



7 Lebanon daily suspends print edition over economic crisis



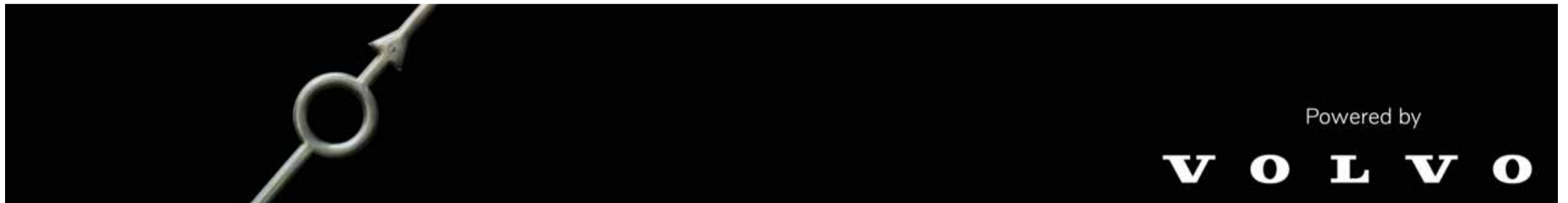
11 AirAsia's Tony Fernandes steps aside amid Airbus bribery probe



24 Pakistan to buy more Malaysia palm oil after India withdrawal



26 N Africa football stadiums double as political arenas



Health minister assures Kuwait free of deadly new coronavirus

MPs demand evacuation of Kuwaitis as toll in China jumps, HK records first death



KUWAIT: MPs Safa Al-Hashem and Khalil Abul during a session at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak and Agencies

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said yesterday the ministry has taken all necessary precautionary measures against the spread of the deadly new coronavirus that has so far killed 425 in China and infected over 20,000. The minister said Kuwait has not discovered any case, and any suspected case discovered at the airport or other entry points will be quarantined and carefully examined in isolation.

Sheikh Basel said an emergency plan has been prepared by the contingency committee at the ministry and that all directors of hospitals have been informed of the necessary guidelines to face the disease. He said thermal examination of arrivals from China will continue, adding that the ministry has called for a Gulf health meeting to discuss coordination against the disease.

Only the United Arab Emirates in the GCC states has announced five confirmed cases of coronavirus, all affecting Chinese nationals who arrived from Wuhan, the epicenter of the disease. The minister said the GCC health council has recommended banning travel to China except in extremely necessary cases, and also called for the evacuation of Gulf diplomats and their families from China.

He said that passengers arriving from countries where coronavirus cases have been detected are carefully examined and those found free of infection will be kept under precautionary observation for 14 days. The minister said that if thermal detectors at the airport find symptoms of the disease in anyone, the person will be immediately taken to hospital and quarantined to examine the type of infection.

Continued on Page 24

Greece to send Patriot missiles to Saudi; Iran wants to resolve issues

ATHENS: Greece will send some of its Patriot defense missiles to Saudi Arabia under a program involving the US, Britain and France, the government spokesman said yesterday. Athens will deploy the missiles at Saudi cost "to protect critical energy infrastructure", government spokesman Stelios Petsas told reporters. "The deployment contributes to energy security, promotes our

country as a factor of regional stability and strengthens our ties to Saudi Arabia," Petsas said, adding that talks on the move began in October. He did not give a date for the deployment. The US, Britain and France are part of the same initiative and Italy is likely to join, the spokesman said.

The announcement came as Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis was on a Middle East tour for investment talks with the governments of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. He visited Riyadh on Monday and was in Abu Dhabi yesterday. "As a defensive system, this constitutes no threat to other countries in the area," Petsas said. Earlier this week Petsas said that "around 130 personnel" would accompany the missiles.

Continued on Page 24

EU rejects Trump plan; Sudan 'stab in back' slammed

BRUSSELS/KHARTOUM: The European Union rejected parts of the new US peace plan for the Middle East yesterday, saying the plan broke with "internationally agreed parameters", and any Israeli annexation of Palestinian land would be subject to challenge. President Donald Trump's plan, announced last week, was warmly welcomed by Israel and rejected outright by the Palestinians. It would give Israel most of what it has sought during decades of conflict, including nearly all Palestinian land on which it has built settlements.

The EU, which often takes time to respond to

international developments because of a need for unanimity among its 27 members, had said last week that it needed to study the Trump plan before it would give its verdict. It made its conclusions public yesterday in a statement from EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell. "To build a just and lasting peace, the unresolved final status issues must be decided through direct negotiations between both parties," Borrell said, noting the issues of the borders of a Palestinian state and the final status of Jerusalem were among those still in dispute.

"The US initiative, as presented on 28 January, departs from these internationally agreed parameters," Borrell said. Steps by Israel to annex Palestinian territory, "if implemented, could not pass unchallenged," Borrell said. EU policy in the Middle East tends to be cautious, as the bloc includes members with varying degrees of sympathy towards the Palestinians and Israel. Some EU members have

Continued on Page 24

Dems turn sights on New Hampshire after Iowa fiasco

MANCHESTER, New Hampshire: Democratic candidates were anxiously awaiting results from the Iowa caucuses yesterday after technical glitches plunged the kick-off vote of the US presidential nominating contest into chaos, drawing the mockery of President Donald Trump. Pete Buttigieg, the 38-year-old former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, claimed victory although the Iowa Democratic Party had not yet released any official results, and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders also declared that he had done "very, very well".

Former vice president Joe Biden's campaign for its part said that although it had "zero official data" so far it believed it had won its "fair share" of the vote and it was a

"tight race with bunched up candidates". But Joe Rospars, chief strategist for Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, chided the other candidates, tweeting that "any campaign saying they won or putting out incomplete numbers is contributing to the chaos and misinformation".

The Iowa Democratic Party said precinct results were still coming in and blamed the delay on an app that was reporting only partial data. "While our plan is to release results as soon as possible today, our ultimate goal is to ensure that the integrity and accuracy of the process continues to be upheld," it said in a statement. "We have every indication that our systems were secure and there was not a cyber security intrusion," it added.

Buttigieg, who is battling Biden for the moderate wing of the party, said that based on an internal tally it was a "clear victory for this campaign". "We were able to demonstrate both the winning message and the winning organization," Buttigieg said in an interview with MSNBC.

Continued on Page 24

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Local

Kuwait Crown Prince receives sheikhs at Bayan Palace

Amir offers condolence over death of ex-Kenyan President



KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. His

Highness the Crown Prince also received Sheikh Dr Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah. In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent yesterday a cable of con-



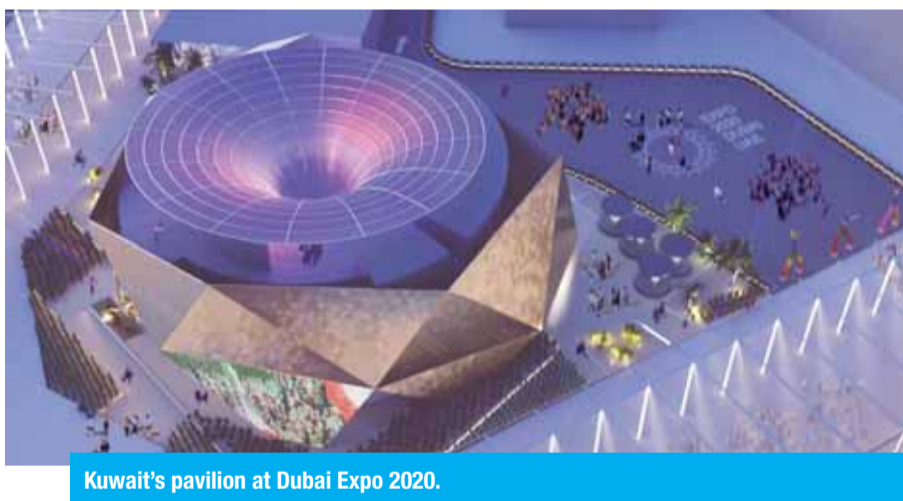
His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Sheikh Dr Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al-Sabah.

lences to President of Kenya Uhuru Kenyatta, expressing his deepest condolences and sorrow over the death of former Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi, wishing his family patience and solace.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. — KUNA



DUBAI: Officials attend a press conference yesterday to announce details of Kuwait Pavilion at Dubai Expo 2020. — KUNA photos



Kuwait's pavilion at Dubai Expo 2020.

Official provides details of Kuwait's Pavilion at Expo 2020

DUBAI: Kuwait Pavilion at Dubai Expo 2020 will be a major icon that attracts the attention of visitors from all over the world, said Kuwaiti Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information Muneera Al-Huwaidi. In a press conference held yesterday, Huwaidi, who is the Commissioner-General of Kuwait at Expo 2020, underlined the details of the Kuwaiti pavilion, in the presence of a number of Kuwaiti officials and Emirati media, noting that since receiving the invitation to participate in the Dubai Expo, Kuwait began working at all levels to ensure a successful participation in this global event. She emphasized that the government's keenness to participate in this international forum stems from the quest to introduce the world to Kuwait and the strategic projects and ambitious initiatives it adopts to achieve development goals according to the vision of New Kuwait 2035. She pointed to Expo 2020, which is an important platform through which Kuwait can strengthen partnerships and relations and exchange experiences in various fields with other countries in addition to highlighting its progress in various fields at the international level, especially the humanitarian role.

Huwaidi affirmed that Kuwait chose to have its pavilion in the 'Sustainability Axis' under the title of 'New Kuwait, New Investment Opportunities for Sustainability,' which stems from the vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to rely on renewable energy and in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Program. The total area of the Kuwait Pavilion is estimated at 4,550 square meters and is one of the largest pavilions participating in the Expo and with a sophisticated exterior design inspired by the Kuwaiti local environment expressed

by sand dunes and the symbol of sustainability, she added. She noted that the pavilion will not be overlooked in highlighting the vast Kuwaiti skills and creativity in various fields where there are nine places outside the pavilion to provide an opportunity for talented Kuwaitis to show what they have in front of millions of visitors who will arrive at Expo 2020 over a period of six months.

Huwaidi said that the fraternal ties as well as the distinguished and long-standing historical relationship between Kuwait and the UAE are "the biggest motivation towards an active and distinguished Kuwaiti participation in the event, especially as it will coincide with the UAE celebrations of the golden jubilee of its National Day." Meanwhile, the Consul General of Kuwait in Dubai and the Northern Emirates Thiyab Al-Rashidi said that the Kuwaiti participation was coordinated for more than four years through continuous meetings with the UAE side to ensure effective and successful Kuwaiti participation at all levels.

He stressed that Kuwait is one of the first countries that have expressed their desire to participate in Expo 2020, adding that Kuwaiti ministries have exerted concerted efforts since the first day to make Kuwaiti participation successful, especially the fruitful cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Information. During the conference, the Kuwaiti officials gave an explanation to the Emirati media about the idea of the Kuwait Pavilion in Expo 2020 and what topics will be presented in the pavilion. The Expo will start on the 20th of next October, will end on April 10, 2021, and will be held in the southern region of the Emirate of Dubai near Al-Maktoum International Airport. — KUNA

Zain strategic sponsor of Kuwait Tech Expo 2020

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced its strategic sponsorship of Kuwait Tech Expo 2020, the biggest technology event of its kind in Kuwait. The expo runs from 6-9 February at Kuwait International Fairground in Mishref, Hall 6, with the presence of the biggest global and local companies from the tech and telecom sectors as well as government entities.

Zain's strategic support to the event comes to affirm its commitment in being present at the various activities and programs that contribute to pushing the national economy wheel and achieve the country's developmental goals, especially those centered around technology and telecommunications. As the world goes through comprehensive digital transformation, Zain expressed its commitment and readiness to be a main contributing partner in progressing Kuwait's digital transformation journey.

Through its dedicated booth at Kuwait Tech Expo, Zain will showcase its capabilities as an active partner in empowering a smart life, a safe community, and an efficient business sector by offering the most advanced services and solutions. This will include Zain LIFE's latest solutions for smart homes, Fintech services, Zain Business solutions for large businesses and SMEs, as well as the latest innovations and most advanced services it offers via its Zain Drone subsidiary. Zain Drone's Drone as-a-Service (DaaS) solutions unlock opportunities in various industries to fast-track growth and help organizations benefit from Internet of Things (IoT) applications in an efficient, safer and faster way. The disruptive power of drone solutions bolsters efficiency as it offers state-of-the-art bespoke solutions while providing advanced analytics for governments and businesses.

Kuwait Tech Expo 2020 is considered Kuwait's biggest event for technology and telecommunications services. The event aims at offering effective solutions to the country's various bodies with the aim of serving the community's needs. Zain's participation reflects its main role as a leading national



company in taking part in the country's various developmental projects that contribute to the nation's further progress. This is especially true as Zain represents the private sector that is considered a strategic and key partner in the country's development plans.

Kuwait Tech Expo aims at finding a common platform for decision makers, companies, and consumers in the fields of telecommunications and technology, while creating opportunities for companies and government entities to learn more about related projects and opportunities. The event also aims at finding the most appropriate mechanisms for communication through the display of the participating companies' products and services at the exhibition, thereby contributing to the development of infrastructures of the various developmental projects.

The event is divided into two events held simultaneously; the first event, 'Kuwait International Technology Show', is the largest

B2B show that offers companies the opportunity to showcase their latest products and applications, paving the way to discuss and exchange ideas and information about the telecommunications and technology industry's key topics. This includes information systems, smart applications, the latest strategies, as well as building partnerships with the major participating companies through face-to-face meetings with leading decision makers, researchers and professionals within the sector.

The second event, the 'Kuwait Tech Shopper', is the only exhibition specialized in direct sales of telecommunication gadgets, smartphones, electronic devices, and their accessories. This event will provide a unique opportunity for all companies to be present and interact directly with the public to present exciting offers. In addition, attendees will experience a unique platform to compare and benefit from special and exclusive offers.

Kuwait hosts 'Made in Qatar Expo 2020'

KUWAIT: Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) and Qatar Chamber yesterday announced coordination to organize the 'Made in Qatar Expo 2020' due to be held in Kuwait in the period of February 19-22, 2020 at Kuwait International Fairgrounds (KIFG) in Mishref with participation of 220 Qatari industrial companies.

This announcement was made during a press conference held yesterday at KCCI, in presence of KCCI General Manager Rabah Abdul Rahman Al-Rabah, Qatar Chamber's General Manager Saleh Bin Hamad Al-Sharqi, KIFG Sales Executive Manager Basema Al-Dehaim and media figures.

Speaking on the occasion, Rabbah hailed the outstanding relations between both countries and the partnership between both chambers to achieve the success of the expo. Rabbah added that a large number of Kuwaiti and Qatari businessmen would attend the forum that takes place as part of the expo to discuss boosting commercial cooperation and relations.



KUWAIT: Officials attend a press conference to announce the 'Made in Qatar Expo 2020' to be held in Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Sharqi said that selecting Kuwait as the third station for the 'Made in Qatar Expo' came to coronate the historic brotherly relations between both countries as well as the profound relations between the private sectors in both states. Sharqi expressed hopes that the expo, due to be organized by Qatar Chamber in cooperation with Qatar's Ministry of Commerce and

Industry and Qatar Development Bank (QDB), and in coordination with the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, would be a good opportunity to acquaint Kuwaiti businessmen with the most significant Qatari industries. The event also offers a chance for Qatari exhibitors to meet with their Kuwaiti peers and discuss possible partnerships, he added.

Local

Cabinet reiterates Kuwait's commitment to support Palestinians

Government pushes to complete airport terminal 2 on schedule

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Cabinet underlined its commitment to supporting Palestinian affairs and global efforts, including by the US, aimed at reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the matter. This came in a statement issued by the Cabinet after its weekly session, chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Ministers underlined Kuwait's commitment to backing the Palestinian people at international arenas in their efforts to obtain legitimate rights in line with international legitimacy and relevant references, approved by the international community, predominantly for the establishment of a sovereign and independent state based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as a capital.

Following the meeting held at Seif Palace, Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said ministers reviewed the Kuwait Public Anti-Corruption Authority's (Nazaha) annual report in light of Kuwait's commitment to global anti-corruption measures, transparency, justice and equality. The report included data on the authority's activities and its efforts in relation to international goals and response efforts to Kuwait's organization requirements in terms of decisions and the impacts of its recommendations. Also monitoring its effectiveness on national anti-corruption policies taken in line with global anti-corruption standards.

Novel coronavirus

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah briefed fellow ministers on the precautions assumed domestically in the event of the spread of the novel coronavirus, pointing out that no cases have yet been recorded in the country. The Cabinet praised the measures assumed by the ministry and other relevant authorities to counter the disease, underlining its commitment to

monitoring developments related to its global spread and taking the necessary precautions and preparations to confront it. Recommendations for a draft decree, specifying the terms of reference for the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development, were also discussed by the Legal Affairs Committee. The Cabinet also reviewed Public Services



Measures to counter virus praised

Committee recommendations regarding the development and construction of the third stage of Al-Shaheed Park. Furthermore, the ministers decided to entrust the National Council

for Culture, Arts and Literature, in coordination with the Amiri Diwan, to establish a museum, within the park's project, for the Skating Rink aimed at the preservation of the recreational facility's historical and architectural significance.

Terminal 2

The Cabinet was also briefed on the committee's recommendations on the periodic report co-submitted by the Ministry of Public Works and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) regarding the stages of implementation of the Kuwait International Airport Terminal 2 (T2) project and relevant projects. The Council decided to assign the DGCA, in coordination with the Ministry of Public Works, to quickly prepare the brochure of the necessary terms of reference for the project of operating the Kuwait International Airport Terminal 2, and the relevant projects and facilities. The Cabinet asked those bodies to provide it, within a month of the specific date, with a timetable for the stages of the airport operation project. The Cabinet further decided to task the Kuwait Municipality to quickly coordinate with the Ministry of Public Works so as to issue the building license necessary for package of works No 3 on the Kuwait International Airport Terminal 2.

The Cabinet studied the commit-



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's weekly meeting. — KUNA

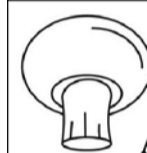
tee's approvals on the Public Authority for Housing Welfare's (PAHW) report to coordinate with the concerned government bodies to provide security, logistic and environment support to the citizens obtaining plots of land in Al-Mutlaa residential city during the period of building these plots. It was informed about the committee's recommendations on the PAHW's report on the action in Al-Mutlaa residential city and measures taken until October 2019.

The ministers were apprised of the committee's recommendations on a statement by the Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN) on the measures taken to transfer the jurisdiction of imported food from the Kuwait

Municipality to the authority, and the results of the examination on imported and locally produced fresh vegetables and fruits. In addition, the Cabinet decided to task the PAFN, in coordination with Kuwait Municipality, to take measures necessary for delivering, preparing and operating the central laboratory building for examining and analyzing the imported food at Al-Shuwaish industrial area. The ministers discussed the National Assembly affairs and were informed about the proposals offered by MPs. They also discussed the political affairs in light of the reports regarding the current developments on the political arena on Arab and international levels. —KUNA

Kuwait-Italy trade surges

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Chamber of Commerce and Industry said yesterday that total two-way trade with Italy hit \$1.6 billion in 2018, adding that the lofty figure is a testament to the progress bilateral ties have made. Kuwait considers Italy as a trusted trade partner, chamber member Fahad Al-Jouaan said as he met with a sizable trade delegation from Rome, disclosing that Italy was among the top eight exporters to Kuwait in the same year. Kuwait's relations with Italy have made palpable progress especially on the economic front, said Italy's ambassador to Kuwait Carlo Baldocci, who expressed his country's eagerness to take bilateral ties to even greater levels. Kuwait now enjoys an alluring business environment that will allow it to lure a great deal of foreign investment, according to Mohammad Yaqoub, the assistant director general of the country's investment promotion authority, promising foreign investors with bountiful opportunities. —KUNA



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KUWAIT: Tunisian Ambassador to Kuwait Ahmad Bin Al-Saghir meets with KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer. — KUNA

Tunisia hails KRCS efforts

KUWAIT: Tunisian Ambassador to Kuwait Ahmad Bin Al-Saghir praised on Monday efforts exerted by Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) over the years in terms of aid and relief to people everywhere. Saqhir said such efforts continues to provide various humanitarian and relief assistance to countries that have been exposed to natural or man-made disasters. Saqhir added, after his meeting with KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer that the speed in which KRCS provides aid to affected people come as a testament and commitment to its humanitarian role and its duty in assisting countries

and peoples around the globe. He expressed gratitude for its help to Tunisia as a result of the recent floods through KRCS, which confirms the strength of the relations between the two brotherly countries at all levels. Meanwhile, Sayer affirmed that the society continues to play its humanitarian role and duty in providing relief to suffering people, including participating in every international efforts around the world. During their meeting, Sayer reviewed most important Kuwaiti humanitarian aid and services in the region, especially to affected areas due to recent floods in Tunisia. — KUNA

Gold holds gains amid virus worries

KUWAIT: The price of gold remained on an upward trajectory last week, rising as much as \$1,590, as apprehension over the spread of coronavirus led to greater investment. The price of gold

hit its highest level since April of 2013 early last month, as investors sought to avoid risk assets following a spike in tensions between the US and Iran. The coronavirus outbreak has triggered risk sell-offs and is expected to provide a lift to the price of gold, as the price of an ounce should fluctuate between \$1600 to \$1610, according to a report by local firm Sabaek Al-Kuwait. Silver hit \$18.20 per ounce, after earlier reaching its highest since early September at \$18.85, the report showed. — KUNA



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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A stray cat looks into the camera as a man is seen in the background at a beach in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Ooredoo Kuwait continues to support entrepreneurs in Murouj

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KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait, first to launch innovated digital services in Kuwait is proudly partnered with Al-Souq Murouj for the fourth consecutive year. The fourth market was held on January 31, 2020 in which Ooredoo supported local entrepreneurs and businesses. The market, which was held at Al-Murouj Complex, included local farm produce, artisanal food products and crafts, with a 'street food' section aimed at highlighting the culinary diversity of Kuwait's local food community. The market also offered a section dedicated for children's activities. It will be held once a month on weekends, until March 2020.

Commenting on this sponsorship, Ooredoo Kuwait Senior Director of Corporate Communications Mijbil Al-



Mijbil Al-Ayoub



Ayoub said: "We are happy to be supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs through this engaging project. This sponsorship comes in tandem with our social responsibility strategy, which in turn is based on our core values of caring, connecting and challenging. We look forward to meeting those young enthusiastic small business owners as well as our valued customers at the next market."



Local

MPs demand giving priority to children of Kuwaiti women in hiring

Kuwaiti discharged from Algeria hospital after being cleared of coronavirus suspicion



KUWAIT: Ministers and MPs eat seeds during a parliament session at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak and A Saleh

KUWAIT: Several MPs called yesterday for holding special sessions to discuss a large number of draft laws on the agenda of the National Assembly for a very long time. Many MPs criticized the slow pace of approving necessary laws. Also, several MPs threatened to grill Minister of Finance Mariam Al-Aqeel over a draft law governing retired people and also over appointment of Kuwaitis. MPs called on the government to give priority to the appointment

of children of Kuwaiti women married to foreigners in government jobs, after citizens. MP Safa Al-Hashem said that appointing this category is far better than appointing "stranger" expatriates.

Coronavirus

A Kuwaiti man who had been quarantined at the University Hospital of Oran in Algeria over suspicions of being infected with the novel coronavirus was yesterday discharged after doctors found he only had flu, said medical sources in Oran. The

sources added that the citizen is a businessman who returned to his hotel room after being subjected to medical tests. "The Kuwaiti citizen was escorted to hospital by police after the hotel reported that he suffered from fever and that he had arrived from China via Istanbul," the sources explained.

Filipinas back home

Manillabullitin.com website announced that 71 Filipinas who had been facing problems in Kuwait arrived

at Aquino International Airport in Manila yesterday morning after efforts exerted by the Philippine foreign ministry. According to the website, 32 of the workers arrived onboard a Qatar Airways flight, while 39 others arrived onboard a Gulf Air flight. The website quoted a returnee named Alice, who said: "I am excited to return to my home country and get reunited with my family. I was a victim of abuse by my sponsor in Kuwait, but managed to flee to the embassy's labor office for help".

Requests approved

Kuwait Municipality Director Ahmed Al-Manfouhi approved a request by the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) to allocate a fruit and vegetable outlet in Riqqa over a total area of 10,000 sq m. The municipality also approved another request made by the Ministry of Social Affairs to allocate 10,000 square meters to build another branch of Jleeb co-op, and a third by the Ministry of Public Works to expand the crossroads near Entertainment City.



MP Ali Al-Deqbasi speaks during the session.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah (front right), Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh (front left) MP Saleh Ashour (back left) and MP Safa Al-Hashem are seen during the session.

Trainers questioned for insulting student firemen

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFS) announced that two trainers were suspended and referred to the proper authorities for questioning at the instructions of KFS Director General Lt General Khaled Al-Mekrad, on charges of verbally insulting several students at firemen preparation centers.

Woman raped

Three persons abducted a Kuwaiti woman from in front of a hotel and took her to a house belonging to one of them, where one of them raped her. They then returned her to the place she was kidnapped from, according to her statements to police. The 18-year-old girl disappeared on Thursday while she was with her family. The victim told police about what happened, and found that her family had already reported her missing, thinking she had escaped from them. Detectives were able to identify and arrest the three.

Smuggling foiled

An Ethiopian passenger was arrested upon arrival at Kuwait International Airport yesterday for



KUWAIT: Pouches containing liquor found with a passenger who was arrested upon arrival at Kuwait International Airport yesterday.

attempting to smuggle 879 pouches containing liquor. The suspect was taken to the proper authorities for further action.

News in brief

Coronavirus hikes masks' prices

KUWAIT: The coronavirus that emerged in China and spread to other countries has created a black market for masks in Kuwait, and some took the opportunity of the increased demand and hiked prices by almost double in some cases, while others have exported their stock to China. The manager of a local company said China asked Kuwait companies and not the government to send around eight million masks. She told Qabas that 80,000 masks were collected by the company that imports them from outside the country, because Kuwait does not manufacture them. Al-Qabas local daily said that there are low quantities of masks in pharmacies, and it was noticed that many citizens and expats are asking for them. Prices varied between pharmacies and medical supply stores as it is not considered a medicine, between 100 fils for ordinary ones to KD 1.5 for one with a filter, which blocks around 95 percent of airborne viruses. — Al-Qabas

Under the influence

KUWAIT: Legal medical tests on the son of a member of parliament proved he was under the influence of liquor. The son, a cadet at Saad Al-Abdullah Security Sciences Academy, deliberately collided with the car of a Kuwaiti woman who ignored him as he attempted to speak to her in Abu Al-Hasaniya four days ago. A police source said the MP's son, who was detained at Abu Fitira police station along with two of his friends, was in his father's National Assembly car, and attempted to attack policemen in protest of legal procedures taken against him. — Al-Qabas

Illegal allowances

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower detected 916 citizens registered with it who received labor support allowance for periods between four to eight years, a total of KD 23 million, had resigned and joined the education ministry. PAM said they are accused of illegally receiving the allowance as they moved from the private to the public sector and registered their names with university qualifications, contrary to what they worked as in the private sector - as undergraduates. — Al-Qabas

Vehicles impounded in Farwaniya campaign

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Farwaniya municipality cleaning manager Saad Al-Khrajneji said that all inspectors have been notified to immediately deal with any complaints, resolve them and report back. Khrajneji added that inspection teams recently removed 16 abandoned vehicles, including 11 that had been left outside Farwaniya police station after all legal procedures had been done, and removed seven others that had been notified by warning stickers, and impounded them all. Khrajneji also said inspectors removed 70 barriers built on public property to reserve parking spots in Farwaniya and removed a truckload of used tires.

Anti-Corruption

The Public Anti-Corruption Authority's (Nazaha) committee to follow up Kuwait's ranking on the Corruption Perceptions Index held a meeting with representatives from Kuwait Transparency Society (KTS) to discuss Transparency International's 2019 report with the aim of uniting all national efforts to improve Kuwait's ranking on the index in the future. The meeting was headed by Nazaha President Riyadh Al-Hajeri and attended by the committee's chairman and Nazaha acting assistant secretary general for prevention Abrar Al-Hammad. Nazaha's technical advisor Tareq Al-Duwaisan and KTS Chairman Majed Al-Mutairi.

Concrete jungles

Municipal Councilmember Oqlah Al-Enezi urged lawmakers, decision makers at the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and the state's advisory councils to put an end to what he described as residen-

tial construction 'jungles' in both private residence and investment areas. Enezi added that house prices have skyrocketed at the expense of citizens, who can no longer afford to purchase houses or apartments for up to 25 times their annual income, and are overburdened with the rents they pay. "The problem is snowballing," he underlined, warning that housing prices had inflated to unbearable levels in view of the long periods of waiting for government-provided housing units. "There are at least 170,000 Kuwaiti families in need of proper housing," he concluded.

Gynecology Conference

Head of Adan Hospital obstetrics and gynecology department Dr Abeer Al-Thayedi announced launching the 24th annual Obstetrics and Gynecology Conference to be held under the auspices of Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah in the period of February 10 to 12 at Arraya conference hall. Thayedi added that the conference will discuss the latest developments in infertility treatment and IVF, the latest in pre- and post-delivery high-risk pregnancy, ovarian and uterine cancer early detection, the latest in diagnosing fetus congenital malformations via ultrasound and embryology, the latest technologies in micro-gynecological procedures, such as uterine and abdominal speculum, robotic uses in gynecological surgeries and reducing births by cesarean sections using the latest technologies to measure the fetus' pulse during childbirth. Thayedi noted that the conference will host nine visiting specialized obstetricians and gynecologists from the UK, US, Italy, Denmark and India, in addition to 1,000 others from Kuwait, GCC states and other Arab countries.



Malawians celebrate after election 'result annulled'

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Coronavirus sends Asia social media censors into overdrive



LONDON: Tourists on a guided tour arrive at a restaurant in London's China Town district yesterday. As the deadly 2019-nCoV strain of coronavirus has spread worldwide, it has carried with it xenophobia and Asian communities around the world are finding themselves subject to suspicion and fear. —AFP

Coronavirus spreads fear and racism

Deadly virus fuelling 'racial profiling'

SYDNEY: As the deadly coronavirus has spread worldwide, it has carried with it xenophobia - and Asian communities around the world are finding themselves subject to suspicion and fear. When a patient on Australia's Gold Coast refused to shake the hand of her surgeon Rhea Liang, citing the virus that has killed hundreds, the medic's first response was shock. But after tweeting about the incident and receiving a flood of responses, the respected doctor learned her experience was all too common.

There has been a spike in reports of anti-Chinese rhetoric directed at people of Asian origin, regardless of whether they have ever visited the centre of the epidemic or been in contact with the virus. Chinese tourists have reportedly been spat at in the Italian city of Venice, a family in Turin was accused of carrying the disease, and mothers in Milan have used social media to call for children to be kept away from Chinese classmates.

In Canada, a white man was filmed telling a Chinese-Canadian woman "you dropped your coronavirus" in the parking lot of a local mall. In Malaysia, a petition to "bar Chinese people from entering our beloved coun-

try" received almost 500,000 signatures in one week. The incidents are part of what the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine has described as "misinformation" which it says is fuelling "racial profiling" where "deeply distressing assumptions are being made about 'Chinese' or 'Asian-looking' people."

Typhoid Marys

Disease has long been accompanied by suspicions of foreigners - from Irish immigrants being targeted in the Typhoid Mary panic of 1900s America to Nepali peacekeepers being accused of bringing cholera to earthquake-struck Haiti in the last decade. "It's a common phenomenon," said Rob Grenfell, director of health and biosecurity for Australia's science and research agency CSIRO. "With outbreaks and epidemics along human history, we've always tried to vilify certain subsets of the population," he said, comparing the behavior to 1300s plague-ridden medieval Europe, where foreigners and religious groups were often blamed.

"Sure it emerged in China," he said of the coronavirus, "but that's no reason to actually vilify Chinese

people." In a commentary for the British Medical Journal, doctor Abraar Karan warned this behavior could discourage people with symptoms from coming forward. Claire Hooker, a health lecturer at the University of Sydney, said the responses from governments may have compounded prejudice.

The World Health Organization has warned against "measures that unnecessarily interfere with international travel and trade", but this has not stopped scores of countries from introducing travel bans. The tiny Pacific nation of Micronesia has banned its citizens from visiting mainland China altogether. "Travel bans respond largely to people's fears," said Hooker, and while sometimes warranted, they often "have the effect of cementing an association between Chinese people and scary viruses".

Abbey Shi, a Shanghai-born student in Sydney, said the attitude shown by some of her peers has "become almost an attack on students who are Chinese". While Australia's conservative government has banished its citizens returning from Wuhan - the central Chinese city at the epicentre of the virus - to a remote island for

quarantine, thousands of students still stuck in China risk their studies being torpedoed. "Right now it looks like they have to miss the semester's start and potentially the whole year, because of the way the courses are set up," Shi said.

According to Hooker, studies in Toronto on the impact of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, or SARS - another global coronavirus outbreak in 2002 - showed the impact of xenophobic sentiment often lasted much longer than the public health scare. "While there may be a cessation of direct forms of racism as news about the disease dies down, it takes quite a bit of time for economic recovery and people continue to feel unsafe," she said.

People may not rush back to Chinese businesses or restaurants, and may even heed some of the more outlandish viral social media disinformation - such as one popular post imploring people to avoid eating noodles for their own safety. "In one sense you might think the effects lasted from the last coronavirus to this one, because the representation as China being a place where diseases come from has been persistent," Hooker said. — AFP

Virus: Rising death toll, global concern

BEIJING: The new coronavirus which appeared late December has claimed more than 360 lives, infected more than 17,200 people in China, and spread to 24 countries. Here is a timeline.

New virus

On December 31, 2019, China alerts the World Health Organization (WHO) to cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, a central industrial city of 11 million people. Several infections are traced to a Wuhan market which is shut on January 1. As infections rise, Chinese officials say on January 7 they have identified a new virus from the coronavirus family. It is named 2019-nCoV.

First death

China announces its first death in Wuhan on January 11. Two days later the first case outside China is reported in Thailand, a woman who arrived from Wuhan. Japan reports its first case, also originating in Wuhan, on January 16. The United States, Nepal, France, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Vietnam and Taiwan confirm cases over the following days. The US is among those that starts screening flights from Wuhan.

Human transmission

By January 20, nearly half of China's provinces are affected, including Beijing,

Shanghai and Shenzhen. The illness can be transmitted between humans, a Chinese infectious disease expert says. Asian countries introduce airport screenings of arrivals from Chinese high-risk areas.

Wuhan under quarantine

Wuhan is placed under quarantine on January 23, with transport links cut there and in other Hubei province cities, affecting more than 50 million people. The WHO says the global risk is "high". Beijing cancels events for the Lunar New Year starting on January 25. Several landmarks are closed. The first two deaths outside Hubei. On January 24, the first three cases are recorded in Europe, in France.

Public shutdown

Beijing extends the holiday to limit population flows. On January 27, the US and Germany tell their citizens not to travel to China. On January 28, Germany and Japan announce the first two confirmed instances of human-to-human transmission outside China.

Evacuations

On January 29, the US and Japan become the first of many nations who will start evacuating their citizens from Wuhan. The first cases appear in the Middle East, in the United Arab Emirates. Some airlines suspend their China flights, while others reduce their links. Foreign companies shut-down Chinese factories and shops, including Toyota and Starbucks. On January 30, Russia shuts its border with China.

International emergency

The WHO declares an international



SANAA: Yemenis gather with flowers outside the Chinese embassy in the capital Sanaa yesterday to express their solidarity with people in China suffering from the 'Corona' virus. China has locked down some 20 million people in Wuhan and the neighboring city of Huanggang to rein in the coronavirus that has already claimed 17 lives and spread to a number of other countries. — AFP

emergency. On January 31, as Britain, France and North Korea airlift their nationals, Italy declares a six-month state of emergency.

First death outside China

On February 2, Wenzhou, around 800 kilometres (500 miles) from Wuhan, becomes the second city to be locked down. The Philippines reports the first coronavirus death outside China - a man from Wuhan, the WHO says. With the virus expected to impact on economic growth, China says it will pump 1.2 trillion yuan (\$173 billion) into the economy.

Chinese stocks collapse

On February 3, Chinese stocks collapse, with Shanghai plunging more than seven

percent on the first day of trading since the holiday. China accuses Washington of spreading "panic", after it bans foreign nationals from visiting if they have been in China recently, a move followed by other countries and cruise lines. China says it "urgently needs" masks and its state anti-doping agency temporarily suspends testing.

China death toll passes SARS

After the single-biggest daily increase in deaths - 57 - the 361 fatalities from the new coronavirus passes the 349 mainland deaths from Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) crisis in 2002-2003.

But with 17,200 confirmed infections, the mortality rate for the new coronavirus is far lower at around 2.1 percent, compared with 9.6 percent for SARS. — AFP

German court rules against niqab ban

BERLIN: A court in Germany ruled Monday against an attempt by authorities in Hamburg to forbid a 16-year-old schoolgirl from wearing a niqab during lessons. The ruling, which cannot be appealed, has fuelled debate in Germany over whether schools should allow the niqab, a facial veil worn by Muslims which leaves only the wearer's eyes visible. Hamburg education officials had ordered the girl's mother to ensure that her daughter did not wear the veil at school, a decision which an administrative court overturned on Monday.

State law does not currently permit the authorities to impose such a ban, the court said in a statement. The teenager, who is studying retail sales, has "a right to unconditional protection of her freedom of belief" the statement added. Hamburg's social-democratic education senator Ties Rabe immediately said that he would seek to change the state law. "Only if students and teachers have a free and open face can school and lessons function," he told local media.

German education laws are made at state level rather than by the federal government, but the case is part of a wider debate across the country. High profile politicians in the conservative CDU, the economically liberal FDP and the far-right AfD have all voiced support for a niqab ban in the past, but others remain divided on the issue. The state parliament in neighboring Schleswig-Holstein failed to pass a ban on full-face veils in its universities and colleges on Monday, after the Green Party voted against it. — AFP

International

South Africa court issues arrest warrant for ex-president Zuma

Judge rejects Zuma's 'sick note' as not valid

JOHANNESBURG: A South African court issued an arrest warrant for former president Jacob Zuma yesterday, after he skipped court on grounds of needing medical treatment, but the judge stayed the warrant until his corruption trial resumes on May 6. Zuma's lawyer presented the judge with a sick note from what he said was a military hospital, but Judge Dhaya Pillay questioned whether the note was valid, as there was no medical number showing if and where the doctor was certified. "I don't even know if ... is a doctor. There is ... nothing to suggest that he is," she said, before issuing the warrant.

The former leader is on trial on 18 charges of fraud, racketeering and money laundering relating to a \$2 billion arms deal with French defense firm Thales in 1999, when Zuma was deputy president. He rejects the allegations as a politically motivated witch-hunt. Dan Mantsha, Zuma's lawyer, said that he was abroad for medical treatment, without saying where. Local media have suggested he is in Cuba, although it was not immediately possible to verify this. Pillay concluded

that the note was insufficient to excuse Zuma from appearing for the trial, but gave him until it resumes on May 6 to turn up before the warrant kicks in.

Zuma, president from 2009-2018, had previously applied for a permanent stay of prosecution but the court in Pietermaritzburg threw out his appeal in November. He is accused of accepting 500,000 rand (\$34,000) annually from Thales in 1999, in exchange for protecting the company from an investigation into the deal. Thales, known as Thompson-CSF at the time, has said it had no knowledge of any transgressions by any of its employees in relation to the award of the contracts.

The National Prosecuting Authority initially filed the charges against Zuma a decade ago, but set them aside shortly before he successfully ran for president in 2009. Following appeals and lobbying by opposition parties, the NPA reinstated the charges in March 2018. Pillay also accepted an application by the company yesterday to be represented by lawyer Barry Roux, who defended Paralympian athlete Oscar Pistorius over the 2013 murder of his girlfriend. — Reuters



PIETERMARITZBURG: Barry Roux, new senior council to South Africa's former president Jacob Zuma appears at the Pietermaritzburg High Court on behalf of former President Zuma with regard to corruption charges in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa yesterday. — AFP

Families in Africa fear impact of US immigration ban

NAIROBI: An Eritrean father yearning to be reunited with his four children after 15 years apart. An American woman adopting a Nigerian toddler. A Nigerian man desperate to be with his American wife and children. These are some of the families waiting to see how they will be affected by President Donald Trump's expansion of the US travel ban. Awet, who asked that Reuters use a nickname to avoid reprisals against his family, fled Eritrea in 2005. He is now a US citizen.

Awet described how he hugged his four young children hard, whispering only to his weeping mother that he was leaving forever. For three days, he said, he hid under rocks by day and dodged hyenas and soldiers at night as he tried to cross the border. Awet spent four years as a refugee in Ethiopia and Kenya before being resettled to the United States in 2009. When a 2018 peace deal between Ethiopia and Eritrea made it possible for the children to leave Eritrea safely, he finally dared hope he would see them again. Awet had been trying to bring his children over on family visas for the past year.

But on Friday, Trump, a Republican, issued an expanded version of his travel ban that suspended immigrant visas - a category that includes family visas - for Eritreans and Nigerians. The other countries with new restrictions are Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Tanzania and

Sudan. US Homeland Security acting Secretary Chad Wolf said the restrictions were needed because the six countries had failed to meet U.S. security and information-sharing standards. But US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat, called the ban "discrimination disguised as policy."

"Trump's new law, for us, it's very hurtful," said Awet, speaking by phone from his home in the United States. "At least let the children in ... those who want to come to be with their mother or father." Awet said he is still praying that he will see his children - now aged 14-18 - again one day. Their mother is in the Middle East. "I'm leaving it to God," he said. "God and a lawyer," his attorney Kari Scofield chimed in.

In the West African powerhouse of Nigeria, 37-year-old Californian Lynsey Elston is waiting to find out if or when her newly adopted daughter will be able to meet the rest of the family back in the United States. The former social worker always wanted to adopt. Three-year-old Eliana Ezinne arrived at her home in Nigeria on Christmas Eve 2019 after years of paperwork, interviews and uncertainty.

"This is my child," she said as she cuddled the sleepy girl. "I can't be separated from my child." Hasan Shafiqullah, head of the Immigration Law Unit at The Legal Aid Society in New York, told Reuters that Elston can apply for Eliana's citizenship only from inside the United States, and Eliana can enter only on an immigrant visa. The 2017 version of the travel ban outlines which groups can qualify for waivers, including adoptees, and the expanded ban says it will follow the same guidelines.

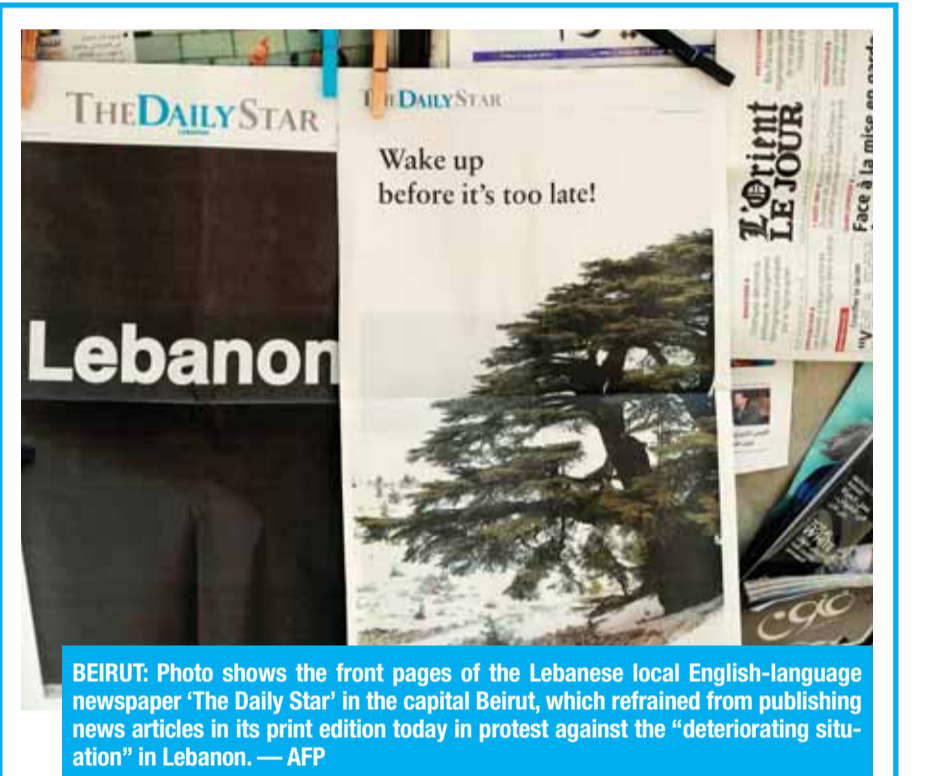
But the system for obtaining waivers



WASHINGTON: In this file photo, US President Donald Trump speaks during a summit on combating human trafficking in the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

has proven opaque and difficult to navigate, and there is an ongoing federal lawsuit challenging the government's implementation of the process. "The emotion I am feeling is anger," Elston said at her home in an upscale neighborhood of Lagos. In the same city, a 38-year-old Nigerian man quit his job last month as he prepared to move to the United States with his two toddlers and wife - all US citizens. He asked for anonymity to avoid prejudicing his visa application.

The man said his mother and two sisters, also US citizens, live in America, and he studied there and lived there for a decade. He wanted his children to grow up near his family, he said, and he considers America his second home. Asked what he will do if he cannot get a visa to move with his family, he drew in a long, slow breath and went silent. "I'm afraid to even consider that," he said at last. "You really are powerless." — Reuters



BEIRUT: Photo shows the front pages of the Lebanese local English-language newspaper 'The Daily Star' in the capital Beirut, which refrained from publishing news articles in its print edition today in protest against the "deteriorating situation" in Lebanon. — AFP

Lebanon daily suspends print edition

BEIRUT: Lebanon's English-language The Daily Star suspended its print edition yesterday, the latest casualty in the collapse of the country's once-flourishing press. The newspaper, which is co-owned by the family of former prime minister Saad Hariri, said on its website the temporary halt of the printing presses was a result of the economic downturn.

It cited "the financial challenges facing the Lebanese press which have been exacerbated by the deterioration of the economic situation in the country." It said the temporary suspension came after "a drop to virtually no advertising revenue in the last quarter of 2019, as well as in January of this year". In recent months, employees at the newspaper had complained of not being paid, with one departing journalist reporting in December that some were owed up to half a year in wages.

A series of prominent dailies in Lebanon have disappeared from print due to funding shortages in recent years. The Daily Star is the latest media outlet linked to the former premier to be struggling. In September

last year, Hariri announced the suspension of Future TV, his ailing mouthpiece whose employees had been on strike over unpaid wages.

In January 2019, the Hariri family's Al-Mustaqbal newspaper issued its last print version, 20 years after it was established. Saudi Oger, a once-mighty construction firm that was the basis of the Hariri business empire, collapsed in 2017, leaving thousands jobless. Hariri stepped down as prime minister in late October following unprecedented nationwide protests against alleged official corruption and ineptitude.

Last year, The Daily Star published a newsless black issue to protest the political and economic crises gripping the country. The economic crisis has since deteriorated, and been compounded by a financial crunch. The Daily Star was founded in 1952 by Kamel Mroue, then owner and editor-in-chief of the pan-Arab Al-Hayat daily newspaper. It closed for more than a decade during the 1975-1990 civil war, returning to news stands in 1996. The newspaper was bought by businessmen close to Hariri in 2010. — AFP

Kenyan ex-president Daniel Arap Moi dies

NAIROBI: Former Kenyan president Daniel Arap Moi, who ruled the country with an iron fist between 1978 and 2002, has died aged 95, President Uhuru Kenyatta announced yesterday. Moi's 24-year rule saw his country become a one-party state where critical voices were crushed, corruption became endemic and tribal divisions were stoked and turned bloody.

"It is with profound sadness that I announce the death of a great man of an African state," Kenyatta said in a statement. He ordered a period of national mourning until a state funeral is held, on a date not yet announced. The former president died "in the early morning of February 4 at Nairobi hospital in the presence of his family," Kenyatta said.

'Chequered career'

Moi fought off rivals in a bitter contest to take the top job in 1978, succeeding Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, when he died. The speaker of Kenya's national assembly, Justin Muturi said that Moi was an "astute politician", who "employed pragmatic nationalism to keep the country together for the 24 years that he led our nation."

"He will be remembered for his great efforts towards consolidating peace and tranquility within the Horn of Africa and largely the East African Region, at a very difficult time for the region and the African continent," Muturi added. His son Gideon Moi, a senator, confirmed Moi died at 5:20 am (02:20 GMT). "He passed away peacefully," he said. "I was by his side and, as a family, we have accepted (his death)."

One of the defining scandals of Moi's presidency was the loss of \$1 billion from the central bank through false gold and diamond exports. A report by Britain-based risk consultant group Kroll in 2007 claimed Moi's family and clique laundered money on a global scale, buying properties and companies in London, New York and South Africa and even a 10,000-hectare (25,000-acre)



NAIROBI: Newspapers with the headline on the death of former Kenya's president Daniel Arap Moi, are displayed, in Nairobi yesterday. — AFP

ranch in Australia.

'Discipline'

Vice-President William Ruto, who comes from the same Kalenjin people as Moi, mourned his "legendary personal discipline" and said that his "life and work touched every one of us in lasting, impactful ways." Those targeted by his regime included human rights and environmental activists, including the writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the future Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai.

Moi was however praised for keeping Kenya a relative haven of peace during a chaotic period in east Africa which saw the genocide in Rwanda and civil wars in Burundi and Somalia. His later return-under significant pressure-to multiparty elections in 1992,

and peaceful handover of power to opposition leader Mwai Kibaki in 2002 also won him some praise. Former opponent Raila Odinga, who spent several years in jail under Moi, referred to the late leader's "chequered career", but also spoke of his decision to finally restore multiparty politics.

"Moi and I reconciled after the political differences of the 1980s and early 90s, and we were able to work together to bring more reforms to the country," Odinga said. In recent years observers have criticized the "rehabilitation" of Moi as the elderly former president often received visits from President Kenyatta, his opposition rival Raila Odinga and any politician seeking his blessing ahead of elections. Kenyatta revived "Moi Day" in honor of the former president in 2017, after it was scrapped in 2010. — AFP

Iran to execute man for spying for the CIA

DUBAI: A man sentenced to death in Iran for spying for the CIA and attempting to pass on information about Tehran's nuclear program will be executed soon, authorities said yesterday, according to the semi-official Fars news agency. In another case, two people working for a charity were sentenced to 10 years in prison for spying and five years in prison for acting against national security on similar charges, judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esmaili said, according to Fars.

"Amir Rahimpour who was a CIA spy and got big pay and tried to present part of Iran's nuclear information to the American service had been tried and sentenced to death and recently the Supreme Court upheld his sentence and he will see the consequences of his action soon," Esmaili said, referring to the individual facing capital punishment.

Esmaili did not provide any additional information about the nationality of the convicted individuals working for a charity. Iran does not recognize dual nationality and the judiciary prosecutes dual nationals as Iranian citizens. Last summer, Iran announced it had broken up a CIA spy ring of 17 individuals and that some had been sentenced to death.

Tensions have spiked between Iran and the United States after Washington killed top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani in a drone strike in Baghdad on Jan 3, prompting the Islamic Republic to retaliate with a missile strike against a US base in Iraq. Speaking at a press conference streamed live on the judiciary's website, Esmaili said the names of the individuals working for a charity would not be released yet because the sentence has not been finalized. — Reuters

International

Malawians, oppn celebrate after presidential vote result annulled

Constitutional court orders a fresh vote within 150 days

LILONGWE: Malawi opposition supporters celebrated overnight after a landmark court ruling that declared incumbent President Peter Mutharika was "not duly elected" in a disputed 2019 vote. The country's constitutional court on Monday ordered a fresh vote within 150 days after it annulled the May election result over widespread irregularities, including the use of correction fluid on results sheets. It had been feared that the verdict would stoke turmoil in the normally peaceful southern African country.

But there were scenes of jubilation overnight as opposition supporters chanted anti-Mutharika songs in the streets, sporadically setting off fireworks in the two largest cities Blantyre and Lilongwe. "It is a good time to be alive in Malawi. We have demonstrated that democracy does and can work in Africa. And this victory is not for us, it is for generations to come," said Lameck Hango, who celebrated with his friends in the capital Lilongwe.

Another Lilongwe resident, Johnson Banda, said he was "very happy with this judgment". "It's a true indication that Malawi has true democracy and we really appreciate our court judgment." The Nation newspaper led with the headline "Null and void", while the Daily Times blared "It's fresh election". Businesses and shops re-opened yesterday after they pulled down their shutters the previous day fearing an outbreak of violence following the verdict.

'The beauty with democracy'

Mutharika, 79, will remain president until the new election because he was in power before the now-invalidated 2019 result. He has the right to appeal the verdict and has six weeks in which to do so. The main opposition Malawi Congress Party, which led the court

challenge, hailed the ruling as "a very fair judgement" that had "set a precedent" for future elections.

Mutharika supporter Chimpele Tsamwa was less pleased. "The judgment is not what I expected nor wanted-but then all in all we trust the courts and have to go with what they have said. That's the beauty with democracy," he said. In a historic ruling the five judges concurred that "the irregularities and anomalies have been so widespread, systematic and grave... that the integrity of the results has been seriously compromised". The court said only 23 percent of the results sheets had been able to be verified.

The judges said that the results announced by Malawi's Electoral Commission "cannot be trusted as a true reflection of the will of the voters". "We hold that the first respondent (Mutharika) was not duly elected as president of Malawi on May 21, 2019," ruled lead judge Healey Potani. Neither the ruling party nor the presidency have commented on the verdict. But Mutharika has repeatedly dismissed opposition accusations that the poll was rigged and shrugged off doubts over the official results.

'Respect the decision'

Sporadic protests have broken out across the country since the election in May, when Mutharika was declared the winner by a narrow margin, with 38.5 percent of the vote. Runner-up Lazarus Chakwera, who lost by just 159,000 votes, said he was robbed of victory and took the matter to court.

The case gripped the nation, keeping Malawians glued to their radios for hours on end as witnesses presented evidence of alleged vote-rigging during six months of hearings. It is the first time a presidential election has been challenged on legal grounds in



LILONGWE: Re-instated Malawi's Vice President Saulos Klaus Chillima (right) greets lawyers in Lilongwe, prior to a Malawi constitutional court ruling which annulled the results of a May 2019 vote that re-elected the then incumbent president. — AFP

Malawi since independence from Britain in 1964. The outcome echoes a historic decision by Kenya's judiciary to annul presidential election results over claims of widespread irregularities in 2017.

International powers have sought calm. "We call upon all Malawians to respect the decision of the court and to adhere to the path outlined in Malawi's constitu-

tion and electoral laws, including on the right to appeal," said Tibor Nagy, the top US diplomat for Africa. The European Union said in a statement that it "stands ready to accompany Malawi on the way ahead in view of preserving the unity and democratic credentials of the country". Zimbabwe's opposition MDC party also welcomed the ruling. — AFP

In his old parish, Argentines hope Pope can help solve debt crisis

BUENOS AIRES: In the Buenos Aires neighborhood where Pope Francis grew up, Argentines quietly hope the pontiff can help solve a debt crisis that has rippled through every part of Argentine society and put the serial defaulter at risk in the markets. Argentina's new Economy Minister Martin Guzman will meet with International Monetary Fund chief Kristalina Georgieva on the sidelines of a Vatican event on Wednesday, a key meeting with the country racing to restructure \$100 billion in debt.

The symbolism of the Vatican meeting, facilitated by an Argentine pope who has been outspoken about economic fairness, is not lost on the streets of the predominantly Roman Catholic country's capital, where many are grappling with recession, high inflation and capital controls.

"It seems to me that the pope is playing an important role as a mediator to unlock the financial situation of our country," said Mercedes F, an artist in the district of Flores best known for her paintings of the pope. Farina reminisced about receiving a hand-written letter from Francis, who she had heard say Sunday mass when he was a parish priest. "I think he has this country in his heart so I think he will support this government," she added. "Hopefully it helps."

Argentina's new center-left President Alberto Fernandez, who met the pope last week, needs all the help he can get. The country cannot currently pay its debts and has an ambitious aim to restructure payments by the end of March. Winning over the IMF, which extended a \$57 billion facility to the country in 2018, is key. Both sides have heralded positive talks so far, with Fernandez's Peronist government hoping it can strike a good faith agreement with the fund.

That is no easy matter for a country that has defaulted twice since the turn of the century, most recently in 2014, straining its relationship with international creditors. Father Gabriel Marronetti, a priest at the pope's old Basilica San José de Flores church, said the pontiff's involvement would help lend a higher moral authority to any agreement. "I believe Pope Francis adds confidence to something by his word," Marronetti, a disciple who recently visited the pope at the Vatican, told Reuters at the Buenos Aires church.

"When he is involved in something, he will do everything possible to make sure whatever is said is fulfilled." In the neighborhood of old buildings and squares full of people selling handicrafts, residents had some mixed feelings about Pope Francis, who has not visited the country since being ordained. But all hoped his focus on poverty would help.

"The pope's support with his gaze towards the poor is always valuable," said Patricia Zanollo, a 61-year-old orthodontist as she left the church where Francis found his vocation. "It's a positive and it gives me hope." On streets near the house with a marble plaque marking the birthplace of Jorge Bergoglio, as Francis was named, psychoanalyst Andrea Muiro praised his focus on "social justice" - a term often used by Fernandez who took office in December. — Reuters

Albin Kurti: Kosovo's 'Che Guevara' turned prime minister

PRISTINA: Albin Kurti has seen prison bars, led street riots and unleashed tear gas in parliament; now the unpredictable politician is Kosovo's prime minister, heralding a new chapter for the young democracy. Once dubbed 'Kosovo's Che Guevara' for his radical antics, the 44-year-old was named PM on Monday after his left-wing Vetevendosje party forged a coalition with the centre-right Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). The two former opposition camps had won October 2018 polls but it took four months of tense horse-trading over government posts to reach a deal to form a government.

Mixing a left-wing agenda with fervent nationalism, Kurti has long been an insurgent force in Kosovo politics. His rise to the top marks a historic defeat of the ex-guerrillas who have held sway over the former Serbian province since it broke away from Belgrade in 2008. Kurti and other critics have long accused those leaders of spreading corruption and nepotism as ordinary Kosovars suffer in one of Europe's poorest corners.

Riots, tear gas

The former student activist first gained fame on the streets, organizing protests in the 1990s against the Serbian regime's repression of Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority. The activism landed Kurti in a Serbian jail for

Migrant arrivals soar on Spain's Canary Islands

MADRID: The number of migrants reaching the Canaries soared last month to 18 times the level of a year ago, Spanish government figures showed yesterday. The spike has raised fears of a resurgence of migrant traffic to the Atlantic islands, a route taken by tens of thousands of people a decade ago.

The figures coincide with a crack-down on illegal immigration by Morocco where the numbers of those trying to reach mainland Spain by boat have fallen. The Canaries lie just off southern Morocco and the journey can be attempted from Mauritania or Senegal, thereby avoiding Moroccan authorities. Last month, 708 migrants reached the

archipelago compared with 40 in January 2019, the interior ministry said.

By contrast, the numbers arriving in mainland Spain were down 72 percent compared with the same period a year earlier. Many appear to have made the crossing from Mauritania, whose coastline lies 1,000 kilometers south of the islands. There have been two repatriation flights from the Canaries to Mauritania this month, carrying 88 migrants a - 72 of them citizens of neighboring Mali, Spanish ombudsman documents show.

Another eight were from Mauritania, seven from Senegal and one Ivory Coast. Over the past two years, the overall number of arrivals in Spain more than halved, the ministry said, falling from 57,498 in 2018 to 26,168 in 2019. Last year, Morocco prevented a large number of boats from setting sail for Spain, with the interior ministry telling AFP it had prevented "74,000 illegal attempts" to reach Spain.

In 2019, the European Union allocat-



PRISTINA: Newly elected Prime Minister of Kosovo Albin Kurti reviews Kosovo's honor guard during the handover ceremony in Pristina yesterday. — AFP

two years when he was in his 20s. After the province broke away from Serbia in the 1998-99 war, Kurti became a leading critic of both local leaders and the international community for its outsized influence.

Now he needs to convince the West he is no longer the radical whose supporters were rioting in the streets not so long ago. Vetevendosje, which means "self-determination" in Albanian, has flexed its muscles over the years with massive rallies that have sometimes veered into violence.

Some of the worst incidents around a decade ago saw supporters flip vehicles belonging to EULEX, the European Union's rule of law mission in Kosovo. On several occasions in 2018, Kurti's lawmakers protested vote outcomes by unleashing tear gas inside the parliament. But in an interview with AFP in 2018, he rejected the "radical" and "nationalist" labels, saying his group has been better characterized as social democratic since 2013. "One could say that I am a romantic person but I am not a chauvinist," he added. — AFP



LESBOS ISLAND: A migrant reacts to tear gas used by riot police during a demonstration outside the municipal theatre of the city of Mytilene, on the island of Lesbos yesterday. — AFP

ed 140 million euros (\$155 million) to support Rabat's efforts against irregular migration, with Madrid also providing additional aid. As well as the Canaries route, some have turned to Algeria's

northern coast, with Spanish police saying Monday they arrested 26 suspected smugglers who had brought more than 900 people to Spain last year, charging each person 2,500 euros. — AFP

Rising populism stokes homophobic hate speech across Europe

LONDON: Homophobic and transphobic rhetoric and other anti-LGBT+ hate crimes are rising across Europe, fuelled by divisive politics and socially conservative groups that also campaign against abortion access, an advocacy group said yesterday. Hate speech by political and religious leaders increased in 17 countries, including in countries such as Portugal, Spain and

Finland, known for being LGBT-friendly.

Homophobic violence also rose across the region, according to a report by ILGA-Europe. Poland's nationalist ruling party railed against "LGBT ideology" in its re-election campaign last year, while Hungary's parliament speaker equated gay adoption with paedophilia and Spanish and Finnish politicians criticised Pride marches.

"It's not just countries of eastern Europe where people traditionally think there is more organized opposition - the groups that are opposing LGBT equality are popping up in more places," said Evelyn Paradis, the executive director of ILGA-Europe. In March 2019, then-deputy prime minister of Italy, Matteo Salvini, who leads the far-right League party, spoke in Verona at the World Congress of Families, a conference that promotes the "natural family" against LGBT+ and abortion rights.

"Those groups tend to be more active where there is overall insecurity and anxiety in the population, where

the overall political discourse, not just on LGBT rights, is a bit more toxic, where populist parties are very active" Paradis said. A rise in hate speech can lead to increases in violent hate crime, said Helga Eggebo, a Norwegian researcher at the Nordland Research Institute, who has studied discrimination.

"There is a relationship between general negative attitudes, hate speech and violent crime against minority groups," she said. "For example, there was a documented rise in violent hate crime against Muslim women after 9/11." While ILGA-Europe's report was not based on comparative, quantitative, hate crime data, Paradis said there was a "heavy trend" of increased anti-LGBT+ hate speech and violence in a majority of European countries. She noted however that there was more recognition of same-sex civil partnerships and parental rights and a growing movement to ban medically-unnecessary genital surgeries on intersex infants who are born with atypical sex characteristics. — Reuters

International

Coronavirus sends Asia social media censors into overdrive

Free speech advocates fear campaign will entrench censorship

BANGKOK: Deluged by misinformation about the new coronavirus on social media, some Asian governments are fighting back with arrests, fines and fake news laws - something free speech advocates fear will entrench measures that can also silence dissent. At least 16 people have been arrested over coronavirus posts in Malaysia, India, Thailand, Indonesia and Hong Kong, while Singapore has used its controversial new "fake news" law, POFMA, to force media outlets and social media users to carry government warnings on their posts and articles saying they contain falsehoods.

"Fortunately, we now have POFMA to deal with these fake news," said Lawrence Wong, one of the ministers heading a Singapore government task force to halt the spread of the virus. Many details of the new flu-like coronavirus that surfaced just weeks ago in the Chinese city of Wuhan are unknown. As the death toll has passed 420, anxiety has been fuelled by social media posts ranging from the bizarre to the malicious. Posts include speculation about how the virus can be caught - through a video game according to one - or avoided - a government minister in Myanmar was rebuffed for sharing a post that recommended eating more onions - to local scares of deaths or anti-Chinese attacks.

"What I call the 'moron strain' has created a global, social media-driven panic that is in turn feeding on itself," wrote Karim Raslan in his regionally syndicated column, noting how much greater the challenge had become for governments to manage. At least five people were arrested and released on bail in India's southwestern state of Kerala over WhatsApp messages, said Aadithya R, District Police Chief of Thrissur. Six people were arrested in Malaysia on suspicion of spreading false news.

In Vietnam, where an army of cyber-censors tracks social media comment for the communist government, at least nine people have been fined and three celebrities asked to explain their actions over posts about coronavirus. Thailand hailed the success of an "anti-fake news centre" it set up last year. Dozens of staff reviewed nearly

7,600 posts in four days from Jan. 25 - leading to 22 posts being highlighted as false on its website and two arrests under computer crimes laws.

"The anti-fake news centre is working intensively to verify these rumors and communicating truth to the people," said Digital Minister Puttipong Punnakanta. Thailand is among countries where laws on social media posts have been toughened in recent years despite complaints from human rights groups that they could be used to target government opponents.

Control

Free-speech advocates are wary that the campaign against coronavirus could help governments extend their control as well as damaging the health campaign. "Criminalisation of speech, even if targeted at falsehoods, is highly likely to stifle the real time sharing of information that is essential during epidemics," said Matthew Bugher, Head of Asia Programme for free expression campaign group Article 19.

China has long censored social media heavily and some critics say that may have delayed information on the emerging virus in Wuhan - and therefore potential countermeasures. Eight people were arrested after being accused of spreading rumors about illness in early January, but the case was dropped last week amid growing public anger over the handling of the new crisis.

Meanwhile, Tencent Holdings' ubiquitous messaging app WeChat has added tools to help debunk virus rumors. The official People's Daily has also introduced a tool to help people verify reports. Western social media companies are also stepping up action. Facebook Inc has said it would take down misinformation about the coronavirus - a rare departure from the usual approach to health content by the world's biggest social network.

Government threats

Taiwan has warned of punishment for spreading disinformation. South Korean police were working with tele-



HONG KONG: A man wearing a facemask while using his phone stands in front of a mural in Hong Kong yesterday as a preventative measure following a virus outbreak which began in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Hong Kong yesterday became the second place outside mainland China to report the death of a coronavirus patient as officials said they feared local transmissions were increasing in the densely populated city. — AFP

coms regulators to block "false information", Yonhap news agency said. Indonesian police said two people had been arrested for spreading fake news and face charges that could see them jailed for up to five years.

Hong Kong police said a shopping mall security guard was arrested for spreading false news about infections. In Singapore, some said the government was using its new fake news law responsibly. "Many examples of misinformation, confusing data and outright fake news present a clear and present danger to public safety, health and security,"

said Nicholas Fang, founder of Singapore consultancy Black Dot Research. But not all were convinced.

Journalist and activist Kirsten Han is among those who have been given a government correction notice - in her case for sharing an article related to state executions last month rather than anything to do with coronavirus. "Just because there are relatively more justifiable uses of a #fakenews law, it doesn't mean that the law was well-drafted and can't be an instrument of abuse and oppression," she commented on Twitter. — Reuters

HIV drugs touted as weapon in war on coronavirus

BANGKOK: As doctors scramble to contain the fast-spreading coronavirus, a potent brew of anti-retroviral and flu drugs has emerged as a possible defense against the mysterious sickness that has killed hundreds. But the science is inconclusive on whether they are actually effective and experts say successful treatment could take years. Here is what we know - and don't know - about the drugs deployed against the SARS-like virus.

Why anti-retrovirals?

Patients diagnosed with the common flu are often prescribed an antiviral drug widely known as Tamiflu. But the seasonal flu is "very different from the Chinese coronavirus", said Sylvie van der Werf at the Paris-based Pasteur Institute. So far, the new coronavirus has infected tens of thousands worldwide and killed more than 420 people mostly in mainland China. Two weeks ago Chinese doctors confirmed they had been giving anti-HIV drugs to coronavirus patients in Beijing, based on a 2004 study during the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, or SARS, that showed "favourable" responses. Used together, lopinavir and ritonavir decrease the amount of HIV cells in a patient's blood, stripping back the virus's ability to reproduce and attack the immune system.

Doctors have also combined the treat-



WUHAN: Photo shows medical staff members on their rounds at a quarantine zone in Wuhan, the epicenter of the new coronavirus outbreak, in China's central Hubei province. — AFP

ment with another anti-flu drug called oseltamivir, hoping the creative cocktail can sap the new coronavirus of its strength. In Thailand, where there are 19 confirmed cases, a 71-year-old Chinese patient returned a negative test within 48 hours of being given the three drugs. But Thai doctors cautioned the medicine needed to be given under supervision due to possible side effects or it clashing with pre-existing medications.

Does it actually work?

In short, we don't know for sure. The 2004 study showed anti-retrovirals used on patients with SARS had "substantial clinical benefits", experts in China said. But random trials on 41 coronavirus patients had "limitations", according to the research, which was published in medical journal The Lancet on January 24. The researchers were not able to obtain complete samples from the patients' lower res-

piratory tract - which is suspected to be the target site of the new coronavirus - and there were not enough patients to verify results. "Further studies in outpatient, primary care, or community settings are needed to get a full picture," they wrote.

What's big pharma doing?

Biotech firms are working on a suite of treatment options. California-based Gilead Sciences said they are working with Chinese authorities on clinical trials to determine if remdesivir - a drug used to treat SARS - is effective against the new coronavirus. Meanwhile three teams around the world - in China, Australia and the Pasteur Institute in France - have now succeeded in cultivating the new coronavirus in the laboratory.

That could lead to pinpointing its "Achilles' heel" by understanding how it replicates in cells, said Christophe d'Enfert, the institute's scientific director. But as of

now there is no specific treatment against it, World Health Organization spokesperson Tarik Jasarevic said. "More investigations and analysis of the epidemiological data is still required," he told AFP.

So what should you do?

The best approach for the general public is to try and "stay healthy" so your immune system can offer a robust response to the threat of the virus, said Singapore's health minister Gan Kim Yong. But for already infected patients, hospitals must provide supportive care to prevent complications. "Chances are if you already have underlying medical conditions... your defenses are weak and your organs may already be impaired, and therefore the risk of death is higher," he told parliament Monday. Developing a successful solution may take months or years, he added.

Home remedies and quackery

But misinformation has proliferated online about home and traditional remedies. A liquid made with honeysuckle and flowering plants used in traditional medicine was initially claimed to "inhibit" the virus, sparking frenzied buying in China. But Chinese state media later sounded a more cautionary note, as researchers warned of potential side effects from the medicine.

In India, where there are three reported confirmed cases, the government has touted ancient homeopathy and Ayurveda remedies as the answer. The jury is out on the effectiveness, and doctors still recommended that patients be treated in a hospital. Online posts erroneously identified saline - basic salt water - as a coronavirus killer in Australia, while in Thailand social media touted that an antiseptic should be sprayed in a person's mouth. The antiseptic company Betadine has refuted the claim. — AFP

YouTube details ban on 'manipulated' election content

WASHINGTON: YouTube said Monday it would remove election-related videos that are "manipulated or doctored" to mislead voters, as part of its efforts to stem online misinformation. The Google-owned service said it was taking the measures as it strives to become a "more reliable source" for news and to promote a "healthy political discourse" amid heightened fears over video fakes around the world.

Leslie Miller, YouTube's vice president of government affairs and public policy, said in a blog post that the service's community standards prohibit "content that has been technically manipulated or doctored in a way that misleads users... and may pose a serious risk of egregious harm." The latest YouTube statement, which seeks to clarify its global policy on election misinformation, was announced as the US presidential primary season kicks off, with caucuses being held in Iowa on Monday and the first primary next week in New Hampshire.

The move comes amid growing concern about so-called "deepfake" videos altered by using artificial intelligence, which can create credible-looking events, but also "shallow" fakes that use more rudimentary techniques to deceive viewers. Deepfakes and manipulated content have raised fears over the election process worldwide, amid notable incidents in Britain and India where videos were used for disinformation.

YouTube noted the policy also bans content which aims to mislead people about voting rules or the US census process that is underway. Online platforms have come under pressure to root out misinformation in the wake of foreign manipulation efforts in the US in 2016 and else-



LOS ANGELES: The Google and YouTube logos are seen at the entrance to the Google offices in Los Angeles, California. YouTube said February 3, 2020 it would remove election-related videos that are "manipulated or doctored" to mislead voters, as part of its efforts to stem online misinformation. — AFP

where in recent years. In the US, critics of online platforms have claimed not enough is being done to curb false claims by candidates themselves.

Concerns over US campaign

Google last year said it was stepping up efforts on election misinformation and would remove false claims in ads, including on YouTube, but the new statement appeared to offer specifics on certain kinds of content that will be blocked. "The underlying standards YouTube explains and illustrates today do not appear to be brand new, but the company deserves praise for setting them out in clear terms and warning that it intends to enforce them vigorously," said Paul Barrett of the New York University Center for Business and Human Rights and author of a 2019 study on political disinformation. "YouTube's statement

today appears to reiterate its determination not to allow its users to be conned during the 2020 election campaign."

The announcement underscores differing policies by major social networks on disinformation. Twitter has said it would ban all political ads for candidates, while Facebook has maintained a hands-off policy for political speech and ads, with some exceptions for content that misleads users about voting times and places. "Each platform is weighing free expression against voter manipulation, but the information operations work across platforms and exploit these loopholes," said Karen Kornbluh, a German Marshall Fund researcher who follows political disinformation.

"That's why the platforms should come together and develop shared, clear, consistent, enforceable rules to protect voters from becoming easy marks for disinformation campaigns." Monday's statement offered specific examples of content that would be removed from YouTube. Among the content banned include any video "manipulated to make it appear that a government official is dead" or that "aims to mislead people about voting or the census processes, like telling viewers an incorrect voting date."

YouTube will also take down any false claims about eligibility requirements for political candidates, "such as claims that a candidate is not eligible to hold office based on false information about citizenship status requirements." A separate statement by Google's head of online trust and safety, Kristie Canegallo, said the internet giant has stepped up its efforts to stem abuse and false information on elections globally.

"Our trust and safety teams span the globe to monitor and disrupt account hijackings, inauthentic activity, disinformation campaigns, coordinated attacks, and other forms of abuse on our platforms on a 24/7 basis," Canegallo said. "We take seriously our responsibility to protect our users from harm and abuse, especially during elections." She added that Google was working with other technology companies and government agencies including the FBI "to identify bad actors, disable their accounts, warn our users about them, and share relevant information with industry officials and law enforcement." — AFP

Tamil-language anthem dropped from Sri Lanka independence party

COLOMBO: A Tamil-language version of Sri Lanka's national anthem was dropped from independence day celebrations yesterday, with critics saying the move was a setback to reconciliation after years of ethnic civil war. A Tamil-language version was included in the 2016 event as part of a push to heal the wounds of a 37-year war between Tamil separatists and the Sinhalese-majority.

But at celebrations yesterday marking the 72nd anniversary of independence from Britain, the anthem was sung only in Sinhala. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's 20-minute speech in Sinhala, however, was translated into Tamil - the language of the largest minority, who account for just over 15 percent of the country's 21 million people. Rajapaksa won a landslide in November elections with the backing of the majority Sinhalese, for whom he is a hero.

He was a key figure in the crushing of the Tamil Tiger separatists that ended Sri Lanka's conflict in May 2009. The war claimed more than 100,000 lives between 1972 and 2009. Opposition legislator Mano Ganesan said dropping the anthem in Tamil was disappointing. "By rejecting the anthem in Tamil... in front of local and the international community, the government has justified discrimination, and has disappointed patriots," said Ganesan, a former minister of national integration and official languages.

Several private media organizations also said dropping the Tamil version was a setback to reconciliation. Authorities insisted the anthem could still be sung in either language. In his address, Rajapaksa vowed there would be no discrimination. "As the president today, I represent the entire Sri Lankan nation irrespective of ethnicity, religion, party affiliation or other differences," he said. — AFP



COLOMBO: Sri Lankan Navy personnel fire a 21-gun salute to mark the island nation's 72nd Independence Day at the Galle Face promenade in Colombo yesterday. Sri Lanka commemorates its independence from British rule on February 4, 1948. — AFP

Analysis

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A picture taken on Oct 1, 2019 shows workers operating sewing machines in a garment factory at the Hawassa Industrial Park in Hawassa, southern Ethiopia. — AFP

Bottled water firms turn on the taps with filters, flavors, fizz

A German firm backed by bottled water giant Danone plans to launch a sparkling-water machine for the home early next year, its chief executive told Reuters, squarely taking aim at PepsiCo's SodaStream. Nestle, the bottled water market leader, is also considering a machine for the home with filters, flavors and fizz that would be a smaller version of its Refill+ dispensers being rolled out in cafeterias, hotels and offices this year.

Concerns about plastic waste and the environmental impact of transporting bottled water are prompting more people to drink straight from the tap, which is in turn pushing water firms to come up with new products to keep customers on board. "Bottled water as we know it today, I don't think will exist in 30 years. You will see much more point-of-use solutions like ours," said Moritz Waldstein, chief executive of Mitte, the Berlin-based company backed by Danone. "I am of the strong belief that it will be a fraction of the market size that we have today," he told Reuters.

The global bottled water market was worth \$135.6 billion in 2019, according to market researcher Euromonitor International, and is expected to grow to \$170.9 billion by 2022, with demand expanding fastest in Asia. Like Nestle, Mitte is betting that concerns about plastic pollution and contamination of public water supplies mean consumers will want countertop devices at home that filter tap water, as well as adding fizz and flavours like SodaStream.

In 2018, a Danone fund which invests in firms responding to growing environmental awareness joined a \$10.6 million funding round for Mitte, which is developing a device to purify tap water and add minerals via cartridges. Danone, the world's third-largest bottled water seller with brands such as Evian, Volvic and Badoit, had slightly lower water sales in its third quarter. It is also looking to boost plastic recycling and encourage alternatives - such as Mitte.

"We think there could be demand from sophisticated consumers who for many reasons will prefer to make their mineral water at home," said Danone Chief Executive Emmanuel Faber. Mitte said it received extra funding from its shareholders in an investment round in December, including the Danone fund, and it might raise more money as interest had been very high.

Mitte's first machine to go on sale will both filter and carbonate water. Set to retail for about 200 euros (\$220), it will mostly be sold online and Mitte will initially target top SodaStream markets such as Germany and Sweden. The company also has high hopes for the United States. When it ran an online Kickstarter campaign to raise funds in 2017, the most pre-orders for its machines came from the United States, followed by Germany and the United Kingdom.

US market fizzes

Sparkling water has long been popular in western Europe but has only really taken off in North America in recent years as health-conscious consumers swap sweet colas for water, often flavoured or with infused vitamins and minerals. PepsiCo CEO Ramon Laguarta said in October that SodaStream, which it bought in 2018 for \$3.2 billion, was doing better than it expected, particularly in western Europe, Japan and Canada.

He said SodaStream was planning "transformational programs" in 2020 to boost penetration in the US market, where Costco, Home Depot and Kohl's and Target currently sell it, with a basic device costing about \$85. Nestle is also making a renewed drive to revive US sales, where it has lagged rivals such as PepsiCo, LaCroix and Coca-Cola in the sparkling and flavored water market.

In October, Nestle said it was overhauling its water division, which generates 9 percent of group sales, after it posted growth of just 0.5 percent in the first nine months of 2019. Federico Sarzi Braga, the new head of Nestle's water business, told Reuters in his first interview that it would put more focus on its premium sparkling water brands Perrier and S.Pellegrino in the United States.

"The value we can get from functional and flavored water is much higher," he said. "So we play strongly in the premium and super premium segment, especially in sparkling." Sarzi Braga, an Italian who started out with Nestle in 2000 at S.Pellegrino, said products launched last year in the United States - including Perrier mixed with fruit juice and flavored S.Pellegrino Essenza - were selling very well.

US sales of flavored, sparkling and functional water - water with added vitamins and minerals - rose 8 percent last year to represent 30 percent of the US bottled water market, outpacing the overall market which grew 3.6 percent, said Euromonitor International. The flavoured, sparkling and functional category already makes up 45 percent of bottled water sales in western Europe and almost 75 percent in the world's biggest sparkling water market, Germany. — Reuters

Angry workers spurn Ethiopia 'industrial revolution'

Zemen Zerihun thought he'd left farming behind and found the ticket to a better life when he began a job cutting fabric for a clothing company at a massive industrial park in southern Ethiopia. But the 22-year-old ended up quitting within months, weary of working eight hours a day, six days a week and still not making ends meet earning \$35 a month. Managers were so strict they would go into bathrooms and yank out workers deemed to be taking too long, he said.

His supervisor would loudly berate him as "slow" and "lazy" when he failed to keep pace on the production line, he told AFP. "After I joined the company, I suffered," he said. "The supervisors treat you like animals." Experiences like his highlight a major challenge facing Ethiopia's push to embrace industrialization and become less dependent on agriculture. By attracting foreign investors through cheap labor, it wants to follow the model of China and other Asian nations in creating a robust manufacturing sector that can offer badly needed jobs for its young workforce. But despite high unemployment, young Ethiopians are not going along with it, preferring to quit rather than stay in jobs where they feel underpaid and disrespected.

Thousands of employees have already walked out of the country's new and burgeoning network of industrial parks. At the Hawassa Industrial Park, where Zemen worked, staff turnover in 2017-18 "hovered around 100 percent," according to a May 2019 report from the Stern Center for Business and Human Rights at New York University. The added recruitment and training costs are a main reason why, in the eyes of manufacturers, Ethiopian labour has "turned out to be considerably more costly than the government had initially advertised," the report said.

Government officials say they are taking steps to address workers' concerns while balancing them with industry representatives' interests. But labor organizers argue the measures are too little, too late, leaving them no choice but to begin unionizing the parks - a development Zemen says is long overdue. "The government needs to pay attention to what is happening in the industrial parks," he said. "They think they are giving everyone good jobs, but some of the workers, they are really struggling."

A lofty vision

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sees industrial parks as an important engine of growth that can help stave off unrest ahead of elections tentatively planned for August. Yet the

strategy was adopted several years before Abiy came to power, after the government realized in 2014 that agriculture couldn't provide enough jobs for a booming population, said Arkebe Oqubay, an architect of the strategy and now special adviser to the premier.

Ethiopia is one of Africa's fastest-growing economies but youth unemployment remains a major problem. The World Bank estimates that two million people enter the workforce every year. Despite long-running efforts to restructure the economy, officials estimate that manufacturing still only makes up 10 percent of economic activity.

As they work to ramp up the sector, officials say they have learned the lessons of places like Bangladesh - where at least 1,134 people were killed in the Rana Plaza factory collapse in 2013 - and are committed to avoiding unsafe and unsustainable working conditions. The flagship Hawassa park, a campus of 52 factory sheds occupied by American, European and Asian companies producing garments and textiles, opened in 2017. Its roughly 30,000 workers sew fabric into T-shirts, sportswear or other sought-after items. By year's end, some 30 industrial parks will be operating across Ethiopia, specialising in sectors like machinery production and information and communications technology, Arkebe said. Currently 12 parks have been built. The parks have already yielded dividends, Arkebe said, raising foreign direct investment to \$4.3 billion in 2017 - a fourfold increase over five years earlier. But wage levels are under the spotlight.

Attracting investment

The \$26 monthly base pay at Hawassa makes Ethiopian garment workers the lowest paid in the world, the NYU Stern Center report said. Though the amount is not uncommon for entry-level employees in a country with no minimum wage, workers say it barely covers food, transport and rent. Even those leasing cramped apartments with three or four co-workers and sleeping in shifts on shared mattresses say they don't make a decent living.

Eight months after resigning, Zemen is living with his family and still looking for a new job, but he has no regrets. He'd rather grow food for himself on the family farm than toil at the factory which he'd initially seen as his escape, he said. He is far from the only worker to have quickly grown disillusioned when the reality of factory life failed to match his expectations.

Tony Kao, deputy general manager of JP Textile, said

For China virus insurance, check the small print

Companies and tourists out of pocket from the global disruption caused by the virus epidemic in China risk meeting a cold shoulder from insurers, industry experts warn. Basic travel insurance policies are unlikely to cover epidemics. Instead, individuals are being advised initially to consult their credit card or travel providers to get refunded for cancelled bookings, and for medical costs.

For companies such as airlines that are now ripping up their China plans, there may be no recourse from their insurers, according to Clarissa Franks, risk management placement leader at insurance broker Marsh in London. "The devil really is in the details because business interruption policies, contingency policies, can cover communicable diseases. However, policy language will quite often exclude this type of disease," she told AFP.

Ripple effects

China has now suffered more deaths from the new strain of coronavirus than during the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2002-03, and cases are cropping up around the world. The reinsurance market at Lloyd's of London has not seen any untoward activity from traditional insurers looking to hedge their exposure to risks arising from this outbreak, two sources in the underwriting trade said.

But in China itself, the outbreak "will likely weigh on Chinese insurers' earnings and revenues in 2020", S&P Global Ratings said, pointing to factors such as volatility on financial markets and reduced face-to-face meetings with customers. Even if they are not covered for communicable diseases specifically, companies will be checking the fine print as ripple effects flow through their China operations and global supply chains, following Beijing's decision to quarantine entire cities.

As with SARS and other pandemics of recent years such as swine flu, Zika and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), the industry will be "paying very close attention to this", Association of British Insurers spokesman Malcolm Tarling said. He cautioned individuals and

companies: "If someone travels (to China) against government advice, then most policies will be invalidated. If you believe your trip is essential, you need to talk to your insurer first."

Risk calculus

The closest analogy is SARS, which first broke out in China in 2002 and led to a slew of disputes between companies and their insurance providers. For the travel industry alone, the impact of SARS was estimated by the World Travel and Tourism Council at \$30-50 billion. But China's economy accounted for five percent of global gross domestic product then, compared to nearly a fifth today, according to World Bank data. More Chinese now travel abroad than any other nationality, and they spend the most on average while away.

The number of infections from the new virus stands at more than 20,000, and the World Health Organization has declared a public health emergency. But health experts stress its mortality rate among patients is lower than for SARS. In a blog, Risk Management Solutions noted that several sporting and cultural events have already been cancelled in China, "and all risk stakeholders will be anxious over the number of months before 2019-nCoV (the novel coronavirus) is contained".

Specialist coverage

Leading British insurer Aviva said customers need to have specific coverage for "travel disruption" as part of their policy to be sure of reimbursement for changes to their plans. "We're monitoring the situation closely, but so far the overwhelming majority of claims relate to customers who are travelling to and from China," an Aviva spokeswoman said. Allianz of Germany said the first port of call for individuals suffering disruption should be their airline or travel agency, rather than their insurer.

The company said the outbreak was "clearly a very urgent alert" but at this stage, normal terms and conditions of insurance contracts applied. For airlines and other companies in the firing line, communicable diseases will typically only be covered if they have taken out specialist coverage. But that would come at a cost that probably outweighs the risk-benefit return. "Traditional insurance can't cover everything and non-traditional insurance will tend to carry a significant cost and require a thorough process to determine what an individual company needs," Franks at Marsh said. "It will be a very bespoke product." — AFP

Coronavirus could also sicken global economy

The rapid spread of a new coronavirus in China, the world's second largest economy, could rapidly weaken already fragile global growth as trade and oil demand slow, analysts say. The world economy could do without this new problem, after suffering from a China-US trade war that set global growth on a path to slow to 2.9 percent this year according to the OECD, its slowest rate since the 2008-2009 global economic crisis.

Many analysts share the views of US Federal Reserve Jerome Powell who said last week that it "very uncertain how far it will spread and what the macro-economic effects will be". But "there will clearly be implications at least in the near term for Chinese output and I would guess for some of their close neighbors", he said. China extended its Lunar New Year holiday as a measure to contain an outbreak that has now infected over 20,000 people and killed more than 400, and some firms are now extending factory closures.

As China is a key supplier of many components this could quickly hobble production elsewhere, as evidenced Tuesday by South Korea's largest automaker Hyundai Motor suspending all domestic production this week because of a lack of parts from China.

'Knock-on effects'

"The greater the disruption in China, the more likely it is to spread overseas," said Neil Shearing, chief emerging markets economist at Capital Economics. "Given that China is now at the heart of many global supply chains, this will have knock-on effects around the world," he added. While Asian economies will likely be the first to be hit, a bigger and longer disruption would eventually hurt manufacturers further afield, as well as commodities producers that supply China.

"Slowing Chinese domestic demand will impact the global economy, just as it is trying to recover from the effects of the 2018/19 trade war," said economists at Dutch bank ING. S&P Global Ratings

Hawassa workers faced challenges switching from agricultural to industrial work. "It took some time for them just to learn industrial work. They now have to be on time to work and now they have to learn new skills, they have to learn how to operate the machines which is a whole new chapter for them," he said. Medihant Fehene left her Hawassa factory job, too. "I'd have to wake up to catch the bus at 5:30 to start work at 6:00, or if I took the afternoon shift I would not get home until 11:30, when it's dark and not safe for a woman to be outside," she said.

Among measures the government is exploring to address such frustrations is giving companies land for dormitories for workers to rent at subsidized rates, Arkebe said. However, he also defended low wages, saying they help ensure firms invest in Ethiopia rather than countries where manufacturing is more established. "If wages are high and investment doesn't come, new employment is not going to be created," Arkebe said. "The livelihood of workers can improve when their productivity improves," Arkebe added, comparing the process to the "industrial revolution" in Britain and the United States.

'It's the future'

Such statements play well with industry representatives. "Ethiopia is the garment future. Everybody's looking at Ethiopia now," said Raghavendra Pattar, head of Nasa Garment Plc in Hawassa. Ethiopian workers have had the right to organize since the 1960s, but Pattar said he saw no need for unions to be established at the industrial park. But Awalew Ahmed, vice president of the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions, told AFP that the first "task forces" to begin organizing workers would form early this year. "If the employers volunteer to have trade unions in the company, that will be OK. Otherwise we will establish them outside the company," he said. The government backs workers' right to organize, provided it is not too disruptive. Eyob Tekalign Tolina, a state minister of finance and one of Abiy's top economic advisers, said. Factory owners at Hawassa meanwhile seem to face no shortage of potential replacements for those who quit. On a recent morning, dozens of applicants waited in line to be tested on tasks such as threading needles or placing nails on a pegboard. Inside the park, 22-year-old Tekle Baraso Bonsa took a break from dyeing yarn to explain how he was using his \$33 a month wage to put himself through university. "If I weren't doing this," he said, "I'd be shining shoes." — AFP

says its base-case scenario is for a halt to the spread of the virus in April, and in May in its worst-case scenario. "This suggests that the peak impact on economic activity across Asia-Pacific will be in the first and second quarters," it said, adding that growth would rebound later in the year. Michala Marcussen, chief economist at French bank Societe Generale, said "one can estimate that China could lose 1 point in annual GDP and this would automatically reduce global GDP by 0.4 points". This was still "relatively benign", she said.

SARS comparisons?

While China rapidly overcame the 2002-2003 SARS outbreak, some analysts warn against relying too much on comparisons. "While useful lessons can be drawn from the SARS experience, we risk being too complacent by using it as benchmark," UniCredit Group Chief Economist Erik Nielsen said in a recent note to clients. "China and the global economy are now much more integrated than in 2003" when China accounted for just 5 percent of global GDP, compared to 20 percent now.

"The vast expansion in global value chains means that disruptions to production in China might have a larger global impact now than then, especially if multinationals shut down their Chinese factories for long periods," he said. If the outbreak doesn't dissipate soon, authorities are likely to extend travel bans, consumers stay at home and delay consumption, while firms defer investment. "We think it's way too early to dismiss this outbreak as just a brief interruption of constructive markets - as much as we wish it were," concluded Nielsen.

ING calls China "the kingpin of the global commodities market" with huge influence over demand for the raw materials that fuel the nation's economy. The oil market is already feeling the pain as China is a major consumer. European benchmark Brent crude was trading at around \$55 a barrel on Tuesday, having slumped more than \$10 over the past month. OPEC members and their ally Russia are to hold a technical meeting on Tuesday and Wednesday to analyze oil price falls since the outbreak of the epidemic. Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodities analyst at Nordic bank SEB, said Chinese refineries are cutting back on processing fuel, which means OPEC and its allies "would potentially need to cut an additional 2 million barrels per day in order to avoid surplus". — AFP

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Business

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2020

12 Kuwait's project awards fall short of expectations in 2019**13** Boubyan Bank sponsors Kuwait-Italy Expo, over 100 Italian firms to attend**14** NBK reveals winner of KD 125,000 in Al-Jawhara monthly draw

BEIJING: People wearing masks walk along a business street in Beijing yesterday. Chinese policymakers are readying measures to support an economy jolted by a coronavirus outbreak that is expected to have a devastating impact on first-quarter growth, policy sources said.— AFP

China readies measures to stabilize economy

Govt may lower planned 2020 economic growth target of around 6%

BEIJING: Chinese policymakers are readying measures to support an economy jolted by a coronavirus outbreak that is expected to have a devastating impact on first-quarter growth, policy sources said. The sources said the government is debating whether to lower the planned 2020 economic growth target of around 6 percent, which many private sector economists see as well beyond China's reach.

With the death toll from the virus epidemic climbing to over 420 and risks to growth mounting, China's central bank is likely to lower its key lending rate - the loan prime rate (LPR) - on Feb. 20, and cut banks' reserve requirement ratios (RRRs) in the coming weeks, said the sources who are involved in internal policy discussion.

"Currently, monetary policy is being loosened, but the central bank will follow a step-by-step approach and watch the virus situation," said a policy insider. The

People's Bank of China (PBOC) has already pumped in hundreds of billions of dollars into the financial system this week as it attempted to restore investor confidence and as global markets shuddered at the potentially damaging impact of the virus on world growth. In the past two days, the PBOC has injected 1.7 trillion yuan (\$242.74 billion) through open market operations.

In order to minimize job losses, China's stability-obsessed leaders are likely to sign-off on more spending, tax relief and subsidies for virus-hit sectors, alongside further monetary easing to spur bank lending and lower borrowing costs for businesses, according to the policy insiders. "We have policy reserves and will step up policy support for the economy. The most urgent task is to put the virus outbreak under control," said a source who advises the government, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Support measures will be con-

centrated on the retail, catering, logistics, transportation and tourism sectors, which are likely to be hit hard and are especially vulnerable to job losses, they said.

Increased government spending could push up the annual budget deficit relative ratio to 3 percent this year from 2.8 percent in 2019, and local governments could be allowed to issue more debt to fund infrastructure projects, the policy insiders said. Policymakers deem targeted measures as more effective than unfettered credit easing at this stage, given that the outbreak has weighed on factory and investment activities due to the extended holiday in some regions, the insiders said.

The Lunar New Year holiday has been effectively extended by 10 days in many parts of China including powerhouse regions such as Shandong province and the cities of Suzhou and Shanghai, while transport net-

works have been curtailed to curb the spread of the disease. More than 40 foreign airlines have suspended flights to China.

"It's necessary to step up policy support for the economy but we don't need to use strong stimulus at this stage," said one of the policy insiders. While Beijing has rolled out a series of support measures in the last two years, mainly in the form of higher infrastructure spending and tax cuts, leaders have pledged they will not embark on massive stimulus like that during the 2008-09 global crisis, which saddled the economy with a mountain of debt.

The PBOC has cut the RRR, or the amount of cash that banks must hold as reserves, eight times since early 2018, with the latest reduction taking effect on Jan. 6. It has also lowered its key lending rates modestly since August. — Reuters

TCL set to end deal making BlackBerry smartphones

SAN FRANCISCO: Chinese electronics group TCL will stop producing BlackBerry-branded smartphones this year, the companies said Monday, leaving it unclear whether that will be the end of the line for the once-dominant handsets. At the end of August, TCL will no longer have rights to design, make or sell BlackBerry smartphones, the Canadian company said in a message shared on Twitter.

"The future is bright for both TCL Communication and BlackBerry Limited, and we hope you will continue to support both as we move ahead on our respective paths," the post read. Canada-based BlackBerry licensed its smartphone technology to TCL in 2016 in an effort to revive its fortunes in a smartphone market now dominated by Apple and Android-powered handsets.

BlackBerry did not disclose any plans for the future of its once-dominant smartphone line. Key2 model smartphones introduced in 2018 were still being promoted at the BlackBerry website on Monday.

TCL unveiled Key2 in mid-2018, combining a physical keyboard with a 4.5-inch screen and powering it with the Google-backed Android



In this file photo, a BlackBerry smartphone is shown off behind closed doors at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.—AFP

operating system. BlackBerry's share of the global smartphone market has fallen to virtually zero since it dominated the market with its physical keyboard design a decade ago.

The rise of Apple's iOS and Android-powered handsets with touchscreens and "apps for that" prompted BlackBerry to abandon the market to concentrate on software and services. Under its agreement with TCL, BlackBerry remains in control of software and security on smartphones, while TCL produced the handsets, abandoning the former BlackBerry OS software. TCL also produces smartphones under the Alcatel brand.—AFP

AirAsia's Tony Fernandes quits amid Airbus bribery probe

KUALA LUMPUR: AirAsia's colorful chief executive Tony Fernandes has stepped aside from the company while authorities probe unusual payments at the Malaysian carrier, as the fallout from a \$4 billion bribery fine at Airbus reverberates across the industry.

The shock decision came after Britain's Serious Fraud Office (SFO) released details of a probe that found individuals associated with the plane-maker had paid to secure deals with AirAsia and its long-haul unit AirAsia X. Fernandes and executive chairman Kamarudin Meranun said in a statement late Monday: "We are relinquishing our executive roles with immediate effect for a period of two months, or such other period that the companies may deem fit."

They added that they "categorically deny any and all allegations of wrongdoing or misconduct on our part as directors of AirAsia. We would not harm the very companies that we spent our entire lives building up to their present global



In this file photo taken on June 10, 2004, AirAsia CEO Tony Fernandes poses with cabin crew of his budget airline AirAsia, the region's first no-frills carrier, at the launch of its first service to Macau.— AFP

status". They will remain with the airline as advisors, they said.

Malaysia's anti-corruption commission said on Saturday it was empowered to investigate any act of corruption committed by citizens or permanent residents anywhere outside the country. Two other agencies in Malaysia, including the aviation agency and the Securities Commission, reportedly have started their own probe. Fernandes has been one of Airbus's most loyal customers and his Malaysia-based budget airline, which he

bought for one ringgit (25 cents at the current rate) in 2001, is the European manufacturer's largest customer for single-aisle jets. Airbus is the only plane supplier to AirAsia.

The news has sent shares in AirAsia plunging 20.9 percent since Monday following the release of the SFO's investigation, with the price at its lowest since September 2015. Tan Kam Meng, analyst with local brokerage TA Securities, warned of further losses if Fernandes and Kamarudin are charged.— AFP

Business

NBK Economic Report

Kuwait's project awards fall short of expectations in 2019

Project activity shows downward trend over last four years, but may pick up in 2020

KUWAIT: The pace of project awards in 4Q19 slowed to a historically weak KD 180 million, compared to KD 281 million awarded in 4Q18, which is consistent with a continued downward trend in project activity over the last four years. Total awards stood at KD 1.1 billion in 2019, an exceptionally low figure, despite an initially planned figure of KD 4.4 billion at the start of the year. This was largely due to delays, prolonged bid negotiations and various technical difficulties, especially in the challenging area of public-private partnerships.

Tight spending constraints imposed by the Ministry of Finance which are aimed at curbing a growing deficit may have been a further contributing factor, according to a report by MEED Projects. The Transport sector saw the least activity in 2019, with only KD 147 million worth of projects awarded, followed by the Power and Water sectors with KD 220 million. By contrast, the Construction sector saw decent activity, with nearly KD 500 million in awards, accounting for just under half of 2019's total annual awards.

According to MEED Projects, some KD 8 billion worth of projects are planned for 2020, mostly in the petrochemical sector, but given the recent trend of delays and setbacks, we expect a much smaller figure to materialize. A large part of expected 2020 awards hinges on KIPIC's highly anticipated Al-Zour Petrochemical Complex, scheduled for 4Q20 and valued at KD 2.85 billion. Additional large projects are also expected, in the power sector with the Dibdiba solar power plant and the KAPP/MEW Khiran IWPP valued at KD 360 million and KD 1 billion, respectively.

Transport

The transport sector saw exceptionally weak activity in 4Q19, with only KD 11 million awarded. Total annual awards stood at KD 150 million, an 8-year low, coming largely from the Public Authority for Housing Welfare's (PAHW) Low Cost Residential Project: Infrastructure Works project valued at KD 67 million awarded in 1Q19. Looking forward, awards may rise in 2020, with about KD 1.3 billion planned during the

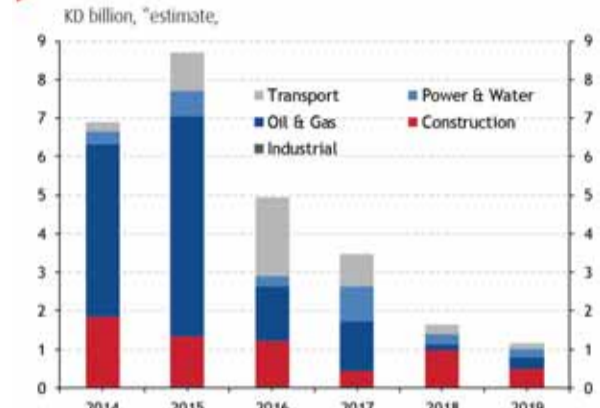
first three quarters of 2020. Notable upcoming projects include several parts of the Northern Regional Roads (KD 444 million) and Ministry of Power and Water's (MPW)- Package 2: Landside Works (KD 345 million) as well as the Kuwait Airport Expansion: Phase 1: Package 1 (KD 150 million), which is scheduled for 1H 2020.

While the construction sector saw no awards in 4Q19, it was the leading sector in 2019 by value of projects awarded of KD 482 million, representing 42 percent of total awards. A noteworthy number of infrastructure projects took place including numerous parts of the Public Authority for Housing Welfare's (PAHW) Public Buildings in Al-Mutlaa City, with a combined value of KD 123.6 million, awarded in 3Q19. In addition to Tamdeen Group's Al-Khiraan Hybrid Outlet Mall (KD 196.8 million), and Amiri Diwan's Al-Shaheed Park third phase (KD 84 million) both awarded in 1Q19. Looking forward, KD 1.3 billion in planned projects are scheduled for 2020, but we expect a smaller figure to materialize given the potential for delays.

On a positive note, the sector saw good activity in January 2020 thanks to the award of three packages related to two key housing projects by PAHW - the Sabah Al-Ahmad and Jaber Al-Ahmad housing megaprojects, a milestone achievement by the authority given the technical challenges and complexities of public private partnerships in the past. This will be the second example of a successful PPP in Kuwait (first being North Al-Zour) and may pave the way for more future projects between the government and private sector. Two packages related to the Jaber Al-Ahmad project were awarded: the southern part (J2) commercial center spanning 145,000 sqm went to the Argaan international real estate consortium, while the mixed-use (residential/commercial) (J3) package with an area of 217,000 sqm went to the Mabaneh consortium. Finally, a single package (S2) of the Sabah Al Ahmad project, with an area of 1.29 million sqm dedicated for industrial use was awarded to Agility PWC.

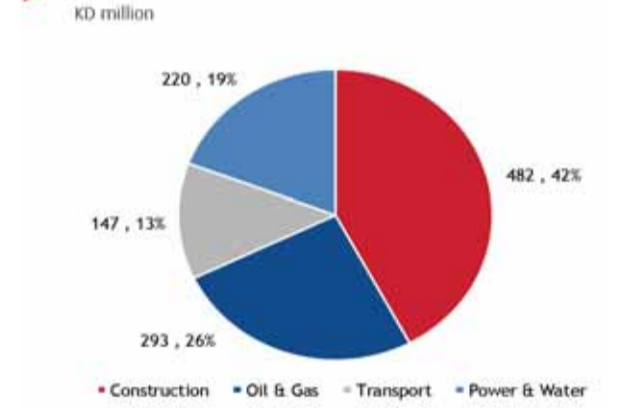
Upcoming construction sector awards include

Chart 1: Annual project awards



Source: MEED Projects, as of January 14.

Chart 4: 2019 Project Awards Breakdown by Sector



Source: MEED projects, as of January 14.

Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP) / Kuwait Municipality - South Al-Jahra Labour City (KD 149 million), planned for 2Q20, Ministry of Power and Water's (MPW) Mubarak Al-Kabeer Seaport Project: Phase 1: Package 3A (KD 271 million) and Ministry of Health's (MOH) - New Ibn Sina Hospital (KD 168 million), both planned for 3Q20.

Power and water

Despite a pressing need for power and water projects due to growing demand, awards came to a mere KD 40 million in 4Q19. Total 2019 awards for the Power & Water sectors stood at KD 220 million, falling short of 2018's KD 260 million. Awarded projects include several parts of PAHW's - 400kV Main Transformer Stations, at a combined value of KD 90 million awarded in 3Q19 and the Ministry of Electricity and Water's (MEW) - Construction of Ground Tanks at West Finatees (KD 18 million) awarded in 4Q19. The outlook for the power and water sector may improve in 2020 with about KD 1.9 billion in planned projects, including the Kuwait National Petroleum Company's (KNPC) - Al-Dibdibah Solar PV Power Plant in

Shagaya Renewable Energy Complex (KD 360 million) and KAPP/MEW - Al Khiran IWPP Plant 1800 MW (KD 1 billion), planned for 1Q20 and 3Q20, respectively.

Oil, gas and chemicals

The oil and gas sector saw about KD 122 million in project awards in 4Q19 stemming from a single project: Kuwait Oil Company's (KOC) 11 Patterns Well Hook-up & Associated Works. Total 2019 project awards came to about KD 293 million, most of which came through in 2Q19 (KD 167 million), including KOC's New Strategic Gas Export Pipeline from North Kuwait to MAA (KD 144 million). Looking forward, the oil and gas sector may only see about KD 435 million in project contracts in 2020 coming largely from the gas sector, with KOC's Jurassic Non Associated Phase 2: JPF 4 & 5 valued at a combined KD 270 million, due in May 2020. Kuwait's typically quiet chemical sector should see some much-anticipated movement in 2020, with Kuwait's Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) - Al Zour Petrochemical Complex. The mega-project is set to be awarded in 4Q20 and is valued at KD 2.85 billion.

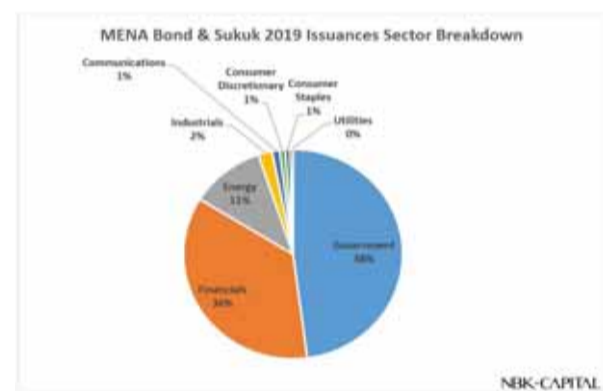
NBK Capital Fixed-Income Report

\$111bn in total debt issuances in 2019, record growth of 17.6%

KUWAIT: Global fixed-income markets continued their positive momentum in the last quarter of 2019 as a coordinated global tightening policy from major Central Banks created a positive backdrop for the asset class. As anticipated, the US Federal Reserve cut its policy rate by 25 basis points (bps) during the meeting in October. This has brought the total number of cuts for the year to three, and lowered the policy rate by 75bps, to a range of 1.50 percent - 1.75 percent.

The reference yield on 10-year US treasury treasuries closed the quarter at 1.92 percent, up 25bps as risks around the US-China trade conflict receded following the announcement of the Phase 1 trade deal. The deal is expected to result in the cancellation of previously scheduled tariffs. Notwithstanding the yield rise in Q4, the reference yield on the 10-year US treasuries closed 77bps lower on a year-to-date basis.

In the fourth quarter of 2019, all central banks in the GCC reduced their policy rates by 25bp, following the Federal Reserve's steps. Investment grade sovereign issuers in MENA saw their 5-years risk premium tightening by 18bps on average in the fourth quarter. The equivalent spread declined by a larger amount for sub-investment grade countries: CDS of Bahrain and Oman dropped by 60 and 90bps respectively during the same period. The risk premium of all GCC countries declined in 2019 as perceived risk in the region receded.



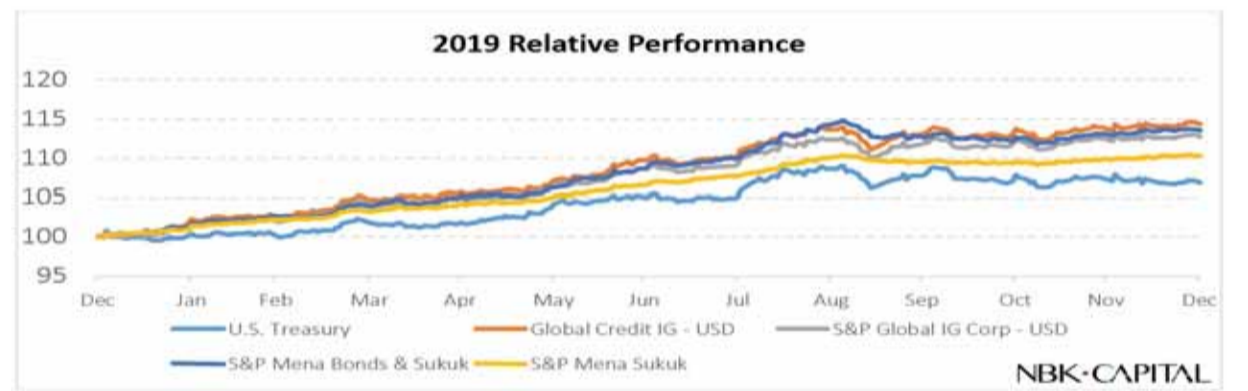
GCC inclusion in the JP Morgan Emerging Market Bond Index was arguably the larger catalyst for regional fixed-income performance in 2019. The inclusion of the sovereign debt of five GCC countries attracted new inflows and improved the liquidity of regional debt market. Regional fixed-income markets performed in line with their global peers during the year.

Total Return of Selected Fixed Income Indices

Global and Regional Indices	Q4	2019
Bloomberg Barclays US Treasury	-0.79%	6.86%
Bloomberg Barclays Global USD Credit Investment Grade	1.18%	14.30%
S&P USD Global Investment Grade Corporate Bond Index	0.89%	12.69%
S&P Mena Bonds & Sukuk	0.77%	13.55%
S&P Mena Sukuk	0.76%	10.30%

Update on Primary Issuances in MENA:

MENA entities borrowed a total amount of \$18.2 billion in Q4. The financial sector dominated primary deals representing around 65 percent of total volume while governments contributed to 35 percent. Overall, total



issuances in the 2019 reached a record level of \$111.2 billion, an increase of 17.6 percent when compared to 2018. Issuances were met with a strong demand from a growing investor base and performed relatively well in the secondary market.

Issuances in Q4

Kuwait: NBK launched a \$750 million AT1 perpetual bond with a coupon rate of 4.50 percent. KIPCO borrowed \$500 million in 7-year senior bond issuance with a coupon rate of 4.23 percent.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:

The Saudi Arabian Government borrowed \$2.5 billion with a 10-year sukuk deal. The issuance has a profit rate of 2.97 percent. Dar Al-Arkan issued a 6-year \$600 million sukuk with a profit rate of 6.75 percent. Arabian Centres borrowed \$500 million in a debut 5-year sukuk with a profit rate of 5.38 percent.

United Arab Emirates:

The Abu Dhabi Government owned Mubadala raised \$3.5 billion in a three-tranche bond transaction with maturities 5, 10, and 30 years. Another Abu Dhabi

related entity, Aldar, borrowed \$500 million in a 10-year Sukuk deal with a profit rate of 3.88 percent. Sharjah Government issued a 10-year \$750 million Sukuk with a profit rate of 3.23 percent. Majid Al-Futtaim Properties borrowed \$600 million with an 11-year Sukuk deal. The issuance has a profit rate of 3.93 percent. Dubai Islamic Bank raised \$750 million in a 6-year Sukuk with a profit rate of 2.95 percent.

Other issuances:

Masraf Al-Rayan borrowed \$500 in a 5-year Sukuk deal. The issuance has a profit rate of 3.02 percent. The Egyptian Government raised \$2 billion in a 3-tranche deal, with maturities at 2023, 2032 and 2059. The deals have coupon rates of 4.55 percent, 7.05 percent and 8.15 percent, respectively.

Regional Primary Market Highlights

Market	Q4	2019
MENA Bond & Sukuk (in billion of USD)	18.2	111.2
MENA Sukuk (in billion of USD)	7.3	20.3

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.811
Indian Rupees	4.269
Pakistani Rupees	1.987
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.675
Nepali Rupees	2.664
Singapore Dollar	225.330
Hongkong Dollar	39.239
Bangladesh Taka	3.547
Philippine Peso	5.996
Thai Baht	9.935
Malaysian Ringgit	77.916

GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	81.294
Qatari Riyal	83.730
UAE Dirham	791.813
Bahraini Dinar	809.490
UAE Dirham	83.000

ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	21.550
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	19.326
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.224
Tunisian Dinar	114.100
Jordanian Dinar	429.960
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.203
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.375

US Dollar Transfer	304.650
Euro	341.660
Sterling Pound	405.640
Canadian dollar	232.380
Turkish lira	52.260
Swiss Franc	320.010
US Dollar Buying	297.200

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	304.300
Canadian Dollar	230.485
Sterling Pound	402.095
Euro	338.810
Swiss Franc	295.780
Bahrain Dinar	809.245
UAE Dirhams	83.250
Qatari Riyals	84.490
Saudi Riyals	82.040
Jordanian Dinar	430.480
Egyptian Pound	19.320
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.673
Indian Rupees	4.260
Pakistani Rupees	1.967
Bangladesh Taka	3.552
Philippines Peso	5.971
Cyprus pound	18.105
Japanese Yen	3.805
Syrian Pound	1.590
Nepalese Rupees	2.678
Malaysian Ringgit	74.945
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	43.795

Thai Bhat	10.735
Turkish Lira	51.320
Singapore dollars	225.111

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.389304	0.403204
Czech Korune	0.005338	0.014638
Danish Krone	0.040992	0.045992
Euro	0.329260	0.342960
Georgian Lari	0.105538	0.105538
Hungarian	0.000908	0.001098
Norwegian Krone	0.028853	0.034053
Romanian Leu	0.053532	0.070382
Russian Ruble	0.004777	0.004777
Slovakia	0.009111	0.019111
Slovenian Krona	0.027540	0.032540
Swiss Franc	0.308388	0.319388
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.196254	0.208254
New Zealand Dollar	0.190625	0.200125
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.223792	0.232792
US Dollars	0.300550	0.305100
US Dollars Mint	0.301050	0.305100
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.002896	0.003697

Chinese Yuan	0.042171	0.045671
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037127	0.039877
Indian Rupee	0.003633	0.004405
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002714	0.002894
Korean Won	0.000246	0.000261
Malaysian Ringgit	0.070498	0.076498
Nepalese Rupee	0.002627	0.002967
Pakistan Rupee	0.001296	0.002066
Philippine Peso	0.005864	0.006164
Singapore Dollar	0.216732	0.226732
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001320	0.001900
Taiwan	0.009962	0.010142
Thai Baht	0.009509	0.010059
Vietnamese Dong	0.000013	0.000013
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.801938	0.809998
Egyptian Pound	0.019261	0.022001
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000199	0.000259
Jordanian Dinar	0.424785	0.433785
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000101	0.000251
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021038	0.045038
Omani Riyal	0.786168	0.794069
Qatar Riyal	0.083024	0.083458
Saudi Riyal	0.080153	0.081553
Syrian Pound	0.001292	0.001512
Tunisian Dinar	0.103651	0.111651
Turkish Lira	0.044430	0.054275
UAE Dirhams	0.082311	0.083139
Yemeni Riyal	0.000990	0.001070

Business

Boubyan Bank sponsors Kuwait-Italy Expo, over 100 Italian firms to attend

Al-Sadoun: Bank is keen on supporting SMEs looking for franchises

KUWAIT: Boubyan Bank has announced the sponsorship of Kuwait-Italy Expo 2020, which is due to be held at Kuwait International Fair, Mishref, during the period from 6 to 8 February 2020 with the participation of over 100 Italian companies looking forward to collaboration opportunities in the Kuwaiti market.

In this regard, Zaid Al-Sadoun, Executive Manager - Business Banking Unit at Boubyan Bank, stated: "Boubyan Bank's sponsorship of this event stems from our keenness on supporting emerging companies in various lines of businesses, especially since the expo involves the participation of a number of Italian companies seeking opportunities of cooperation".

"Buying international franchises provides investment opportunities sought after by youth wishing to start their own businesses and breakthrough in the world of business. Kuwait-Italy Expo 2020 is a chance for youth to contract and close up deals with outstanding trademarks, and it is planned to hold an introductory workshop on the franchise concept at the headquarters of the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise

Development prior to launching the Expo," he added.

Al-Sadoun went on to assert: "Kuwait-Italy Expo 2020 is of major significance for young SMEs' entrepreneurs, who are the currently targeted segment. The expo brings successful business ideas already implemented in various sectors in Italy and presents them to the Kuwaiti youth, who are looking forward to applying for funding from the National Fund to kick off their own projects. The expo also provides a package of free legal and practical consultancy services during the expo to guide entrepreneurs on how to choose the best Italian business project and conclude a franchise contract."

Al-Sadoun also noted that a firm specialized in feasibility studies would be readily available to prepare such studies for entrepreneurs after agreement with an Italian company so that they can apply for SME funding.

Boubyan and supporting the business sector

Moreover, Al-Sadoun stressed: "Ever since establishing its Business Banking Unit, Boubyan Bank has



Zaid Al-Sadoun

been focusing on providing a variety of exceptional privileges and smart, easy and smooth banking solutions that understand the needs of various projects and entrepreneurs. A group of our young employees take care of this, as they provide 24/7 consultations to entrepreneurs in addition to understanding the nature of Kuwaiti youth and what they aspire for as soon as they think

of setting up their own business". Speaking of business management services, Al-Sadoun clarified: "There are many banking services provided by Boubyan Bank to the business sector, such as managing the company's accounts, submitting requests and applications, checking balances, obtaining account details, and performing many other online services such as depositing employee salaries, making

local and international remittances, requesting check-books and audit certificates, checking the details of all accounts, printing and downloading account statements, deposit service and many other services."

"The services also include swift and easy online employee salary transfers, POS terminals which facilitate company transactions and make them swifter and securer as well as the benefits provided by the ePay gate especially designed for companies and retailers to help them manage their online transactions," Al-Sadoun added.

Furthermore, Al-Sadoun elaborated: "The banking services and solutions include ePay service to collect company payments by sending SMS messages with receipt numbers to clients so that they can pay them online using their own debit cards in addition to the Visa corporate credit card, especially designed for companies to provide cardholders with an exceptional package of benefits and privileges and access to a number of offers and unique experiences with the world's leading trademarks and brands."

Disappointing growth hits Google parent Alphabet shares

SAN FRANCISCO: Google parent Alphabet missed revenue expectations in the fourth quarter despite stellar growth at YouTube and in the cloud, earnings figures released Monday showed.

Detailing its cloud computing and YouTube revenues for the first time, Alphabet reported that profits rose 19 percent from a year ago in the quarter to nearly \$10.7 billion as revenues increased 17 percent to \$46 billion. Alphabet and Google chief executive Sundar Pichai touted YouTube as a revenue star at the company, with ad revenue reaching \$15 billion last year in an increase of about 36 percent from 2018.

YouTube music and television premium services now have more than 20 million paid subscribers, according to Pichai. Despite assurances by executives that Alphabet sees plenty of money-making potential ahead and is investing to capitalize on long-term trends, Alphabet shares slipped more than four percent in after-market trades that followed release of the earnings figures.

The California tech giant, which dominates online search and makes the Android mobile operating system, has been working to reduce its dependence on the digital advertising which delivers most of its cash. "Our investments in deep computer science, including artificial intelligence, ambient computing and cloud computing, provide a strong base for continued growth and new opportunities across Alphabet," said Pichai.

The company said its cloud computing services took in \$2.6 billion in revenue during the last three-month period-up more than 50 percent-and nearly \$9 billion for the year.

Chief financial officer Ruth Porat said Alphabet will ramp-up hiring this year. Much of that will be engineering talent for its cloud division which competes with cloud market-leaders Amazon and Microsoft. "We are leaning into investing for long-term growth," Porat said.

"That has been a key principle here and continues to be," Google advertising took in the majority of revenue at \$38 billion in the quarter, and more than 80 percent of its annual revenues of \$162 billion. Colin Sebastian, an analyst at Baird, said the earnings report showed "a deceleration" in growth for Google, which may have been due to the impact of fewer holiday shopping days.



In this file photo taken on November 21, 2019, the Google and YouTube logos are seen at the entrance to the Google offices in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Highlighting YouTube

Despite that, Sebastian said he sees "no change to our positive long-term thesis" for Alphabet. Analyst Nicole Perrin at eMarketer said the results highlight the significance of YouTube, the popular video service for which Alphabet had not up to now disclosed financial data.

"This is something investors have been looking for, but the information should also give advertisers valuable information about the importance of YouTube as a digital ad vehicle," Perrin said.

"YouTube is growing strongly according to this report, and revenues are above where eMarketer had thought they were." Alphabet's "other bets" which include Waymo autonomous vehicles, life sciences and drone delivery, took in \$172 million in revenue in the final three months of the year, ending the 12 months with a big operating loss.

The results come with the company facing intense pressure around the globe over its dominance of the online ecosystem. It also has been at the center of a dispute over tax policy for multinational firms. Global negotiators are seeking a new treaty on how to tax digital operations spanning the globe.

"It is something we always need to take a look at," Pichai said on an earnings call with investors and others, when asked how regulatory or taxation moves could affect Alphabet's bottom line.

"We are engaged in these issues and we anticipate and structurally work on them early on." Indian-born Pichai, who had been CEO of Google, was promoted last year to the same role at Alphabet. — AFP

Britain to ban new petrol and hybrid cars from 2035

LONDON: Britain will ban the sale of new petrol, diesel and hybrid cars from 2035, five years earlier than planned, in an attempt to reduce air pollution that could herald the end of over a century of reliance on the internal combustion engine. Prime Minister Boris Johnson is seeking to use the announcement to elevate the United Kingdom's environmental credentials after he sacked the head of a Glasgow UN Climate Change Conference planned for November known as COP26.

"We have to deal with our CO2 emissions, and that is why the UK is calling for us to get to net zero as soon as possible, to get every country to announce credible targets to get there - that's what we want from Glasgow," Johnson said on Tuesday at a launch event for COP26 at London's Science Museum, alongside broadcaster and naturalist David Attenborough.

"We know as a country, as a society, as a planet, as a species, we must now act." The two-week COP26 summit is seen as a moment of truth for the 2015 Paris

Agreement to combat global warming with responsibility for persuading big polluting countries to agree more ambitious emissions cuts falling on the British hosts.

Britain has pledged to reach net zero by 2050, but Greenpeace UK Head of Politics Rebecca Newsom said Johnson needed to take broader action than cleaning up transport.

"We need a complete rethink of the way we power our economy, build homes, move around and grow our food," she said. Britain's step amounts to a victory for electric cars that if copied globally could hit the wealth of oil producers, as well as transform the car industry and one of the icons of 20th Century capitalism: the automobile itself.

Countries and cities around the world have announced plans to crack down on diesel vehicles following the 2015 Volkswagen emissions scandal and the EU is introducing tougher carbon dioxide rules. The mayors of Paris, Madrid, Mexico City and Athens have said they plan to ban diesel vehicles from city centers by 2025. France is preparing to ban the sale of fossil fuel-powered cars by 2040 and Norway's parliament has set a non-binding goal that by 2025 all cars should be zero emissions.

Electric vehicles

While some automakers may find it hard to countenance the end of the combustion engine, others have embraced a future in which electric

vehicles prevail. The ban poses a threat to German jobs as Britain is the biggest global export market for its car manufacturers, amounting to about 20 percent of global sales, and electric cars take less time to build than combustion-engined or hybrid variants. The government said that, subject to consultation, it planned to bring forward an end to the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans to 2035, or earlier if a faster transition was possible.

Diesel and petrol models still account for 90 percent of sales in Britain, and prospective buyers of greener models are worried about the limited availability of charging points, the range of certain models and the cost.

The government said last year it was providing an extra 2.5 million pounds (\$3.25 million) to fund the installation of more than 1,000 new charge points for electric vehicles on residential streets. It has also provided investment for the development of electric vehicle technology.

Johnson's launch of COP26 was marred by a stinging attack on the prime minister by the summit's former head Clare O'Neill who was sacked from the post last week. Johnson declined to answer any questions on O'Neill, but last week the government said the role would be filled by a minister. A government source suggested her replacement would most likely be announced in a wider reshuffle of government posts expected this month. —Reuters

BP annual profit slides to \$4.0bn on lower oil prices

LONDON: British energy giant BP yesterday said annual net profit slumped 57 percent to \$4.0 billion last year, hit by weaker oil prices, as long-time chief executive Bob Dudley bowed out.

The figure, equivalent to 3.6 billion euros, compared with profit after tax of \$9.38 billion in 2018, the company said in a statement marking the end of American Dudley's decade at the helm.

It was announced in October that Irish national Bernard Looney would replace Dudley, who steps down after a 40-year career at BP. Looney joined BP in 1991 as a drilling engineer, rising to lead its upstream division that comprises exploration and production.

"After almost ten years, this is now my last quarter as CEO," Dudley said in yesterday's statement.

"In that time, we have achieved a huge amount

together and I am proud to be handing over a safer and stronger BP to Bernard and his team. "I am confident that under their leadership, BP will continue to successfully navigate the rapidly-changing energy landscape," he added.

Despite the dive in annual net profit, BP's share price surged 4.0 percent in London morning deals.

"BP boosted its dividend... despite a substantial fall in profits because of weaker crude prices," noted Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Markets.com. "The worry for the oil majors now is that we see ongoing demand destruction in Asia from the coronavirus outbreak that bleeds into Brent crude prices throughout the year." BP noted that average Brent crude prices slid last year to below \$65 per barrel from above \$71 in 2018.

Benchmark Brent was trading at around \$55 yesterday after massive falls over the past week linked to the impact of coronavirus on global energy demand should the economy tank.

While traditional energy companies remain massively dependent on income from fossil fuels, in the latter years of Dudley's reign BP increasingly moved into cleaner energies, fuelled by changing public attitudes and government policies towards carbon emissions and climate change. — AFP

PRIVATE HOSPITAL	
CLINICAL POSITIONS	
Physicians	Consultants, Specialists, Senior Registrars & Registrars for the following Sub-Specialties:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Orthopedics & Sports Medicine Rheumatology Internal Medicine
Charge Nurse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +4 years of clinical experience Operational supervision of Patient care team Coordination of infection control program
Staff Nurse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 years clinical experience in relevant outpatient or rehabilitation unit.
Senior Physiotherapist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +6 years in a rehabilitation facility with 2 years of supervisory experience Works on patients with a range of Neurological, Musculoskeletal & Cardiac Conditions
Physiotherapist:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +3 years in a rehabilitation facility
Nutritionist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> +3 years of hospital based experience
* All applicants for medical position should have the following:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valid, transferable residence in Kuwait Valid License under Ministry of Health, Kuwait NOC letter from the employer
ADMINISTRATION POSITIONS	
Front Office & Contact Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Front Office & Guest Relations Manager Guest Relations Supervisor Contact Center Team Leader Guest Relations Officers Call Center Agents Housekeeping Supervisor Housekeepers
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing Manager Social Media Executive Marketing Coordinator Graphic Designer
Medical Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insurance Supervisor Insurance Coordinator Medical Records Officer
*All applicants for administrations positions should be:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fluent in English Proficient in the use of Microsoft Office
Please send your most updated CV mentioning the position applied for in the subject to: hr2020kwt@gmail.com	

Business

Service Hero Index: Widening customer expectation-satisfaction divide in Kuwait

Overall customer satisfaction stood at an ordinary score of 75.1 out of 100 in 2019

KUWAIT: Service Hero, the Kuwait-based and the region's only consumer powered customer satisfaction index, has revealed that the gap between customers' expectations and brands' ability to satisfy them has been increasing steadily over the last 10 years. The company's 2019 Customer Satisfaction Index, released yesterday, shows that overall customer satisfaction in Kuwait stood at an Ordinary score of 75.1 out of 100, falling 9.2 points against a customer expectation score of 84.3 points. This is the widest gap since the index started, for companies failing to meet customer expectations even though actual satisfaction has remained the same as last year.

Based on a robust sample of 22,514 validated assessments by consumers spanning both genders and a broad range of age, nationality and education levels, the Index shows that customer satisfaction in 2019 was nearly the same as the year before, however, customer expectation was up 2.7 points from 2018. In 2010, when the survey was launched, the divide between customer expectation and satisfaction was 2.6 points - 75.2 vs. 72.6.

Commenting on the survey results, Faten Abu-Ghazaleh, President of Service Hero, said: "We are pleased to release our 2019 Customer Satisfaction Index that incorporates a decade of data based on 300,000 collected consumer assessments in Kuwait and the UAE. As the findings of the survey indicate, consumers have progressively become content with the services offered by companies across different sectors in Kuwait. However, it is also important to note that their expectations have been increasing significantly over the years and service providers are failing to keep up the momentum. We are confident that our Index, which offers exclusive deep insights into customer needs and aspirations, will tremendously help businesses to improve their service delivery against its eight service benchmarks to offer exceptional user experiences in order to enhance customer loyalty and brand perception." All the eight key service dimensions

the Customer Satisfaction Index measures fell below expectations. Reliability had the highest customer expectation score and the biggest gap in satisfaction delivery, at 8.3 points, after Value for Money, which had the lowest expectation and satisfaction scores at 78.2 and 69.6 respectively. Staff scored the highest in customer satisfaction followed by Reliability, meaning brands have remained keen on hiring employees who have a service attitude and have improved elements that strengthen Reliability.

Companies have yet to apply an approach that enables their customers to feel they are getting their money's worth as none of the service dimensions, including Product Quality, Speed, Call Center, Location, and Website, met the criteria of incredible service with 90 points and above to feature in the 'Heroic' ranking. Meanwhile, Value for Money received the 'Bland' grade with the bare minimum of what users expect.

Of the 18 industry categories on the Index, four featured in the 'Good' ranking, including Cafés, which delivered the strongest performance in customer satisfaction at 83.1 points, and Health Clubs, Casual Dining, New Car Sales, and Clothes at 81 points. Internet Service Providers (ISPs) bottomed out with a score of 61.9 points, followed by Mobile Operators, Home Furniture, and Airlines, with all four categories receiving a 'Bland' grade. Local Brands, Fast Food, Fine Dining, Retail Banks, Islamic Banks, Car Service, Electronics, Supermarkets, and Private Hospitals scored between 70 and 80 to be ranked as 'Ordinary'.

As reflected in the Kuwait index for complaint resolution at an Ordinary score of 72.5, ineffective complaint resolution has remained the biggest impediment to achieving customer satisfaction for many industry categories. As a result of not delivering even the bare minimum level of service in quickly and effectively rectifying problems as they occur, ISPs and Mobile Operators were the lowest scoring categories on this front, with 'Unheroic' scores of 51.4 and 58.2 points respectively. Car Service, at 16 per-



cent, and Fast Food, at 11 percent, are the two categories that have improved the most since 2010 in overall satisfaction, while ISPs saw the biggest drop at 10 percent, followed by Home Furniture and Supermarkets at 6 percent and 5 percent respectively.

In terms of satisfaction by different customer demographic groups, female consumers continue to be more satisfied than their male counterparts and customers aged over 60 have the highest satisfaction rate, whereas Arabs are least satisfied with the service provided by companies,

followed by Kuwaiti citizens. Consumers in their 50s and those who hold Master's or PhD degrees also had the lowest satisfaction rate. Service Hero adheres to ESOMAR principles (the European society of opinion and market research) and is overseen by an independent Advisory Council. The Advisory Council includes the Director of Research from the American Customer Satisfaction Index as well as academic and independent members from leading private universities in Kuwait and the UAE and established companies.

Gulf Bank launches new economic research unit

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank recently launched their Economic Research Unit, which aims to prepare detailed analytical studies and compile reports on the most important economic issues in both the region and the world. Among the new unit's most important tasks is preparing studies that the Bank's senior management can use to assist in their decision-making process and in setting the Bank's strategy.

The new reports will also pave the way for Gulf Bank to provide even more dedicated services to its clients, allowing customers to achieve their financial goals. As part of its commitment to raising the state of financial awareness in the region, Gulf Bank will also be making the new reports and relevant studies accessible to the general public through its various media channels, including social media.

The unit kicked off its activities in October 2019 with an economic forum on the real estate market in Kuwait. The economic forum, which was organized by Gulf Bank, was attended by a group of specialists from the public and private sectors. The Economic Research Unit also launched its first economic report, titled "Economic Insight Report," which details the current demographic makeup of Kuwait. The report is the first of a series of reports that aim to discuss various financial and economic subjects with the goal of educating readers and guiding decision-makers. The Economic Research Unit also prepares the Weekly Market Brief, which summarizes the most important financial and economic events of the week.

Keeping in line with Gulf Bank's commitment to social responsibility and economic sustainability, the Economic Research Unit also prepares short weekly videos presented by Tareq Al-Saleh, Deputy General Manager of the Economic Research Unit at Gulf Bank. The videos aim to promote financial literacy and create a culture of financial awareness, and cover a variety of topics including Fintech, investment, saving, and general tidbits about the state of the economy. Tareq Al-Saleh, Deputy General Manager of the Economic Research Unit at Gulf Bank, said: "The establishment of the Economic Research Unit is a natural development for a bank the size of Gulf Bank. We have a large and diversified client base, and we strive to raise awareness in our society as part of our social responsibility initiatives, so it is only natural that we develop our service offering to include various reports based on sound economic data and financial research.

We are delighted to have launched Gulf Bank's weekly one-minute videos in which we provide simple tips related to personal finance and also simplify a variety of financial topics that some may think are too complex or difficult to understand. We are looking forward to offering our clients even more services and activities in the future, which will include panel discussions with industry experts, various studies and financial reports, and more financial tips on social media."

NBK reveals winner of KD 125,000 in Al-Jawhara monthly draw

KUWAIT: In a commitment to always provide customers with the best services and products as well as rewarding them, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announced Ahmad Abdulhadi Marzouq Ahmad as the winner of the KD 125,000 prize in Al-Jawhara monthly draw for January 2020. The draw was held live on FM 88.8 Kuwait Pulse, with the attendance of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and NBK. Al-Jawhara Account monthly and quarterly draws are supervised and audited by Deloitte.

Customers of Al-Jawhara Account are automatically enrolled in the draws. For every KD 50 deposited into their account, they receive a chance to win KD 5,000



weekly, KD 125,000 monthly and KD 250,000 as the quarterly grand prize. If no withdrawal or transfers occur on the account during the required period, customers will receive an additional chance to enter the draw for every KD 50 held in the account, doubling their chance to win.

"We are pleased to be announcing Al-Jawhara winner in this monthly draw. This account is ideal for every mem-

ber of the family as it is an efficient account to earn interest, grow savings as well as plan for the future," stated Hisham Al-Nusf, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait.

"Al-Jawhara Account offers many services and benefits, and every account holders have the chance to win," he added. Al-Nusf affirmed that anyone could open an Al-Jawhara Account by visiting the nearest NBK Branch, while NBK Customers can open an account through NBK Mobile Banking or NBK Online Banking.

He further said that NBK continues to work on rewarding its customers and providing them with a unique banking experience that is advanced and secure. NBK also announced the winners in Al-Jawhara's weekly draws for the month of January who were: Esraa Khudhair Ahmad Khudhair Abdullah, Zaher Yousef Mahmoud Alhamadi and Fadhah Sulaiman Jassim Alghanim. Since 2012, the National Bank of Kuwait has rewarded loyal customers with a total worth of prizes up to KD 2,200,000 in the weekly, monthly, and quarterly Al-Jawhara draws. NBK is committed to introduce customers with a diversified set of offers and rewards that meet their aspirations throughout the year. It also offers them the most outstanding, disruptive and secure banking services.

Abdulaziz Al-Bloushi becomes a millionaire with Ooredoo Kuwait

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait, first to launch innovated digital services in Kuwait announced the winner of the Nojoom millionaire, a campaign which is part of its award winning Nojoom Rewards Program. The winner of the one million Nojoom points worth KD 1,500, Abdulaziz Al-Bloushi, was announced in a draw held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry at the company's headquarters in Kuwait City. Over 15,000 customers joined the competition on the company's Instagram account.

Ooredoo is committed to providing customers with a comprehensive experience that enriches their lives and meets their expectations, this is portrayed through the Nojoom Rewards Program which has been tailor made to offer members free upgrades, vouchers and discounts from a large variety of partners to meet their lifestyle needs. In addition, customers can earn more Nojoom points from our most recent partners which include Kuwait Finance House, Booking.com, Floward, Joyalukkas, Cozmo, Mr. Fix, White Dental, Paintball Kuwait, Cafe Supreme, Breezyn, Mashawi, Chocolateness and many more to come in 2020.

Ooredoo has carefully selected



partners for our Nojoom program to cover the main industries in Kuwait, which include Eureka, Crowne Plaza Hotel, Jarir Bookstore, Starbucks, H&M, Debenhams, Foot Locker, Mothercare, Boots, Vision Express, Pinkberry, Jazeera Airways, Al-Rifai, Safat Home, Bumper and Burger King to ensure that all customers get a rewarding experience.

The Nojoom Rewards Program has many benefits which include transferring Nojoom points to friends and family, donating Nojoom points for charitable causes, selecting specific Ooredoo Services and top-ups,

exchanging Points to Miles with leading Airline Companies such as Kuwait Airways and Qatar Airways as well as redemption for partners' cash voucher which are readily accessible through www.ooredoo.com.kw or the My Ooredoo app.

Established in 2012, the Nojoom Rewards Program has been continuously revamped to match the Kuwaiti lifestyle, which is modern and youthful and meets local and international trends. Nojoom has been awarded the best loyalty program in the Middle East and Africa for three consecutive years in 2012, 2013, and 2014.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds unveils 'Heart to Heart' jewelry collection

KUWAIT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one among the largest jewelry retailers globally with a strong retail network of over 250 outlets spread across 10 countries launched a special collection of diamond and 18K gold jewelry named 'Heart to Heart' collection to celebrate the season of love. 'Heart to Heart' jewelry collection showcases exclusive jewelry to symbolize the best way to express your love. As the demand for heart shaped jewelry increases during this season of love, the jewelry retailer launched the exclusive collection to cater to the customer demand.

This unique jewelry collection is a perfect gift to express true emotions to your loved ones. With prices starting from as low as KD 65, there is something to fit everyone's budget.

Apart from the pendants in diamonds and 18k, customers can also choose the heart shaped beautifully crafted bangles, bracelets and rings to gift your loved ones. The company has also launched a special 2 in 1 Pendant which can be worn in 2 different ways. To add more delight to this occasion, the customers can also avail a branded Kenneth Cole watch or Giordano watch absolutely free with this limited edition diamond jewelry. This offer will be available at their outlets until 15th February 2020.

Apart from these, Malabar Gold & Diamonds also showcase an incredible collection of unique designs in gold and diamond jewelry from Italy, Singapore, Turkey, Bahrain, India, etc to suit the tastes and budget of its different customers. Customers can also choose gifts to their loved ones from their branded jewelry segment that includes Era - Uncut Diamond Jewelry, Ethnix - Handcrafted Designer Jewelry, Mine - Diamonds Unlimited, Precia - Gem Jewelry and Divine - Indian Heritage Jewelry.

Celebrate month of February with stc's special offers

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, kicks-off the month of February by launching special offers and promotions to celebrate Kuwait's National and Liberation Days for the entire month. stc is offering its customers exclusive postpaid plans with double the benefits as well as special offers on the latest smartphone and internet devices.

Celebrating the first month of February since the successful launch of its new brand, the Company is doubling the data packages and minutes of all its postpaid plans, as well as two additional free months on all data postpaid plans for both 4G and 5G packages. stc is also giving out free AirPods 2 or a Jawwy TV media player as special gifts for customers who commit to an iPhone 11 postpaid plan. For customers interested in getting Samsung's latest Note 10+ 5G, or Huawei Mate30 Pro 5G, stc is offering double the benefits through its various postpaid plans.

Commenting on the launch, Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) of stc, Haneen Ibrahim Al-Fulaj, said, "In line with our new strategy and initiative to enrich and enhance our customers' experience as we progress towards the digital transformation in Kuwait, we are excited to begin the month of February by offering the best value products and customer-centric packages. stc is an active and continuous supporter of Kuwait's community, celebrating the national holidays and takes this opportunity to offer its customers a chance to get more benefits through stc's postpaid plans with special offers."

Al-Fulaj said, "stc's ongoing commitment to offer the latest smartphones and devices the tech world has to offer is a result of the Company's new strategic approach to meet and exceed our customers' expectations. With our strategic approach targeting sustainable development, our focus relies on providing our customers with integrated digital solutions that contribute towards enhancing their lifestyles beyond the traditional telecom services."

Al-Fulaj concluded, "stc will continue to show its support to the local culture by participating in national events that bring together citizens, residents and tourists to celebrate Kuwait's National and Liberation Days." Stc's special offers will be offered to customers throughout the festive month and will be valid from February 1st till the 29th. In addition to that, the Company will continue to roll out exclusive promotions and initiatives as part of its ongoing celebration to mark the special occasion.



Haneen Ibrahim Al-Fulaj

What's On



LuLu Hypermarket distributes prizes to winners of 'Shop at LuLu & Win' promotion

LuLu Hypermarket, the leading retailer in the region, awarded prizes to the winners of its recent 'Shop at LuLu & Win' promotion, which was held in association with Kalyan Jewellers from 20 November, 2019 to 10 January, 2020.

The Regional Director of LuLu Group International, Kuwait, Mohamed Haris, and the Business Head of Kalyan Jewellers, Appu Murugesan, presented the six lucky winners of the promotion with 250 grams of gold each.

The prize distribution ceremony, held at the Al Rai outlet of LuLu Hypermarket on 1 February, was witnessed by a large gathering of shoppers, well-wishers and media personnel, as well as top officials of LuLu Hypermarket Kuwait and Kalyan Jewellers Kuwait.

The promotion entitled Shoppers purchasing a minimum of KD10 worth of goods at any LuLu Hypermarket in Kuwait during the promotion

period were entitled to an e-affle coupon that entered them into the grand draw to pick six winners, with each receiving 250g of gold.

With a total of 1.5 kilos of gold on offer as prizes from Kalyan Jewellers, the response to the promotion was overwhelming. To excite customers further, the promotion offered e-affle coupon holders were also eligible for other prizes from Kalyan Jewellers such as gift vouchers for gold and diamond purchases and zero percent jewelry-making charges during the promotion period.

Winners of the 'Shop at LuLu & Win' promotion were picked and their names announced at a grand draw held at the ministry of commerce premises on 14th January, in the presence of ministry officials and senior officers from LuLu Hypermarket and Kalyan Jewellers in Kuwait.

During the prize distribution ceremony, winners of the 'LuLu Travel Fest' promotion were

felicitated by LuLu hypermarket officials. The first place winner was presented with a KD 600 worth gift voucher, while the remaining 14 winners each received a KD 100 worth of gift vouchers.

The Promotion held from 5 December, 2019 to 4 January, 2020, shoppers at any LuLu outlet, who purchased a Wagon-R / Beelite / Cortigiani brand of soft or hard trolleys, were entitled to one raffle coupon, which would enter them into a raffle draw.

The 'Shop at LuLu & Win' promotion is part of the hypermarket's continued commitment to interact with their patrons at every retail touch-point. From offering high quality products at competitive prices, to providing a relaxing and comfortable shopping ambiance, to regular value-driven promotions, shopping at any LuLu Hypermarket in the country is an enjoyable and exciting experience for everyone.



CBK receives Dasman Bilingual School students

The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK), recently received a number of Dasman Bilingual School students with special needs who made a field visit to CBK's marketing and corporate communication where they were briefed about the daily tasks at both sectors.

The visiting students were escorted by CBK's corporate communication and

marketing employees to explain work at both sections and respond to students' questions about the products and services CBK offers to its clients.

The visit is part of CBK's social responsibility activities and comes with in its belief in the significance of explaining banking services to the students in a simple way in order to eventually help integrate them within the society.



The president of Chinese community in Kuwait Zhang Yongda organized 8,000 medical mask and 4,000 set of overalls from the local market and sent them by air to four hospitals in Coronavirus affected area Wuhan in Hubei province yesterday.

LuLu Hypermarket launches 'Dream Drive' promotion

LuLu Hypermarket, the largest retailer in the region, has launched a 'Dream Drive' promotion from 29 January to 14 March at all LuLu outlets in Kuwait. During the 45-day promotional period, shoppers will receive one e-affle coupon for every KD 5 worth of purchases at any LuLu Hypermarket outlet in the country. The coupon entitles shoppers to enter a raffle draw to win one of four Nissan X-Trail 2020 model Sports Utility Vehicles (SUV). In addition to the bumper prize, 100 winners will each receive KD 100 worth of gift vouchers, for a total of KD 10,000 in promotional vouchers.

LuLu Hypermarket remains committed to offering customers the widest range and largest variety of quality products from around the world at highly competitive prices. The 'Dream Drive' promotion is part of this customer-oriented approach that aims to ensure customer satisfaction at every retail touch-point, and add value to the shopping experience at the hypermarket.



15 medals for The Regency Hotel at HORECA Kuwait 2020

The sparkling talents of The Regency Hotel Kuwait were shining at HORECA Kuwait 2020 competitions, where only 19 participants from the Culinary and Housekeeping divisions were able to grasp 15 impressive medals.

Among the won medals, 2 were first gold medals in the Sushi competition and the Six Course Set Menu competition, and 3 were gold medals in respective competitions of Vegetable Carving and Mystery Basket competition; in addition to 5 silver and 5 bronze medals in other competitions.

On this occasion, Otto Kurzendorfer, the General Manager of The Regency Hotel Kuwait, expressed his happiness with this achievement. "I am proud to lead such a dedicated team showing again great talents and skills. This success is a clear evidence of the progress and efforts made by our team to bring the best quality of food and a world-class level of service to our guests to ensure the highest level of satisfaction and hospitality. Special thanks to Executive Chef Dirk Heinen and Executive Housekeeper Riyaz Haniffa for skill-

fully leading their respective teams through the ever-challenging competition" said Otto.

The Regency Hotel Kuwait is a five-star hotel with 203 elegantly designed rooms and suites, reflecting the traditional style and values of the region. The hotel is a luxurious retreat with exceptional hospitality at its core. It is ideally situated on the shores of the Arabian Gulf, located just a short 20 minutes drive from Kuwait International Airport and within easy reach to Kuwait's prime business, shopping and entertainment destinations.

Love is in the air at Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait

Love is in the air at Four Seasons Hotel Kuwait at Burj Alshaya as the city's most exclusive address prepares to host a Valentine's Day celebration like no other. Couples can create sweet memories together as the Hotel embraces the art of romance with exquisite dining, dreamy Valentine-themed decor and heart-warming entertainment.

A tempting selection of treats and desserts awaits at the Hotel's luxurious candy bar corner, setting the mood for the sweetest of occasions. The Valentine's theme will be brought to life with balloons and table decorations. Couples will also have the chance to capture tender moments at the giant heart-shaped photo booth on the 21st floor. Meanwhile, a passionate live music performance will help couples celebrate in perfect harmony, filling the air with sweet melodies and setting the mood for a fairy tale evening that creates memories to cherish for a lifetime.

It has often been said that good food is the way to a man or woman's heart. With this in mind, the Four Seasons culinary teams have prepared delightful menus that make the Hotel's acclaimed restaurants the hottest ticket in town for dining connoisseurs with a taste for romance. Guests can choose to

savour the exotic flavours of modern far-eastern cuisine at Sintoho, Kuwait's trendsetting rooftop gourmet destination where stunning city views and live music will set hearts fluttering. Meanwhile, time-tested culinary traditions and the romance of Italy join hands in the intimate surroundings of the neighbouring Dai Forni restaurant, where every dish is a labour of love garnished with a hearty dose of Italian flair.

Couples who wish to celebrate the season of love in style can book their own private cabana at the poolside Al Bandar restaurant, which promises a true VIP experience. Exquisite cuisine will be complemented by a private butler service and romantic touches including a personalised menu signed by Executive Chef Sebastiano Spriveri. Guests can also enjoy a cosy meal with a table for two at Elements restaurant, the Hotel's market-style dining venue.

The celebrations begin at 7pm, with packages starting from KWD

65 (Sintoho), KWD 80 (Dai Forni), KWD 200 (Al Bandar Cabanas), KWD 35 (Al Bandar Lounge), and KWD 50 (Elements) per guest.

Couples can experience the ultimate Valentine's Day getaway with the Hotel's Romance Package, which offers themed in-room amenities, a bottle of Zahara and a celebration cake, together with 15% savings on wellness treatments at The Spa and Sintoho restaurant.

Guests are also invited to share an indulgent Spa experience at Kuwait's best-loved wellness destination. The two-hour 'Love Rocks' package makes the perfect treat and offers a 60-minute massage session followed by a soothing, regenerating or anti-aging Biologique Recherche facial and complimentary access to the indoor pool and Jacuzzi for a truly rejuvenating experience.

The Hotel's Valentine's Day dining packages are always popular with guests, therefore advance booking is recommended.



Health & Science

Blinded by light, firefly species face extinction

PARIS: Fireflies are in deep trouble, with many species facing extinction due to habitat loss and exposure to pesticides, according to the first major review of their global status, published Monday. Adding irony to injury, one of Nature's most entrancing spectacles is also being snuffed out by artificial light pollution, researchers reported in the journal *BioScience*.

More than 2,000 species of fireflies — which are, in fact, beetles — illuminate wetlands, marshes, grasslands, forests and urban parks worldwide. A few, such as the Big Dipper in the United States, seem to be flourishing. "Those guys can survive pretty much anywhere," said Sara Lewis, a biologist at Tufts University in Massachusetts and lead author of the study, based on a survey of dozens of firefly experts.

But other varieties — from the glowworms of southern England to Malaysia's synchronous fireflies and the Appalachian blue ghost, both of which draw tourists — are being extinguished by humanity's ever-expanding ecological footprint. "Some species get hit especially hard by habitat loss because they need specific conditions to complete their life cycle," said Lewis.

The Malaysian firefly *Pteroptyx tener*, for example, lives during its larval phase in riverside mangroves, many of which have been ripped up to make way for palm oil plantations and fish farms. The glowworm (*L. noctiluca*) has another problem — females are flightless, which means that can't simply buzz off to a new location when their habitat is swallowed by a suburb, commercial crop or country road.

Other species of fireflies, which eat only during their larval phase, are "dietary specialists," meaning they subsist on one or two kinds of snail, earthworm or other soft-bodied prey. When fruit orchards in Mediterranean Spain are abandoned or give way to urbanization, so too do the snails preferred by aptly named *Lampyrus iberica*, leaving the firefly larva nothing to eat.

'Flashing through the gloom'

Adult *Pteroptyx* in Malaysia, meanwhile, gather for nightly courtship displays in specific trees located along mangrove rivers. Many of those trees have been cut down. Of 10 possible drivers of extinction, experts fingered habitat loss as the top threat everywhere — except east Asia and South America.

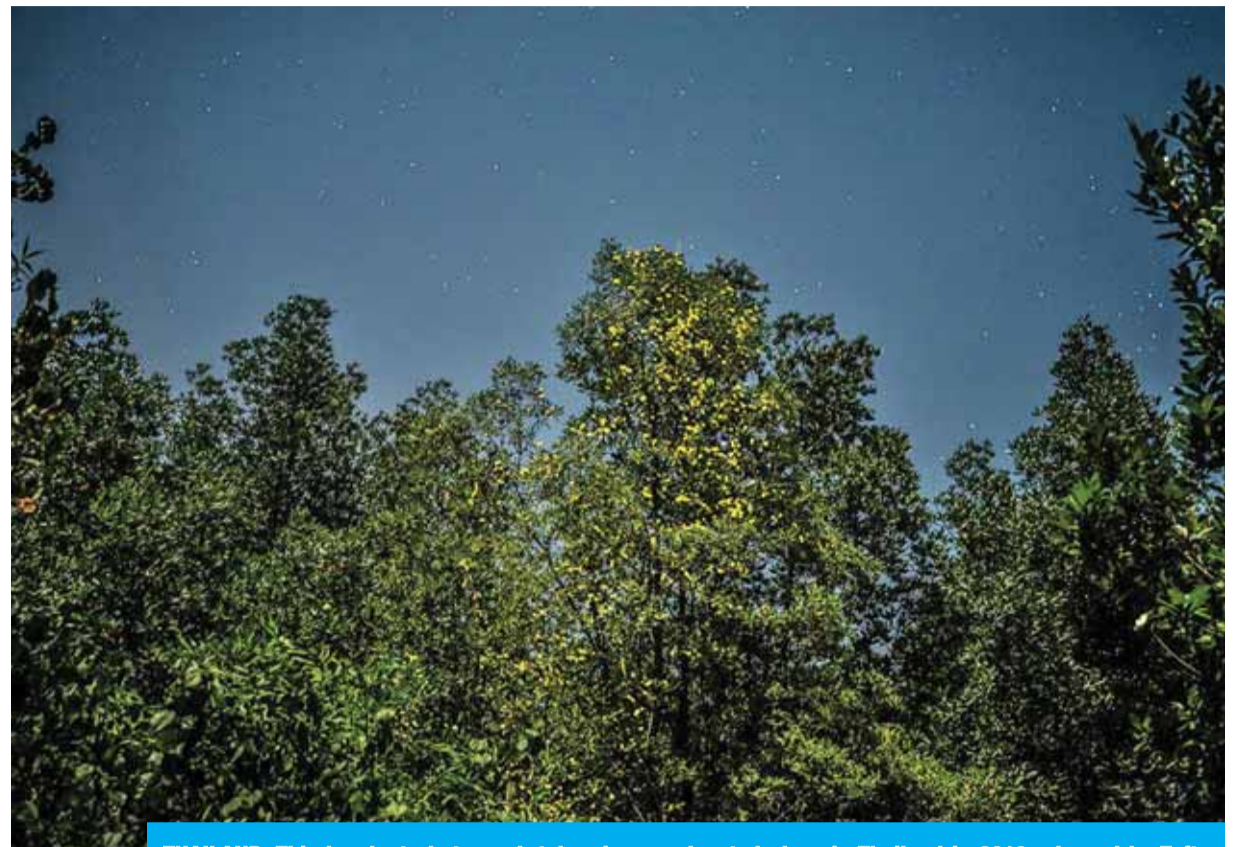
In those two regions, artificial light was seen as the biggest menace to the world's luminescent beetles. "In addition to disrupting natural biorhythms, light pollution really messes up firefly mating rituals," said co-author Avalon Owens, a doctoral student at Tufts. Many species of firefly depend on their ability to light up to find and attract mates.

To make matters worse, that window of opportunity is very narrow: while the firefly larval phase lasts months to years, adults typically live only a few days. The twinkling beetles are so focused on reproducing that they don't even eat.

The survey found that fireflies are also being decimated by commonly used insecticides, the third major threat. "Organophosphates and neonicotinoids are designed to kill pests, yet they also have off-target effects on beneficial insects," the researchers wrote.

Fireflies light up by triggering a chemical reaction — involving oxygen, calcium and an enzyme called luciferase — inside special organs in their abdomen, a process called bioluminescence. Their otherworldly glow has been an enduring source of fascination.

But firefly tourism — long popular in Japan, Malaysia and Taiwan — has also taken a toll, with fragile ecosystems damaged by too much foot traffic. The plight of fireflies at the beginning of the 21st century add a new layer of meaning to lines written more than a century ago by Canadian poet Bliss Carman. "And the fireflies across the dusk, Are flashing signals through the gloom," he wrote. While climate change is not seen as a current threat, future sea level rise and drought



THAILAND: This handout photograph taken in an unlocated place in Thailand in 2019 released by Tufts University on February 3, 2020, shows a firefly display tree. — AFP

also could accelerate the drive towards extinction. The dozen authors contributing to the study are all affiliated with the Firefly Specialist Group — set up in 2018 — of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which compiles the Red List of threatened species. — AFP

CLINIC
PAGE

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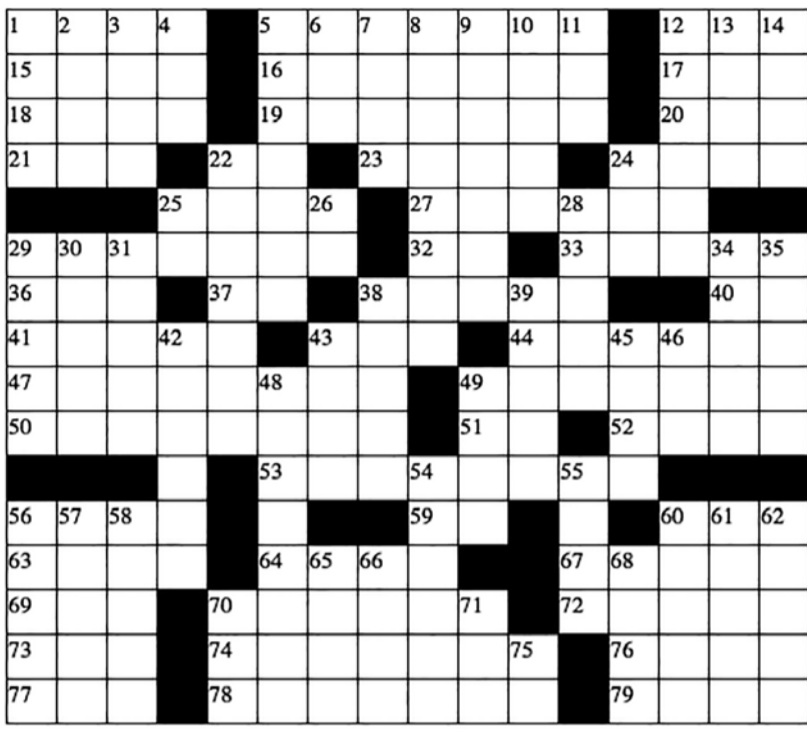
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Stars

CROSSWORD 2428



- ACROSS**
- (usually followed by 'to') Having the necessary means or skill or know-how or authority to do something.
 - A starch made by leaching and drying the root of the cassava plant.
 - Any of various units of capacity.
 - Type genus of the Majidae.
 - Having columns at one or both ends but not along the sides.
 - A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
 - Essential oil or perfume obtained from flowers.
 - Reduce to ashes.
 - Consisting of or made of wood of the oak tree.
 - 10 hao equal 1 dong.
 - Little known Kamarupan languages.
 - Stout-bodied insect with large membranous wings.
 - Pertaining to or characteristic of an ascetic.
 - A Russian river.
 - United States chemist (1839-1903).
 - The syllable naming the first (tonic) note of any major scale in solmization.
 - A state in midwestern United States.
 - The branch of engineering science that studies the uses of electricity and the equipment for power generation and distribution and the control of machines and communication.
 - Place in a line or arrange so as to be parallel.
 - Alloy of copper and tin and zinc.
 - Sweet topping especially for pies made of beaten egg whites and sugar.
 - A battle during the American Revolutionary War (1777).
 - A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
 - An annual award for outstanding achievements in television.
 - A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (trade name Clinoril).
 - A landlocked republic in northwestern Africa.
 - A ductile gray metallic element of the lanthanide series.
 - The act of scanning.
 - A river in central Europe that arises in northwestern Czechoslovakia and flows northward through Germany to empty into the North Sea.
 - (of pain or sorrow) Made easier to bear.
 - (prefix) Opposite or opposing or neutralizing.
 - Any of numerous low-growing cushion-forming plants of the genus *Draba* having rosette-forming leaves and terminal racemes of small flowers with scapose or leafy stems.
 - (of champagne) Moderately dry.
 - Having feathered wings.
 - A Kwa language spoken in Ghana and the Ivory Coast.
 - Hormone secreted by the posterior pituitary gland (trade name Pitressin) and also by nerve endings in the hypothalamus.
 - All the weapons and equipment that a country has.
 - A small cake leavened with yeast.
- DOWN**
- A woman hired to suckle a child of someone else.
 - A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
 - The dynasty that ruled much of Manchuria and northeastern China from 947 to 1125.
 - The sense organ for hearing and equilibrium.
 - Genus of tall smooth herbs of forested mountains of Europe and Asia minor.
 - The month following March and preceding May.
 - (linguistics) The form of a word after all affixes are removed.
 - A mild comatose state.
 - Brazilian tree with handsomely marked wood.
 - Resembling or characteristic of a prophet or prophecy.
 - Fermented alcoholic beverage similar to but heavier than beer.
 - African tree having an exceedingly thick trunk and fruit that resembles a gourd and has an edible pulp called monkey bread.
 - Divulge information or secrets.
 - A body of (usually fresh) water surrounded by land.
 - Enduring trying circumstances with even temper or characterized by such endurance.
 - American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).
 - A light strong brittle gray toxic bivalent metallic element.
 - The district occupied entirely by the city of Washington.
 - 100 agorot equal 1 shekel.
 - Type genus of the Soleidae.
 - Make a vibrant noise, of grasshoppers or cicadas.
 - Make difficult to perceive by sight.
 - Full of seeds.
 - Conforming to an ultimate standard of perfection or excellence.
 - A gland in which gametes (sex cells) are produced.
 - A B vitamin essential for the normal function of the nervous system and the gastrointestinal tract.
 - Delicacy highly prized in Japan but highly dangerous.
 - An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
 - A belief (or system of beliefs) accepted as authoritative by some group or school.
 - A preacher of the Christian gospel.
 - An inflammatory disease involving the sebaceous glands of the skin.
 - Someone who cuts and delivers ice.
 - In bed.
 - (of complexion) Blemished by imperfections of the skin.
 - Spring-loaded doorlock that can only be opened from the outside with a key.
 - Port city on southern Honshu on Osaka Bay.
 - Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
 - A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
 - A transparent optical device used to converge or diverge transmitted light and to form images.
 - Consisting of or made up of bone.
 - An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
 - An accountant certified by the state.
 - The 7th letter of the Greek alphabet.
 - Angular distance above the horizon (especially of a celestial object).

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Take charge of your overall health today, Aries. You'll likely wake up feeling energetic and well. Seize this opportunity to be active in doing things that will help continue your good feelings. Consider all aspects of your health, including emotional and spiritual. If you can, sit outside in the sunshine and fresh air to consider the areas of your life that could use a workout. Take a walk, do some gardening, engage in something both creative and physical.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

If there's something crafty or artsy you've had your eye on and would really like to get but can't afford, Taurus, consider making it. Even if you don't consider yourself artistic, you may surprise yourself if you give a project half a chance. There are numerous websites that cater to novices and can give you the support and instruction you need. Don't dismiss your ability. Explore this avenue and see about finding a creative niche for yourself.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

It's the perfect day to get up and head outside, Gemini. You'll likely find yourself feeling positive and energetic, and some fresh air, sunshine, and physical activity may be long overdue. Even if this is a workday for you, make the most of your breaks and lunch hour by walking. This evening may be the opportune time to get together with some friends for coffee or a favorite sporting event.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

It won't be surprising if you find yourself getting frustrated with a close friend or partner today who is far less ambitious than you, Cancer. The energy in the air can really emphasize your "go, go, go" way of reaching goals and achieving success. Others who are passive or fearful in this area may be difficult to understand. Yet each person has to do things in ways that are best for him or her. Try to be patient.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

See about using your good relationships with friends and loved ones today to get some group activities going, Leo. Chances are you'll feel pretty good and the idea of socializing will appeal to you. See about inviting people over for supper or a game of cards. If you're especially lively, some sports may be just the ticket to get you out and moving. Do whatever it takes to have some fun and get some fresh air today.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

If you're lacking a regular exercise routine, Virgo, today's a great day to turn that around. Exercise doesn't have to wear you out or hurt. Even relaxing activities like walking or yoga are excellent ways to keep you in good shape. Participating in a sport that appeals to you like volleyball or bowling combines fun with exercise. Heck, even dancing is a recognized form of exercise! See about finding something that will work for you.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Getting through today shouldn't pose too big a problem for you, Libra. You may feel a huge second wind that can give you the drive and determination to see your chores and projects through. Make some plans for this evening, such as getting together with friends or taking in an event that really intrigues you. Until then, go about your tasks bit by bit. You'll get things finished before you know it.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Don't hesitate when it comes to taking on a project or making plans today, Scorpio. Extra energy will complement your organizational skills, making the perfect combination to handle almost anything. Be sure to write down your goals and plans to help keep you focused. If you decide to tackle any cleaning today, get rid of the things you never use. Consider donating such items to charity, since there's undoubtedly someone out there who could use them.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Today should go well for you, Sagittarius. Expect to feel a renewed energy and perspective on things, especially those that are work related. Make the most of this by working toward finishing projects that are waiting for you or by cleaning and organizing your desk or broom closet. Feel confident that you'll be able to handle most any task in no time. When everything you wanted to get done is taken care of, make some plans for a little recreation. You deserve it.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Today you may notice that you're feeling very creative and ambitious, Capricorn. You might want to use these strengths to work directly on an artistic project. Or you may choose to channel that energy into activities like organizing your home or workspace. If you plan it out, there should be plenty of time to get to both if you have a mind to. Make the most of the day!



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Don't be surprised if you wake up feeling super today, Aquarius. Chances are good that you'll feel a renewed physical strength with energy to spare. That said, it might be a good day to tackle any projects that require you to use some muscle. Perhaps there's some yard work that needs to be done or furniture you want to move around. On the fun side, you might want to get to the gym for a workout or swim. Whatever the activity, today is a good day to go for it!



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

The effect from the planetary aspects will bring an end to any lethargy you've been feeling, Pisces. It's an excellent day to get up and head into the open to do something active. Walking, running, or going on a hike can make great use of both your energy and creativity. Fresh air and physical exertion will lend much to your health as well, so make the most of this. Even if you have to work today, you can always enjoy the evening.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Moods & Emotions 3

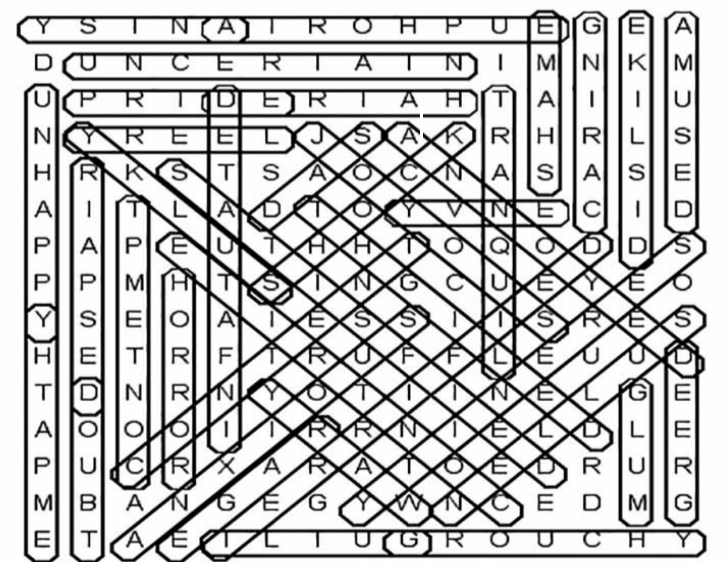
Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 13 letters spell an additional word.

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

- | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|----------|
| ANGER | EDGY | GRUMPY | OUTRAGE |
| APPRECIATIVE | ENVOIOUS | HAPPY | PUZZLED |
| ARROGANT | EXUBERANT | HOPE | REGRET |
| BITTER | FEAR | INDIFFERENT | SADNESS |
| CALM | FRANTIC | JEALOUS | SCARED |
| CHEERFUL | FRETFUL | JOLLY | SCORNFUL |
| CONFIDENT | GLEEFUL | JOYFUL | SORRY |
| CURIOS | GRATEFUL | MOROSE | SURPRISE |
| DISGUST | GRIEF | MOURNFUL | TRANQUIL |
| DUBIOUS | | NERVOUS | WORRY |

Yesterday's Solution

Moods & Emotions 2



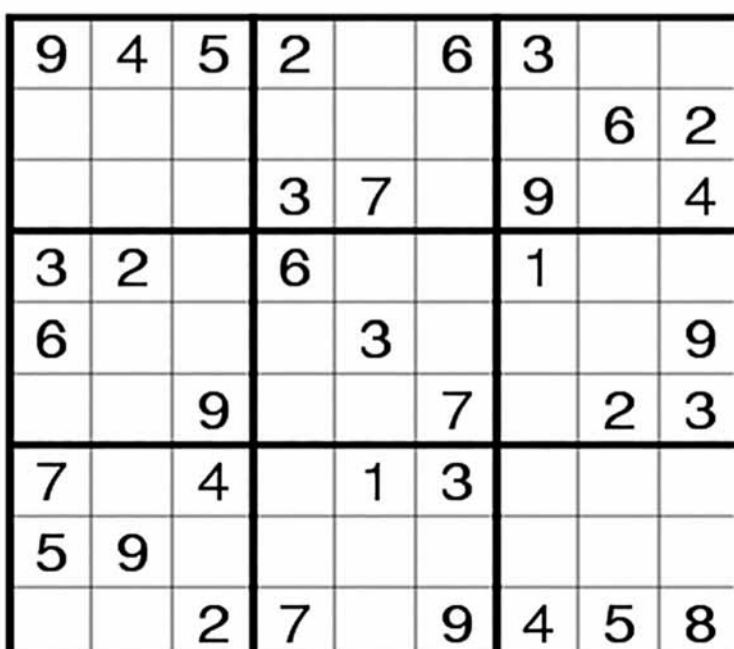
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|----------|----------|------------|-----------|
| AMUSED | DISLIKE | HORROR | SHOCK |
| ANNOYED | DOUBT | INFATUATED | SULKY |
| ANTSY | EMPATHY | JOYOUS | SULLEN |
| ANXIOUS | ENVY | LEERY | TERRIFIED |
| CARING | EUPHORIA | PRIDE | TRANQUIL |
| CONTEMPT | GLUM | RAGE | UNCERTAIN |
| CONTENT | GREED | SAD | UNHAPPY |
| CONTRITE | GROUCHY | SATISFIED | WARY |
| DELIGHT | GUILT | SERENITY | |
| DESPAIR | HATRED | SHAME | |

The hidden word is: DISCOURAGED

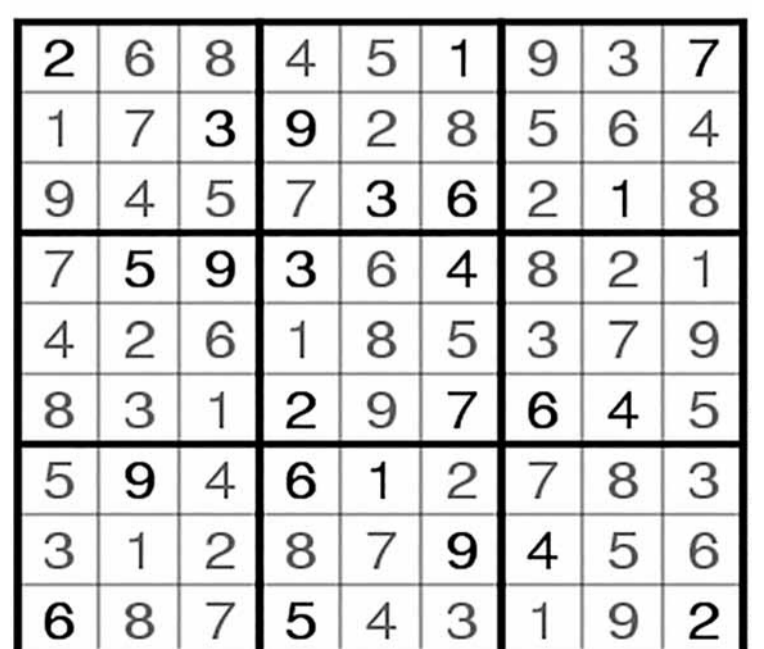
Yesterday's Solution



Daily Sudoku



Yesterday's Solution



Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2020



File photo shows the minaret and buildings of Slovenia's first mosque, designed by the Bevk Perovic Arhitekti architecture firm, in Ljubljana. Slovenia's first mosque opened its doors in the capital Ljubljana on Monday, more than 50 years after the initial request to build it was made. Muslims in the predominantly Catholic Alpine country first filed a request to build a mosque in the late 1960s while Slovenia was still part of the former Communist Yugoslavia. The community received permission 15 years ago, but ran into opposition from right-wing politicians and groups, as well as financial troubles. — AFP

Long snubbed, women of rap break old molds and claim their due

Long stereotyped as a boys' club, not least for its braggadocious lyrics and objectification of women, the rap world has seen a bevy of female stars reclaim their space. Over the past decade, diverse talent has climbed up through hip-hop's ranks, as women shun old ideas about what makes their acts marketable and the internet opens new avenues to stardom.

Women were prominent players in rap's formative years—the fierce list includes Salt-N-Pepa, MC Lyte, Foxy Brown, Lil' Kim, Lauryn Hill, Missy Elliott

2010, the number hovered at around three, according to the documentary "My Mic Sounds Nice: The Truth About Women in Hip Hop." Women who did get a break were pigeonholed as either hypersexual or tough lyricists, with the industry often pitting them against each other—perpetuating the idea that only one rap queen could rule at a time.

Major Minaj

Still, there was no shortage of innovation coming from artists even if labels weren't supporting them. "Napster made

rap crowd, and then men who just wanted to hear women rapping about sex." Minaj—who announced her retirement from rap last year, though fans are skeptical—herself has claimed credit for "reintroducing the successful female rapper back to pop culture."

"When I came out, there had been a drought of a few years where NO female rap album had gone platinum, females weren't getting budgets, the industry did NOT believe in the female rapper anymore. They had stopped generating MONEY for labels," she wrote on

opened a wealth of possibilities for women shunned by mainstream labels.

"Back in the 90s and the early 2000s, to be an artist, you had to have a big major label pushing for your video to be on TV," she told AFP at her recording studio in Brooklyn. "The internet... gave us an unfiltered chance to do what we wanted," said the statuesque artist with sparkling nail extensions, luxurious scarlet hair and leather overalls. Before, "you had to have those people... sign off on you, and you had to look a certain way and to be a certain way," she continued. "Whereas when the internet came, I don't need anyone's permission to be in the public eye—like, I'm just going to do it."

'Camaraderie'

Dai Burger—who is queer and fuses sex-positive, unapologetic lyricism with heavy club beats—said these days, "there's more camaraderie with women" in the rap world. "There's so much room for all of us. There's a thousand guys in the industry, you know, doing their thing," she said. "The girls want some action!" The ascent of hip-hop's women is not without naysayers, of course: rapper and producer Jermaine Dupri last year complained the contemporary crop of women was sex-obsessed and lacked vision.

Cardi B, who once worked as a stripper, clapped back: "First of all, I rap about my p***y because she my best friend." "There's a lot of female rappers that be rapping they a** off," she said in an Instagram rant. "Y'all don't be supporting them and they be mad dope." Iandoli is "cautiously optimistic" the growing guard of women rappers is here to stay. She said "women work smarter" and are more strategic in their bids to get ahead.

"The ethos is different—when you're buying into an industry where you know the odds are against you, you have to move differently than the guys." "I don't think there's a single woman who takes for granted her ability to get in the room," Iandoli continued. "This didn't happen by chance, it happened by hard work." — AFP

'Unfiltered chance'

The post-Minaj world features a growing pantheon including, but not limited to: America's sassy brash sweetheart Cardi B, hardcore hottie Megan Thee Stallion, punk head-banger Rico Nasty, the fast-rising duo City Girls and surrealist auteur Tierra Whack. Queens rapper Dai Burger said platforms like the video-streaming service YouTube and the DIY discovery site SoundCloud—not to mention Instagram's self-promotion powers—



This combination of file pictures shows US rappers (From left) Megan Thee Stallion, Nicki Minaj and Cardi B. — AFP

and Queen Latifah—and set the stage for future generations, leaving indelible marks on hip-hop's DNA. But if the 1990s saw women carve out room to shine, the 2000s saw them pushed aside, with labels fumbling to survive as illegal music downloads began upending standard procedure. "The industry took a nosedive—when it came to cutting the costs of everything, of course women were the ones who felt it the hardest," said Kathy Iandoli, whose recent book "God Save The Queens" details the trajectory of women in rap.

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, dozens of women rappers were signed to major labels at any given time, but by

record companies lose their minds, but it created a very strong underground," Iandoli said of the pioneering music-sharing service. "It set up the ability to create a career in a way that had never been done before, because people weren't so hellbent on getting a label." Nicki Minaj, a provocative walking work of art with a lightning-speed flow, burst onto the scene in 2010 and began changing the game.

"She was the first female hip-hop artist to really break through during that lull," Iandoli said of the Trinidadian-born artist from Queens. "Nicki was the first in a very long time who was both sexy and lyrical, so she appealed to the street

Bizarre news

Owl became obese after snacking on mice

An owl became "extremely obese" after gorging on mice and voles. The bird had been rescued from a ditch in Suffolk, with rescuers initially thinking that the creature was injured – but they soon discovered that she was simply too heavy to fly. Suffolk Owl Sanctuary revealed the bird tipped the scales at 245g, a third heavier than she is supposed to be. Fatty deposits around the owl's body were preventing her from flying effectively – and carers decided to monitor her for a few weeks to see why she had piled on the pounds. They concluded that "natural obesity" was to blame, and the place where the chubby bird was found was "crawling with field mice and voles" because of the mild December weather. The owl has now been deemed healthy enough to return to the wild, only after embarking on a "strict diet".



Police dog sniffs out wedding ring

A police dog sniffed out a lost wedding ring after its owner threw it away following a row with his wife. PD Odin, a six-year-old German shepherd, came to the rescue after PC Carol Woodall spotted a man and his friend acting suspiciously in Birmingham in the early hours of Saturday. The officer questioned what the men were doing and they told him about the missing ring. Fortunately Odin was able to sniff out the ring in less than two minutes. PC Woodall said: "Apparently the man pulled the ring off and threw it in a momentary loss of temper... but very quickly regretted his actions and was desperate to find it. "Our dogs are trained to sniff out human scent. The men said they'd been looking for quite some time and the ring was quite small, so I wasn't confident there'd be enough scent for Odin." The officer was delighted when the canine proved him wrong. He added: "Odin got a pat and thanks all round. It's nice to be nice and I was back on patrol in less than five minutes."



Cheese-themed hotel suite opens

The world's first cheese-themed hotel suite has opened in London. The Cheese Suite in Camden features themed furniture, wallpaper, cushions – and even offers cheese-scented soap in the bathroom, while guests can snuggle up for the night in cheese-themed bedding. The suite has been created by Cafe Rouge to celebrate its new "cheesy menu", but it will only be open until tomorrow with stays limited to a single night. The accommodation is self-catered and there are plenty of themed cookbooks to hand. If guests don't fancy cooking, guests can call a suitably cheesy delivery service. Jacqueline Fletcher, head of marketing at Cafe Rouge, said: "We wanted to give the nation somewhere new and exciting to be totally immersed in one of their favorite foods in none other than a cheese-themed hotel suite, while also trying some of our winter dishes from the comfort of the sofa."



Residents of an Indian village are dressing up in bear costumes to frighten monkeys. Sikandarpur village in the state of Uttar Pradesh has a population of 2,000 primates, and the monkeys have caused mayhem by throwing bricks and stones at people from high perches. Residents have taken action by buying three bear costumes and taking turns posing as the predator that scares the mischievous mammals. Village head Ram Lalit says the move has been successful, as reports of monkey attacks in the village are down since they began donning the costumes. He said: "We have now started taking turns in wearing the bear costume and roaming around the village. It was a relative who had told me about the idea, and it is actually working." The local government has said it will look to replicate in other villages if the reports of monkey attacks continue to fall. — BangShowbiz



Lifestyle | Gossip



Stormzy: Nothing will beat Glastonbury and my first MOBO

Stormzy says nothing will beat headlining Glastonbury and winning his first MOBO award. The 'Vossi Bop' hitmaker - who credits God with "blessing him" with his career success - topped the bill on the iconic Pyramid Stage at the world famous festival in Somerset, England, last summer, and has admitted that even though he may get to headline Coachella in the US and go on to win a Grammy one day, nothing will top Glastonbury and his Best Grime MOBO win in 2014. He told the March issue of GQ Magazine - of which he is the cover star - that: "There's no award that's going to beat my first MOBO. "But, of course, God willing, one day I'll get a Grammy. "I'm never going to feel like Glasto again. "But one day maybe I'll headline Coachella and then I'll have that. "That's the blessing from God. "He gave you an indescribable feeling that's so personal to you. And only you can hold it." Stormzy cried for an hour after his Glasto set because he thought he had messed up his performance due to technical glitches, however when he watched it back he was overwhelmed by how well it was received. He recalled: "I was just bawling my eyes out. "I thought, 'You have just absolutely screwed that.' I haven't cried like that since primary school. I just broke down." The 'Audacity' hitmaker - who released his second studio album 'Heavy Is the Head' in December - has compared his career highlights to winning the World Cup and vowed that there will be "more World Cups" for him to win. On what his goals are now, the rapper said: "Now I want to do it all over again. "I was standing at the pinnacle of music at 25. "It's like winning the World Cup. "I wonder how Mbappé feels. You won the World Cup. "And it's like, "Wow. I've done it ... I guess there'll be more World Cups."



Moranis could come out of retirement for Honey, I Shrank The Kids

Rick Moranis is in talks to come out of retirement for a 'Honey, I Shrank The Kids' reboot. The 66-year-old actor could reprise his role from the 1989 film as Wayne Szalinski, an inventor who accidentally shrinks his own and his next door neighbor's kids before throwing them out with the trash. Rick has not appeared in a live-action film since 1997's 'Honey, We Shrank Ourselves', although he has voiced characters in animated films, such as Disney's 'Brother Bear'. The project will be titled 'Shrunk' and is being described as a "legacyquel" meaning it will contain elements of the original film's

plot whilst also existing in the same universe as the three films in the franchise and be a continuation of the overall story arc. 'Frozen' star Josh Gad has been confirmed to star in the new movie, which will be set around three decades after the original, with Josh playing a grown-up version of Wayne's son, Nick Szalinski, who was played by Robert Olivier in the first film. According to Disney Insider, the film will see Wayne struggling to cope after losing his wife, Diane, to cancer. The report says: "Aware that the family ties have loosened over time but seemingly afraid to confront anyone directly, He has been tinkering alone

in his attic for decades, dealing with the grief of losing his wife. "When we first meet him, he has accidentally shrunk himself and is flying around on a shrunken drone - seemingly lost in a continuous of tinkering and experimenting that often puts himself and his family in jeopardy. "He later reveals he shut himself away to try and invent a solution to help shrink Diane's cancer but found it hard to cope when he ran out of time. His guilt and shame is palpable. Through the crisis of the kids getting shrunk, the truth emerges and the bonds begin to redevelop between him and his kids." The original 'Honey, I Shrank The Kids' was an unexpected box office hit, grossing \$222 million worldwide and becoming Disney's highest-grossing live-action film ever at the time, a record it held for five years. The film spawned two sequels titled 'Honey, I Blew Up the Kid' and 'Honey, We Shrank Ourselves' as well as a television show that ran from 1997 to 2000 and saw Peter Scolari take over the role of Wayne Szalinski. Disney had initially discussed the idea of debuting the film on their new Disney Plus platform but are now planning a theatrical release.



SMASHING PUMPKINS TO RELEASE DOUBLE ALBUM

The Smashing Pumpkins will release a double album this year. Frontman Billy Corgan has revealed the alternative band - including founding members James Iha and Jimmy Chamberlin, who rejoined the group 2018 - have a wealth of new material which will be released as two discs some time in 2020. The rocker has described the untitled release as the group's first "real" record with the original line-up since 2000's 'Machina', even though they released 'Shiny and Oh So Bright, Vol. 1 / LP: No Past. No Future. No Sun' two years ago.

Billy told Nashville newspaper The Tennessean: "In many ways, this is the first real album (since the reunion) where we've hunkered down and made a classic, 'Let's throw it all at the wall and see what happens' type of Pumpkins record. "I've been working on it for over a year. "It currently is at 21 songs, and we're going to release it as a double this year." The 'Tonight Tonight' hitmaker teased that their new tunes have "a greater conceptual" theme and admitted he's been excited by their studio sessions as he and his bandmates have returned to being risk-takers. He continued:

"This is the first album since the album that came out in 2000, 'Machina', where me, James and Jimmy worked on something for a very long time. "It's got a greater conceptual base, and it's probably a wider swath of music. "The last one was kind of like, 'Let's just jump in, record some stuff real fast, and let it be what it is' ... so I'm excited about this, because we're kind of back in the lane of taking a risk, and trying to bring something new to the table, as opposed to just aping what we're known for."

Lambert announces mini Las Vegas residency



Adam Lambert has announced a mini Las Vegas residency. As well as embarking on 'The Velvet Tour' in Europe - which kicks off on August 30 at Manchester Pride and concludes in Helsinki on September 12 - in support of his solo LP 'Velvet', the 'For Your Entertainment' hitmaker will perform at The Venetian Resort Hotel & Casino in Sin City on April 22, 24 and 25. Plus, the pop star - who releases his record on March 20 - has also released his new song, 'Roses', featuring Chic legend Nile Rodgers. It's an extremely busy time for the 'American Idol' alumni, who is also set to head on tour with Queen on 'The Rhapsody Tour', which will see the rock legends play six shows at London's The O2 arena. Brian May, Roger Taylor and Adam - who sings in the place of late frontman Freddie Mercury - will bring their spectacular new live show to the UK in June, kicking off with a mini residency at the North Greenwich venue between June 2 and June 9, before a stop at Manchester Arena on June 11. The tour comes off the back of the blockbuster Queen musical 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. Meanwhile, Adam recently launched his own charity to support LGBTQ+ communities of all ages and backgrounds. The 37-year-old singer has founded the Feel Something Foundation after being inspired to do so after hearing the stories and witnessing first-hand the difficulties LGBTQ+ people continue to face all over the world. As a member of the community himself, Adam is determined to make a difference with his non-profit organization. The 'Ghost Town' hitmaker is planning to work with fellow charities which focus on impacting the communities in areas of Education & the Arts; Homelessness; Suicide Prevention & Mental Health to help achieve his goals. With the help of directors and public funds, Adam hopes to empower the LGBTQ+ community by supporting other charities to build a strong foundation.

Rodriguez wants to play Catwoman

Michelle Rodriguez wants to play Catwoman. The 'Fast & Furious' star wants to follow in the footsteps of her co-star Dwayne Johnson - who is going to play Black Adam - and join the DC Extended Universe as Gotham City burglar Selina Kyle in the future. Speaking to MTV International, she said: "I would love to be a superhero. I think DC has my favorite superhero, which is Catwoman. "I like her because she's bad and good and I'm in the middle when it comes to being good. I'm pretty bad and good so I would go the DC route 'cause there aren't a lot of really great female superheroes in general and so I need a little edge or I can't play and so Catwoman I think is my favorite." However, Michelle looks to have a long wait to land the role as Zoe Kravitz will be slipping into the catsuit for the role in Matt Reeves' upcoming 'The Batman', which stars Robert Pattinson as The Dark Knight. The 41-year-old actress, who plays the role of Letty Ortiz in the 'Fast & Furious' franchise, has previously discussed the importance of a female influence on each movie, revealing that she only returned for the latest installment after a female writer joined the project. Last year, she said: "I felt like there was not enough of a female voice in the franchise. You should evolve with the times, not just pander to certain demographics that are stuck in the past." Michelle also threatened to leave the franchise, as she posted on social media criticizing the role of women in the series following the DVD release of 'The Fate of the Furious'. In an Instagram post, she wrote: "F8 is out digitally today, I hope they decided to show some love to the women of the franchise on the next one. Or I might just have to say goodbye to a loved franchise. It's been a good ride (and) I'm grateful for the opportunity the fans (and) studio have provided over the years." Vin Diesel, who plays the role of Dominic Toretto, confirmed that he has been working on a female-led 'Fast' spin-off. He said: "I've created a female spinoff. And that script comes in next month, so we will see."



Ford confirmed for Indiana Jones 5

Harrison Ford is confirmed for 'Indiana Jones 5'. The 77-year-old actor has starred as the titular archaeologist in all four of the franchise's movies, and after he insisted that nobody will ever be able to replace his alter ego, Lucasfilm's boss Kathleen Kennedy has said the screen legend is very much "involved" in the delayed flick. The 66-year-old movie producer also reassured fans of the blockbuster series that the fifth installment is a "continuation" of the story and "not a reboot". Giving an update on the movie's progress, she told the BBC: "We're working away, getting the script where we want it to be and then we'll be ready to go. "Harrison Ford will be involved, yeah. It's not a reboot; it's a continuation." There were rumors of 'Guardians of the Galaxy' star Chris Pratt taking over the role back in 2015, when talk of the fifth film began. However, Ford soon shot down the gossip. He said: "Nobody else is gonna be Indiana Jones! Don't you get it? I'm Indiana Jones. When I'm gone, he's gone. It's easy... This is a hell of a way to tell Chris Pine this." The movie was pushed back until 2021, so that more work could be done on the script. The motion picture was originally due for release in July 2019, before it was later pushed back to July 2020 and Disney issued an amended schedule in July 2018, which listed 'Indiana Jones 5' as coming out on July 9, 2021. The franchise, which started in 1981, follows the fictional archaeologist, who originally fought against the Nazis in their search for Biblical artefacts. However, in the 2008 movie 'Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull', fans of the franchise were disappointed that the movie took a different angle and dealt with alien origins rather than Biblical stories.



Cena denies he is a villain in Fast and Furious 9



John Cena has denied that he is playing a villain in 'Fast & Furious 9'. The 42-year-old wrestler-turned-actor portrays Jakob Toretto, the brother of Vin Diesel's character Dominic, and in the trailer that has just been released Jakob is depicted as a new threat to Dominic's street-racing crew, but John insists that it is "not true". Speaking to 'Entertainment Tonight', he said: "We'll leave it for the audience, we'll leave it for the 'Fast...' family around the world to decide who's bad and who's good. Keep in mind, the trailer shows just enough for you to have a ton of questions - and me not to be able to answer any of them!" Vin Diesel agreed with John's point, claiming that there are "no cookie-cutter characters" in the 'Fast & Furious' franchise. He said: "That's fair. You're going to have to decide. Like, all the characters in this saga, they are multidimensional and there are no cookie-cutter characters. They all have layers, as we've seen ... But we're so excited about this." Meanwhile, John - who is making his first appearance in the franchise - was full of praise for fans of the series, describing them as "superheroes without capes". The WWE Superstar explained: "So this is what I find brilliant about the 'Fast...' franchise, and this is truly a testament to the 'Fast...' family, the people around the world who love these movies. "They walk in to see these movies with a sense of family, and a sense of fun, and you're right, over the course of the eight installments, soon to be nine, they're superheroes without capes." John previously opened about his desire to "earn the respect" of the 'Fast & Furious' family and the "expectation" on him to deliver for the fan base. He explained: "It really is a family atmosphere, there's a lot of respect for the franchise, there is that expectation to deliver for the fan base, and it's been like no other experience I've been on. "You kind of have to earn your respect in so many ways, but once you do you are absolutely, unexpectedly welcomed into the family. It's been really, really special, and I'm very fortunate." — Bang Showbiz

Lifestyle | Music & Movies

Pamela Anderson and new husband split after just 12 days

Former "Baywatch" star Pamela Anderson and movie mogul Jon Peters have called it quits just 12 days after tying the knot. The actress and animal rights activist wed "Batman" producer Peters on January 20 at a ceremony in Malibu reportedly attended by her two sons and his three daughters and ex-wife. But there was apparently trouble in paradise as Anderson abruptly flew to her native Canada on Saturday morning. The Hollywood Reporter said, just days after posting a photo of herself and Peters on her Instagram account.

"I have been moved by the warm reception to Jon's and my union," Anderson, 52, said in a statement to US media. "We would be very grateful for your support as we take some time apart to re-evaluate what we want from life and from one another." The pair had each been married four times prior. Anderson said in her statement that the wedding had never been formalized and the pair had decided to step back while mulling their next move.

She was previously married to rockers Tommy Lee and Kid Rock. She twice wed

professional poker player Rick Salomon. More recently she dated French soccer star Adil Rami, with whom she lived in France. Peters, 74, a former hair stylist, rose to Hollywood prominence after a high-profile romance with Barbra Streisand, going on to produce her 1976 version of "A Star Is Born." He subsequently oversaw the Tim Burton "Batman" films in the 1980s and 1990s, and brought another DC comic books icon back to the screen in 2006's "Superman Returns." He was co-chairman of Columbia Pictures for a stint in the 1990s. Peters

reportedly first met Anderson at the Playboy Mansion in the 1980s, and proposed to her shortly after. "There are beautiful girls everywhere. I could have my pick, but for 35 years I've only wanted Pamela," he told THR when the pair tied the knot in January. — AFP



This combination of pictures created shows US actress Pamela Anderson and Producer Jon Peters. — AFP



Film producer Harvey Weinstein arrives at the courtroom for his sexual assault trial at Manhattan criminal court in New York City. — AFP photos



Jessica Mann (center) exits the Manhattan criminal court after testifying against film producer Harvey Weinstein for his sexual assault trial at Manhattan criminal court in New York City.

TRIAL HEARS ACCUSER TRIED TO MAKE WEINSTEIN 'PSEUDO-FATHER'

Harvey Weinstein's defense team presented new messages on Monday that it says prove the disgraced movie mogul was in a consensual relationship with one of the main accusers in his rape trial. Lead defense attorney Donna Rotunno subjected ex-actress Jessica Mann, who says Weinstein raped her in March 2013, to brutal cross-examination that appeared to severely weaken her earlier testimony. "Thank you for your unflinching support and kindness. It's helped me believing in myself," Mann wrote in an email to Weinstein six months after she alleges he sexually assaulted her. "Nobody understands me quite like you," she wrote in another message.

In a third, written in 2014, she referred to

Weinstein's smile and "beautiful eyes," the New York state court heard. Weinstein, 67, faces life imprisonment if convicted of predatory sexual assault related to actress Mann and former production assistant Mimi Halesy, who accuses him of forcibly performing oral sex on her in 2006. The once-powerful producer of "Pulp Fiction" and "Sin City" denies the charges and maintains that the incidents were consensual. His trial began in earnest almost two weeks ago.

Mann, 34, admitted on Friday that she had had "non-coerced" sexual contact with Weinstein up to 2016. She said she had only stayed in contact with him out of fear. But on Monday, the defense asked her to read out an email she wrote to a boyfriend in 2013 in which

she talked about Weinstein. "He offered me help when my parents didn't," she read, choking back tears. "I tried to make him a pseudo-father. He gave me all the validation I needed," she added, reading what she had written.

Judge James Burke adjourned Monday's hearing early after Mann wept profusely and failed to regain her composure. Dozens of women have accused Weinstein of sexual misconduct since claims against him ignited the #MeToo movement in October 2017. Only the cases of Mann and Halesy have led to criminal charges in the New York court. — AFP

'Serf' comedy becomes top grossing Russian film

A comedy that tells the story of a misbehaving rich kid waking up as a 19th century serf has become the highest grossing Russian film of all time in its home market. Since its release in late December, "Serf" has garnered more than 3 billion rubles (\$47 million) in Russia and a number of post-Soviet countries known as the Commonwealth of Independent States, kinobusiness.com, the film industry website, said on Monday.

Only James Cameron's sci-fi epic "Avatar", which grossed 3.6 billion rubles (\$57 million) in the country, has raked more in the box office so far. Directed by US-educated Klim Shipenko and starring Serbian actor Milos Bikovic, the film tells the story of Grisha, an entitled rich young man who one day wakes up in the 19th century and finds out he's a serf. In reality, Grisha's oligarch father, fed up with his son's shenanigans, had teamed up with a psychologist to build a simulated 19th century village to re-educate his son who believes he has traveled back in time after a car accident.

"We could not expect such success but we dreamt about it," the 36-year-old Shipenko told AFP. He said a number of factors were at play including the time of the release, its appeal to a wide audience and pure "luck." Speaking in an interview with Meduza news website, Shipenko compared his film to "The Truman Show", a 1998 American science fiction comedy-drama starring Jim Carrey, and said his movie made people both laugh and cry. "It's a summery movie," he said, adding that moviegoers wanted to have a good laugh and escape Russia's winter, especially during the long New Year's holidays.

Independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta said the movie combines elements of a melodrama, period sitcom and action film and appeals to both young and older audiences. "We were not afraid of touching upon serious subjects," Shipenko told Novaya Gazeta, adding that the main character turns to God in the end of the film. — AFP



A man walks past a ticket machine displaying an advertisement for the movie "Serf" on its screen at a cinema in Moscow yesterday. — AFP

'Bad Boys for Life' victorious at N American box office

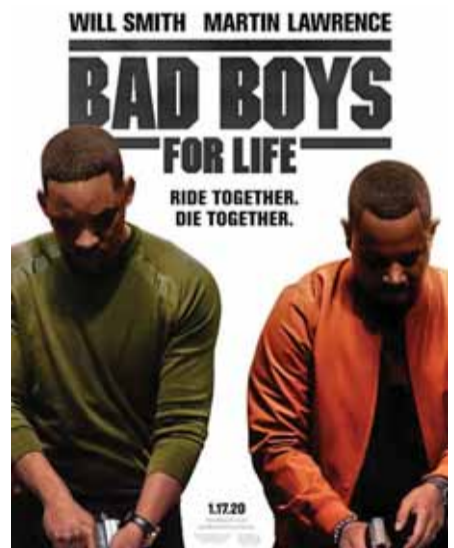
Sony's "Bad Boys for Life" held on to its lead in the North American box office during the weekend, again edging out Universal's "1917" and "Dolittle," industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said Monday. The weekend cine-

"Bad Boys," with Will Smith and Martin Lawrence reprising their roles as wisecracking detectives, took in \$17.7 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period.

"1917," a war film which lacks big stars but has steadily racked up awards, placed second at \$9.5 million. The Sam Mendes film, shot as if it were one continuous take, is an Oscar favorite. "Dolittle," based on the children's book about a veterinarian who can talk to the animals, has drawn tepid reviews but, with an all-star cast headed by Robert Downey Jr and Emma Thompson, placed third at \$7.6 million. In fourth was new horror film "Gretel and Hansel" from United Artists.

The dark reimagining of the Brothers Grimm tale earned nearly \$6.2 million—not bad for a film produced with a relatively tiny budget of \$5 million, according to Variety. Fifth spot went to Sony's "Jumanji: The Next Level" at \$6 million. Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson and Kevin Hart star in the action sequel.

Rounding out the top 10 were: "The Gentlemen" (\$5.6 million) "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" (\$3.2 million) "Little Women" (\$3.1 million) "The Turning" (\$3 million) "The Rhythm Section" (\$2.7 million)—AFP



ma was overshadowed by Sunday's blockbuster TV event, the National Football League's Super Bowl, when theaters are often near-empty. Overall weekend ticket sales of roughly \$85 million were the lowest in years, another industry tracker, Comscore, reported. Still, action comedy



Alyona Alyona,
the plus-sized
queen of
Ukrainian rap

Alyona Alyona is turning the macho rules of rap on their head. For a start, the former kindergarten teacher tries never to swear in her songs. She proudly raps in the Ukrainian she grew up speaking in her rustic home village, rather than in English or Russian. And she has become something of a plus-size icon for letting it all hang out in a silver swimming costume in the video for her first big hit, "Ribki" ("Fish"). Flanked by two scantily-clad, pencil-thin women of the type that usually people rap videos, the song is a clear metaphor for young women who feel out of place.

The rapper, whose real name is Alyona Savranenko, has put body positivity, bullying and female empowerment in songs that defy the stereotype of what hip-hop should be. The hugely popular 28-year-old has become a phenomenon in Europe, tearing it up at the Eurosonic showcase in the Groningen in the Netherlands last month after being picked out as a rising star by the New York Times.

'Such a story'

"She's really extraordinary, and hugely charming," said Jean-Louis Brossard, who booked the charismatic performer for his Trans festival in the French city of Rennes last year. "She brings people together with her smile and her enthusiasm—and she has such a story," he told AFP. "She is super-good, technically great, sassy, what can I say?" added music journalist Eloise Bouton, who founded the Madame Rap website. Her videos have scored millions of hits despite their down-to-earth settings like her home village in central Ukraine, where horses and carts were a common sight in her childhood.

One clip, which starts with her parents at the kitchen table of their Soviet-era apartment, has

give up her job. "Fish" is about women who have piercings, tattoos or strange coloured hair, or a body that is not seen as normal," the singer said. "We, these women, are like fish in tank. And behind the glass, we don't hear the nasty words directed at us," she added.

Another track "Pushka", which roughly translates as "the bomb", also challenges how women are seen. In it, Alyona calls herself a "pishka", a term of abuse for someone who is overweight. Other lyrics are more poignant: "They may have a fresh view on everything, but they never invite us home..." Hip-hop is hardly known as a hotbed of feminist thinking, and Alyona has had to put up with some zingers. "They have told me that women were made to cook, to look after children, to do their nails, to do their makeup," she recalled.

Body positive

"But I try to show that women have their place in rap battles," the off-the-cuff bragging contests that characterize the genre. And Alyona has found her niche, far from the cliches of "drugs and gangs—because that is not my life. I go to see my parents or go on holiday. "I try to inspire people. I am not just there to say to women that they can be rappers, but to tell them to believe in themselves," she said.

Even though Alyona grew up idolizing Eminem—"He represents everything you should do and not do at the same time," she quipped—she prefers not to rap in English or in Russian, which might also bring her a bigger audience. "I taught in Ukrainian and I want to say things in Ukrainian," she insisted. But she denied that it had anything to do with nationalism. "I don't like politics. My generation is tired by politics... we want to create new things. There are so many great performers, painters, so many talented people out there." — AFP

Facing down sexism

Alyona realized if she was going to get serious about her musical career, she would have to



In this file photo Ukrainian rap singer Alyona Alyona performs on stage during the Eurosonic festival in Groningen. — AFP

'Hamilton' musical to be released in cinemas

A big screen version of smash hit musical "Hamilton" is coming to movie theaters in 2021, its creator announced on Monday. The show—which has become one of the highest grossing Broadway musicals of all time since its 2015 debut—tells the story of Alexander Hamilton, one of the founding fathers of the United States. Lin-Manuel Miranda, who also stars in "Hamilton," said the film would be a live performance of show at New York's Richard Rodgers Theatre that comprised the original cast. It will be distributed by Disney and released on October 15, 2021, he said in a tweet. Variety magazine said it would get the-

atrical runs in the US and Canada.

"Hamilton" has made \$633 million in box office receipts and has been seen by 2.5 million people in New York alone since arriving on Broadway in August 2015, according to Broadway.com. A production of "Hamilton" has also been on in London's West End since 2017 and a three-year tour of the show just ended in Chicago. Mixing political history with rap and hip hop, the show won 11 Tony Awards in 2016, including best musical. Another of Miranda's musicals, "In the Heights," has been adapted for theaters and is due out in June. — AFP



Visitors view the exhibition "Worn by the Gods" at the Fashion and Costume Museum in Palazzo Pitti in Florence. — AFP photos



A sandal is displayed during the exhibition.



Boots are displayed during the exhibition.



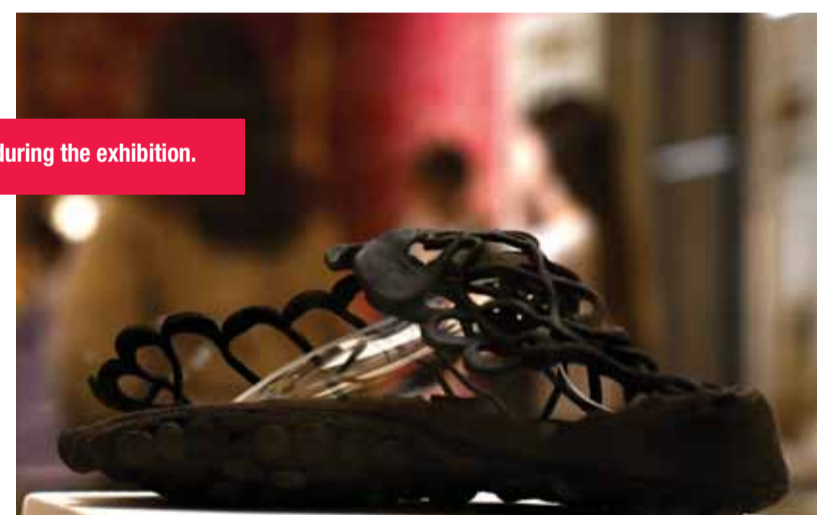
A visitor takes photos of sandals during the exhibition.



A sculpture is displayed during the exhibition.



Sandals are displayed during the exhibition.



Ancient footwear on display at Italy's Pitti Palace

As sandal season fast approaches, a new exhibit on ancient footwear at a top Italian museum seeks to remind today's well-heeled that when it comes to fashion, do as the Romans did. The classics are always in, as evidenced by the new show in Florence's Pitti Palace, which traces the humble sandal's outsized influence in contemporary fashion and film, while astonishing the modern eye by the elegance of the ancients. "At the Feet of the Gods: The art of footwear in ancient Rome, epic film and contemporary fashion," features 80 works from sculptures and decorative urns to sandals ancient and new, many on loan from international museums.

The show—which promises to satisfy the curiosity of both shoe fetishists and wearers of plastic Crocs alike—runs through April 19. "With this show, we've tried to make the shoe, commonly thought of as an accessory, instead the protagonist," Fabrizio Paolucci, one of the curators, told AFP. In ancient times, shoes acted as a sort of "identity card" for their owner. They could reveal a great deal of information about the wearer—such as their sex, profession or economic status—even more so than today, when the choice of a pair of red-bottomed Christian Louboutin stilettos, Nike swooshes or orthopaedic (but now trendy) Birkenstocks is loaded with meaning.

The humble sandal, whose prehistoric fore-runners date as far back as 10,000 years, flourished under the ancient Greeks, whose deities were their best models. Massive feet in marble and bronze, the remnants of destroyed statues of gods and others, are brought together in the show, all adorned with "krepides"—sandals fastened via an intricate web of laces covering the foot. The delicate footwear is also seen on pottery dating back as far as the fifth century BC. On one vase, Eros, the Greek god of love, helps a virgin change into the skin-exposing sandals she will wear as a bride. On an Etruscan urn, a nude courtesan laces up sandals whose nailed soles left impressions on carpets spelling, "Follow me".

Sandals with socks?

Greek footwear paved the way centuries later for the "caliga" worn by Roman soldiers, authentic examples of which can be seen in the show, their leather still intact. The low sandals with exposed toes, reinforced by iron studs hammered into the soles and sometimes worn with socks, were ideal footwear for Roman armies, who often marched as far as 35 kilometers (22 miles) per day. They were also the ideal inspiration for Hollywood costume designers tasked with outfitting thousands of extras in the "sword-and-sandals" movies of the 1950s and beyond, from "Ben Hur" in 1959 and "Cleopatra" in 1963 to "Gladiator" in 2000.

The exhibition places side by side ancient objects with footwear from these films, including the brown and gold boots worn by Charlton Heston in "Ben Hur"—a sort of ancient Roman Doc Martin—or Elizabeth Taylor's towering gold platforms in "Cleopatra." "Footwear in film offers some very accurate comparisons based on detailed study of how the shoes were created," said Lorenza Camin, another of the show's curators. "Others are more imprecise." One case in point is the 2004 film "Alexander" starring Colin Farrell about the Greek general of the same name—in which the actors nevertheless sport Roman footwear.

Gladiators with hairy feet

Set in the sumptuous rooms of the ornate palace, the exhibition's more modern takes on ancient footwear would cause Imelda Marcos to swoon. Few would be reminded of hairy-toed gladiators when gazing on the delicately criss-crossed gold ankle boots from Italian brand Genny in 1994 or Emilio Pucci's thigh-high stiletto sandals constructed of 26 bands of leather—perfect for a Roman dominatrix.

Roman-inspired creations by Yves Saint Laurent, Ferragamo and Richard Tyler all appear, and to end the show, a ruby red Rene Caovilla sandal with a snake-like strap embossed with Swarovski crystals slithers up an imaginary ankle. And in case of sore feet, the show also boasts a second-century therapeutic foot warmer in which warm liquid would have been poured into a cavity covering a ceramic foot form. Gladiators, soldiers—and wearers of modern-day stilettos—would be grateful. —AFP



Shoes worn by late British-US actress Elizabeth Taylor are displayed during the exhibition.

No takers for 'pluck tyre off croc' contest

Indonesia has called off a contest offering a cash reward to anyone brave enough to remove a motorbike tyre stuck around the neck of a giant crocodile. Authorities in Palu, capital of Central Sulawesi, said no would-be crocodile wrangler stepped forward to take up the challenge of removing the unwanted necklace from the 13-foot (4-meter) reptile.

The contest was rolled out last month, but made headlines again last week when an unspecified reward was offered. The local conservation agency offered few details about the reward — or how outsiders might pull off the dangerous task — but its chief said the money would come out of his own pocket.

Conservationists who fear the croc is being slowly strangled have been trying — and failing — for years to find a way to untangle the beast. Rumors circulated that popular TV personality Panji the Explorer — Indonesia's answer to late Australian "Crocodile Hunter" Steve Irwin — was keen for another shot after a failed attempt two years ago.

Officials said a team from the environment ministry will now redouble efforts to free the croc from its rubber stranglehold. "The contest has been cancelled," said Central Sulawesi Natural Resources Conservation Agency Head Hasmuni Hasmari. "But we now have back up from the ministry and government experts to help us." — AFP



This photo shows a crocodile, with a motorbike tyre around its neck, by the riverbanks in Palu, Central Sulawesi province. — AFP

Neolithic Czech well claimed as world's oldest wooden structure

Archaeologists claimed yesterday that a Neolithic well found in the Czech Republic was the world's oldest uncovered wooden structure, citing extensive tests. "We have carried out a dendrochronological analysis and confirmed it with radiocarbon dating," said Jaroslav Peska from the Archeological Centre in the eastern Czech city of Olomouc. "The well dates back to 5,256-5,255 BC. There is currently no older man-made wooden structure dated by dendrochronology in the world, although this may change in the future," Peska told AFP.

Originally about four meters (yards) deep, the well was found in 2018 at the site of a future motorway about 120 kilometers

(75 miles) east of the capital Prague. "We dug up a lower wooden part of the well that is 1.4 meters high and which rose to the surface," said Peska. The CTK news agency reported the well had wooden posts in corners with grooves for planks, a technology that scientists thought had been used much later.

The archaeologists removed the well together with soil which is also being tested to give scientists an idea of the environment of the Neolithic era, the last period of the Stone Age. "The well is under conservation now, and when that's done, it will be taken to a museum in (the nearby city of) Pardubice in about two or three years," said Peska. — AFP

Classifieds

Wednesday, February 5, 2020



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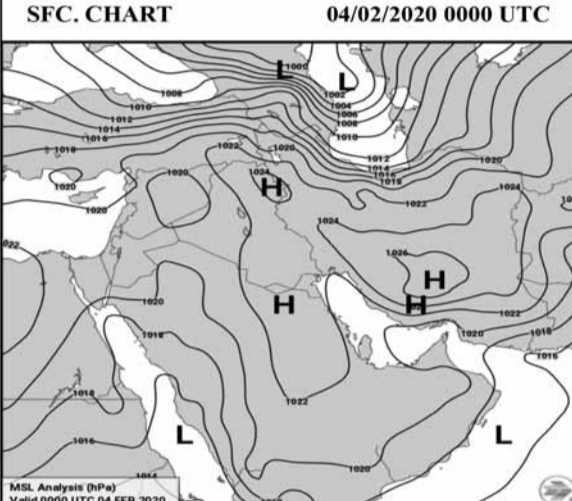


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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light variable wind to light to moderate south easterly wind, with speed of 06 - 26 km/h with a chance for scattered light rain later on.

BY NIGHT: Cold and Partly cloudy with light to moderate south easterly wind to light variable wind, with speed of 06 - 28 km/h.

WEATHER WATCH			Frost		
STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.	SFC. CHART 04/02/2020 0000 UTC		
KUWAIT CITY	20 °C	09 °C			
KUWAIT AIRPORT	19 °C	03 °C			
ABDAILY	18 °C	03 °C			
BUBYAN	18 °C	06 °C			
JAHRA	19 °C	06 °C			
FAILAKA ISLAND	18 °C	08 °C			
SALMIYAH	17 °C	12 °C			
AHMADI	17 °C	11 °C			
NUWAISIB	18 °C	06 °C			
WAFRA	20 °C	04 °C			
SALMY	17 °C	04 °C			

4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Wednesday	02/05	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	21 °C	05 °C	SE	08 - 30 km/h
Thursday	02/06	Partly cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery	25 °C	09 °C	SE	15 - 40 km/h
Friday	02/07	Warm and Partly cloudy	26 °C	13 °C	SE-VRB	10 - 32 km/h
Saturday	02/08	Warm and Partly cloudy with a chance for rising dust and a chance for scattered light rain	22 °C	13 °C	NW	15 - 45 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:15
Sunrise	06:36
Zuhr	12:02
Asr	15:07
Sunset	17:28
Isha	18:47

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	19 °C
MIN. Temp.	06 °C
MAX. RH	80 %
MIN. RH	27 %
MAX. Wind	N 32 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
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Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

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changed my name Shaikh Aslam Shaika Farid to Given name: Shaikh Aslam Shaikh Farid. (C 5627)

I, Javed Ahmed Abdul Hamid, holder of Indian Passport No: M4640773, Civil ID No: 270020704398, changed my name from Javed Ahmed Abdul Hamid to Shaik Javed Ahmed S/o Shaik Abdul Hamid. Permanent Address: House No. 76-106-A11-A5, Guru-Raghavandra Nagar Ballary Chowrasta Kallur Kurnool 518003. (C 5628) 4-2-2019

Shaikh Aslam Shaika Farid, holder of Indian Passport No: R5454580 issued at Kuwait on 16/04/2017, Civil ID No: 267060106811, permanent address room 403 4th floor A Wing Tagore SRA CHS Ltd. 90 feet road Anna Nagar Kumbharwada Dharavi Mumbai Maharashtra 400017. Has

Given name is Abdul Taiyeb Zainy now change to given name Abdul Taiyeb and last name Zainy. Add. Shergarhwala Mohalla, Yusufpura Partapur, Dist. Banswara (Raj). (C 5626)

EMERGENCY
112

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Flight Schedule

DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Wednesday 5/2/2020				Departure Flights on Wednesday 5/2/2020			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
ETH	3620	Addis Ababa	00:01	MSR	575	Riyadh	14:10
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	KAC	752	ELQ	14:20
AIC	989	Mumbai	00:10	MSR	575	Sharm el-Sheikh	14:20
JZR	254	Amman	00:45	FDB	059	Dubai	14:20
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	KAC	742	Dammam	14:35
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	KAC	672	Dubai	14:40
KAC	102	London	00:55	KAC	774	Riyadh	14:40
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30	SVA	500	Jeddah	14:45
MSR	618	Alexandria	01:35	KAC	118	New York	14:50
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	KAC	364	Colombo	14:50
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:55	KAC	286	Dhaka	14:55
IGO	1759	Delhi	01:55	KAC	618	Doha	15:00
UAE	853	Dubai	02:15	KAC	512	Mashhad	15:15
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	JZR	234	Taif	15:15
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	KAC	788	Jeddah	15:25
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	JZR	222	Riyadh	15:30
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	OMA	645	Muscat	15:35
KKK	1268	Istanbul	03:05	IRA	601	Tehran	15:40
PGT	858	Istanbul	03:05	KAC	412	Bangkok	15:40
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	UAE	857	Dubai	15:45
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	JZR	724	Cairo	15:50
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	ABY	127	Sharjah	15:55
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	JZR	152	Mashhad	16:00
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	RBG	211	Luxor	16:10
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30	JZR	212	Jeddah	16:25
KAC	302	Mumbai	04:40	QTR	1072	Doha	16:35
KAC	796	Madinah	04:40	KAC	198	Baku	16:35
JZR	540	KTM	04:45	JZR	612	Tbilisi	16:40
JZR	702	Asyut	04:55	JZR	116	Doha	16:40
FDB	069	Jeddah	05:00	FDB	051	Dubai	16:45
KAC	358	Kochi	05:10	KAC	546	Cairo	16:45
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10	SAW	705	Damascus	17:00
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	FEG	341	Sohag	17:20
KAC	382	Delhi	05:20	SVA	510	Riyadh	17:25
KAC	784	Jeddah	05:20	SVA	504	Madinah	17:30
JZR	654	OSS	05:25	GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30
THY	770	Istanbul	05:25	JZR	214	Jeddah	17:45
JZR	502	Lahore	05:35	UAE	875	Dubai	18:00
KAC	112	Doha	05:35	FDB	063	Dubai	18:15
KAC	284	Dubai	05:35	JZR	302	Istanbul	18:15
JZR	216	Dhaka	05:35	JZR	124	Dubai	18:20
JZR	402	Mumbai	05:50	MSR	620	Jeddah	18:30
KAC	332	Trivandrum	06:05	QTR	1080	Doha	18:30
KAC	344	Chennai	06:10	RJA	640	Amman	19:10
KAC	544	Cairo	07:00	KAC	156	Istanbul	19:20
BAW	157	London	07:05	ABY	123	Sharjah	19:25
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05	GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30
JZR	120	Dubai	07:10	KAC	744	Dammam	19:35
KAC	206	Islamabad	07:10	QTR	1090	Doha	19:35
IRB	889	Mumbai	07:10	KAC	782	Jeddah	19:50
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	JZR	104	Bahrain	19:55
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	KNE	381	Taif	20:00
KAC	354	Bengaluru	08:10	FDB	057	Dubai	20:00
KAC	622	Doha	08:30	JZR	776	Riyadh	20:05
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	KAC	104	Muscat	20:05
JZR	408	Ahmedabad	08:45	OMA	647	Bahrain	20:20
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55	KAC	616	Bahrain	20:30
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	QTR	1088	Doha	20:30
KAC	384	Delhi	09:30	MSC	401	Alexandria	20:30
KAC	304	Mumbai	09:30	KAC	166	Rome	20:40
IRA	665	Shiraz	09:35	DLH	624	Frankfurt	20:55
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	KAC	674	Dubai	20:55
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	MEA	402	Beirut	21:20
QTR	1070	Doha	09:45	ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:20
RBG	553	Alexandria	09:50	ALK	229	Colombo	21:20
JZR	410	Delhi	10:00	UAE	859	Dubai	21:30
IWA	157A	Al Najaf	10:00	KAC	172	Frankfurt	21:30
JZR	114	Doha	10:20	GFA	219	Bahrain	21:45
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	KLM	445	Amsterdam	21:50
JZR	714	Sohag	10:50	RBG	217	Asyut	22:00
JZR	889	Luxor	10:55	KAC	564	Amman	22:00
AWB	122	Mangalore/Bahrain	11:10	KAC	620	Doha	22:00
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	KAC	168	Paris	22:00
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	QTR	1082	Doha	22:05
PVV	730	Sharjah	12:00	JAV	621	Amman	22:15
KIS	6032	Mashhad	12:00	ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:15
IWA	157	Al Najaf	12:00	OMS	225	Muscat	22:20
AHY	119	Baku	12:05	AIC	975	Chennai/Goa	22:25
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05	SVA	514	Riyadh	22:30
MSR	610	Cairo	12:25	KAC	786	Jeddah	22:50
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	GOW	061	CNN	23:00
QTR	1078	Doha	13:25	JZR	002	LGW	23:05
TBZ	3605	Mashhad	13:40	QTR	1092	JZR	23:10
RBG	213	Sohag	13:45	SVA	502	Jeddah	23:10
KAC	614	Bahrain	13:50	MSC	411	Asyut	23:15
CLX	7912	Luxembourg	14:00	JZR	128	Dubai	23:15
				JZR	736	Cairo	23:30
				FDB	071	Dubai	23:40

Pakistan to buy more Malaysia palm oil after India withdrawal

KUALA LUMPUR: Pakistan will buy more palm oil from Malaysia, Prime Minister Imran Khan said yesterday, to try and compensate after top buyer India put curbs on Malaysian imports last month amid a diplomatic row. India imposed general restrictions on refined palm oil imports, and informally asked traders specifically to stop buying from Malaysia, the world's biggest producer of the edible oil. Sources said the move was in retaliation after Malaysia criticised India's new religion-based citizenship law and its policy on Kashmir.

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday that he discussed palm oil with Khan who was on a visit to Malaysia and that Pakistan had indicated it would import more from Malaysia. "That's right, especially since we noticed India threatened Malaysia for supporting the Kashmir cause, threatened to cut palm oil imports," Khan told a joint news conference, referring to India's Muslim-majority

region of Kashmir. "Pakistan will do its best to compensate for that."

India is a Hindu-majority country while Malaysia and Pakistan are mainly Muslim. India and Pakistan have been mostly hostile to each other since the partition of British India in 1947, and have fought two of their three wars over competing territorial claims in Kashmir. Pakistan may have bought around 135,000 tonnes of Malaysian palm oil last month, a record high, India-based dealers who track such shipments told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

The figure is close to estimates of 141,500 tonnes from Refinitiv, which says sales to India in January may have plunged 80 percent from a year earlier to 40,400 tonnes. Malaysia will release official export data on Monday. Pakistan bought 1.1 million tonnes of palm oil from Malaysia last year, while India bought 4.4 million tonnes, according to the Malaysian Palm Oil Council.

India has repeatedly objected to Mahathir

speaking out against its move last year to strip Kashmir's autonomy and make it easier for non-Muslims from neighboring Muslim-majority Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan to gain citizenship. At the news conference, Mahathir did not refer to Kashmir but Khan did. "The way you, PM, have stood with us and spoken about this injustice going on, on behalf of Pakistan I really want to thank you," Khan said.

He also said he was sad he could not attend a summit of Muslim leaders in Malaysia in December. Saudi Arabia did not attend the summit, saying it was the wrong forum to discuss matters affecting the world's Muslims and Khan belatedly pulled out from attending. Some Pakistani officials, unnamed because they were not authorized to speak to the media, said at the time that Khan pulled out under pressure from Saudi Arabia, a close ally of Pakistan, though local media reported his officials denied that was the reason for his absence. — Reuters



PUTRAJAYA, Malaysia: Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad watches as Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan signs a document during an official visit yesterday. — AFP

EU rejects Trump plan; Sudan 'stab...

Continued from Page 1

already recognized a Palestinian state, although the bloc as a whole says this is a matter to be resolved in peace talks. The EU condemned Trump's decision in 2017 to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, saying Washington had compromised its position as a mediator for peace.

Meanwhile, Sudan's leader yesterday briefed the country's ruling body after the Israeli prime minister said the two had discussed normalizing bilateral ties after decades of hostility. On Monday, Benjamin Netanyahu's office said he had met General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, chairman of Sudan's ruling sovereign council, in the Ugandan city of Entebbe in a previously unannounced meeting. Israel remains technically at war with Sudan, which supported hardline Islamist forces during the decades-long reign of autocrat Omar Al-Bashir, who was ousted amid mass protests last year.

The Palestinian leadership has denounced Burhan's talks with Netanyahu which came days after the Israeli leader and US President Donald Trump unveiled a controversial plan to resolve the Middle East dispute that is widely seen as skewed towards Israel. Netanyahu's office said Monday that he and the Sudanese general had "agreed to start cooperation leading to normalization of the relationship between the two countries".

Sudan's cabinet said it had been unaware of such talks and convened yesterday to discuss the issue. Sudan's sovereign council, a transitional body of civilians and military officials led by Burhan, also held a meeting where the issue was being discussed, a source told AFP. The source said Burhan, who had now returned from Entebbe, was briefing the council about his meeting with Netanyahu.

Netanyahu's office said on Monday that he believed post-Bashir Sudan is headed "in a new positive direc-

tion" and that he had also expressed this view to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. "Burhan is eager to help his country modernize by taking it out of isolation and putting it on the world's map," it said. The Uganda meeting came after Sudan said Pompeo had invited Burhan to Washington for an official visit, the first such invitation to a Sudan ruler in more than three decades. The United States still classifies Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism, a legacy from the rule of Bashir who in the 1990s welcomed Osama bin Laden.

Late on Monday, Sudan's government spokesman Faisal Mohamed Salih said the cabinet had only learned of the meeting at Entebbe through the media. "We, the members of the cabinet, were not notified or consulted about this meeting," Salih said in a statement. Sudan under Bashir was part of the decades-long Arab boycott of Israel over the Jewish state's treatment of the Palestinians. The Palestinians have been seeking a united front since Trump last week unveiled his Middle East plan. The initiative gave the Jewish state the US green light to annex settlements in the occupied West Bank, as well as the Jordan Valley, a key part of the territory Palestinians see as their future state.

"This meeting is a stab in the back of the Palestinian people... at a time when the administration of President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu are trying to liquidate the Palestinian cause," Saeed Erekat, secretary general of the Palestine Liberation Organization, said in a statement carried on official news agency Wafa. The Sudanese Communist Party, which is part of the umbrella protest movement that led to the ouster of Bashir last April, also condemned the Burhan-Netanyahu meeting, using the same phrase.

"What happened at the meeting between Burhan and Netanyahu is a stab in the back of Sudanese people's struggle against imperialists and also their continuous position in supporting the Palestinians," party spokesman Fathi Fadoul said in a video broadcast on the party's Facebook page. "We also condemn the statement from the cabinet. The cabinet has to say directly what its position is about the meeting rather than saying it was not notified about it." — AFP

lion people in Hubei. On Sunday the Philippines reported the first death abroad: A Chinese man who had come from Wuhan. However, the WHO said yesterday that the outbreak does not yet constitute a "pandemic".

The death of the 39-year-old man in Hong Kong came as the semi-autonomous city closed all but two land crossings with the Chinese mainland. Hong Kong media said the man had underlying health issues that complicated his treatment. He had visited Wuhan last month and his 72-year-old mother was also infected. The financial hub has been particularly on edge over the virus as it has revived memories of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak of 2002-03, which killed nearly 300 people in the city and 349 people in the mainland.

"We can't rule out the possibility that there will be massive transmission in the near future," said Chuang Shuk Kwan, an official from Hong Kong's Centre for Health Protection. With more than 20,400 confirmed infections in China, health officials noted yesterday that the mortality rate for the new coronavirus stood at 2.1 percent, with most victims either old or with underlying health problems. SARS killed nearly 10 percent of patients.

Singapore announced yesterday its first four cases of people being infected locally, taking the total number of infections in the city-state to 24. "There is as yet no evidence of widespread sustained community transmission in Singapore," the health ministry said in a statement. In another example of growing global anxiety, Japan has quarantined a cruise ship carrying 3,711 people and was testing those onboard for the virus after a former passenger was diagnosed with the illness in Hong Kong.

Macau, China's semi-autonomous gambling hub that is popular with mainland Chinese visitors, decided to temporarily close all of its casinos for at least two weeks. And the UK's Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on Tuesday advised Britons to leave China, "if they can" to minimize their risk of exposure to the virus.

China's Communist leadership made a rare admission of fallibility on Monday, acknowledging "shortcomings and difficulties exposed in the response to the epidemic". The elite Politburo Standing Committee called for improvements to the "national emergency management system" at the meeting, according to the official Xinhua news agency. The government also said it "urgently" needed medical equipment such as surgical masks, protective suits, and safety goggles as it battles to control the outbreak.

Most of the deaths have been in Wuhan and the rest of surrounding Hubei province, which has largely been under lockdown for almost two weeks. A 1,000-bed field hospital in Wuhan built from scratch within two weeks to relieve overburdened medical facilities started receiving patients yesterday, with a second makeshift hospital due to open later this week. A cultural building, an exhibition center and a gymnasium have also been converted into improvised clinics with 3,400 beds.

Iraqi protesters face off against Sadr followers

DIWANIYAH, Iraq: Anti-government demonstrators faced off against followers of influential cleric Moqtada Sadr in protest squares across Iraq yesterday, a day after one demonstrator was killed in a clash between the two sides. Sadr, an enigmatic militiaman-turned-politician, backed the anti-government rallies when they erupted in October but has split with other demonstrators over the nomination of Mohammad Allawi as prime minister. The cleric endorsed Allawi while other protesters rejected him, charging he is too close to the ruling elite they have been demonstrating against for four months.

In the southern city of Diwaniyah yesterday, the rift escalated into a fistfight between young anti-regime demonstrators and Sadr backers, who are recognizable by their signature blue head caps, an AFP correspondent said. Police intervened to separate the two camps but the young protesters broke into chants against Sadr, Iraqi authorities as well as Iran, accused by demonstrators of backing the government's crackdown against them.

Sadr took to Twitter yesterday afternoon in an apparent attempt to calm the tensions. "The 'blue hats' have a duty to peacefully secure schools and service centers, not to defend me or suppress the voices that chant against me," he said. Tensions have been high in protest squares in recent days between youths furious at Allawi's nomination and Sadrists.

On Monday, a demonstrator was stabbed to death and three others wounded after men in blue caps attacked an anti-regime rally, medics and security sources said. Sadr had called for his supporters to help reopen schools, roads



BAGHDAD: Iraqi protesters hold pictures of the premier-designate Mohammad Allawi with the inscription "rejected" during an anti-government demonstration in the capital's Tahrir Square yesterday. — AFP

and public offices shuttered by months of sit-ins and the interior ministry on Monday followed up with an order for reinforcements to deploy at schools. Security forces could be seen outside schools in Diwaniyah as a few students trickled in yesterday. Hundreds of students refused to go back to class, however, marching through the main anti-government protest camp with Iraqi flags and a banner that read, "Protest March for Diwaniyah High Schools."

In Nasiriyah, too, all schools had reopened after police deployed, according to the education directorate's press chief Halim Al-Hossayni. But students took to the streets there as well to insist on keeping up their protests. "We're determined to pursue our peaceful movement in Habbubi square, because we want a homeland free of corruption and sectarian people," said student Hamad Ali. Allawi, 65, was nominated on Feb 1 after two months of political stalemate over who would replace ex-premier Adel Abdel Mahdi, who resigned in December. — AFP

Republicans led by Trump gloated over the Democratic setback, a closely-watched test in the months-long process to determine who will be the party nominee in November. "The Democrat caucus is an unmitigated disaster," Trump tweeted. "Nothing works, just like they ran the country." Alluding to his own victory in Republican caucuses in Iowa, Trump said "the only person that can claim a very big victory in Iowa last night is 'Trump'."

"When will the Democrats start blaming RUSSIA, RUSSIA, RUSSIA, instead of their own incompetence for the voting disaster that just happened in the Great State of Iowa?" Trump said. Trump wallo to deliver his nationally televised "State of the Union" address later yesterday to a joint session of Congress under the cloud of impeachment but all but certain acquittal in the Senate today.

According to Buttigieg's website, citing results from 1,200 of the 1,700 precincts in Iowa, he earned the support of 24.7 percent of the 152,000 voters who took part in Monday's caucuses. Results released by the Sanders campaign from nearly 40 percent of the Iowa precincts showed him with 28.62 percent of the state delegate equivalent, the figure used to determine who wins the Iowa caucuses. Buttigieg was credited with 25.71 percent, followed by Warren with 18.42 percent and Biden with 15.08 percent which, if confirmed, would be a disappointing showing for the candidate who has consistently claimed he is the person best positioned to take on and defeat Trump. — AFP

Soleimani's message that he was meant to deliver when he arrived in Baghdad on Jan 3, the day he was killed, set out Tehran's position on "fighting terrorism and achieving peace and security in the region". Masjedi said.

A senior Saudi official said last month that he was not aware of any message carried by Soleimani for mediation efforts between Riyadh and Tehran. The killing of Soleimani struck a blow to Iran's regional strategy. Soleimani was the mastermind behind Iran's control, through proxy militia forces and political alliances, over a corridor of territory stretching from Tehran through Iraq to the Mediterranean via Syria and Lebanon. The United States says it is determined to counter Iran's influence in the region and has imposed economic sanctions on Iran's oil sector and allies abroad and targeted its paramilitary forces.

After Soleimani's killing alongside top Iraqi paramilitary commander Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, Iran launched at least 15 missiles at two bases hosting US forces in Iraq, causing traumatic brain injury to 50 US service members but no deaths. Masjedi said the attack on the sprawling Ain al-Asad base, where the injuries were caused, was a response to Washington using "bases in the region ... and choosing Iraqi territory" to kill Soleimani — a suggestion that the drone strike was launched from Ain al-Asad.

He said Iran would respond harshly to any future attacks by the United States. Masjedi also welcomed the naming last week of Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Tawfik Allawi, who is accepted by Iran-backed Iraqi political groups but rejected by protesters who have staged months of anti-establishment demonstrations. — Agencies

Health minister assures Kuwait...

Continued from Page 1

MP Saadoun Hammad called on the foreign ministry to evacuate Kuwaiti citizens from China and for the government to halt flights arriving from there. He asked the minister if quarantine rooms have been established at the airport and other entry points. He also inquired if schools have taken sufficient precautions. MP Abdullah Fahhad called for strengthening monitoring at the airport and border posts and for carefully monitoring Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. But a majority of lawmakers praised the health ministry for taking sufficient measures to prevent the disease from reaching Kuwait.

Meanwhile, three more Asian countries confirmed coronavirus infections yesterday among citizens who had not travelled to China, as Hong Kong reported its first death from the disease and millions more people in Chinese cities were ordered to stay indoors. The toll in mainland China soared to 425 after 64 more people died, the biggest single day tally since the first fatalities emerged last month.

More than 20 countries have confirmed cases of the virus, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare a global health emergency, several governments to institute travel restrictions, and airlines to suspend flights to and from China. But it has continued to spread with Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand yesterday reporting new infections that were not imported from China.

In a sign of growing concern about a spread to other densely-populated Chinese metropolitan areas, authorities in three cities in eastern Zhejiang province — including one near Shanghai — limited the number of people allowed to leave their homes. Three districts in Hangzhou — including the area where the main office of Chinese tech giant Alibaba is based — now allow only one person per household to go outside every two days to buy necessities, affecting some three million people.

The city is only 175 km southwest of the financial hub of Shanghai, which has reported more than 200 cases, including one death, so far. Similar measures were imposed in Taizhou and three districts in Ningbo, covering a total population of nine million people. Days before, similar restrictions were placed on Wenzhou, home to another nine million. Zhejiang has confirmed 829 cases — the highest number outside the central province of Hubei, whose capital, Wuhan, is the epicenter of the outbreak.

The disease is believed to have emerged in December in a Wuhan market that sold wild animals, and spread rapidly as people travelled for the Lunar New Year holiday in late January. China has struggled to contain the virus despite enacting unprecedented measures, including virtually locking down more than 50 mil-

Dems turn sights on New Hampshire...

Continued from Page 1

"This is really the first proof point for how we're building the campaign that is ultimately going to go on to defeat Trump" in November's presidential election, he added.

Sanders, 78, said he had "a good feeling we're going to be doing very, very well here in Iowa". "Tonight in this enormously consequential 2020 election, the first state in the country has voted, and today marks the beginning of the end for Donald Trump," said the self-described democratic socialist. Another Democratic candidate, Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar, called for patience. "I think they'll be able to count them by hand, just like they used to," Klobuchar told CNN. "I'm sure they're working hard."

With Iowa still mired in confusion, Democratic candidates were already turning their sights on the next nominating contest, which takes place in New Hampshire on Feb 11. According to a Boston Globe/WBZ-TV/Suffolk University poll released Monday, Sanders is leading in New Hampshire with 24 percent support followed by Biden with 18 percent, Warren with 13 percent and Buttigieg with 11 percent.

Greece to send Patriot missiles to Saudi...

Continued from Page 1

Greek opposition parties have condemned the move as dangerous "adventurism". "This would be a Greek military presence outside the Mediterranean for the first time in decades," leftist Eurodeputy Dimitris Papadimoulis tweeted in January.

Meanwhile, Iran wants to resolve differences with its Gulf foes Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates "as quickly as possible", Tehran's ambassador to Iraq said in remarks published yesterday. Ambassador Iraj Masjedi said top commander Qassem Soleimani, killed at Baghdad airport by a US drone strike last month, was carrying a message setting out Iran's position on possible rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, the Iraqi state news agency reported.

"Tehran welcomes Iraq's role in trying to solve differences between Iran and Saudi," Masjedi was quoted as saying, referring to recent Iraq efforts to mediate between the regional rivals, expressing Iran's "wish to resolve differences and challenges with Saudi and the UAE as quickly as possible". Masjedi made his remarks in an interview with the agency, which published excerpts in Arabic.

Iran has long been at odds with US Gulf Arab allies. Washington blamed a series of attacks against oil interests in the Gulf last year on Iran, and the killing of Soleimani brought the region to the brink of war.

Sports

Biggest threats to reign of Kansas City Chiefs, Mahomes

Patrick Mahomes is the best player in football

MIAMI: Just 36 starts into his career, he has a Lombardi Trophy, plus regular-season and Super Bowl MVP awards. He's only 24.

That's bad news for the rest of the NFL, especially the AFC. The Chiefs already have hosted back-to-back AFC Championship Games and were whiskers from consecutive Super Bowl appearances. Their division foes are struggling, and the best younger QB in the conference abruptly quit football in August.

Yes, things are looking great in Kansas City, which will host a parade today to fete the Chiefs and their 31-20 win in Super Bowl LIV. Who can challenge the Chiefs' reign? These are the five greatest obstacles standing in the way of a Kansas City dynasty.

THE SALARY CAP

The Chiefs' greatest enemies, at the moment, are the league's established restrictions to promote parity. Even with a quarterback still on a rookie contract, Kansas City already is feeling the pressure.

Kansas City has just \$19 million in cap room for 2020, per Spotrac, and that's without accounting for Chris Jones — an elite interior pass rusher — and defensive backs Bashaud Breeland and Kendall Fuller, all pending free agents. Jones' negotiation might require the franchise tag, making for a delicate balancing of the books.

The Chiefs also have four key players with two years left on their contracts: tight end Travis Kelce, right tackle Mitchell Schwartz, safety Tyrann Mathieu and left tackle Eric Fisher. As elite players at their positions, Kelce and Schwartz could demand raises this offseason on deals signed in 2016. If they don't, they'll surely command top-level extensions next offseason. Likewise, Mathieu and Fisher will want new deals next summer.

And of course, a megadeal for Mahomes is looming. Initial reports suggested the Chiefs would get it done this offseason, but they might not have the flexibility. The sooner the better — Mahomes' price tag (at least \$40 million annually) only will rise.

Kansas City will look for relief. Sammy Watkins and Anthony Hitchens have wildly disappointed on pricey contracts from 2018, and cutting Watkins (if he doesn't step away, as he suggested he might this week) would save \$14 million. Hitchens, however, restructured his deal in September and will count \$12.7 million against the cap in 2020 barring a post-June 1 release, which would push \$8.4 million of that into 2021.

Modest savings could be found elsewhere. Laurent Duvernay-Tardif (\$4.9 million savings), Cameron Erving (\$4.7 million), Daniel Sorensen (\$3.75 million) and Damien Wilson (\$3 million) could be released, but that would leave nearly \$6 million in dead money and some depth issues on the O-line.

The Chiefs' saving grace is that they'll be a destination for free agents as long as Mahomes is around. That

won't solve cap issues entirely, but it's a nice consolation.

LAMAR JACKSON AND THE RAVENS

It's easy to forget that the Chiefs weren't even the best team in the AFC during the regular season. When the Tennessee Titans upset the Baltimore Ravens and Lamar Jackson in the divisional round, they gave Kansas City a far easier path to the Super Bowl.

Baltimore has work to do (Matt Judon, Jimmy Smith and Michael Pierce are free agents), but it has more cap room (\$26.6 million) than Kansas City and is at least a year away from extending Jackson. The Ravens restock and reload as well as any NFL team. They have a quality offensive line, young weapons in Mark Andrews and Marquise Brown, plus a loaded defense with great depth at cornerback.

Despite the sour result, Jackson did not play all that poorly against the Titans, and any narratives about his playoff record (0-2) are downright silly at this point. The unanimous MVP, he's one of the NFL's best players and still ascending, having turned 23 in January.

The Chiefs already are assured of facing the Ravens in Baltimore in 2020 and 2021, games that could decide the conference's top seed. That might make Jackson vs. Mahomes the next great quarterback rivalry.

The two have met twice. The Chiefs won both games, but one required a series of miraculous plays from Mahomes to win in overtime in 2018.

BILL BELICHICK

Nobody knows who the New England Patriots' quarterback will be in 2020. But Bill Belichick will be the head coach, and that should keep Mahomes and the Chiefs wary. Kansas City lost Mahomes' first two meetings with Belichick despite scoring a combined 71 points. The Chiefs turned the tables in December 2019 in Foxborough, Mass., winning 23-16, and they'll get to host the Pats in 2020.

Another go-round with Belichick and Tom Brady would be dangerous for the Chiefs, especially if the Patriots can improve their offensive line and add another weapon or two. Even if Brady is not back, don't count New England out. How about a trade for Cam Newton? Andy Dalton is uninspiring, but Belichick could win a division with him. Don't put it past the Patriots to take the maligned Josh Rosen from division-rival Miami and turn him into an above-average starter.

Until we have reason to believe otherwise, Belichick and the Patriots remain dangerous.

DESHAUN WATSON

This is more about Watson himself than about the Houston Texans as a whole.

Watson is a terrific young quarterback, a smart and talented passer who is incredibly dangerous both on-



MIAMI: Patrick Mahomes #15 of the Kansas City Chiefs is tackled by Jaquiski Tartt #29 of the San Francisco 49ers Super Bowl LIV at Hard Rock Stadium on February 02, 2020 in Miami, Florida. — AFP

schedule and off-schedule. His protection is improving, and he'll get even better with sharper pocket awareness. He should battle Jackson and Mahomes as the conference's top quarterback over the next several years.

The reason Watson isn't higher on this list is because the Texans' future looks murky. Head coach Bill O'Brien took general manager duties and bet the farm on 2019, selling off future assets for Laremy Tunsil, Duke Johnson and Kenny Stills. Houston is without first- and third-round picks in 2020 and first- and second-round picks in 2021. After blowing a 24-0 lead to the Chiefs in the AFC divisional round playoff game, the Texans have major holes to fill in the secondary and the pass rush, and few means to do so. Tunsil is about to command a mammoth extension, which will cut into Houston's \$56.5 million in cap room. Top cornerback Bradley Roby is a free agent, and Watson's own megadeal will be needed before long. Given O'Brien's process thus far as the GM, it's hard to trust him to steer the Texans properly moving forward.

DIVISIONAL SURPRISES

Perhaps this should be higher on the list. We often tend to underestimate how quickly teams can improve (or decline), and how quickly a weak division can

become strong. For now, the AFC West has no worthy challengers and hasn't in some time. Dating to November 2015, Kansas City is a staggering 27-2 against division foes: 9-0 against the Broncos and 9-1 against both the Raiders and Chargers.

The Chargers — the most talented of those teams — either will be searching for a new quarterback this offseason or will rely on an aging Philip Rivers in 2020. The Raiders reportedly are interested in Tom Brady, and a split between Jon Gruden and Derek Carr appears likely at some point. The Broncos may or may not have their quarterback of the future in Drew Lock, who merely was OK despite a 4-1 finish.

At least one of those teams, though, will threaten the Chiefs before long. Perhaps the Chargers land Justin Herbert in the upcoming draft, and he blossoms. Maybe Brady joins Gruden and makes the Raiders contenders. If Lock becomes a star, Mahomes suddenly would have a long-term rival in the division. Perhaps Trevor Lawrence is drafted by one of these teams in 2021. None of these scenarios is a lock at the moment, but eventually, a challenger will emerge. That's just how the NFL works. It could be awhile, though, before anyone dethrones the four-time defending AFC West champions. — Reuters

Nadal to inaugurate Rafa Nadal Tennis Academy Kuwait with historic match

KUWAIT: The world's best tennis player, Rafael Nadal, will serve up the start of a new era for the sport of tennis when he inaugurates the Rafa Nadal Tennis Academy Kuwait, a training and developmental hub at the all-new Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex, with an special match today (5th February).

The 19-time Grand Slam champion will face former top-ranking ATP player David Ferrer in the inaugural Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait Champions Challenge in front of a sold-out crowd at the 1,500-seater outdoor stadium, just one of 18 courts at the world-class Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex.

Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait is the second such facility bearing the name of the global tennis icon and the first Rafa Nadal Academy outside the superstar's hometown in Mallorca, Spain, and constitutes a key part of the Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex. The Academy will now open membership registration before opening the doors in April.

One of the country's pioneering public-private partnership projects, this is the biggest sports initiative in value and size under the Kuwait Public Authority for Sport. It is directly linked to Tamdeen Group's award-winning flagship 360 Mall.

"The creation of this fascinating project was an important milestone in the vision of our wise leadership and government to invest in youth and nurture their talent in recogni-



Aerial view of Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex.

tion of the vital role that the youth play in the developmental process," said Mohammed Mustafa Marzouq Al-Marzouq - General Manager of Tamdeen Sports.

"To contribute to the development of the sports system in Kuwait, we strive to support this vision. We hope that the launch of this project will constitute an important transformation in this system. The launch of this project and the existing cooperation with the Rafa Nadal Tennis Academy has formed a space of hope and joy for our youth, children, and all lovers of the game in Kuwait."

The Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Tennis complex boasts the latest world-class technology throughout, from the "ProCushion" acrylic international standard surfaces to the advanced soundproofing method, and will, when fully operational, be home to the Kuwait Tennis Federation. At its heart will be the 5,000-seat Kuwait Arena.

Professionally certified coaches who embody the all-action work ethic of the planet's best tennis player will coach all levels and ages, and have access to state-of-the-art fitness centres for men and women, and healthy

great Margaret Court's record, has reached four Grand Slam finals since giving birth to daughter Olympia in 2017 but failed to win any of them.

She arrived at this year's Australian Open having won the Auckland Classic title but was beaten by China's Wang Qiang in the third round. "We have to accept the fact that it's not working," Mouratoglou told the BBC.

"We have to face reality, but she's positive that she can make it, otherwise she probably wouldn't be on a tennis court anymore. She believes she can and I believe it too. She's not that far, but we have to change a few things. "Maybe come back with a different angle,



Rafael Nadal arrives in Kuwait.

F&B options. The Academy will play a leading role in educating and encouraging local and regional tennis players, and follows Nadal's five main principles of greatness: tennis training, physical training, mental training, good nutrition and competition.

strategy and goals so she can make it. She does feel positive, she feels negative too because it's a failure when she doesn't win a Grand Slam." Mouratoglou said time was not on Williams' side in the pursuit of the record.

"She had everything to retire, 23 Grand Slam titles ... it's difficult to know how many chances she'll have. I don't know how long she's going to be able to play, but being able to reach four Grand Slam finals says a lot about her level.

"Her level is good enough but we have to understand what's going on, why she's not able to win. There's a big difference between reaching a final and winning one." — Reuters

Kuwait Stars wins again at Arab ice hockey club event

KUWAIT: Kuwait Stars, clinched their second consecutive victory at the Arab Ice Hockey Men's Club Championship,



Kuwait Stars versus Egypt's Pharaohs match in progress.

beating Egypt's Pharaohs, 5-1, on Monday. With today's victory in the event hosted by Kuwait's Winter Games Club Complex, the host team boost their position, adding to a four-point tally. Henrik Nielsen, member of the International Ice Hockey Federation's executive committee praised the hosting venue as a distinguished facility in line with international standards. Kuwait is now able to host major international tournaments, added Nielsen, who is also President of the Danish Ice Hockey Federation. — KUNA

Clay season can help Murray get fit

MELBOURNE: Former world number one Andy Murray must build up his fitness during the European clay-court season but should consider skipping the French Open to be fresh for Wimbledon, his former coach Alex Corretja has said.

The 32-year-old Briton missed the Australian Open due to a pelvic injury sustained at the Davis Cup Finals in November and then pulled out of tournaments at Montpellier and Rotterdam.

Spaniard Corretja said Murray, who recovered from hip resurfacing surgery to win the Antwerp title in October, should prioritise Wimbledon for his Grand Slam singles comeback having

won the title in 2013 and 2016. "Andy should use clay to get enough matches to be ready for grass," Corretja, now an analyst for Eurosport, was quoted as saying by British media.

"If he skips the claycourt season, there's going to be such a long gap before the grass. I believe he should use clay, not for practice, but to get in shape."

Corretja, who worked with Murray in spells between 2008-11, said skipping the French Open in May would not be a bad idea if his body was not ready to play five-set contests.

"If he feels it can be a little bit risky, maybe he should sacrifice the French Open, because it's very demanding," Corretja said.

"He should aim for the grass season and why not the Olympics again? It's very special, he loves the feeling there and it's a competition he knows he can win." Murray won Olympic singles gold at London and Rio. — Reuters

Serena needs fresh approach to surpass Court

NEW YORK: Former world number one Serena Williams must rethink her approach to Grand Slams after her latest bid to win a record-equalling 24th major prize came unstuck at Melbourne Park, her coach Patrick Mouratoglou has said. The 38-year-old American, who is looking to match Australian

Sports

India crush rivals Pakistan to reach Under-19 World Cup final

India will play either New Zealand or Bangladesh in the finals

POTCHEFSTROOM: Defending champions India cruised to a 10-wicket win over neighbours and arch-rivals Pakistan in Potchefstroom yesterday to reach the Under-19 Cricket World Cup final for the seventh time.

India, the record four-time winners of the underage competition, dismissed Pakistan for 172 in 43.1 overs before comfortably knocking off the runs with 88 balls to spare.

India will play either New Zealand or Bangladesh, who meet in the second semi-final, for the title at the same venue on Sunday. Pakistan will contest the third-place play-off in Benoni on Saturday.

Yashasvi Jaiswal struck an unbeaten 105 off 113 balls, completing his century and sealing the victory in style with a six over deep mid-wicket. "It's a dream come true for me. To be able to do this for my country is a great feeling. To score a hundred against Pakistan in a World Cup semi-final is something I can't put into words," said Jaiswal.

"They bowled well initially and we wanted to ride that out and we knew we could dominate them after that." Left-hander Jaiswal, who was snapped up by the Rajasthan Royals in the 2020 IPL auction, smacked eight fours and four sixes as he took over as the tournament's leading runscore.

He was ably supported in a leisurely chase by

Divyaansh Saxena who finished 59 not out, his second fifty of the competition. Jaiswal earlier picked up the key wicket of Pakistan opener Haider Ali (56) with his part-time legspin as Pakistan collapsed from 96 for two in an innings where just three players made double digits.

Ali and captain Rohail Nazir (62) helped Pakistan recover after losing Mohammad Huraira and Fahad Munir cheaply, but only Mohammad Haris, who hit a brisk 21 off 15 balls, provided any additional contribution.

Left-arm seamer Sushant Mishra took 3-28 while right-arm quick Kartik Tyagi and legspinner Ravi Bishnoi collected two wickets apiece. "The pitch was good, and we didn't put enough runs on the board," said Pakistan skipper Nazir.

"I think Haider and I had a great partnership, we were at a good position at the 25-over mark, but Haider got out at a crucial point, and the rest of the batsmen weren't able to take enough responsibility."

He added: "We learn from all our mistakes, and the boys are confident and happy that we played some good cricket in the tournament." Pakistan, who were back-to-back champions in 2004 and 2006, haven't beaten India at the U19 World Cup since 2010. With political relations on a knife-edge, there has been no Test series between the two countries at senior level since 2007-08 and no white ball series since 2012-13. — AFP



POTCHEFSTROOM: India's batsman Yashasvi Jaiswal plays a shot during the ICC Under-19 World Cup cricket semi-final between India and Pakistan at the Senwes Park, in Potchefstroom, yesterday. — AFP

Injury ends Rohit's NZ tour, India recall Shaw

NEW DELHI: India opening batsman Rohit Sharma has been ruled out of the rest of the tour of New Zealand after suffering a calf strain in the final Twenty20 international in Mt. Maunganui, the country's cricket board (BCCI) said yesterday. Rohit retired hurt on Sunday when he was on 60 off 41 balls. He received treatment for several minutes in the 17th over but hobbled off three deliveries later and was unable to continue.

"He underwent an MRI scan in Hamilton on Monday. The opening batsman has been ruled out of the upcoming ODI and test series and will be referred to the National Cricket Academy for further management of his injury," the BCCI said in a statement. India, who swept New Zealand 5-0 in the T20 series, play three ODIs starting Wednesday in Hamilton and selectors have named Mayank Agarwal as Rohit's replacement in the 50-overs squad.

Prithvi Shaw, who was sidelined first by an ankle injury and then a doping ban last year, was named in the 16-member test squad and is expected to open with Agarwal with fellow 20-year-old Shubman Gill as the reserve opener.

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah returns to the test squad after a stress fracture on his lower back kept him out of the home series against South Africa and Bangladesh last year.

Quick Ishant Sharma was also named in the squad but his participation is subject to him clearing a fitness test after suffering an ankle injury during a domestic match last month. Spinner Kuldeep Yadav was left out but Rishabh Pant retained his place in the side though Wriddhiman Saha remains India's preferred test wicketkeeper.

Wellington hosts the first test from Feb. 21 and the second begins in Christchurch eight days later.

India will also be without all-rounder Hardik Pandya for the test series as he recovers from a back injury. On the New Zealand team, a shoulder injury has ruled out skipper Kane Williamson from the first two one-dayers. He will be replaced by left-handed batsman Mark Chapman.

India test squad: Virat Kohli (captain), Mayank Agarwal, Prithvi Shaw, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Hanuma Vihari, Wriddhiman Saha, Rishabh Pant, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Jasprit Bumrah, Umesh Yadav, Mohammed Shami, Navdeep Saini, Ishant Sharma (subject to fitness). — Reuters

Maxwell returns for Australia's limited overs tour of S Africa

SYDNEY: Glenn Maxwell was recalled to the Australia one-day and Twenty20 squads for the tour of South Africa yesterday, returning to the international setup for the first time since taking a break to deal with mental health issues in October.

The explosive all-rounder was not picked for the January series in India but returns for the three one-dayers and three Twenty20s in South Africa on the back of 389 runs at 43.22 in the domestic Big Bash series.

"It is fantastic to have Glenn back in both squads given his brilliant form in the middle order for the Stars

along with his results with the ball," national selector Trevor Hohns said in a statement. Maxwell, 31, told reporters in Melbourne the break did him a world of good.

"I think I've come back a fresher player," he said. "I think I've been able to work out a few things off the field and get mentally right to perform and play well without any mental scars or anything like that going on behind."

There was no place for the leading run scorer in the Big Bash, however, with Marcus Stoinis's 612 runs at 55.63 and Player of the tournament honours not enough to end his six-month exile from international cricket.

"Marcus Stoinis is a standby player for each squad and was unlucky to miss out due to the makeup of the current top order," Hohns said. "It is terrific to have a backup player of his calibre in such good form." All-rounder Mitchell Marsh was handed another chance to steady his stop-start limited-overs career after he impressed with the Perth Scorchers.

"I haven't played a one-day game for two years and a

T20 for a year so it's certainly nice to be back playing for Australia in white ball cricket," Marsh told reporters in Perth. Batsman Marnus Labuschagne retains his place in the one-day squad after scoring 54 and 46 in his first two ODI innings on the tour of India.

Australia start the tour of South Africa on Feb. 21 with the first Twenty20 in Johannesburg before the one-day series starts in Paarl on Feb. 29 and concludes with further matches in Bloemfontein and Potchefstroom in early March.

ODI squad: Aaron Finch (captain), Ashton Agar, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Marnus Labuschagne, Mitchell Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Kane Richardson, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Matthew Wade, David Warner, Adam Zampa

Twenty20 squad: Aaron Finch (captain), Sean Abbott, Ashton Agar, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins, Mitchell Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Jhye Richardson, Kane Richardson, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Matthew Wade, David Warner, Adam Zampa. — Reuters



CASABLANCA: Moroccan security forces stand on guard as supporters of Raja Club Athletic chant slogans and wave their flags as they attend a Moroccan Botola football match between Raja and Mouloudia Oujda in Casablanca. — AFP photos

Hamilton is good, says Verstappen

LONDON: Max Verstappen believes he can thwart Lewis Hamilton's bid for a seventh Formula One title this season if Red Bull give him the tools to do the job.

The 22-year-old Dutch driver won three races last year, finishing third overall in the championship, and is not about to be awed by anyone's reputation — even if that person is possibly the greatest driver of all time.

"It's very car-dependent of course in Formula One," Verstappen told reporters at a Red Bull team media event on Monday. "Lewis is very good. He is definitely one of the best out there, but he's not God. Maybe God is with him, but he is not God."

Hamilton, 35, is chasing several records this season including Michael Schumacher's 91 race wins and seven titles, and has won five of the last six championships with dominant Mercedes. "We really want to mount a challenge to especially Mercedes and I think we can do that," said Verstappen, who last month signed a contract extension to the end of 2023 and has a new English trainer and physio for 2020. He said the new contract had taken away the hassle of being asked all the time about his future, removing another potential distraction. Verstappen suggested Hamilton could be vulnerable if put under sustained pressure, with the Briton having singled out Verstappen already last year as someone he gave more space to because of his aggressive reputation.

"I'm very much looking forward to it, everybody's fired up and everybody's very motivated. Coming off last year, at the end, we were very competitive," said the Dutch driver. Team boss Christian Horner said Red Bull, who use Honda engines, would be helped by stable regulations and were looking to apply the lessons learned from 2019 to take the fight to Mercedes and Ferrari.

The new car will have its first track shakedown behind closed doors at Silverstone on Feb. 12, with Verstappen and Thai team mate Alexander Albon starting pre-season testing in Barcelona on Feb. 19. — Reuters

N Africa football stadiums double as political arenas

CASABLANCA: From Casablanca to Algiers via Tunis, the chants belted out across football stadiums echo young North African fans' frustrations not connected to the highs and lows of the beautiful game. Chants of "Fbladi delmouni!" ("Oppressed in my country!") at the demonstrations that have been commonplace in Algeria since last year originated on the noisy terraces manned by the ultras of Morocco's Raja Casablanca.

The song of the club's "Ultras Eagles" has notched up close to nine million hits on YouTube. On match days, the chant is belted to the accompaniment of drumbeats, smoke bombs and elaborate, choreographed displays. "We live under a dark cloud in this country... You've robbed the wealth and shared it with foreigners. You've destroyed a whole generation," are among the lyrics of the song which came out in 2018.

For Moroccan author Abdellah Taia, the song is "despairing, lucid, true, without any embellishment". Khalid, a green-scarved fan emerging from a recent match, said it "describes the lives of thousands of young people from working-class areas". Raja Casablanca is no exception. Youths in both Tunisia and Algeria, faced with inequalities and curbs on freedom, voice their rejection of corruption, frustrations with life and desire to flee abroad through the songs of the ultras.

"Free and unbowed," composed by ultras of rival club Wydad, denounces Morocco's high youth unemployment and constant privatization of public services. Fans of Itihad Tangiers sing out against "injustice" and demand "a boat to save us from this land". Such chants "criticize everything and straddle sport and politics", said Moroccan journalist Abderrahim Bourkia, who has written a book on the ultra movement.

For sports researcher Moncef El Yazghi, "it's a new



CASABLANCA: Supporters of Raja Club Athletic chant slogans and wave their flags as they attend a Moroccan Botola football match between Raja and Mouloudia Oujda in Casablanca on January 22, 2020.

form of protest which doesn't seek authorization and without any fanfare". The fervor can spill out of the stadium, such as when Raja's supporters group tweeted "total support for all those detained" in Morocco for their views. Algerian football stadiums have since the late 1970s provided an outlet, sometimes a violent one, for young people who feel robbed of a future.

They came out in support of the Hirak protest movement that finally led to the ouster of longtime president Abdelaziz Bouteflika in April 2019 following months of mass street demonstrations. "In a protest movement that rejects the framework of traditional parties, the ultras emerge as the most structured, especially as they've suspended differences between clubs in the general interest of the Hirak," wrote historian and author Jean-Pierre Filiu.

'ACH OUR LIFE'

In Tunisia, especially since its 2011 revolution, fans

give voice to social and political woes in their chants, pinning blame on government corruption. "Ach, our life," is a constant refrain of the African Winners ultras of Club Africain in the first division of the Tunisian football league. Supporters in Egypt were also active during the Arab Spring revolts of nine years ago. In 2019, small-scale anti-government demonstrations took place on match nights of Cairo club Al-Ahly. They were swiftly put down, with police making thousands of arrests.

In Morocco, after supporters failed to inform police of fan displays, Raja supporters said "massive arrests" were carried out last December. In 2018, 14 supporters of Tetouan in the north were jailed for up to 10 months for waving Spanish flags in the stands to protest the Moroccan navy's killing of a female student trying to cross by sea to Spain. "But still we're less exposed inside the stadium. We can express ourselves without facing problems," said Raja supporter Tarik. — AFP

Sports

Sampdoria fightback in vain as Napoli snatch late goals

Match featured two controversial VAR decisions

NAPOLI: Napoli grabbed two late goals to win 4-2 at Sampdoria on Monday in a Serie A match featuring two controversial VAR decisions and a spectacular effort by veteran Fabio Quagliarella for the hosts.

Diego Demme and Dries Mertens struck in the final 10 minutes as Napoli continued their mini-revival under fiery coach Gennaro Gattuso with a third successive win in all competitions.

Napoli had plummeted down the table after a dreadful run of results but are now back up to 10th with 30 points, nine off the Champions League spots.

"We're back, we giving continuity to the work we do during the week with the boss," said team captain Lorenzo Insigne. "The Champions League is feasible but we have to think match by match."

Napoli raced to a 2-0 lead after 16 minutes as Arkadiusz Milik headed in to finish off a slick passing move and Eljif Elmas turned the ball home at the far post from a corner for his first Serie A goal, the North Macedonian crying with emotion as he celebrated.

Quagliarella pulled one back in the 26th minute as the ball was chipped forward to the edge of

the area where the 37-year-old met it with a volley on the turn which flew into the bottom corner.

Sampdoria thought they had levelled 10 minutes after halftime with an overhead kick by Gaston Ramirez but, after a long VAR review, the goal was controversially chalked off for handball by Manolo Gabbiadini at the start of the move.

VAR, however, went in Sampdoria's favour when Kostas Manolas clipped Quagliarella's ankle and, after another review with the pitchside monitor, the referee gave a penalty and Gabbiadini converted in the 73rd minute. Demme put Napoli back in front after 82 minutes and Mertens curled the fourth into an empty net from midfield after Sampdoria goalkeeper Emil Audero charged out of his area and headed the ball straight to the Belgian.

"It was a really good Napoli team, they surprised us," said Sampdoria coach Claudio Ranieri, whose side are 16th and only four points clear of the drop zone. "We did more and they did less in the second half but we made some mistakes at the end and they made us pay." —Reuters



NAPOLI: Napoli teammates celebrate after scoring two late goals to beat Sampdoria.

Walter Mazzarri parts company with Torino

MILAN: Torino's Walter Mazzarri became the 10th manager in Serie A to lose his job this season yesterday, leaving the side 12th in the league after shipping no fewer than 17 goals in their last four games.

The gruff 58-year-old former Inter Milan, Napoli and Watford coach, who had been in charge for just over two years, is replaced by Moreno Longo, a former Torino player and youth team coach, the club said.

Torino's indifferent season took a sharp turn for the worse when they lost successive league games 7-0 at home to Atalanta and 4-0 at lowly Lecce with a 4-2 Coppa Italia loss to AC Milan sandwiched in between.

Mazzarri, who has been sent off around 20 times in his career and is known as one of Italy's angriest coaches on the touchline, led the side to seventh place last season, despite a health scare when he was ordered to rest for several days.

However, instead of progressing, they have taken a step back this term and Mazzarri, who has a degree in psychology and sociology, has been unable to turn the

situation around. "President Urbano Cairo and coach Walter Mazzarri, after a thorough analysis of the current situation, have decided to end their professional relationship," the club said in a statement http://torinofc.it/en/news/04/02/2020/torino-and-mazzarri-part-ways_23704.

"The club wishes to thank the coach and all of his staff for the commitment, fairness, and professionalism shown in these last two years," Longo began his professional career at Torino after being raised at the club, for whom he made 31 appearances. He went on to play for several lower-tier teams in a career punctuated by injury. As a coach, he was in charge of Torino's youth team for four seasons and led Frosinone out of Serie B in 2017-18, although he was sacked after four months of the following campaign in Serie A, his only top-flight coaching experience.

The other coaching changes in the 20-team league this season have been at Sampdoria, AC Milan, Napoli, Udinese, Fiorentina and twice each at Brescia and Genoa. — Reuters



Walter Mazzarri

WADA asks CAS for public hearing on Russia doping case

MONTREAL: The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said Monday it has asked the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) for a public hearing on its case for Russia's exclusion from international sporting competitions.

At stake in the hearing will be the fate of Russian athletes hoping to compete in such events as this year's Tokyo Olympics and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and 2022 football World Cup.

WADA director general Olivier Niggli said his group made the formal request for a public forum to resolve the dispute would ensure the world hears the case from both sides and understands how punishment, if any, is administered. "WADA's investigations on Russia, and this latest case of non-compliance, have generated huge interest around the world," Niggli said. "It is WADA's view — and that of many of our stakeholders — that this dispute at CAS should be held in a public forum to ensure that everybody understands the process and hears the arguments."

WADA sent its case against the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA) to CAS, the world's highest sport court, last month. It will be a CAS panel that must decide whether to confirm the four-year ban WADA imposed on Russia last month after considering Russia's case against the epic sanction.

In December, WADA imposed a four-year ban on Russia over what it considers a state-sponsored doping scheme — prohibiting Russia from participating in such events as this year's Tokyo Olympics.

WADA says Russia "manipulated" data from an anti-doping laboratory in Moscow in the latest move in a long-running scandal that began with the 2015 revelation of long-term institutional doping involving senior Russian officials, secret agents and trafficked urine vials. Under the sanctions, Russians would be allowed to compete in the Tokyo Olympics only if they can demonstrate they were not part of the doping network — the same situation Russian athletes faced at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

RUSADA disputed the WADA executive committee ban on December 27, setting the stage for WADA to send the case to CAS. WADA investigators retrieved data from the RUSADA Moscow laboratory last year, but in analyzing the data, WADA and independent investigators confirmed the data had been manipulated and some data had been deleted.

Earlier, the executive committee of Russia's suspended athletics federation resigned on Monday and transferred its authority to a working group designed to lift the organisation out of a 4-1/2-year doping crisis, the federation said.

The federation was plunged into deeper crisis when

its president and six other people were provisionally suspended last November for having provided false explanations and forged documents to justify three missed doping tests by high jumper Danil Lysenko.

The charges prompted World Athletics, the sport's global governing body, to suspend the federation's reinstatement procedure and bar Russian track and field athletes from competing internationally as neutrals. The Russian federation's woes worsened last week when the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU), the global body overseeing integrity in the sport, said the organisation had shown a "total lack of contrition" in its response to the Lysenko case and recommended that it be expelled from global athletics.

The federation said on Monday that its leadership was resigning and all responsibilities, including liaising

with World Athletics, the AIU and other global organisations, was being transferred to a working group run by the Russian Olympic Committee.

"The crisis in Russian athletics has already lasted five years and it is clear to everyone that is had dragged on," the federation quoted Sports Minister Oleg Matytsin as saying.

"Our common goal is to promptly normalise cooperation with World Athletics in order to restore our membership." World Athletics said last week that the federation could avoid expulsion if its officials admitted to their involvement in the scandal. Russia is also in the process of appealing a four-year ban from competing under its flag at major international events as punishment for having provided WADA with doctored laboratory data. — Agencies

Winning CL would salvage City's season

MANCHESTER: With Liverpool set to take over as Premier League champions, Manchester City should prioritise Europe and can still have a "great season" if they win the Champions League, former England striker Ian Wright has said.

City's 2-0 loss at Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday was their sixth league defeat of the season, two more than in the whole of the previous campaign, and left them 22 points behind Liverpool, who are set to end a 30-year wait for a league title.

But Wright said City, who meet Real Madrid in the last 16 of the Champions League this month, can still salvage their season. "You feel if they don't win the Champions League then it's not a good season. But if

they do win it, it's a great season," Wright told BBC Radio 5 Live.

"I would start saving players for it because that's what City have got to start focusing on." Pep Guardiola, who won two Champions League titles at Barcelona, has not managed to take City beyond the quarter-finals of the competition.

"With the team he assembled, we thought it would happen in his tenure," Wright added. "He's three years in with a team that has played at a really high intensity and City have not been able to stay up with a Liverpool side that have kicked on." City return to league action on Sunday against 18th-placed West Ham United. — Reuters

Live		Matches on TV
(Local Timings)		
SPAIN COPA DEL REY		
CD Mirandes v Villarreal CF		23:00
beIN SPORTS		
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
SS Lazio v Hellas Verona FC		22:45
beIN SPORTS		
FRENCH LEAGUE		
Olympique Lyonnais v Amiens SC		21:00
beIN SPORTS		
Montpellier HSC v FC Metz		21:00
beIN SPORTS		
Toulouse FC v RC Strasbourg		21:00
beIN SPORTS		
Stade Brest 29 v FC Girondins de Bordeaux		21:00
beIN SPORTS		
Stade Reims v OGC Nice		21:00
beIN SPORTS		
Nimes Olympique v Dijon		21:00
beIN SPORTS		
Saint Etienne v Olympique Marseille		23:00
beIN SPORTS		

Pysyk hat trick helps Panthers beat Maple Leafs

TORONTO: Mike Hoffman scored the go-ahead goal midway through the third period, Mark Pysyk had three goals, and the visiting Florida Panthers overcame a two-goal deficit to defeat the Toronto Maple Leafs 5-3 on Monday night. Hoffman's 19th goal of the season at 10:13 was the third of four consecutive Florida goals in the third period. Pysyk notched his third goal of the game and seventh of the season into an empty net at 19:12. Jonathan Huberdeau also scored for the Panthers, who have won seven of their past eight games. Mike Matheson had three assists, and Hoffman added an assist. Maple Leafs starting goaltender Frederik Andersen collided with Panthers center Frank Vatrano near the end of the first period and missed the final two periods due to an upper-body injury. Andersen, who allowed one goal in eight shots, finished the first period. Michael Hutchinson replaced him and gave up three goals on 13 shots.

STARS 5, RANGERS 3

Joe Pavelski had two power-play goals in the first period as Dallas won at New York. Pavelski, a free agent signee for the Stars last summer, had been struggling with the puck, scoring his first goal in nine games on Saturday against the New Jersey Devils. Stephen Johns, Blake Comeau and Corey Perry also scored for Dallas, and Anton Khudobin made 33 saves for the Stars. Pavel Buchnevich, Brett Howden and Brendan Lemieux scored power-play goals for the Rangers, and Lemieux added an assist.

FLYERS 3, RED WINGS 0

Kevin Hayes scored one of Philadelphia's two third-period, short-handed goals, and Brian Elliott faced just 16 shots en route to his 40th career shutout as the Flyers won at Detroit. Scott Loughton and Matt Niskanen also scored, and Elliott posted his second shutout in his past three starts. Jonathan Bernier made 28 saves for the Red Wings, who are 0-8-1 since beating the Ottawa Senators on Jan 10. — Reuters

25 Nadal to inaugurate Rafa Nadal Tennis Academy Kuwait with historic match



26 India crush rivals Pakistan to reach Under-19 World Cup final



27 Walter Mazzarri parts company with Torino



LA Clippers rally to beat Spurs



LOS ANGELES: Lonnie Walker IV #1 of the San Antonio Spurs drives to the basket against the LA Clippers at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

LOS ANGELES: Paul George found his groove just in time to help the Los Angeles Clippers pull off a 108-105 NBA victory over the San Antonio Spurs on Monday. George, who made just two of his first seven shots, drained four of his last six as the Clippers rallied from a 15-point second-quarter deficit to snatch the win. Trailing by nine points at halftime, the Clippers out-scored the Spurs 31-19 in the third period to take an 85-82 lead. After a back-and-forth battle in the fourth the Clippers emerged with the win by three.

"We don't care if it's a blowout or it's a close one — we need to learn how to do both," said George, who also pulled down 12 rebounds and handed out eight assists as the Clippers, second in the Western Conference, improved to 35-15. Kawhi Leonard led the Clippers with 22 points and his one-handed dunk — off a pass from George — put Los Angeles up by two with 1:35 to play.

George drained a jump shot with 13.7 seconds left to give Los Angeles a 106-102 lead, the Spurs responding with a three-pointer from Patty Mills before Lou Williams made two free throws for the Clippers to seal it. "Defense is key," said George, who left the game with his nose bleeding in the third after taking an elbow from DeMar DeRozan but returned in the final period. "I think defensively we got in a nice little zone and offensively it comes down to us making good shots. "I just found a rhythm," he said of his own late surge. "I was able to see the ball go down ... that's all it took."

LaMarcus Aldridge scored 13 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter for the Spurs, but DeRozan, who scored 26, came up empty in the final period.

BUTLER SHINES

In Miami, Jimmy Butler exploded for a season-high 38 points against his former team, doing enough dam-

age to sit out all of the fourth quarter of the Heat's 137-106 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers.

Butler's aggressive game helped the Heat overcome the early departures of injured Tyler Herro and Meyers Leonard — who had to be helped from the floor with sprained left ankle. With Boston's 123-115 victory over the Hawks in Atlanta, Miami and the Celtics both finished the night with records of 34-15 — eight games behind Eastern Conference leaders Milwaukee and 1.5 behind second-placed Toronto.

"I felt great," Butler said. "More than anything I'm super-happy that we got the Dub (W)." Bam Adebayo added 18 points, eight rebounds and 11 assists for the Heat, who scored 41 points in the third quarter to blow open the game.

In Atlanta, the Hawks rallied to pressure the Celtics late, but rookie Grant Williams came up with a couple of big baskets down the stretch — including a driving layup with 37.6sec remaining that pushed Boston's

lead to six points. Jayson Tatum scored 28 points for Boston, connecting on 10 of 20 shots from the field including five of nine from three-point range. Gordon Hayward added 24 points and Jaylen Brown had 21 for the Celtics, who led by as many as 13 before the Hawks — led by 34 points from Trae Young — slashed the deficit to three points with less than four minutes to play. The Golden State Warriors, coming off a 131-112 win over the Cleveland Cavaliers, kept things rolling with a 125-117 victory over the Wizards in Washington.

Alec Burks came off the bench to score 30 points for Golden State, who had six players score in double figures to withstand a 43-point performance from Washington's Bradley Beal.

Davis Bertans added 19 points for Washington while Thomas Bryant and Japan's Rui Hachimura — back in the starting lineup after missing 22 games with a groin injury — scored 11 points apiece. — AFP

French skating coach facing probe into claims of sexual abuse of minors

PARIS: French prosecutors opened an investigation into claims of rape and sexual abuse of minors in figure skating yesterday as details emerged of allegations made 20 years ago against the coach at the heart of the case. The probe, hailed as a "strong signal" by French Sports Minister Roxana Maracineanu and in which "the words of the victims must be heard", will focus on claims made by former world championship medallist Sarah Abitbol last week.

In her autobiography, which was published on Thursday, Abitbol accused coach Gilles Beyer of raping her several times from 1990 to 1992 when she was between the ages of 15 and 17. "He (Beyer) started to

do horrible things leading to sexual abuse and I was raped at 15," said Abitbol, now 44, in a video interview with L'Obs last week.

The investigation will also "attempt to identify all the other victims who suffered... offences of the same nature", Paris-based prosecutor Remy Heitz said in a statement. Abitbol's revelations last week coincided with sports daily L'Equipe publishing an investigation in which three other skaters accused Beyer and two other coaches, Jean-Roland Racle and Michel Lotz, of abuse and rape when they were minors.

Further allegations of underage sexual abuse emerged from former swimmers and tennis players. On Friday, 62-year-old Beyer admitted to having had "intimate" and "inappropriate" relations with Abitbol, telling AFP he was "sincerely sorry".

"I acknowledge having had intimate relationships with her," Beyer said in a statement. "If my memories of the exact circumstances differ from hers, I am aware that, given my duties and her age at the time, these relationships were inappropriate." Racle has denied the accusations while Lotz has not commented.

CALLS FOR RESIGNATION

Abitbol's claims, which came on the heels of French

tennis coach Andrew Geddes being jailed for 18 years for raping four underage players, gathered further pace on Monday when sports minister Maracineanu told Didier Gailhaguet to quit as president of France's ice skating federation.

"The weight of facts and their continuation over time illustrate that a general dysfunction exists within the federation," she said. "Didier Gailhaguet cannot absolve himself of his moral and personal responsibility, so I have asked him to assume all his responsibilities and resign."

Maracineanu, a former swimming world champion, does not have the power to sack Gailhaguet but intimated that the federation would face state sanctions if he remains. Gailhaguet is due to hold a press conference today.

Gailhaguet admitted to "mistakes", but defended his record on this matter. "She (Maracineanu) did not listen to me and she certainly didn't hear me," said the 66-year-old who has been the most influential figure in French ice skating since he first became president in 1998, some years after the alleged offences.

Gailhaguet has been president ever since apart from a three-year hiatus between 2004 and 2007 which followed a judging scandal at the 2002 Winter Olympics

in Salt Lake City. He was suspended by the International Skating Union for three years from 2002 and duly gave up, temporarily, the presidency of the French federation.

Gailhaguet's accession to the presidency in 1998 opened the door for Beyer to take charge of the French national team. Two years later, another skater made a complaint against Beyer which was followed up at ministry level but not acted on by prosecutors.

The report of that investigation, which has been seen by AFP, shows that Gailhaguet was aware of the nature of the allegations against Beyer. In a letter addressed to him and dated February 8, 2000, the parents of a young skater outline Beyer's inappropriate behaviour towards their daughter, who was 17, during a training camp.

According to the letter which relates to an incident in July 1999, Beyer was "under the effects of alcohol" when he sat down on the girl's bed. After talking he said he would leave but asked if he could kiss her. She declined. "It would be desirable, not to say essential ... that this gentleman never again gets close to adolescent skaters who are minors," the parents said in the letter. Beyer did not comment on the letter when contacted by AFP. — AFP