting a hat trick against the Tampa Bay Lightning on Oct. 30, gave the Devils their only lead of the game by firing a shot from the faceoff circle past former teammate Keith Kinkaid.

SABRES 4, SENATORS 2

En route to his first career four-goal game, Jack Eichel scored the go-ahead tally with 7:47 left in regulation as Buffalo ended a six-game losing streak with a win over visiting Ottawa. Ottawa forward and ex-Sabre Tyler Ennis tied the game just 2:01 into the third period, deflecting a Ron Hainsey shot from the point to make it 2-2. But Eichel came through again, blasting a shot on the short side and past Senators goaltender Craig Anderson (28 saves) to break the deadlock. Eichel, who added an empty-netter with 14 seconds left, topped his career best and only NHL hat trick against Carolina on Dec. 15, 2017. This performance ended Buffalo's 0-4-2 stretch. Anthony Duclair also scored for the Senators, who had won two straight and four of their previous five. They've lost three in a row at Buffalo, which got 21 saves from Linus Ullmark.

PANTHERS 4, RANGERS 3

Evgenii Dadonov scored twice, including the go-ahead goal late in the second period, as Florida defeated New York in Sunrise, Fla. Mike Hoffman and Brett Connolly also scored for the Panthers, and Jonathan Huberdeau and Keith Yandle each had three assists. Huberdeau became Florida's career leader in assists, passing Stephen Weiss, who had 249 during his time with the Panthers. Ryan Strome, Artemi Panarin and Tony DeAngelo scored for New York. Panarin extended his career-best points streak to 11 games, the longest by a Rangers player since Rick Nash did the same in the 2014-2015 season. Saturday also marked Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist's 868th NHL game, tying him with Grant Fuhr for 10th place on the league's all-time list. Lundqvist made 26 saves. —Reuters

told broadcaster ABC that Pattinson had "let himself down, he's let the group down".

"We actually had a chat last night about the fact that we hold ourselves to a really high standard now with our behaviour," Paine said. "That's not just while we're playing (Test) cricket, we've got to go back to domestic cricket and lead the way on that front as well."

"We're disappointed ... but James has owned up and knows he's made a mistake and has apologised for it and will come back bigger and better." Pattinson admitted he "made a mistake in the heat of the moment".

"Straight away I realised I was in the wrong, and I apologised immediately, both to the opponent and to the umpires," he said. "I have done the wrong thing and accept the penalty. I'm gutted to miss a Test match, but the standards are there for a reason and the fault is mine." CA said no replacement will be called up for the Test squad. —AFP

Janat stars as Afghanistan upset WI to level series

LUCKNOW: Karim Janat came in from the cold to take a starring role Saturday as Afghanistan beat West Indies by 41 runs to level their three-match Twenty20 series. The 21-year-old was only a substitute in the first clash in Lucknow that West Indies easily won. But he took five wickets as West Indies were restricted to 106-8 in the chase for Afghanistan's 147-7 in the second game.

Janat's 26 from 18 balls, including five fours, was also the joint-highest score for Afghanistan along with opener Hazratullah Zazai. "I was the 12th man for the last game and that was the best way for me to see what the line should be. I had a plan in mind and I kept to it," said Janat, whose change of pace and skillful choice of length claimed valuable scalps including Evin Lewis and Shimron Hetmyer.

"On this wicket, change of pace is a good weapon to have." Afghanistan had looked on course for a bigger total but Kesrick Williams took two wickets in two balls to claim openers Zazai and Rahmanullah Gurbaz after they put on 42.

Some of Afghanistan's mid-order wickets went cheaply and with dew making bowling difficult, West Indies captain Kieron Pollard must have thought his side's unbeaten record in the tour so far was safe.

But medium pace bowler Janat was well-supported by the other Afghan bowlers and the West Indies batsmen looked sluggish as they chased a run-rate that quickly got out of control. "At the halfway stage, we were happy with 147," said Pollard. "Their batsmen came hard at us, but we came back well, especially Kesrick. We cannot fault the bowlers. "We didn't get a good start in the powerplay, and we lost wickets every time we were trying to be aggressive. "We just have 24 hours to wrong the rights, and hopefully we can come back and do those things right tomorrow."

The final game is also in Lucknow, where Afghanistan play their home games, on Sunday. West Indies beat Afghanistan 3-0 in the one-day series before the T20s. —AFP



SHIZUOKA: File photo taken on October 3, 2019, Italy's head coach Conor O'Shea looks on during the captain's run training session at the Ecopa stadium in Shizuoka, during the Japan 2019 Rugby World Cup. —AFP

ences that I will never forget. "The young people who are coming through join a system that, by continuing with the right decisions, can only improve in the years to come."

Former Scotland coach Vern Cotter is among the names being touted to replace O'Shea, along with fellow New Zealander Dave Rennie, currently in charge of

Glasgow Warriors. Cotter, 57, was hired as Montpellier's head coach in 2017, but moved to the director of rugby role earlier this year.

Former Wales assistant coach Rob Howley had been seen as a potential candidate before being sent home from the World Cup for allegedly breaching betting rules. —AFP

Sports

Netherlands book Euro 2020 berth after Davis penalty miss

Dutch sit second in group, two points behind leaders Germany

BELFAST: The Netherlands booked their place at Euro 2020 as they survived a missed penalty from Steven Davis in Saturday's 0-0 draw against Northern Ireland. Ronald Koeman's side arrived at Windsor Park knowing one point would be enough to ensure they qualified from Group C. They achieved that goal thanks to a stroke of luck when Northern Ireland captain Davis blasted his first-half penalty high over the bar. The Netherlands had failed to qualify for the Euro 2016 and the 2018 World Cup, so this was a cathartic moment for a country with such a rich football heritage.

They sit second in the group, two points behind leaders Germany with one match left. Netherlands captain Virgil van Dijk admitted Davis's penalty miss was the key moment. "It was a tough game. Unlucky for him, good for us! The lads are very happy in the dressing room. We're back at a major tournament," he said.

Whether the current crop, headlined by Frenkie de Jong and Matthijs de Ligt, are good enough to emulate the Netherlands side that won the 1988 European Championship thanks to the brilliance of Ruud Gullit and Marco van Basten is another matter.

This was at least a step in the right direction for an emerging young team that lost to Portugal in the Nations League final in June. "It means a lot for us as players. Hopefully it means so much to the Dutch people," Liverpool defender Van Dijk added.

"We have to make sure we prepare very well for a big tournament. We missed the last two. We want to perform well." Third-placed Northern Ireland cannot qualify via the group stage now, but they are assured of a place in the play-offs in March.

It was a frustrating night for Northern Ireland manager Michael O'Neill, in what could be his last home

game in charge after he was appointed Stoke boss recently. O'Neill, who will manage both Stoke and his country until after the play-offs, had hoped for revenge over Koeman after he branded Northern Ireland's tactics "terrible" and "outrageous to watch" following the Netherlands' 3-1 victory in October.

This time, Koeman was without injured Lyon forward Memphis Depay and ill Liverpool midfielder Georginio Wijnaldum and they almost fell behind in the opening moments when keeper Jasper Cillessen took too long to clear. Although Corry Evans blocked the ball, it didn't land in time to slot into the empty net and the Dutch averted the danger. Josh Magennis headed just wide from Paddy McNair's cross and Jonny Evans couldn't keep his header on target as Northern Ireland piled on the pressure.

Despite their early struggles at the back, Steven Berghuis was inches away from putting the Netherlands in front when he met Quincy Promes' pass with a close-range shot that looped onto the crossbar. Finding their rhythm, the visitors threatened and created a series of chances in quick succession.

Ryan Babel forced two good saves from Bailey Peacock-Farrell either side of a Promes curler that flashed narrowly wide. Northern Ireland were gifted a golden opportunity to take the lead after 30 minutes when Joel Veltman was ruled to have handled McNair's cross in the area under pressure from George Saville.

Making his 116th appearance as he became the United Kingdom's most capped midfielder, Davis had the chance for a night to remember when he stepped up to take the penalty. But, after a lengthy protest from Cillessen, the Rangers star blazed his spot-kick into the stands. — AFP



BELFAST: Netherlands' midfielder Frenkie De Jong (R) vies with Northern Ireland's defender Patrick McNair (L) and Northern Ireland's defender Michael Smith (C) during the Euro 2020 qualification football match between Northern Ireland and Netherlands at Windsor Park in Belfast. — AFP

Wales maintain Euro 2020 hunt with Azerbaijan win

PARIS: Wales kept their hopes of reaching Euro 2020 alive on Saturday after beating Azerbaijan 2-0 and piling pressure on their rivals in a tight Group E.

With two teams qualifying, Ryan Giggs' side moved into third thanks to first-half headed goals from Kieffer Moore and Harry Wilson. They are one point behind second-placed Hungary, who travel to Cardiff on the final day as four teams vie for a spot in next summer's finals. Group leaders Croatia will seal their place later

with a draw at home to fourth-placed Slovakia, who are a point behind Wales and can jump into second with a win over the World Cup finalists.

Wales would be knocked back down to fourth in their five-team group and would need a miracle should Croatia lose, as in their final match Slovakia take on an Azerbaijan side that have collected just one point.

However a Croatia win would set up a winner-takes-all clash with the Hungarians. In Saint Petersburg the Hazard brothers made short work of Russia as already-qualified Belgium maintained their 100 per cent record with a 4-1 win that secured them top spot in Group I.

Eden and Thorgan Hazard put Roberto Martinez's side three goals ahead at the break before in-form Inter Milan striker Romelu Lukaku crashed home the fourth in the 72nd minute to make absolutely sure of the result. Georgi Dzhikiya scored a consolation for

the hosts 11 minutes from the end. Belgium are top scorers in qualifying with 34 goals in nine matches, and stretch their lead over second-place Russia to six points with one game remaining.

Both are already assured of a place in the Euros as their closest rivals Scotland are a fully nine points behind Russia despite their 2-1 win at Cyprus earlier on Saturday. In the group's other game Filippo Berardi scored rock bottom San Marino's first goal in qualifying in a 3-1 home defeat to Kazakhstan, slotting home in the 77th minute after rounding goalkeeper Dmytro Nepogodov with his side already three goals down.

However they have picked up no points and conceded 46 goals in another miserable campaign. In Group G Slovenia beat Latvia 1-0 to move third, two points from Austria, but are unlikely to progress from the group as the Austrians just need a draw against North Macedonia later to seal their spot. — AFP

Yellow card turns to six-month ban for South African

JOHANNESBURG: Cape Town City midfielder Mpho Makola has been banned for six months after shoving a referee — an offence for which he was only yellow carded. The 33-year-old former international used both hands to push referee Abongile Tom last month after opponents Kaizer Chiefs were awarded a penalty during a League Cup match.

Although a red-card offence, Tom only cautioned out-of-control Makola, who had to be dragged away from the match official by teammates.

The Makola ban has shocked many South African football followers used to offenders receiving light sentences for serious acts of ill discipline.

Match bans and fines are often conditionally reduced, leading to criticism that the lenient approach encourages bad behaviour.

When a top-flight footballer was handed a 12-month sentence for spitting at a referee, it was slashed to six matches and a suspended 100,000 rand (\$6,800/6,150 euro) fine on appeal.

After another spitting incident, this time between players, a 10-match ban was cut to six after the offender appealed, and no fine was imposed. With the Makola ban effective from November 15, he will miss the rest of the 2019/2020 season unless Cape Town reach the FA Cup final, scheduled for May 23. — AFP

Unimpressive Coast need two penalties to beat Niger

JOHANNESBURG: Ivory Coast needed two penalties to defeat Niger 1-0 Saturday in the last match-day one qualifier for the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon. Max-Alain Gradel missed the first spot-kick during the opening half after grabbing the ball from Arsenal forward Nicolas Pepe, who won the penalty and wanted to take it. Out-of-favour AC Milan midfielder Franck Kessie was entrusted with the second spot-kick, awarded for handball midway through the second half.

Niger goalkeeper Kassaly Daouda, who had brilliantly foiled Gradel, could not do it again, going the wrong way as Kessie planted the ball in the left corner. It was an unconvincing performance by the 1992 and 2015 African champions, given they are ranked 56th in the world, 51 places above Niger.

Niger were playing for the first time under Frenchman Jean-Guy Wallemme who was only appointed last week. The 52-year-old former defender previously coached Congo Brazzaville, three Algerian clubs and one in Morocco.

Ivory Coast share first place in Group K with Madagascar, who beat Ethiopia 1-0 in Antananarivo thanks to a first half goal from Rayan Raveloson. The Malagasy team were the surprise package of the 2019 Cup of Nations in Egypt, stunning Nigeria and surprising the Democratic Republic of Congo before losing to Tunisia in the quarter-finals.

Coach Nicolas Dupuis, who combines coaching Madagascar with managing a French lower league club, was rewarded with a new four-year contract. He was satisfied with the tentative performance against Ethiopia given the poor state of the national stadium pitch and limited preparations.

"We need a new venue because the pitch we used today was unplayable," said the 51-year-old who rose from obscurity to worldwide recognition during the 2019 tournament. "Now we face a difficult trip before playing Niger Tuesday. We must manage fatigue and will have insufficient time to prepare before the match in Niamey."

Limited flights, seats and direct routes mean Madagascar, like many African national teams, face logistical headaches having to play two matches in a seven-day international window. Some of the Malagasy squad left the vast Indian Ocean island at 0300 local time (midnight GMT) Sunday while the rest followed 12 hours later.

"What pleased me about the victory over Ethiopia was our ability to defend a narrow advantage. That was a hallmark of our performances in the previous qualifying competition," added Dupuis. — AFP



MOENCHENGLADBACH: Belarus' Stanislav Dragun and Germany's Toni Kroos (L) vie for the ball during the UEFA Euro 2020 Group C qualification football match between Germany and Belarus. — AFP

Kroos calls for improvements as Germany book Euro 2020 berth

MONCHENGLADBACH: Toni Kroos struck twice as Germany qualified for the Euro 2020 finals on Saturday by thumping Belarus 4-0 but the Real Madrid star insists there is still room for improvement.

A deft back-heeled goal from defender Matthias Ginter and impressive finishing by Leon Goretzka and Kroos gave the Germans a comfortable 3-0 lead early in the second half. Germany captain Manuel Neuer produced a superb save to keep out Belarus striker Igor Stasevich's penalty before Kroos dribbled through the defence to claim his second goal seven minutes from time. "Until we went 1-0 up, it is always difficult against an opponent like that," said Kroos. "Overall we did well but at the moment I don't include us among the favourites for the European title."

"The important thing is that we play as a team in the March internationals." The result left Germany two points above the Netherlands and means victory Tuesday in Frankfurt over Northern Ireland, who drew 0-0 at home to the Dutch, will send them through as Group C winners.

"We have reached our goal," said Germany boss Joachim Loew. "The team played well, we saw some good combinations out there and four goals. 'Certainly not everything was perfect but all in all, I am happy.'"

Loew singled out Moenchengladbach defender Ginter

after the centre-back showed a sublime touch to score his first goal for Germany at his home stadium. "He is very reliable and a very good footballer," said Loew. "It's great that he scored such a nice goal here."

In the pre-match build-up, Loew had agreed with Kroos that this fledgling Germany team can not be considered among the favourites for the Euro 2020 title next July. There seemed to be some truth to that as a poor first-half performance saw Germany struggle to break down the visitors' dogged defence despite 80 per cent possession.

Long-term knee injuries in recent months to Bayern Munich defender Niklas Sule and Manchester City winger Leroy Sane have robbed Loew of two key components for his new-look side. Bayern Munich winger Serge Gnabry and RB Leipzig striker Timo Werner led the Germany attack.

Just after Belarus had tested Neuer when Stasevich managed a rare shot on the German goal it was Gnabry who helped put the hosts ahead. His well-timed cross gave Ginter the chance to conjure up an innovative finish as he flicked the ball past Belarus goalkeeper Aleksandr Gutor on 42 minutes.

"Until we got the first goal it was pretty tight in their area, but we played better in the second half," said Ginter. Germany doubled their lead four minutes after the restart when Goretzka drilled a Kroos corner into the top corner.

Kroos claimed Germany's third goal when Ginter passed across to him and the Madrid midfielder casually hit the back of the net from the edge of the area on 55 minutes. Neuer proved he is still one of the world's best goalkeepers when he denied Stasevich from the spot 15 minutes from time following a foul by Robin Koch on Pavel Nekhaychik. Kroos netted again as he beat two defenders and sent Gutor the wrong way as Germany moved five points clear of third-placed Northern Ireland with one game to play. — AFP

Austria beat North Macedonia to qualify for Euro 2020

VIENNA: David Alaba's early goal and a snap effort from Stefan Lainer in the second half ensured Austria qualified for next year's European Championship with a 2-1 win over North Macedonia on Saturday.

It is a second successive qualification for Austria and will be only their third appearance at the finals, having also been co-hosts in 2008. The victory kept Austria second in Group G, behind already qualified Poland, who won on Saturday in Israel, and left North Macedonia hoping for success in the playoffs to have any chance of also participating in the finals.

Austria got off to the perfect start to settle as Lainer played a cross-field through ball from deep in his own half, catching North Macedonia's defence watching Marko Arnautovic in an offside position and not picking up a run from deep by Alaba.

As Arnautovic made no effort to go for the ball, Alaba came speeding onto it, rounding opposing goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski to score with seven minutes played. Arnautovic came close with three separate efforts and Dimitrievski made a dramatic save to deny Marcel Sabitzer before halftime.

Straight after the break the North Macedonia keeper made another acrobatic stop to tip over Valentino Lazaro's close-range effort but when his attempt to punch away the resultant corner failed, Lainer snapped up the loose ball to double the lead in the 48th minute.

North Macedonia proved a handful for the home defence in the latter stages with substitute Vlatko Stojanovski having two good efforts in front of goal - the first narrowly wide and the second saved by Austria's Alexander Schlager.

But 41,100 Austrian supporters began their celebrations early and seemed little bothered when Stojanovski scored a consolation with the last touch of the game. — Reuters

25 Gulf Bank congratulates winners of 'Gulf Bank 642 Marathon'

26 O'Shea resigns as Italy rugby coach

27 Netherlands book Euro 2020 berth after Davis penalty miss



George, Clippers pummel Hawks

Doncic, Porzingis carry Mavericks past Raptors



LOS ANGELES: Paul George #13 of the LA Clippers shoots the ball against the Atlanta Hawks at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Paul George scored 37 points in only 20 minutes, leading the Los Angeles Clippers to a 150-101 victory over the visiting Atlanta Hawks on Saturday night despite playing without Kawhi Leonard. George, who scored 25 points in the first half, converted 10 of 17 shots from the floor overall, including 6 of 11 3-pointers. He made all 11 of his free throws. George, who scored 33 points in his season debut Thursday in a loss to the New Orleans Pelicans, is 21 of 21 from the line in two games. Lou Williams, who made 15 of 15 free throws, had 25 points off the bench for the Clippers, who snapped a two-game losing streak. Jerome Robinson contributed 21 points, and Montrezl Harrell had 17, helping the Clippers' bench outscore the Hawks' reserves 81-35. Trae Young led the Hawks with 20 points to go along with six assists. Young, though, hit just 4 of 16 shots from the floor. De'Andre Hunter and Cam Reddish each had 12 points, and Jabari Parker, Damian Jones and Evan Turner chipped in 11 apiece for Atlanta.

ROCKETS 125, TIMBERWOLVES 105

James Harden recorded his fifth 40-plus point scoring effort during Houston's seven-game winning streak, posting 49 in a victory over Minnesota in Minneapolis. Hamstrung by a roster depleted by injuries, Harden took a career-high 41 shots. He finished 8 of 22 on 3-pointers and added five rebounds and six assists over 39 minutes. The Timberwolves led by as many as 11 points in the first half but struggled to contain Harden. They also missed the production of their second-leading scorer, forward Andrew Wiggins, who missed his second consecutive game (personal reasons). Karl-Anthony Towns paired 27 points with 15 rebounds to pace the Timberwolves.

TRAIL BLAZERS 121, SPURS 116

CJ McCollum scored 32 points, and Hassan Whiteside added 21 points and 12 rebounds as visiting Portland built a huge early lead, gave it all back and more, but

then rallied for a win over host San Antonio. The Spurs trailed by as many as 20 in the first quarter and 23 in the second, but rallied to take the lead in the third and lead by as many as 15 three minutes into the fourth quarter. Portland came back to tie the game at 111 after a putback layup by McCollum with 2:26 to play. The Trail Blazers were the better team down the stretch, outscoring San Antonio 10-5 in the final two minutes to snap a two-game losing streak. Damian Lillard added 22 points for the Blazers, and Rodney Hood hit for 16 points in the win. LaMarcus Aldridge led the Spurs with 30 points and a season-high 13 rebounds.

BUCKS 102, PACERS 83

Giannis Antetokounmpo recorded 26 points and 13 rebounds as Milwaukee ran off from host Indiana for a comfortable victory in a duel between the Central Division's top two teams in Indianapolis. The game was supposed to be a reunion between Pacers guard Malcolm Brogdon and his former Bucks teammates, but Brogdon was a scratch with a sore back that also cut short his playing time Friday night at Houston. Brogdon left Milwaukee in an off-season sign-and-trade. Indiana held a four-point lead late in the first period before Robin Lopez hit a pair of jumpers, one a 3-pointer, to give Milwaukee the lead for good. The Pacers, who had won four in a row before losing Friday at Houston, never got closer than seven in the second half.

MAVERICKS 110, RAPTORS 102

Luka Doncic had 26 points, 15 rebounds and seven assists, and Dallas defeated visiting Toronto to snap a two-game losing streak. Kristaps Porzingis added 20 points and 15 rebounds for the Mavericks. Seth Curry and former Raptor Delon Wright each had 15 points, while Maxi Kleber and Dorian Finney-Smith each scored 10. Normal Powell led the Raptors with a season-best 26 points, and Fred VanVleet added 24. Pascal Siakam had 15 points and seven assists, and Matt Thomas had 10 points as

Toronto completed a 3-2 road trip.

NETS 117, BULLS 111

Spencer Dinwiddie had a team-high 24 points, Joe Harris added 22 points and eight assists, and Brooklyn rallied for a win over host Chicago. Taurean Walker-Prince added 13 points, and Garrett Temple had 12 for the Nets, who ended a three-game losing skid. Jarrett Allen tallied 11 points, and Theo Pinson contributed 10. Zach LaVine scored 36 points on 11-for-24 shooting for Chicago, which lost for the second time in three nights. The Bulls received double-

performances from both Wendell Carter Jr. (18 points, 14 rebounds) and Lauri Markkanen (16 points, 10 rebounds).

HORNETS 103, KNICKS 102

Devonte' Graham hit a career-high nine 3-pointers, scored 29 points and hit the go-ahead 3-pointer with 2.8 seconds left as Charlotte edged host New York. The Hornets won their second straight game on a last-second shot. A night after Malik Monk's buzzer-beater beat the Detroit Pistons to halt Charlotte's four-game losing streak, it was Graham's turn to com-

plete a comeback from 15 points down early in the third quarter and from eight points down in the final 6:40. New York held a 102-98 lead on Julius Randle's dunk with 48.2 seconds left. After two free throws by rookie PJ Washington, Randle air-balled a floater with 12.3 seconds to go, setting it up for Graham. After the timeout, Nicolas Batum inbounded the ball from near midcourt to Washington. Washington made a bounce pass to Graham, who gained enough separation from Frank Ntilikina to hit the 3-pointer from well beyond the top of the key. — Reuters

Dominic Thiem dethrones Zverev

LONDON: Dominic Thiem beat defending champion Alexander Zverev on Saturday to join Roger Federer's conqueror Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final of the ATP Finals in London.

The Austrian fifth seed saw off the big-serving German 7-5, 6-3 after Greece's Tsitsipas, making his debut at the tournament, had earlier beaten Federer 6-3, 6-4. Thiem is playing in his fourth ATP Finals but during his first three trips to the season finale, he won only three matches and never advanced out of the group stage at the O2 Arena.

Zverev landed 75 percent of his first serves but Thiem was tougher in the big moments, breaking in the 12th game of the opening set and in the sixth game of the second set. The Austrian also saved all four break points on his racquet.

Germany's Zverev, who beat Novak Djokovic in last year's final, went toe to toe with Thiem in a relatively uneventful first set but served a double fault to lose the opener 7-5. The seventh seed, 22, regrouped and settled back into his serving rhythm at the beginning of the second set but was broken again to trail 4-2.

Thiem, looking unflustered, fended off a couple of break points in the following

game and served out to take the match, winning with a forehand down the line. "This is a big, big dream coming true for me, it is one of the biggest and most prestigious tournaments of the whole year and I'm getting the chance to play the final," said Thiem.

The 26-year-old, who reached the final of this year's French Open, has been considered a clay-court specialist but joked after winning indoors in Vienna last month and now reaching the final in London he was becoming a "big, big fan of faster hard surfaces".

Earlier, Tsitsipas, 17 years younger than Federer, ended the 38-year-old's hopes of securing a seventh year-end title. Federer was unrecognisable from the player who dominated Djokovic in his final round-robin match, struggling on serve and hitting a total of 26 unforced errors compared with just five against the Serbian.

But Tsitsipas belied his years with a performance full of confidence and grit, saving 11 out of 12 break points during the match. "I'm so proud of myself today, a great performance and once again the people were great," he said.

"I really enjoyed myself on the court and sometimes in matches like these you

wonder how you recover from difficulties and break point down." Tsitsipas, ignoring loud support for Federer, broke the Swiss at the first time of asking, taking advantage of two missed overheads.

The Greek was forced to dig deep in a dramatic 13-minute final game of the first set in which he saved two break points and needed seven set points to close it out 6-3. Federer was in deep trouble when Tsitsipas broke him to love in the third game of the second set but he finally made a break point count to level at 2-2.

Undaunted, Tsitsipas, dominating rallies from the back of the court, broke again straight away with a forehand cross-court winner for a 3-2 lead. At 5-4 down Federer knew he had to break Tsitsipas for only the second time in the match.

The Greek slipped to 15-40 down but Federer again could not take advantage, spraying a forehand out to give his opponent a match point and he won with a thundering ace. "I'm frustrated I couldn't play better, and when I did and fought my way back, I threw it away again," said the Swiss. "It was also parts of him. He did come up with the goods when he had to and he was better than me today." — AFP