



3 Kuwait seeks information on alleged Airbus bribery case



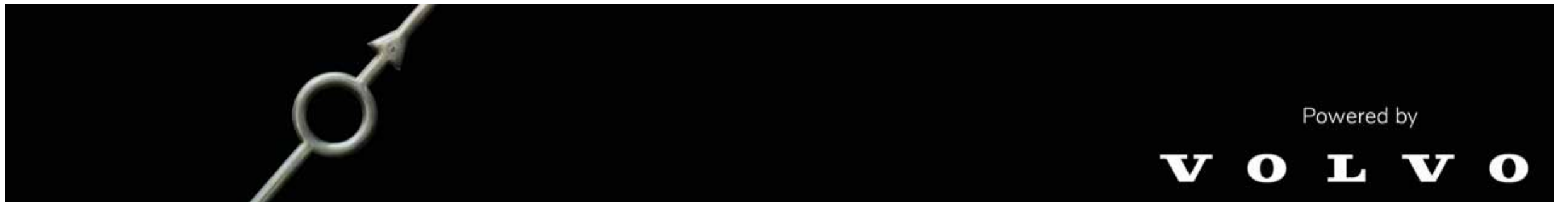
6 Exit polls predict Modi defeat as Delhi votes



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28 Everton charge into European contention with Palace win



Ghanem rejects Trump Mideast peace plan, dumps it in dustbin

Top Jordan lawmaker sees Palestinian statehood as viable solution



Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sabah and Bader Al-Kharafi sign the MoU.

CBK, Zain sign MoU for cloud solutions, data center services

KUWAIT: As part of the joint collaboration between the Commercial Bank of Kuwait and Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, the two companies signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) through which Zain will offer CBK the latest cloud solutions, data center services, and the most advanced security solutions to drive the bank's digital transformation efforts.

Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi said:

"We applaud CBK, a well-regarded and successful entity in Kuwait, for proactively assessing its transformation roadmap to digitization and are honored to enter this milestone MoU with them. Storing digital assets securely and efficiently is becoming a key differentiator to businesses in general, and financial services institutions in particular, and it is important we have robust systems in place to be able to store, access, retrieve and restore data." (See Page 11)

AMMAN: A Middle East peace plan presented by US President Donald Trump was "destined to die", Kuwait's top lawmaker said yesterday, adding it was met with near-unanimous disapproval from the international community. Peacemakers should work "seriously" towards genuine peace, which can only mean a full-fledged Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said during an extraordinary meeting of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union in Amman, where some 20 Arab top lawmakers have gathered.

He emphasized the Palestinians and the entire Arab region vehemently "reject" the US-proposed peace plan, saying the Europeans share similar sentiments as well. The Arab world fully supports all efforts to achieve true peace in the Middle East, in which the rights of the Palestinians are fully protected, Kuwait's top lawmaker underlined. "History, geography and demographics are not on the side of our enemies," Ghanem said, promising that the reality that is the state of Palestine will come "sooner or later", thanking Jordan for organizing the talks.

Trump had suggested creating a Palestinian state as part of a Middle East peace plan with strict conditions allowing Israel to maintain control over West Bank settlements. The plan drew the ire of the wider Arab region, with the Palestinians deeming it as largely biased towards Israel. Jordanian Parliament Speaker Atef Tarawneh said Palestinians will only accept a viable solution



AMMAN: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem throws a copy of US President Donald Trump's Middle East peace plan in the dustbin during an extraordinary meeting of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union yesterday.

that envisages a Palestinian statehood on the June 4 border with its capital in Jerusalem. He warned that the US Middle East peace plan "confiscates the Palestinian people's rights and undermines the very foundations on which relevant international legitimacy resolutions were based".

Palestinian Parliament Speaker Salim Al-Zanoun addressed the gathering by calling on Arab countries to throw more weight behind the Palestinian people, including

material, political and parliamentary backing, and to oppose the recently unveiled US move. He underscored that it is also essential to adopt resolutions that can ensure the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to put relevant international legitimacy resolutions in place. Zanoun also urged Arab parliaments and governments to work together as a united group to openly and emphatically turn down the US plan for the Middle East peace process. — KUNA

MoI: No driving licenses for expat students, nurses

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The interior ministry has banned the issuance of new driving licenses to expat students as well as nurses. Students or nurses who previously obtained driving licenses can only renew them provided a registration certificate is furnished from the university or the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training or from the nurses' employers respectively.

Kuwaitis urged to avoid travel to Singapore; virus toll hits 722

BEIJING: The death toll from the novel coronavirus outbreak soared to 722 in China yesterday, including the first foreign victim, as Hong Kong imposed a mandatory quarantine on mainland arrivals to block the spread of an epidemic that has caused global panic. With 86 more people dying in mainland China - the highest one-day jump so far - the toll was closing in on the 774 killed worldwide during the 2002-2003 SARS epidemic.

Meanwhile, Kuwait asked its citizens to delay their travel plans to Singapore

because of the coronavirus. The Kuwaiti Embassy in Singapore made the announcement yesterday after the government of the Asian city-state raised its alert level over China's coronavirus outbreak to "orange".

In a statement published by KUNA, the embassy called on Kuwaitis desiring to travel to Singapore to wait until things get back to normal, also urging its citizens in the city-state to leave immediately. It stressed the importance of following instructions of the local

Continued on Page 24



SHANGHAI: People wearing protective facemasks walk inside a mall yesterday. — AFP

Thai gunman kills at least 20 in mass shooting

BANGKOK: Dozens of terrified shoppers were evacuated from a Thai mall early today as armed police said they had "taken control" of the ground floor of the complex from a gunman who killed at least 20 people. But authorities did not give any firm details on the whereabouts of the attacker - a junior army officer named Sergeant-Major Jakrapanth Thomma. There were fears the shooter could try to hide amongst the panicked crowds. Police from the Crime Suppression Division urged fleeing shoppers to "raise their hands" and identify themselves on the ground floor "and authorities will evacuate you".

Earlier Jakrapanth relayed his shooting spree through Facebook posts which charted the attack from an army barracks to the mall where an unknown number of shoppers remained trapped. Hospitals across the country braced for a grim night ahead. "There are about 20 dead," Kongcheep Tantravanich, defense ministry spokesman said.

Continued on Page 24



NAKHON RATCHASIMA: This screenshot from the Facebook livestream video of Thai soldier Jakrapanth Thomma shows him standing in front of a building on fire during an attack yesterday. — AFP

Trump ousts impeachment star witnesses

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump on Friday fired two of the highest profile witnesses in his impeachment probe, sparking accusations that he is on a campaign of revenge. Trump recalled his ambassador to the European Union, Gordon Sondland, just hours after Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman, a decorated soldier who worked at the National Security Council, was ordered out of the White House. The firings came two days after the Republican-majority Senate acquitted Trump of charges that he abused his office and one day after he gave a victory speech branding his opponents as "evil".

Trump attacked Vindman in a tweet yesterday. "Fake News @CNN & MSNBC keep talking about 'Lt. Col.' Vindman as though I should think only how wonderful he was," Trump wrote, apparently referring to news outlet MSNBC. "Actually, I don't know him, never spoke to him, or met him (I don't believe!) but, he was very insubordinate, reported contents of my 'perfect' calls



Alexander Vindman



Gordon Sondland

incorrectly." "In other words, 'OUT.'"
Sondland, a political appointee who got his post after donating \$1 million to Trump's inauguration, said in a brief statement, "I was advised today that the president intends to recall me effective immediately." The ouster of Vindman, a respected officer who was wounded in Iraq, was even more abrupt, when he was ordered out of his NSC offices at the White House. He was "escorted out of the White House where he has dutifully served his country and his president," his lawyer David Pressman said in a statement. "Vindman was asked to leave for telling the truth," Pressman said.

Continued on Page 24

Local

Kuwait continues humanitarian relief contributions towards the needy

Kuwaiti charity sets up mobile clinics in Yemen

KUWAIT: Kuwait continued last week its humanitarian approach by providing quality relief work with aim of alleviating suffering of the needy and assisting societies in restoring normal life in various sectors. Kuwait focused during the week on alleviating plight of the Yemeni people, providing substantial relief supplies for those affected by the current crisis, in addition to providing humanitarian assistance within the 'Winter 2020 Project' campaign in Tunisia. In this regard, Yemeni officials opened in Aden a free medical camp for children with birth defects and a mobile medical vehicle project funded by Al-Rahma (Mercy) International Charity as part of the 'Kuwait by Your Side' campaign that has been proceeding for years.

"The 'Smile II Camp' aims to perform 50 surgeries to correct the cleft lip and palate dome in children with congenital anomalies," said the Communication for Human Development Foundation implementing the two projects in a statement. "The camp includes conducting free checks and surgeries and providing the necessary treatment. It will last for a week in Al-Nahdha dispensary in the Mansoura city in Aden," the statement added. It pointed out that the second project includes five mobile medical vehicles equipped with all field medical equipment in the fields of ophthalmology, dental, emergency services and health care. During the inauguration ceremony, First Deputy Governor of Aden Mohammad Al-Shazly expressed, in a press statement, deep gratitude and appreciation to Kuwait, namely His Highness the Amir, the Government and people for the generous and continuous support and quality projects they execute in Yemen and in Aden in particular. Meanwhile, Director-General of the Communication Foundation Raed Ibrahim said the qualitative interventions carried out by Al-Rahma International come from a careful study of the



A 'mobile ophthalmology clinic' vehicle funded by Kuwait's Al-Rahma International Charity providing medical care for patients in Yemen.



Doctors inside the mobile clinic.

needs and priorities in the health sector. He pointed out that the launch of these projects is coordinated and fully supervised by the Yemeni Ministry of Public Health and Population and its offices in the targeted governorates.

In Tunisia, the International Islamic Charitable Organization, in cooperation with the Kuwaiti Embassy and the Tunisian Merhma Association, distributed food, blankets and winter clothes to over 500 families in the northwest of the capital Tunis. Kuwaiti Ambassador to Tunisia Ali Al-Dhafiri said this humanitarian aid comes within the 'Winter 2020 Project' campaign, which covered three states: Jendouba, Kef and Kasserine. He noted that the Kuwaiti International Islamic Charitable Organization has contributed with more than \$50,000, praising the role of Kuwaiti charitable and humanitarian institutions in promoting bilateral relations and assisting brothers in Tunisia and other friendly countries. Meanwhile, Tunisian Ambassador to Kuwait Ahmad bin Al-Sagheer said speed of the Kuwait Red Crescent in providing aid to the affected peoples comes to complement the humanitarian role of Kuwait and emanates from a sense of the humanitarian duty to assist the countries and peoples affected by disasters.

Following a meeting with the Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, bin Al-Sagheer praised the association's efforts and what it has provided over the past years and continues to provide, namely various humanitarian and relief assistance to countries that have been stricken with disasters. In the meantime,



Kuwaiti Ambassador to Tunisia Ali Al-Dhafiri distributes aid as part of the 'Winter 2020 Project' campaign.

Sayer stressed that the association continues to play its humanitarian role and duty in providing relief to the afflicted peoples, participating in every international effort to alleviate suffering of these peoples. —KUNA

local spotlight

Nationality forgery



By Muna Al-Fuzai

Muna@kuwaittimes.net

The forgery of citizenship is a complicated, thorny and embarrassing issue for individuals and the government, especially in cases where the forger's death has occurred, making it difficult to hold his children accountable for a crime that was committed by their deceased father.

This difficult file was reopened with great courage by Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem recently during a parliamentary session. I can't think of anyone who can dare to carry out this mission now except for the speaker, due to his status and the immunity he possesses.

As soon as this issue was presented accompanied by facts and figures, many citizens supported his plea, because this issue will surely open the door to other corruption cases that need to be exposed. One of the first cases is the exploitation of public funds at the expense of the state without any right. Just as forgery is a crime punishable by law, silence is a devil.

Therefore, it is imperative to support the demands of the speaker to reveal the facts in this file. It is natural that there are those who fear even talking about the topic because it will disclose some names who could be known to the public, and some who would rather stay in the dark to benefit from privileges they do not deserve.

There is a good and excellent suggestion from Ghanem to establish an authority for nationality, whose task will be to follow up the regulations of acquiring Kuwaiti nationality and uncovering cases of fraud. I believe it is about time.

During the speech by the speaker on the issue of citizenship forgery, he presented the case of a female forger, and frankly, it was a strange and malicious story. Like other citizens, we were very touched to learn about this "forged" ghost lady who had two characters and one image. I hope Ghanem will complete his national role to present the full details of the truth, because it is not only a case of fraud, but selling and manipulating national identity.

In recent years, a number of persons who were involved in citizenship fraud have been referred to the judiciary because they obtained Kuwaiti citizenship by manipulation to benefit from residential care, employment and education.

Another key file is the bedoon issue, because it is necessary to differentiate between those who deserve Kuwaiti nationality and those who do not. Some bedoons have sacrificed their lives for Kuwait, while some hide their nationality in order to obtain citizenship privileges. This is a serious matter that affects loyalty to the country and its future demographics, so revealing the facts about this file is essential.

I believe that the demand to maintain Kuwaiti identity is not an electoral matter, but a national appeal to protect the country from exploitation and greed from those who want to convert the honor of Kuwaiti nationality into a commodity to sell, and that is why we should not be lenient with those involved in such crimes.

A big thank you to the speaker of the National Assembly, because we really need to focus on such issues to protect Kuwait's future.

Gulf Bank launches 'Sawaed Al-Khaleej' volunteer group

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has launched 'Sawaed Al-Khaleej,' an internal volunteer program bringing together Gulf Bank employees from various departments for a variety of good causes. The program aims to reinforce Gulf Bank's commitment to its Corporate Social Responsibility program by strengthening the bank's community outreach initiatives, including internal and external events within the local community. Some of these initiatives include beach cleanups, food distributions in Ramadan, supporting Gulf Bank 642 Marathon and representing the bank during Qout Market.

Sawaed Al-Khaleej currently includes members from multiple different departments and units within the Bank and includes several executives. As part of the volunteer program, all members receive Emergency First Response training (EFR Certification) to prepare them for emergency situations. The course covers essential required skills for emergency situations such as CPR, Heimlich maneuver, First-aid for adults and children.

Commenting on the internal volunteering program, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources,



Salma Al-Hajjaj



KUWAIT: The 'Sawaed Al-Khaleej' team in a group photo.

Salma Al-Hajjaj, said: "The Sawaed Al-Khaleej volunteer program reflects a long-standing culture at Gulf Bank, which has long encouraged its employees to volunteer in the hopes of giving back to their local communities. Today we are officially launching Sawaed Al-Khaleej to be a destination for all Gulf Bank employees seeking to get involved in the local outreach program through a variety of CSR initiatives that we organize throughout the year."

It is worth noting that Gulf Bank is the largest local supporter of INJAZ Kuwait. INJAZ Kuwait is a non-

profit, non-governmental organization for education workforce readiness, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship that aims to train and prepare local youth for the strategic economic challenges facing the region. Gulf Bank has sponsored numerous educational and entrepreneurial courses for high school students across both the public and private sectors, as well as college students. Last year, more than 282 Gulf Bank employees volunteered in several schools and universities across Kuwait, inspiring over 3,275 students.

Ooredoo sponsors 'Made in Qatar 2020'

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait is officially announced as the Telecom Sponsor for the upcoming 'Made in Qatar 2020' exhibition which will be held in Kuwait from February 19 to February 22, 2020. The 3rd edition of this exhibition to be organized outside the State of Qatar will be held on an area of 10,000 sqm at the Kuwait International Fairground with the participation of over 220 companies and factories from Qatar.

Commenting on the sponsorship, Ooredoo Kuwait CEO Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulla Al Thani said that the exhibition represents a special event that will take place in a special joyful month in the country where Kuwait celebrates the National Days throughout.

"This exhibition demonstrates the close brotherly relationships between Qatar and Kuwait and we are pleased to participate in one of the largest events in the Gulf region. This platform brings together innovations and high technologies of Qatari companies and

factories under one umbrella in the state of Kuwait," said Al Thani.

Al Thani pointed out that the exhibition offers a good opportunity for Kuwaiti community and young businessmen to meet with Qatari manufacturers, businessmen and investors to learn more about Qatar's various industries. "The exhibition provides an optimal platform for both parties to review establishing new alliances and partnerships that help enhance Qatari industries, particularly those that depend on modern technologies," he added. Stressing the company's role in social responsibility, Al Thani said that Ooredoo's participation in the exhibition "emphasized our social responsibility strategy that is based on many values including communicating with all segments of the society, caring for them and enriching their digital lives, as well as manage all the challenges that might hinder the progress of our societies."

Meanwhile, Qatar Chamber Director-General Saleh bin Hamad Al-Sharqi praised the Ooredoo Kuwait's participation in the exhibition, assuring that the company's sponsorship affirmed its interest to support cooperation ties between Qatari and Kuwaiti companies and create an appropriate climate for mutual and joint investments. He also said that the private sector in both countries are very close, assuring that this convergence opens the door for more partnerships, alliances and



Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulla Al Thani



Saleh bin Hamad Al-Sharqi

transaction between exhibiting and Kuwaiti companies.

The exhibition, which is organized by the Qatar Chamber in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Qatar Development Bank as strategic partner and in coordination with the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, aims to foster cooperation and exchange expertise between Qatari and Kuwaiti companies. It also helps inform the Kuwaiti business community on Qatari products and open new external markets for Qatari large and small industries.

Local

Kuwaiti Speaker, Jordanian counterpart discuss Palestinian cause in Amman

Kuwait participates in pro-Jerusalem conference in Kuala Lumpur



AMMAN: Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem meets with his Jordanian counterpart Atef Al-Tarawnah. — KUNA photos



Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem meets with his Iraqi counterpart Mohammad Al-Halbousi.

AMMAN/KUALA LUMPUR: Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem yesterday discussed with his Jordanian counterpart Atef Al-Tarawnah ways to intensify efforts on many files and issues, notably the Palestinian cause. This came during a joint meeting between the two sides in Amman on the sidelines of the 30th Arab parliamentary conference to discuss the US peace plan for the Middle East, said the National Assembly in a statement. Both sides addressed developments on the regional and international arenas and underlined the significant bilateral ties between the two countries, the statement added.

Meanwhile, Ghanem discussed with his Iraqi counterpart Mohammad Al-Halbousi a large number of files and issues of common concern. The Kuwaiti assembly said in a statement yesterday the parliament speaker and the head of the Iraqi legislative assembly addressed developments on the regional and international arenas. Ghanem, along with accompanying legislators, arrived in Jordan on Friday to partake in the extraordinary meeting. The Kuwaiti delegation includes MPs Awdeh Al-Rowaie, Mohammad Al-Dallal and Khalil Abel as well as Secretary General of the Assembly Allam Al-Kandari.

'Parliamentarians for Al-Quds'
In the meantime, the conference of the Association of 'Parliamentarians for Al-Quds (Jerusalem)' kicked off yesterday, with the participation of a Kuwaiti Parliamentary delegation comprising deputies Osama Al-Shaheen and Abdullah Al-Enezi, in addition to more than 500 parliamentarians from 72 countries. The two-day conference was inaugurated by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in the presence of the President of the Association, Sheikh Hamid Al-Ahmar, Speaker of the Malaysian Parliament, Mohammad Yusuf, and a number of parliament speakers in Arab and international countries.

In a statement to the press, MP Osama Al-Shaheen said that the participation of the Kuwaiti delegation comes to support the principles and objectives of the Association and to express pride in the role of parliament, people and government in Kuwait in line with the directions of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in supporting the Palestinian cause. Shaheen noted that the participation affirmed its solidarity with the parliamentarians around the world in rejecting the US peace plan, stressing the rejection altogether and in detail to the plan that does not reflect

Arab rights and claims and United Nations resolutions.

Meanwhile, MP Enezi said that the Kuwaiti involvement came in response to an invitation by the association, noting that it is an association that brought together parliamentarians from all over the world in support of the Palestinian issue, which is the main and strategic cause of both Islamic and Arab worlds. Kuwait's Ambassador to Malaysia Hamad Burhama stressed the importance of Kuwait's partaking in the parliamentary conference in order to support the Palestinian issue after the announcement of the US peace plan. The conference discusses several axes, including the need to support the Palestinian cause, defend the legitimate rights of the Palestinians and deal with the Palestinian issue from a purely humanitarian perspective. — KUN



Members of the Kuwaiti delegation taking part in the conference of the Association of 'Parliamentarians for Al-Quds' in Kuala Lumpur.

Kuwait seeks info on alleged Airbus bribery case

CAIRO: Kuwait's Public Anti-Corruption Authority (NAZAHA) said it was open to receiving any information about alleged bribes paid to secure Airbus plane orders involving Kuwaiti parties, according to the state news agency. NAZAHA's investigations spokesman, Mohammad Bo-Zober, was

quoted as saying the authority had started reaching out to local newspapers and media outlets that had covered the scandal to collect all possible evidence.

Airbus bribed public officials and hid payments as part of a pattern of worldwide corruption, prosecutors said on Jan 31 as the European plane-maker agreed a record \$4 billion settlement with France, Britain and the United States.

French prosecutors said their corruption probe involved transactions in a number of countries, including Kuwait. The NAZAHA spokesman said the authority could summons people to provide statements, and confirmed Kuwait would cooperate with British prosecutors to collect evidence. — Reuters

Italy open to contributing to Kuwait's development

ROME: Italy's Lombardy Governor Attilio Fontana commended Kuwait's 2035 development vision as a "holistic concept of sustainable development." Fontana made the remark while meeting Kuwaiti Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Azzam Mubarak Al-Sabah at the region's government headquarters in Milan, the Kuwaiti embassy said in a

statement to the press. Both sides tackled vistas of growing cooperation between Kuwait and Lombardy, particularly in economic, investment and trade realms, according to the statement. Fontana was quoted as speaking highly of Kuwait's "eye-catching vivacity involving economic, industrial and cultural domains, not to mention its momentous part in safeguarding regional stability." The Italian official also voiced willingness to join Kuwait's development blueprint to put the Kuwaiti economy on the list of major global economies, the statement added. Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti ambassador welcomed the Italian region's eagerness to join the Kuwaiti vision as a partner, thus enabling Kuwait to capitalize on Lombardy's distinct development model. — KUNA



ROME: Italy's Lombardy Governor Attilio Fontana meets with Kuwaiti Ambassador to Italy Sheikh Azzam Mubarak Al-Sabah. — KUNA

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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Horizontal symmetry photography technique used in this photo taken at Boulevard Park. — Photo by Ahmad Al-Falakawi (KUNA)

NCCAL, embassy conclude Kuwaiti Cultural Days in Madrid



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MADRID: The Kuwaiti Cultural Days in Madrid, held in the Spanish capital under the auspices of the Kuwaiti Embassy, in cooperation with the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature (NCCAL), concluded yesterday. The activities inaugurated by the Ambassador of Kuwait to Spain Eiadah Al-Saidi and the Assistant Secretary-General for the Culture Sector in the National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature Dr Essa Al-Ansari included an exhibition of the Council's publications at the Islamic Library in Madrid. The Arab House Foundation also hosted a lecture by Kuwaiti Dr Hassan Ashkenani on the history of Failaka Island, in which he reviewed the environmental, cultural, archeological and civilizational importance of the ancient island in understanding the history of Kuwait and the region and the human movement in ancient history.

Moreover, the events included two art exhibitions; one by Kuwaiti plastic artist Ottarid Al-Thaqib, and a photography exhibition by artist Reda Salem. In a statement to the press, Salem said that his works displayed in Madrid are 40 photographs from 100 pictures that mark daily moments in Al-Mubarakiyah market in the heart of Kuwait, which dates back nearly 200 years and was named after Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah, the former ruler of Kuwait. Salem pointed out that photographs convey the content in all honesty,



Ottarid Al-Thaqib

indicating in this context that he chose to present these images in black and white to be more abstract and to focus on the essence and content of the image. On Tuesday, the inauguration ceremony was held at the 'Arab House,' the official center for Arab-Spanish cultural exchanges, with attendance of several officials and diplomats. — KUNA



MADRID: A photography exhibition by artist Reda Salem.



Members of the Kuwaiti delegation. — KUNA photos

Local

Govt wants to discuss with parliament 'Kuwaitization' of public, private jobs

Road repairs, traffic jams proposed for discussion

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The government plans to urge the parliament to discuss three main issues during monthly two-hour discussions it had proposed to discuss certain issues, well-informed sources said. Speaking on the condition of anonymity, the sources explained that the government intends to request discussing citizens' employment in both the public and private sectors and replacing expat employees with citizens in a bid to reduce unemployment rates - a process commonly known as jobs' 'Kuwaitization'.

"The government will also propose discussing road repairs, future plans to resolve traffic congestions and the railway project execution," the sources said. The sources added that the third topic the government seeks to discuss is its plans to

execute the 2035 development plan. "Those discussions will start in April," the sources stressed.

Canceled applications
Minister of Public Works and Minister



28,197 canceled housing applications

of State for Housing Affairs Rana Al-Fares said the total number of cancelled housing applications between 1985 and Sept 8, 2019 is 28,197. Responding to an inquiry

by MP Mohammad Al-Dallal, Fares stressed that the Public Authority for Housing Welfare is committed to providing housing welfare to candidates eligible according to law number 47/1993 and its amendments and according to rules and regulations.

MoE reshuffles

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is scheduled to approve new reshuffle decisions this week including directors at the ministry as well as various educational zones. In another educational concern, informed sources said MoE has completed preparing lists of those due to retire by the end of this school year, including educational and administrative staff members. The sources added that the lists include around 120 employees (85 citizens and 35 expats) who have been in service for over 34 years.



KUWAIT: The National Assembly.

Detective hurt after fugitive released dogs at him

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A detective suffered severe injuries including a dislocated hand and scalp wounds when a fugitive he tried to arrest released two dogs at him. The incident happened on Friday when the detective raided the suspect's farm with a warrant in hand, only to be attacked by the dogs, allowing the suspect to escape. The officer was taken to hospital, while investigations are underway in search for the runaway suspect. Meanwhile, Interior Ministry's Assistant Undersecretary Maj Gen Khaled Al-Dayeen visited the injured detective in hospital yesterday. He told the victim that Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh and ministry Undersecretary Lt Gen Essam Al-Naham are following up on his condition, the ministry said in a statement released to the press.



KUWAIT: Interior Ministry's Assistant Undersecretary Maj Gen Khaled Al-Dayeen visits the injured detective in hospital.

Malnutrition behind 35% diseases in children below 5

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Thirty five percent of diseases that children below five develop result from malnutrition during the 1,000-day period starting with pregnancy, which affects children throughout their lives, Chairman of the Kuwait Society for Food and Nutrition Dr

Ahmad Al-Haify stressed. His statement came on the sidelines of an event organized to announce plans to hold a scientific seminar on child health and nutrition on Feb 11 at Regency Hotel with the presence of a number of expert pediatricians and nutritionists from the Ministry of Health (MoH) and private hospitals and academics. Haify added that according to the World Health Organization (WHO), the child rights' agreement says every infant and child has the right to get good nutrition, adding that sound nutrition means a safe life for children that will cut expenses of their future healthcare. Aside from Dr Haify, the seminar will include other speakers such as the newborn baby specialist Dr Mohammed Jalal Khallaf and pediatrics consultant Dr Fayez Hafez.

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Mass wedding defies the coronavirus fears

In another Trump win, court tosses Democrats' suit

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NEW DELHI: People queue at a polling station to cast their votes during the Legislative Assembly elections in New Delhi yesterday. — AFP

Delhi exit polls predict Modi defeat

Capital votes in test for Modi and women protesters

NEW DELHI: Millions in the Indian capital voted yesterday in a key regional election, with exit polls suggesting a big defeat for right-wing Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was a distant second behind the upstart Aam Aadmi Party, or Common Man's Party, led by former tax inspector Arvind Kejriwal, according to exit polls released after voting ended. An average of nine exit polls showed Kejriwal's party was likely to win 52 out of 70 seats.

"We are winning by a huge margin," tweeted Manish Sisodia, the deputy chief minister of Delhi. Federal Home Minister Amit Shah, who had campaigned vigorously for BJP highlighting his tough stance on national security, called a meeting of party members late yesterday. Earlier in the day long lines had formed outside New Delhi polling stations amid

heavy security as a weeks-old protest by women against a new citizenship law took centre stage.

In an often vitriolic election campaign, Modi and other BJP leaders had slammed opponents of the law who deem it anti-Muslim. The BJP had been seeking to oust Kejriwal, the capital's chief minister whose party took a record 67 of 70 Delhi assembly seats in 2015. While Kejriwal focused on local issues including the heavily subsidized electricity, water and health-care he introduced, BJP leaders sought to turn the vote into a referendum on the women's protest.

Hundreds have been blocking a main road through Shaheen Bagh district since December 15 in protest against legislation that offers a fast-track to Indian nationality for persecuted religious minorities from neighboring countries but excludes Muslims. On the eve of the elections, the BJP sent out messages telling

people to vote for the party if they wanted an end to the Shaheen Bagh demonstration. With the BJP on the back foot after failing in recent state elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand, analysts said the Delhi result will be a key test of opinion on national issues.

Protest referendum

Near the women's protest site, food company senior executive Maroof Ahmad said the "BJP has only two agendas - Shaheen Bagh and Pakistan. They have nothing else to talk about." "GDP is falling, the economy is in a mess and they are only bothered about temples and mosques," he added. But others lined up behind the prime minister. In the affluent Jangpura neighborhood, flower garlands and balloons decorated the polling station as financial consultant Vinod Kumar came to vote.

"I am not biased towards any political party but I don't endorse the Shaheen Bagh protest. Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru believed in and supported the citizenship law," he said referring to India's revered independence leaders. Thousands of extra security officers were on duty for the election with a large contingent at five polling stations near the Shaheen Bagh protest.

Women's safety has increasingly become an issue in Delhi since a 2012 gang rape murder made international headlines. In a bid to persuade more females to vote, authorities set up dozens of women-only "pink polling booths" across the capital. "I still don't feel safe in Delhi, a lot more must be done," said Shweta Laxmi. More than 14 million people were eligible to take part in yesterday's vote. The results will be announced Tuesday. — AFP

California's moms on frontline of battle against homelessness

OAKLAND: When Dominique Walker moved back from Mississippi to her native California last year, she planned to pursue a nursing degree while caring for her two small children. But she and other moms and their children ended up living as squatters in a bold, high-profile protest against homelessness.

And today the 34-year-old has come to symbolize a crisis that has reached historic proportions in one of America's wealthiest states. Walker became the latest casualty of the housing crisis after moving back to Oakland, about 13 miles east of San Francisco, last April to escape domestic violence. She initially stayed with family and in hotels as she looked for housing but quickly realized she could not afford sky-high rental prices in the Bay Area.

"There are programs to help but nothing worked," said Walker, who now works full time as a community outreach organizer for a tenants rights group. "I tried different agencies and got no help. 'In order to afford a two-bedroom house, you need to earn \$40.88 an hour and the minimum wage is \$14.14 an hour.'" With nowhere to turn, and aware that she was on the verge of homelessness, Walker and several other mothers in the same predicament occupied a vacant house in Oakland in November, hoping to raise awareness about an epidemic ripping communities apart. Their gamble worked.

The group, known as Moms 4 Housing,



OAKLAND: Carroll Fife, the director of the Oakland office for the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment walks outside a homeless encampment in Oakland. — AFP

were evicted from the house last month but not before their initiative garnered national attention and prompted officials to vow to do more to address an issue that has become the Democratic state's most vexing and shameful. Walker lived there with her one-year-old son Amir and five-year-old daughter Aja. Along the way, during the 58 days they and the other moms and kids lived in that house on Magnolia Street, little Amir took his first steps.

Numbers keep going up

The owner of the house, real estate investment group Wedgewood, eventually agreed to sell the property to a non-profit that acquires land and property for affordable housing. "The attention that our movement has gotten is indescribable," said Misty Cross, 39, one of the mothers who occupied

the house and now lives in a shelter while working as a caregiver. "We didn't see anyone trying to fight for the little people so we decided to step up and put our lives on the line to speak up for the ones that are not being spoken for."

According to city officials, an estimated 4,071 people were living on the street, in shelters or in their cars in 2019 in Oakland, a 47 percent increase in two years. Activists, however, estimate the number is probably higher than 6,000, as many people in the city that has a population of 425,000 sleep on someone's couch or in a hotel and are not included in the official count. "Homelessness in Oakland has grown at a faster rate in the last few years than we've seen at any point in our history," said city council president Rebecca Kaplan, who has been working closely with Moms 4 Housing. — AFP

Clashes leave eight dead in Kazakhstan

MASANCHI: Eight people were killed, dozens hurt and property burned during clashes in southern Kazakhstan, prompting concern yesterday from authorities who portray the country as a beacon of stability. Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev held an emergency government session yesterday to tackle Friday's violence in an ethnically-mixed pocket of the Jambyl region, near the border with Kyrgyzstan.

A commission of enquiry was also set up. "Eight died, more than 40 were injured" in the clashes, Interior Minister Yerlan Turgumbayev said in the capital Nur-Sultan. An AFP journalist who visited Masanchi - one of the villages where clashes took place - said few people were out walking on streets lined by smouldering houses as fire crews put out the remaining fires.

Some residents could be seen gathering belongings from houses partly destroyed by fire as they prepared to leave the village, which is under the guard of police and special forces. The clashes that saw 47 people detained occurred close to the Kyrgyz border where an AFP journalist saw over a thousand people queuing to get into oil-rich Kazakhstan's poorer neighbor. Border authorities were only letting women and children through, he said.

Kyrgyzstan's health ministry said that a hospital in the city of Tokmak close to the border admitted 18 patients following the clashes, 10 of whom were still being

treated. President Tokayev said the fighting that subsided overnight occurred in a number of settlements in the Kordai district of Jambyl region. "Unfortunately there are injuries and fatalities. I express my sincere condolences to the close ones of those who died," Tokayev said during the emergency session.

A government commission set up to "determine the reasons for the conflict, decide questions of a socioeconomic and humanitarian character, and determine the scale of the damage" arrived in the area yesterday. Deputy Prime Minister Berdibek Saparbayev visited a hospital in Korday and pledged that "the guilty will be punished." "The main question now is ensuring stability, the law and security in the region," he said in comments published on the prime minister's website.

Bazaars closed

Footage posted on social media late Friday showed scenes of young men, some armed with clubs, marching along the road of a village with buildings ablaze either side. The conflict is widely believed to have pitted Kazakhs against minority Dungans. Dauren Abayev, Kazakhstan's information minister, said it had been sparked by an "everyday confrontation." Abayev also said that key bazaars in Almaty had been closed to ensure the conflict did not spread. "There were calls for violence at these markets," he told journalists in the capital Nur-Sultan.

"Accordingly, precautionary measures were taken," he said of the markets where ethnically diverse populations of traders sell wares from China, Turkey and other countries. A Dungan lawmaker, a chair of a Dungan association and the deputy chairman of the Kazakhstan's Assembly of the Peoples are among those included in the commission. — AFP

International

Army overruns Idlib crossroads town despite Turkey's warnings

Syrian forces press a blistering assault with Russian support

DAMASCUS: The Syrian army took control of the strategic northwestern crossroads town of Saraqeb yesterday in the latest gain of a weeks-long offensive against the country's last major rebel bastion of Idlib. The advance came shortly after Turkey sent additional troops into the region and threatened to respond if any of its military observation posts in Idlib, set up under a 2018 truce, come under attack.

"Army units now exercise full control over the town of Saraqeb," state television reported, over footage of the town's streets, deserted after weeks of bombardment. Since December, government forces have pressed a blistering assault against the Idlib region with Russian support, retaking town after town despite warnings from rebel ally Turkey to back off. The violence has killed more than 300 civilians and sent some 586,000 fleeing civilians onto the roads, seeking relative safety nearer the Turkish border.

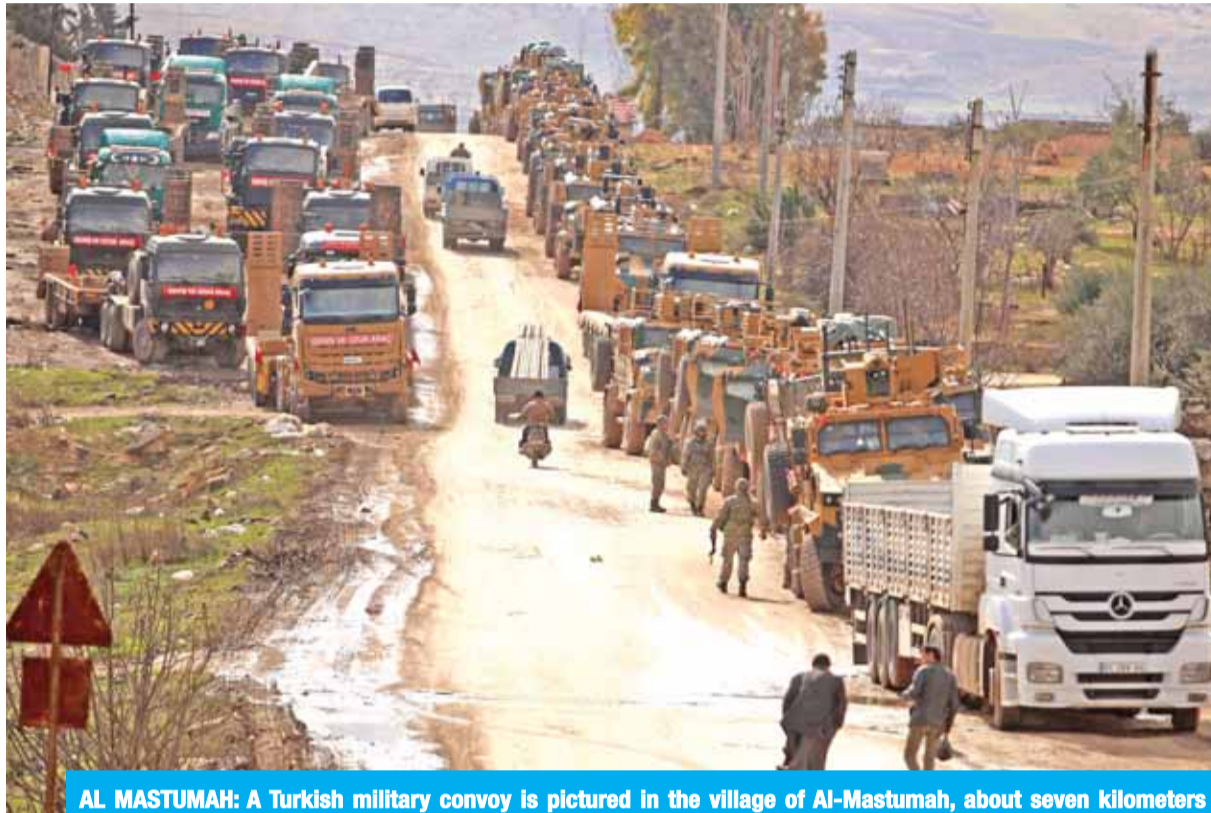
The United Nations and aid groups have appealed for an end to hostilities, warning that scale of the exodus risks creating one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes of the nearly nine-year war. But President Bashar Al-Assad's forces have pressed on with their advance. Saraqeb is a strategic prize for the government it seeks to take back control of two major highways that meet in the town. The M5 motorway connects the capital to second city Aleppo. Running up from the Jordanian border in the south, it is Syria's longest highway.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Friday that government forces were in control of the whole extent of the M5 in Idlib province. Only a 30 kilometer section in neighboring Aleppo now remains in rebel hands. Saraqeb sits at the crossroads with the M4, the main east-west highway in Idlib which links Aleppo with the Mediterranean port city of Latakia, a government bastion. The M4 is still largely controlled by jihadists and their rebel allies.

Shrinking rebel bastion

Just a few months ago, Saraqeb counted some 110,000 residents, the Observatory says. But after weeks of deadly bombardment by the government and its ally Russia, large swathes of the town have been leveled and its inhabitants have fled. To the north of the town, some three million people-half of them already displaced by the changing fortunes of the war-are huddling in what is left of rebel territory. Some 50,000 fighters have holed up in the shrinking pocket, many of them jihadists but the majority allied rebels, according to Observatory estimates.

With Saraqeb recaptured, little more than half of Idlib province remains in rebel hands, along with slivers of



AL MASTUMAH: A Turkish military convoy is pictured in the village of Al-Mastumah, about seven kilometers south of the city of Idlib yesterday. — AFP

neighboring Aleppo and Latakia provinces. Turkey, which already hosts some 3.7 million Syrian refugees, has called on the government to halt its campaign in Idlib, fearing a new influx across the border. Tensions flared on Monday after a rare flare-up between government and Turkish forces in Idlib killed more than 20 people on both sides. Turkey has since sent additional troops into northwestern Syria, prompting Damascus to accuse Ankara of trying to hamper its advance.

Turkish buffer zone

According to Turkish state news agency Anadolu, Ankara has sent more than 350 vehicles with commandos and ammunition to reinforce its observation posts in Idlib since Friday. A Turkish security source emphasized the troops' mission was solely to reinforce the 12 existing posts established under a 2018 deal with Russia aimed at preventing major fighting triggering a humanitarian crisis.

Turkey says three of its outposts-all in the southeastern part of Idlib-have been surrounded by the Syrian army. The Observatory said that all the Turkish reinforcements were deployed to outposts behind the front line north of Saraqeb. "They have formed a buffer blocking further regime advances in Idlib," Observatory head Rami Abdul Rahman said.

Some Turkish troops were seen heading towards a military airport in the Taftanaz area, 16 kilometers north of Saraqeb, he said. Others were deploying to a military base south of Idlib city. Turkey has threatened to respond if any of its posts come under attack. "Our observation posts in Idlib continue their duties and are capable of protecting themselves with the weapons and equipment they possess," the Turkish defense ministry said on Twitter. "In the event of a new attack, proper response will be given in the strongest manner, based on the right of self-defense." — AFP

African leaders grapple with failure to 'silence the guns'

ADDIS ABABA: Seven years ago, amid extravagant celebrations marking the African Union's 50th anniversary, the continent's heads of state declared they would "end all wars in Africa by 2020." But as leaders travel to Addis Ababa this weekend for the latest summit of the 55-member bloc - organized under the theme "Silencing the Guns" - there is little question they are doomed to fall well short of their goal. Some success has been achieved in Central African Republic and Sudan, but long-running conflicts in places like Libya and South Sudan have been joined by new crises from the fringe of the Sahara to Mozambique.

In remarks Thursday to AU foreign ministers, AU Commission Chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat painted a bleak picture of the continent's security situation, citing extremist threats stretching from the Sahel to Somalia. The "missed deadline" to silence the guns, he added, "reveals the complexity of the security situation in Africa." In an op-ed this week in South Africa's Mail & Guardian newspaper, Solomon Dersso, head of the AU's human rights body, was blunter, saying the current level of insecurity "seems to make a mockery of the theme of the year." Two days of talks open on Sunday.

As they grapple with their failure to foster peace, African leaders have struggled to convince world bodies like the UN to take them seriously - for example as they seek a more prominent role in Libya. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who will take over from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as AU chair on Monday, appears well aware of these challenges. In a speech to South Africa-based diplomats last week, he warned that conflict "continues to hamper" development. South Africa's goals of advancing economic integration and curbing violence against women "must be underpinned by the promotion of a peaceful and secure Africa," he added. Diplomats say Ramaphosa would do best to tackle the economic and political root causes of violence. — AFP



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International

In another Trump win, court tosses Democrats' suit over his businesses

Lawsuit focused on Trump hotel in downtown Washington

WASHINGTON: A federal appeals court on Friday threw out a lawsuit brought by Democratic lawmakers that accused Donald Trump of violating anti-corruption provisions in the US Constitution with his business dealings, capping a week of political victories for the Republican president. A unanimous three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit ruled that the more than 210 House of Representatives and Senate Democrats lacked the required legal standing to bring the case, reversing a lower court judge's decision that had allowed the case to proceed.

Two days after being acquitted by the Senate in his impeachment trial, Trump hailed the ruling as a "total win," telling reporters that "it was another phony case." Elizabeth Wydra, a lawyer for the lawmakers, said they were disappointed in the decision and were weighing their next steps. Trump still faces two similar lawsuits pending in other courts that also accuse him of violating the Constitution's rarely tested "emoluments" clauses that bar presidents from taking gifts or payments from foreign and state governments.

The lawsuits all have focused on his ownership of the Trump International Hotel in Washington, just blocks from the White House. The hotel, opened by Trump shortly before he was elected in 2016, has become a favored lodging and event space for some foreign and state officials visiting Washington. The rul-

ing came during a week of positives for Trump as he seeks re-election on Nov 3. He previewed election themes in his State of the Union address on Tuesday, benefited from the chaotic aftermath of Monday's Democratic presidential nomination contest in Iowa, and was given a lift by Friday's strong jobs report.

Reuters/Ipsos polling shows that Trump's approval rating has been largely unchanged by impeachment, with 42 percent of Americans approving of his performance as president. Unlike past presidents, Trump - a wealthy real estate developer-turned politician, has retained ownership of his business interests while serving in the White House. The emoluments lawsuits have accused him of making himself vulnerable to bribery by foreign governments.

In the case dismissed on Friday, the appeals court decided that it was bound by Supreme Court rulings that have limited the ability of individual members of Congress to litigate questions that affect the legislative branch as a whole. The Democratic lawmakers "can, and likely will, continue to use their weighty voices to make their case to the American people, their colleagues in the Congress and the President himself," the three-judge panel wrote. "But we will not - indeed we cannot - participate in this debate."

One of the two other emoluments lawsuits against Trump, brought by the Democratic attorneys general for the District of Columbia and Maryland, is awaiting a



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump walks from Marine One on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, DC. —AFP

ruling by the Richmond, Virginia-based 4th US Circuit Court of Appeals. The New York-based 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals last year revived the other emoluments lawsuit, which was brought by a public interest

advocacy group, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington. At least one of those cases could end up being decided by the US Supreme Court, according to legal experts. —Reuters



Two similar cases are still pending in other courts

Greece aims to outflank Turkey in Mediterranean

ATHENS: Greece has sought to bolster its Mediterranean presence in recent weeks in response to heightened tension with Turkey, ramping up its manoeuvres but sparking accusations of adventurism at home. Over the past month, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has revamped a defence agreement with the United States, sent a warship to join a French naval battle group and will deliver defensive missiles to Saudi Arabia. The latest flurry has exposed the recently elected, US-educated prime minister to accusations of "adventurism" in a particularly volatile Middle East.

"You are embroiling the country in adventures that lie beyond its capacity and change decades-old foreign policy," leftist former PM Alexis Tsipras told Mitsotakis last month. Mitsotakis, who became prime minister in July, has shrugged off the criticism as short-sighted. "We are strengthening the framework of our strategic alliances, not just with the US... our military cooperation (with France) has never been better," he told lawmakers in January as parliament prepared to approve the US defense deal.

A few days earlier, a Greek warship had joined the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, whose battle group is on a mission against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. According to diplomats, France has encouraged Greece to be more "autonomous" and play a more active role in EU defense initiatives. And after a decade-long debt crisis that saw Greek arms spending drop by over 70 percent, the Mitsotakis government wants to be heard, says Spyridon Litsas, professor of international relations at the University of Macedonia.

'Idle is risky'

"Being idle during these days of high volatility is equally risky and has nothing substantially to offer to Greece's attempt to achieve a return to international politics after the economic crisis of 2010," he says. Greek relations in Turkey never particularly warm-have taken a turn for the worse in recent months under the added burden of migration and an energy exploration scramble in the eastern Mediterranean. Right now, "France is the ideal Greek ally", Panagiotis Tsakonas, a professor of international law at Athens University, told AFP.

"The two countries share views on the situation in the eastern Mediterranean," he said, citing involvement of French firms in energy exploration off Cyprus, historically Greece's chief ally. Turkey has pushed ahead with drilling activity in Cyprus's designated exclusive economic zone (EEZ) despite EU threats of sanctions. Greece last month signed an agreement with Cyprus and Israel on EastMed, a huge pipeline project to ship gas to Europe. The rivalry has extended to Libya.

Turkey signed a maritime and military cooperation memorandum with the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) in November, carving out energy spheres of influence in the Mediterranean at the expense of Greece. Athens retaliated by expelling the GNA ambassador and by seeking to build ties with Khalifa Haftar, a general based in the east who controls three-quarters of Libyan territory. Other Middle Eastern states wooed by Athens-the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt-are foes of Turkey and back pro-Haftar forces. —AFP

Top hopefuls Buttigieg, Sanders under fire in Democratic debate

MANCHESTER: White House hopefuls Bernie Sanders and Pete Buttigieg-riding neck-and-neck in the polls ahead of the next Democratic primary contest-come under sustained attack on the debate stage from rivals seeking to challenge Donald Trump in November. Buttigieg, a former mayor of South Bend, Indiana who at 38 is a fresh face on the national stage, defended himself against charges of inexperience and, in a dig at Sanders, urged Americans to elevate a nominee who will "leave the politics of the past in the past."

The 78-year-old leftist Sanders, eyeing the moderate Buttigieg as his possible chief adversary, aimed his own shots at his far younger rival in the Manchester, New Hampshire debate-casting him as the candidate of Wall Street. "I don't have 40 billionaires, Pete, contributing to my campaign," Sanders said.

Buttigieg and Sanders finished atop the pack earlier this week in Iowa's chaotic caucuses, and both hope to renew the performance Tuesday in New Hampshire, as the Democratic Party seeks to pick a challenger to Trump in November. But Sanders, a veteran senator calling for "political revolution," was in the firing line from several rivals, including former vice president and fellow septuagenarian Joe Biden who branded his policies too radical to unite Americans.

The 77-year-old Biden, fighting to keep his White House hopes alive after finishing an unnerving fourth in Iowa, insisted liberal policies like Sanders's flagship universal health care plan would be too divisive, expensive and difficult to get through Congress. "How much is it going to cost?" Biden asked about Sanders's Medicare for All bill which estimates the project would cost tens of trillions of dollars. "Who do you think is going get that passed" in Congress? Biden performed more aggressively than in previous showings, seizing a chance to argue that today's global tensions required an experienced

Ireland starts vote in 'three horse race' to form a government

DUBLIN: Ireland began voting in a general election yesterday, with Prime Minister Leo Varadkar hoping to secure a new term on the back of Brexit but voters likely to judge him more on his domestic record. Polls opened across the country at 0700 GMT, although a small number of islands off the west coast voted on Friday to allow for rough seas that could disrupt the transport of ballots by boat. Some 3.3 million people are eligible to vote to elect 159 members of the Dail, the lower chamber of parliament in Dublin.

A 'Brexit election'

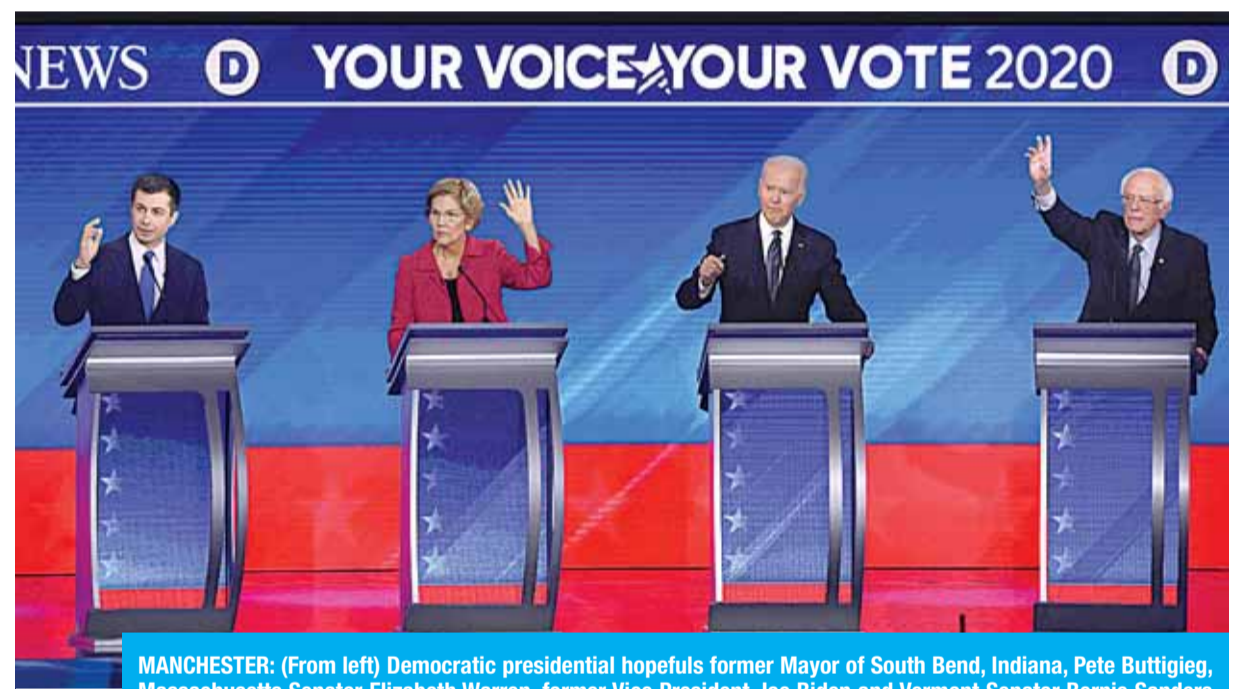
Varadkar's Fine Gael party has been in power since 2016 but polling suggests they are trailing centre-right rivals Fianna Fail and republicans Sinn Fein. On Monday, Sinn Fein - the former political wing of the IRA paramilitary group - were out in front on 25 percent, with Fianna Fail on 23 percent and Fine Gael on 20 percent. "This election is wide open," Varadkar said at his final campaign stop in the western town of Ennis on Friday. "It's a three horse race, three parties, all within shouting distance of each other."

Varadkar launched his campaign after

successfully helping to broker a deal cushioning Britain's EU exit on January 31 by avoiding a hard border with British-run Northern Ireland. An open frontier was a key requirement of the 1998 peace agreement that largely ended three decades of violence over British rule in the north, which left more than 3,000 dead. Varadkar has warned voters that Brexit is "not done yet", as London prepares for talks with Brussels to secure a longer-term trade deal in record time before the end of this year. Failure to do so could present an "existential threat" to the Irish economy, he said.

But experts suggest he may have miscalculated the public mood with surveys indicating Brexit was a low concern among the electorate. Other parties have hammered Fine Gael over failings in health care, housing and homelessness. Varadkar acknowledged he understood that on Friday. "You want us over the next three years to focus on issues like health and housing with the same passion and intensity that we've focused on Brexit in the past three years," he said.

Varadkar is Ireland's first mixed race and openly gay premier who has come to represent a more socially progressive Ireland after years of dominance by the Roman Catholic church. But despite Brexit, and landmark votes to overturn strict abortion laws and introduce same-sex marriage, some predict he could be on his way out. "Varadkar is young, he's gay, he looks like part of the new Ireland," Eunan O'Halpin, of Trinity College Dublin said. "Yet his personal



MANCHESTER: (From left) Democratic presidential hopefuls former Mayor of South Bend, Indiana, Pete Buttigieg, Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, former Vice President Joe Biden and Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders gesture during the eighth Democratic primary debate of the 2020 presidential campaign season. —AFP

statesman to guide the nation out of a dark period.

Despite the Iowa setback he also made plain he still views himself as best placed to mount a centrist challenge to the Republican Trump, who this week survived an impeachment trial that did little to dent his electoral support. A national unknown one year ago, Buttigieg has run an ambitious campaign that resonated with voters who appreciate his articulate explanations of policy. But rivals including Senator Amy Klobuchar argued Buttigieg is an untested novice on the world stage.

"We have a newcomer in the White House, and look where it got us," she said in a gibe at both Buttigieg and Trump. Buttigieg draws on his experience as a military veteran to cast himself as a credible commander-in-chief. And he advanced his central argument for generational change as the best way to take on the nation's tests. "The biggest risk we could take at a time like this would be to go up against the fundamentally new challenge by trying to fall back on the familiar," Buttigieg said.

'Trump's worst nightmare'

Also onstage in New Hampshire were Senator Elizabeth Warren, entrepreneur Andrew Yang and billionaire activist Tom Steyer. Klobuchar, a pragmatist from Minnesota, put in a forceful performance as she voiced her opposition to Sanders and Warren, arguing their liberal plans would only divide voters. "Truthfully, Donald Trump's worst nightmare is a candidate that will bring people in from the middle," she said.

While Biden held his own, he acknowledged he was fighting an uphill battle in the first two voting states. "I took the hit in Iowa and I'll probably take it here," he said, in apparent recognition that Sanders is likely to win New Hampshire, which borders his home state of Vermont. Democratic tensions have simmered as the party struggles to decide whether to take incremental progressive steps or a more radical turn as proposed by self-declared democratic socialist Sanders. —AFP



DUBLIN: Ireland's Prime Minister and leader of the Fine Gael party Leo Varadkar casts his vote at a polling station in Castletknock, Dublin yesterday. —AFP

popularity appears to have dipped, and that of his party has dipped very significantly."

Negotiations

Polls close at 2200 GMT and votes start being counted at 0900 GMT today. A three-way race led by left-wing Sinn Fein is a new dynamic for the Republic, where governments have been historically dominated by Fine Gael and Fianna Fail. Since 2016 Fianna Fail have propped up Fine Gael in government with a confidence and supply arrangement that could implicate

them in the perceived failings of the government. "(Young people) blame the current government and coalition of parties in government for this mess," said O'Halpin about the housing shortage.

Despite its opinion poll lead, Sinn Fein which wants to unite Northern Ireland with the Republic is only fielding 42 candidates and cannot form a majority government even if they all win. Both Varadkar and Fianna Fail leader Micheal Martin are adamant they will not form a coalition with Mary Lou McDonald's party. —AFP

International

In sickness and in health: South Korean mass wedding defies coronavirus fears

Couples - some in facemasks - tie the knot in Church

GAPYEONG: Thousands of couples - some in facemasks - tied the knot in a mass Unification Church wedding Friday, despite concerns in South Korea over the spread of the coronavirus outbreak. The church founded by Sun Myung Moon - revered as a messiah by his followers - distributed face coverings to the 30,000 crowd, but only some donned them.

"I am overwhelmed that I am getting married today," said Choi Ji-young, who met her husband - matched by the church - only two months ago. "It would be a lie if I said I was not concerned at all about the infection," said the 21-year-old university student. "But I feel like I will be protected from the virus today."

South Korea has recorded 24 cases of the novel coronavirus outbreak that emerged in neighboring China, where more than 30,000 cases have been confirmed, and Seoul has barred entry to foreigners who have recently been in Wuhan, the epidemic's centre. Festivals, graduation ceremonies, and K-pop concerts have been cancelled over fears large events could facilitate virus transmission, and authorities have asked religious groups to co-operate in preventing it spreading.

The church went ahead with the event because it had been "four years in the making" as part of the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Moon's birth, said official Jang Young-chul. But followers from China were asked not to come, he added. Nearly 6,000 identical-dressed couples from 64 countries - many of whom met for the first time in recent weeks - married in Gapyeong, a festive mood filling the venue

as newlyweds took group photos and were congratulated by friends and relatives.

'God's control'

Mass weddings, often held in giant sports stadiums with tens of thousands of couples, have long been a signature feature of the church, whose followers have been dubbed "Moonies" after its founder, who died in 2012. They began in the early 1960s, involving just a few dozen couples at first but with numbers mushrooming over the years. In 1997, 30,000 couples took part in a joint wedding in Washington, and two years later around 21,000 filled the Olympic Stadium in Seoul.

Those who choose to be matched by the church must confirm under oath that they are virgins, and after their wedding the couple must refrain from sexual relations for a minimum of 40 days. Kim Chang-seong, 27, who was marrying a woman whom he met 20 days ago, said he was not concerned about infection because the mass wedding had "special meaning" for him. "By marrying a fellow church believer, I am taking a path paved by our church leaders." The teachings of the Unification Church are based on the Bible but with new interpretations, and Moon saw his role as completing the unfulfilled mission of Jesus to restore humanity to a state of "sinless" purity. While it claims a worldwide following of three million, experts suggest the core membership is far smaller. Evelynne Chimfwembe, who flew in from Botswana to attend the ceremony with her husband of 28 years, said she was not worried about the virus as she believed the event would be "under God's control". — AFP



GAPYEONG: Couples wearing protective face masks attend a mass wedding ceremony organized by the Unification Church at Cheongshim Peace World Center in Gapyeong. — AFP

After US killing of chief, what's next for AQAP?

DUBAI: The US killing of the leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in war-torn Yemen raises questions about the jihadist group's operations and its future. President Donald Trump said the United States "conducted a counterterrorism operation" that eliminated Qassim Al-Rimi, according to a White House statement released on Thursday. But what does this mean for AQAP and for Yemen, where a five-year war between the government - backed by a Saudi-led military coalition - and the Iran-aligned Huthi rebels has crippled the country?

How significant was Qassim Al-Rimi?

Al-Rimi was named AQAP leader after his predecessor, Nasir Al-Wuhayshi, was killed in a US drone strike on Yemen in June 2015. He was one of the group's founders in 2009 and its first military commander. "Al-Rimi's death is significant," said Gregory Johnsen, a non-resident fellow at the Sana'a Center think tank. "However, he was not a good leader for AQAP and since he took over in 2015, the group's international terrorist wing has atrophied badly."

Johnsen said the two most likely candidates to succeed Al-Rimi were Khalid Batarfi, reportedly running the group's external operations, and Saad bin Atef Al-Awlaki, the group's leader in Yemen's Shabwa province. According to Peter Salisbury, an analyst at the International Crisis Group, a successor will most likely be announced soon. But, he added, it will not be "someone



File photo shows a combo of two pictures of a suspected military chief of Al-Qaeda network in Yemen, identified as Qassim Al-Rimi (or Qassim Al-Rimi). — AFP

with the name brand recognition Al-Rimi had, and certainly not of the stature of his predecessor, Al-Wuhayshi".

AQAP's operations in Yemen

AQAP, along with other jihadist groups, has flourished in the chaos of the war between the Yemeni government and the Huthi rebels. But analysts say the group's abilities on the ground have dwindled over the years. "Al-Rimi's skills as a military planner will be missed, but AQAP's ability to operate on the ground in Yemen had already diminished greatly," said Elisabeth Kendall, a researcher at the University of Oxford. "In operational terms, its activity peaked in 2017 with over 270 domestic attacks, albeit mostly small scale."

Johnsen also said that AQAP's ability on the ground has weakened over the past decade, describing it as "a shadow of its former self". AQAP has carried out operations against both the Houthis and government forces as well as sporadic attacks abroad, including on the offices of the French satirical publication Charlie Hebdo in 2015.

Andreas Krieg of King's College London said Al-Rimi's killing has a "PR value" for the United States but will not affect AQAP's ground operations.

How will it affect AQAP's ability?

The killing of Al-Rimi comes after AQAP claimed responsibility for a December 6 shooting at the US Naval Air Station Pensacola in Florida, where a Saudi officer killed three American sailors. The attacker was identified as Mohammed Alshamrani, 21, a second lieutenant in the Royal Saudi Air Force and a student naval flight officer. The SITE monitoring group said he had posted a short manifesto on Twitter before the attack that condemned America "as evil" and that it included a quote from Al-Qaeda's slain leader Osama bin Laden.

"It is still unclear how much of a hand AQAP had in directing, as opposed to inspiring, the Pensacola shooting," Johnsen said. According to Johnsen, Al-Rimi's killing "is one more blow" to attacks by the group overseas. "Prior to the Pensacola attack, the last time AQAP claimed any credit for an overseas attack was in 2015," he added. The group's focus has "shifted onto inspiring rather than directing attacks", said Kendall. Salisbury noted that AQAP has not executed a major overseas operation for the past decade.

"Attacks associated with the group have either come from legacy, former operatives or 'lone wolf' attacks by people inspired and sometimes in limited contact with the group over the internet," he said. The United States has waged a long-running drone war against the leaders of AQAP, which it considers Al-Qaeda's most dangerous branch. According to the White House, Al-Rimi's killing "further degrades AQAP and the global Al-Qaeda movement". "It brings us closer to eliminating the threats these groups pose to our national security," it said. — AFP

UN: South Sudan violence and rights abuses on the rise

JUBA: Violence and rights abuses are on the rise in South Sudan as a new deadline approaches for the country's two rival factions to form a power-sharing government under a peace deal, a UN commission said on Friday. President Salva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar, who fought a civil war in 2013, signed a peace accord two years ago but missed two deadlines to form a government. South Sudan won independence in 2011, but its territory was subsequently divided into 32 states, a major source of tensions as the factions squabble over state borders.

The two factions are expected to form the new government by February 22. The UN said localized conflicts were on the rise as tensions spill into violence over the failure to fully implement the peace agreement and its security arrangements. "We have noted an upsurge in incidents of armed conflict particularly in Yei," Andrew Clapham, one of three members of the UN rights commission for South Sudan, referring to the southwest city.

He said fighting between rebel groups holding out against the peace deal and government forces was creating instability, forcing the displacement of civilians. Another sticking point has been security, such as training and uniting rebel and government troops into a single army. Troops and rebels are supposed to be screened, trained and unified in a single force at so-called "cantonment" camps. But the program has faced logistical hurdles.

The UN commission said the government has failed to release half the funds promised for the program. "We are extremely concerned to learn there has been no response to these challenges from the government," Clapham said. The UN rights commission also noted attacks on freedom of expression and on rights activists. It said women from civil society groups were also being harassed by security forces. War broke out in South Sudan in December 2013 after a dispute between Kiir and Machar sparked ethnic clashes and brutal violence, leaving almost 400,000 dead. — AFP

China turns to AI, data in fight against virus

BEIJING: A man who had travelled to Wuhan - the central city at the heart of China's coronavirus crisis - was surprised when police showed up at his door after he returned home, asking to check his temperature. The man, who had quarantined himself at home in Nanjing, eastern Jiangsu province, said he had not told anyone about his recent trip to the city. But by trawling through travel data from Wuhan, local authorities were able to identify him and dispatch officers to his home last week, according to a newspaper article posted by the Nanjing government.

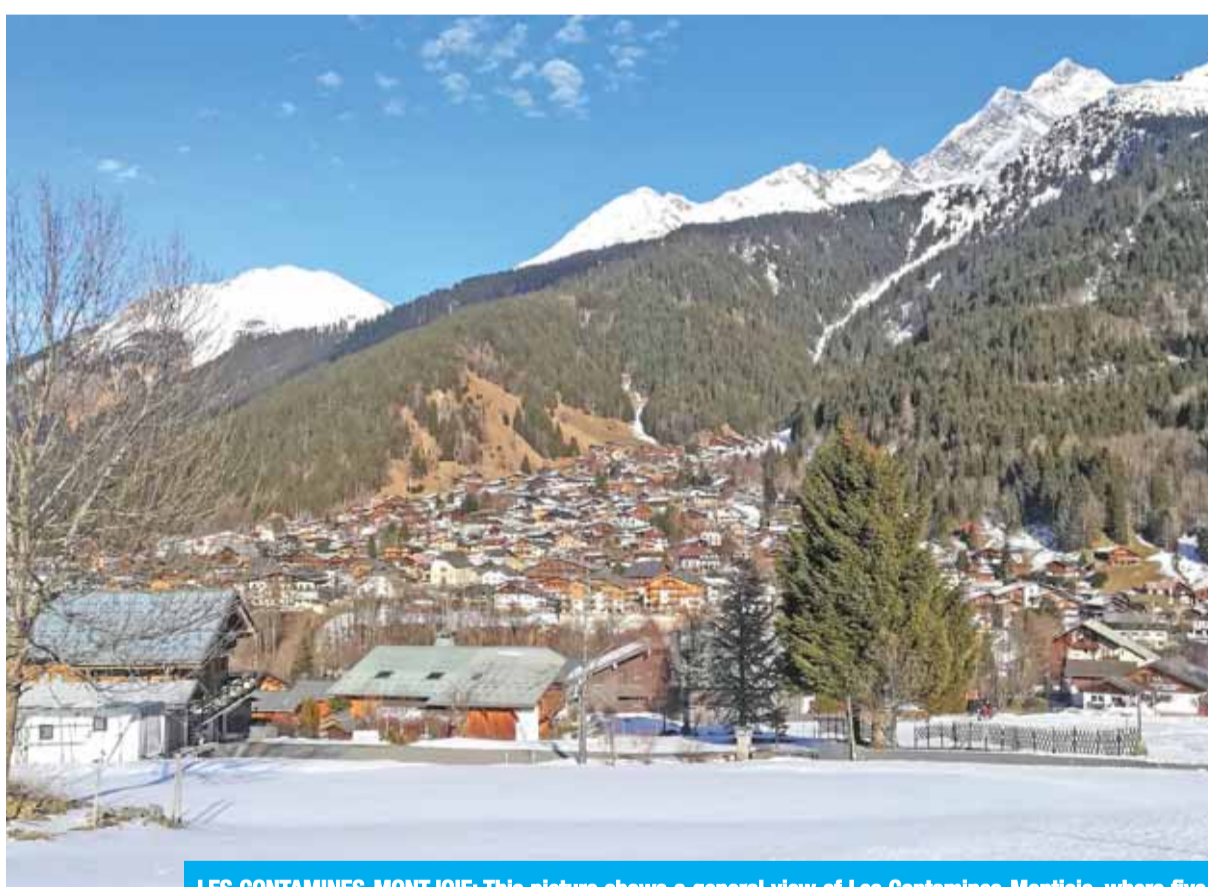
As Chinese authorities race to contain the spread of a new virus, which has infected more than 34,000 people and killed more than 700 in China, Beijing is turning to a familiar set of tools to find and prevent potential infections: data tracking and artificial intelligence. Several Chinese tech firms have developed apps to help people check if they have taken the same flight or train as confirmed virus patients, scraping data from lists published by state media. In Guangzhou, southern Guangdong province, robots at one public plaza have even been deployed to scold passersby who are not wearing masks, according to the state-run Global Times.

And in Beijing, one neighborhood committee responsible for an apartment complex of about 2,400 households said they used flight and train data to keep track of everyone's recent travel record. "Use big data technology to track, screen priority (cases), and effectively forecast the development of the epidemic in real time," China's National Health Commission (NHC) told local governments in an online statement Tuesday. "Strengthen the information link between... public security and transportation, and other departments," it said, urging them to share train, flight, communication, and medical data.

Fever tech

As Chinese authorities search for potential infections, a point of focus has been detecting fevers, a common symptom of the disease. While neighborhoods and office buildings rely primarily on hand-held thermometers, public transport hubs are also trialling fever detection systems that use artificial intelligence and infrared cameras. In Beijing, a system developed by Chinese search giant Baidu screens travelers at the Qinghe railway station using infrared and face detection technology, which automatically photographs each person's face.

If someone has a body temperature of 37.3 degrees Celsius (99 degrees Fahrenheit) or above, the



LES CONTAMINES-MONTJOIE: This picture shows a general view of Les Contamines-Montjoie, where five British nationals including a child have tested positive for the new coronavirus in France. — AFP

system sets off an alarm - prompting a secondary check by station staff. On Thursday, railway personnel, clutching red-and-white megaphones, ordered passengers arriving from northern Shanxi province to slow down as they passed by Baidu's system. According to the company, its system can check more than 200 people a minute, far faster than the thermal scanners used at airports.

Megvii, an AI firm that was blacklisted by the US in October over alleged rights abuses, has developed a similar system, which is currently being used at a subway station in Beijing. "Having a team of nearly 100 people working together remotely from home hasn't been easy," said a spokesperson at Megvii in an emailed statement. "All of them are working around the clock during Lunar New Year public holidays," said the company, adding that the team had to optimize its models to "effectively detect temperature with only the forehead exposed."

Five million travelers

Besides fever detection, Chinese tech firms have raced

to develop a wide variety of services to help with epidemic control efforts, from preparing drone deliveries of medical supplies to mapping the spread of the virus from Wuhan. Although the city has been under effective quarantine since January 23, some five million travelers left Wuhan during the Lunar New Year festival, according to the city mayor - galvanizing a nationwide search for recent Wuhan visitors. Still, the majority of tracking carried out by local authorities in China requires a lot of manpower, though some are entering data online to help with registration, especially as residents return after the holiday.

In Beijing, some neighborhoods are prompting residents to scan a QR code to fill out personal details, such as their phone number and hometown address. One form also prompted participants to fill out details on their mode of transport, such as their license plate or flight number, if they had travelled. It also asked if they had "recently" visited central Hubei province - where Wuhan is located - or come into contact with anyone from the hard-hit region. — AFP

Cyclone Damien batters northwestern Australia

SYDNEY: Tropical cyclone Damien lashed northwestern Australia's resource-rich Pilbara region yesterday, downing trees and forcing locals to heed a code red emergency warning and hunker down indoors. The category three storm brought winds of 195 kilometers per hour, sending debris into the air, knocking over trees and - in a few instances - ripping roofs off sheds and other outbuildings. The Bureau of Meteorology said Damien had brought "very destructive winds", "very heavy rainfall" and could yet spark dangerous storm surges.

Power was reportedly knocked out around the towns of Dampier and Karratha, but there were no immediate reports of serious damage to homes or businesses. The sparsely populated area - home to several of Australia's largest iron ore producers - experiences cyclones regularly. Many locals stocked up on essentials and locked down their homes as the storm approached. Mines and ports cleared out non-essential staff. But Damien did not strengthen to a category four storm on the five-point scale as had been feared.

Meanwhile, heavy rain was raising hopes Friday for an end to Australia's unprecedented bushfire crisis, as downpours douse blazes that have burned out of control for months. The devastating fires, fuelled by prolonged drought and record-high temperatures, have raged since September, burning more than 10 million hectares and killing 33 people. An estimated billion animals have perished in the fires that destroyed more than 2,500 homes. The rains in New South Wales (NSW), which began earlier in the week in some areas and are forecast to extend into next week, are expected to drench a number of the remaining fires and help contain others. — Agencies

Analysis

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Farmers show why premature births may boom in warmer world

Sirreh Samateh has worked outdoors through all eight of her pregnancies, laboring in the sun to grow rice and vegetables in her Gambian village of Jali. But each recent year has been hotter than the last, said the 41-year-old, who is seven months pregnant, as she joined other village women hauling water from a well for their onion patch. Last week temperatures in her region hit 42 degrees Celsius - and this is the cold season.

"My previous pregnancies were not so difficult but now, around two to five o'clock, my whole body feels hot," said Samateh, a flowered veil covering her head and pregnant belly. "When I'm working in the sun I feel dizzy and my whole body shakes," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Samateh is taking part in a first-of-its-kind study to figure out how such heat affects both mother and baby, as growing evidence suggests it may lead to premature births and low birth weight, said health researcher Ana Bonell.

As the planet warms, some regions - including the African tropics - are heating up faster than others. Periods of extreme heat are becoming longer and more frequent, and that has dangerous effects particularly on vulnerable groups including the elderly, infants, and people who work outdoors, scientists say. "We know that many African subsistence farmers are women, and they've been a neglected area of research," said Andy Haines, a former director of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and a supervisor of Bonell's research. That means "this work is potentially very significant".

Large studies from the United States and Europe have shown that higher temperatures are linked to an increase in premature births and babies born underweight, but they have not demonstrated how or why it happens, said Bonell, a doctor specializing in tropical medicine and maternal health. To try to answer that question, she has observed 50 pregnant women so far in an ongoing study for the Medical Research Council (MRC) Unit The Gambia at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. She aims to monitor 125 in total. In about 30 percent of the women, Bonell said, she has seen signs of foetal distress - either a high fetal heart rate or not enough blood going to the baby - when mothers work outside in the heat.

Heating up

Gambian women said they see weather patterns changing and heat rising but there is relatively little they can do to adapt. "The sun is getting hotter and we have a smaller amount of rain during the rainy season," said Jankey Drammeh, a 44-year-old farmer who is eight months pregnant with her 11th child. "For four years now we have noticed these changes," she said. When it gets too hot she stops and rests for a bit, pours some water on her head, and then keeps working, she said.

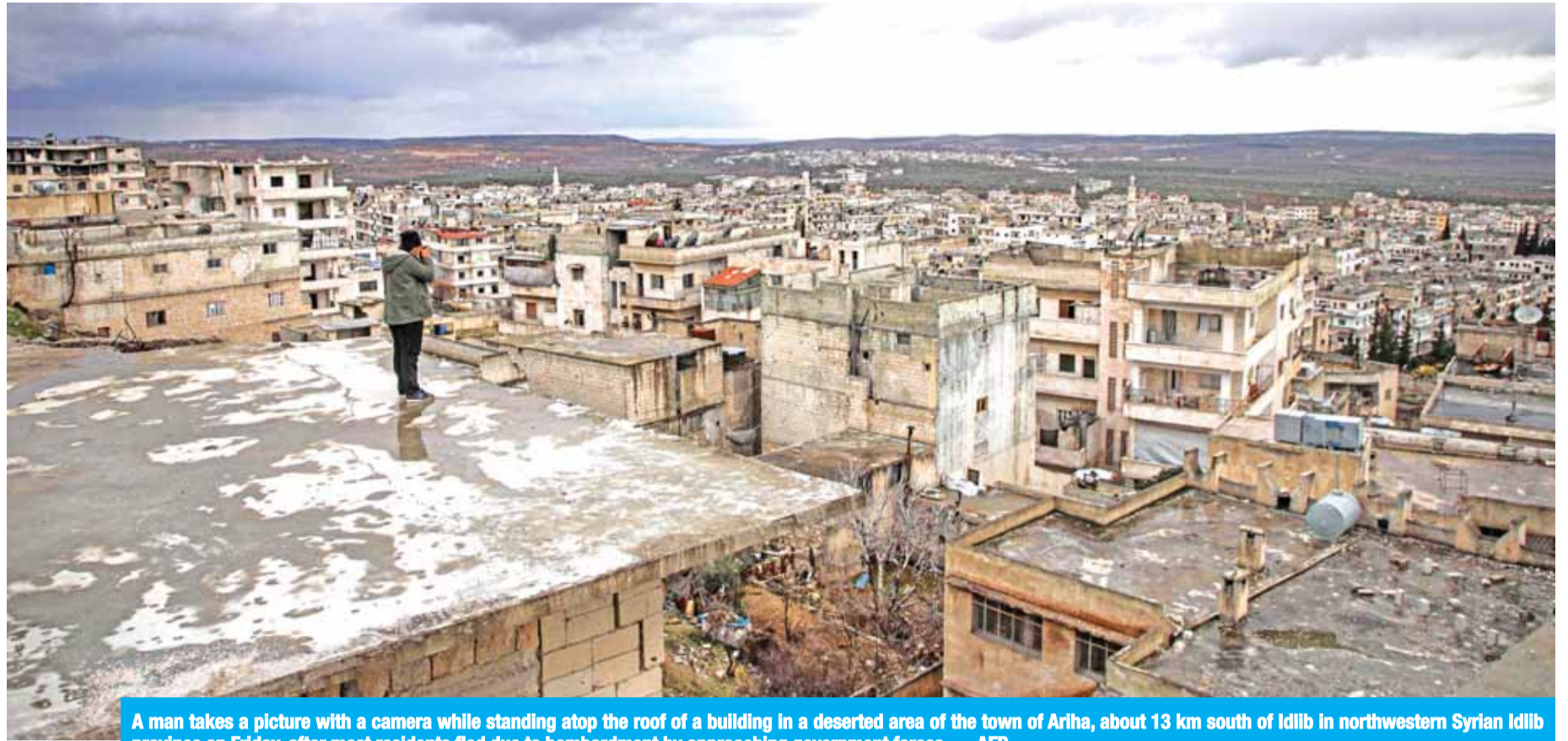
When people's bodies are exposed to heat, more blood flows to the skin to allow heat to escape and to cool them. This means less blood flowing to the heart and internal organs, including potentially the placenta, said Bonell. In studies where pregnant sheep were put on a treadmill in the heat, scientists found a decrease in blood flow to the placenta, which is critical for normal fetal growth. For ethical reasons, this type of study has not been done on humans.

Bonell's research consists of observing, throughout a single day, changes in uterine blood flow and foetal heart rate in pregnant women who normally work in high heat. She scans her subjects in the middle of the workday and if there are worrying symptoms she encourages the mother to rest or brings her to a clinic, she said. "I'm definitely seeing changes in the umbilical artery in about 30 percent of women," she said, although she has not analyzed the data yet.

That would correspond with previous, unrelated studies showing that about 35 percent of all outdoor workers develop heat strain. After a year, Bonell - who started her study in August - hopes to be able to show that heat does have negative effects on the fetus. She then plans to carry out a larger study to establish the link with prematurity and other birth outcomes. Premature birth complications are the leading cause of death for children under five, and preterm birth rates are increasing around the world, according to the World Health Organization.

Climate change is predicted to have huge impacts on human health, ranging from a rise in infectious diseases to more antibiotic resistance and growing malnutrition. Few studies have been done in Africa, and scientists last month pledged to double down on research in this area at an international health conference hosted by the MRC Unit in Gambia. "One of the obvious and direct effects of climate change is going to be to reduce the ability of people to work outdoors," said global health expert Haines. "Given that we can't cut emissions tomorrow, we do need to adapt," he said. — Reuters

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



A man takes a picture with a camera while standing atop the roof of a building in a deserted area of the town of Arifa, about 13 km south of Idlib in northwestern Syrian Idlib province on Friday, after most residents fled due to bombardment by approaching government forces. — AFP

Regime to chip away at Idlib region in stages

The Syrian regime will claw back the country's last major opposition bastion in stages, experts say, chipping away at Idlib until jihadists and rebels have run out of options. Since December, Russia-backed regime forces have pressed a blistering assault against the Idlib region, retaking town after town despite warnings from rebel ally Turkey to back off. "The Assad regime does not currently have the manpower or resources to capture all of Idlib in one operation," said Nicholas Heras of the Institute for the Study of War.

Instead, retaking the region dominated by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate will require Russian backing over the course of "multiple operations with limited objectives". The latest offensive against Idlib, home to some three million people, comes despite several failed ceasefire deals. The most significant deal was signed by Moscow and Ankara in the Russian town of Sochi in 2018, aiming to avert an all-out government onslaught.

Under that agreement, a buffer zone was to be created to separate jihadist and rebel fighters in the region from pro-Damascus combatants outside it. In exchange, traffic was to return to two key commercial arteries running across the bastion, linking the capital and coast to second city Aleppo. But tensions saw the deal sidelined, and the regime gradually chipped its way northwards to claim towns on those two highways. Yesterday, its forces took control of the strategic crossroads town of Saraqeb in the latest gain of a weeks-long offensive.

Freeze the conflict

North of those roads lie some 50,000 combatants - more than half of them rebels and the rest jihadists, according to estimates from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor. Battles to take those areas would be costlier than either Moscow or Damascus would want to bear at this point, Heras said. Turkey has called on the regime to halt its campaign. It already hosts some 3.7 million refugees and fears a new influx.

Since December, the violence has killed more than 300 civilians and sent more than 580,000 people fleeing towards the Turkish border. Tensions flared on Monday after a rare escalation between Syrian regime and Turkish forces in Idlib killed more than 20 people on both sides. Turkey has since sent additional troops into northwest Syria, causing Damascus to accuse Ankara of trying to hamper its advance by their presence.

Syria analyst Samuel Ramani said further regime progress "depends on whether the Syrian army faces stiffened resistance from Turkish forces or Turkish retaliatory strikes". If it did, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad "might want to freeze the conflict temporarily and then re-escalate once this crisis in Syria-Turkey relations blows over", he added. A fresh demilitarized line could be established to protect civilians. "A new buffer zone in Idlib is probably the most likely option, but it's unclear whether Turkey would ultimately see that through," he said.

Surrender or flee

Assad, whose forces now control around 70 percent of Syria, has repeatedly vowed to retake the entire country. Waddah Abd Rabbo, editor of pro-government daily Al-Watan, told AFP the reconquest of Idlib would happen "in stages, according to international agreements such as Sochi". After "the highways are re-opened, it will be imperative to move forwards and liberate the whole province".

Until then, he added, civilians in Idlib would have the option of settling their status with the regime and Syrian fighters could surrender. Foreign fighters in Idlib are estimated in their thousands and have in the past hailed from Uzbekistan, Chechnya and China's ethnic Uighur minority. "They will have no choice but to surrender and face trial by the Syrian judiciary, or flee back to where they came from - that is, Turkey," Abd Rabbo said.

Idlib's population has swelled in recent years, mostly with civilians but also with thousands of fighters evacuated under surrender deals from other parts of the country. If Idlib were retaken, those local fighters would have few options left. Ramani said the fate of Idlib's rebels largely "depends on Turkey's future course of action". Late last month, French President Emmanuel Macron accused his Turkish counterpart of sending ships laden with Syrian mercenaries to fight in the Libyan conflict. "Some Syrians will join Turkey as foreign fighters in Libya," Ramani said. "But for most, they are at the mercy of Assad's forces" or face life as refugees. — AFP

Trump's trial over but final verdict not in

In Hollywood, it is called a false ending - where the story appears to be heading to a close but is not yet over. US President Donald Trump's impeachment trial ended on Wednesday with a conclusion that was unsurprising - his acquittal. But in reality the end of the story will play out in November, when American voters go to the polls.

That is when Democrats will finally learn whether their gamble to impeach a president for the third time in US history paid any electoral dividends in winning over undecided voters. Opinion polls during the impeachment proceedings suggested little political harm to Trump - opinions among Republicans and Democrats were largely entrenched from the outset.

November is also when Republican Party lawmakers in the US Congress, especially those in districts and states that are a toss-up, may learn the political costs of erecting a human wall to block efforts to remove Trump from the Oval Office. Trump's lawyers argued that with elections nine months away it should be left to the voters to render the final verdict on whether Trump abused his office by pressuring Ukraine to investigate a Democratic political rival, Joe Biden.

The impact of the trial on the election is far from clear. By the time Election Day arrives, Trump's impeachment, and the partisan battle around it, may be a distant memory for many voters more focused on bread-and-butter issues. Still, the impeachment of one of the most polarizing presidents in modern US history has shaken up the election race by energizing both parties' bases.

"I think it's done one good thing for Democrats. It has awakened some of the activists to the very real possibility that Trump will win a second term," said Larry Sabato,

director of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics. Trump has raised millions of dollars for his re-election campaign off the impeachment trial, netting \$46 million in the fourth quarter of 2019 in the most lucrative haul of his re-election campaign. The money, raised during the impeachment inquiry, was mostly from supporters angry at Democratic efforts to oust him from office, Republican officials said.

Democrats, who have to worry about their fragile controlling majority in the House, saw massive fundraising spikes too on both Democratic presidential candidates and in congressional races. Republicans and Democrats are likely to attack their opponents' impeachment votes in the Senate and the House of Representatives in media ads during the election campaign, some political analysts said. In some places that has already begun.

Representative Joe Cunningham, a Democrat who flipped a South Carolina district in 2018 that had been Republican for decades, launched advertisements in his district this month to emphasize his legislative achievements to counter a wave of anti-impeachment attack ads by Republicans. Cunningham's approach echoes that of many Democrats, especially in vulnerable districts: Say little about impeachment and focus on accomplishments. "I just want to make sure the record is clear on exactly what we are doing, and where our focus is," the congressman told Reuters.

Swaying voters

When House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the top Democrat in Congress, announced the impeachment inquiry in September, many Democrats were hopeful of winning over a greater share of public opinion. Pelosi cited polls showing increased support among Americans for an inquiry into Trump's conduct. Over the course of months, public opinion edged towards support for impeachment but the hoped-for groundswell failed to materialize despite televised congressional hearings in which current and former government officials detailed a pressure campaign to push Ukraine to carry out the probes Trump sought.

El Salvador govt effort against gangs bears fruit

Since his arrival in office in June, Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele has stepped up the country's war on criminal gangs, an effort that is bearing fruit according to experts who point to a falling murder rate. The country of 6.5 million is one of the most violent in the world and its citizens also face chronic poverty which has prompted many to flee northward towards the United States, including in infamous migrant caravans.

In January El Salvador recorded 119 murders, its lowest monthly tally since the end of its civil war in 1992, the president said recently. Its murder rate, meanwhile, has dropped massively between 2018 and 2019, from 51 to 35.6 inhabitants per 100,000. When Bukele assumed office, criminal gangs intensified their activity in an apparent attempt to force the new government to make concessions such as easing jail conditions, analysts said.

Far from buckling, the government toughened its stance on jailed gang members. "The message was clear: The gangs know that if they challenge the president, the jailed leaders will pay the consequences," said analyst Juan

Ramon Medrano, a professor at Francisco Gavidia University.

Gangs holding back

Justice and Security Minister Rogelio Rivas has repeated several times: "Now the government is in control of the country's prisons". El Salvador's criminal gangs, which are involved in extortion, drug-trafficking and other crime, boast around 70,000 members, including 17,000 who are incarcerated. According to Janette Aguilar, a researcher at the Central American University (UCA) of El Salvador, pressure from authorities has led to the gangs reigning in their activities.

She suggested that "an agreement has been reached between the main rival gangs" Barrio 18 and Mara Salvatrucha, more commonly known as MS-13, to reign in their violent activities against each other. Carlos Carcach, a researcher from the Higher School of Economics and Business said that "something is happening inside the gangs that explains them reducing their violence levels."

Bukele, 38, enjoys sky-high popularity ratings and his security policies have been well-received among weary Salvadorans. Medrano says the public believes that under Bukele the police, with help from the military, are "trying harder" to combat criminal gangs while working "more intelligently."

Extortion still rampant

While there are fewer murders not all of the gangs'



The feet of suspected members of Mara 18, who remain under custody, are seen at Isidro Menendez Justice Court in San Salvador on Feb 6, 2020. — AFP

activities are on the decline. "There's been no decrease in extortion, which is the gangs' oxygen," said Medrano. The president's biggest challenge is "to stop extortion and get to the root of the problem," which means preventing the gangs from recruiting new young members, he added. But to do that, "youngsters need to have the opportunity to work and study to better themselves," he said. Greater reduction of gang violence would open the way for more investment in El Salvador's poorest communities therefore helping the youngsters, he added. — AFP

Business

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Commercial Bank of Kuwait, Zain sign MoU to offer cloud solutions and data center services



Sheikh Ahmad Al-Sabah and Bader Al-Kharafi sign the MoU.



Al-Sabah and Al-Kharafi shake hands after signing the MoU.

KUWAIT: As part of the joint collaboration between the Commercial Bank of Kuwait and Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, the two companies signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) through which Zain will offer CBK the latest cloud solutions, data center services, and the most advanced security solutions to drive the bank's digital transformation efforts.

The MoU signing ceremony was held at CBK's main headquarters in Kuwait City in the presence of CBK Chairman Sheikh Ahmad Duaij Jaber Al-Sabah; Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi; CBK CEO Elham Yousry Mahfouz, Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan, as well as the executive management teams from both companies.

As part of the MoU, Zain will offer innovative cloud solutions to revamp CBK's integrated digital infrastructure. The solutions include Zain Business Data Center (ZBDC) services such as data storage and industry-leading security and connectivity. The agreement also includes network cabling and management services, connectivity, CCTV, service management, and more.

Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi said "We applaud CBK, a well-regarded and successful entity in Kuwait, for proactively assess-

Bader Al-Kharafi: 'Storing digital assets securely and efficiently is becoming a key differentiator to businesses in general, and financial services institutions in particular'.

Sheikh Ahmad Duaij Al-Sabah: 'Strategic partnership between CBK and Zain towards digital transformation in banking services'

ing its transformation roadmap to digitization and are honored to enter this milestone MoU with them. Storing digital assets securely and efficiently is becoming a key differentiator to businesses in general, and financial services institutions in particular, and it is important we have robust systems in place to be able to store, access, retrieve and restore data."

On his part, Sheikh Ahmad Duaij Al-Sabah, Chairman, Commercial Bank of Kuwait said: "we are

industry and accelerating technological advancement, the Bank endeavors to cooperate and partner with digital service and solution providers in Kuwait, particularly Zain - the leading IT solution, communication and cloud computing provider," stated Sheikh Ahmad.

Sheikh Ahmad further explained that banks endeavor to leverage their technology platforms through capitalization on Online Banking and Mobile Banking to enhance their digital presence, stressing that this mutual cooperation between the Bank and Zain will contribute in improving the Bank's digital infrastructure.

Sheikh Ahmad emphasized that developing the banking services through employing the latest digital technologies shall reflect positively on our customer base on one hand and on the service & product offering to our retail and corporate customers in such a way that would satisfy their ambitions and live up to their expectations and cope with the advanced services offered by banks over the globe.

It is worth noting that the innovative cloud solutions and Zain Business Data Center services are a vital tool towards digital transformation to boost the Bank's efforts towards Hi-Tech Banking & digital innovation without compromising on the security and confidentiality of information.

proud to sign this Memorandum of Understanding where Zain will provide the Bank with innovative cloud solutions, Zain Business Data Center's services and information security solutions. This partnership reflects the Bank's efforts towards digital transformation and the employment of sophisticated technology systems with a view to keep up with the latest digital innovation technologies".

"Given the digital transformation seen in the banking



Al-Sabah, Al-Kharafi, Mahfouz and Al-Roudhan with Zain and CBK teams.

Business

IMF: Without reforms, Gulf oil wealth could vanish by 2034

Global energy market undergoing fundamental change

DUBAI: Energy-addicted Gulf states must undertake much deeper reforms or risk seeing their wealth drain away in 15 years as global demand for oil slides, the IMF warned. "At the current fiscal stance, the region's financial wealth could be depleted by 2034," the International Monetary Fund said in a study on "the future of oil and fiscal sustainability" in the region. The Gulf states, which heavily depend on the "black gold" that has enriched them for decades, have no choice but to accelerate and widen economic reforms to avoid becoming net borrowers, the IMF said.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which groups Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, accounts for a fifth of the world's crude supplies and oil income makes up 70-90 percent of public revenues. Banking on hefty oil revenues over nearly two decades through 2014, the six nations controlled by ruling dynasties accumulated

some \$2.5 trillion of financial assets invested mostly overseas through sovereign wealth funds.

But the oil price shock of mid-2014 has battered the finances of GCC nations, drastically reducing their revenues and forcing them to borrow and draw down on their assets to plug persistent budget deficits. GCC gross domestic product plummeted as a result, with the IMF estimating the economies grew by just 0.7 percent last year from an already meagre 2.0 percent in 2018 - far from rates of above 4.0 percent before the oil crash.

The global energy market is undergoing fundamental change as new technologies are increasing supply, while concerns over climate change see the world moving towards renewable sources, the IMF said. "This outlook spells a significant fiscal sustainability challenge for the GCC region," which must adapt for the combination of long-term low

demand and prices, the global lender said.

Good times are over

A legacy of sharply rising expenditure during 2007-14 thanks to high oil prices, followed by a steep decline in hydrocarbon revenues, has weakened fiscal positions in the region, it said. The resulting deficits lowered the region's net financial wealth during 2014-18 by around \$300 billion to \$2 trillion, according to IMF estimates. The drop now is believed to be even deeper. GCC government debt rose from around \$100 billion in 2014 to nearly \$400 billion in 2018. As a result, net financial wealth is on track to turn negative by 2034 or even faster, turning the region into a net borrower, the report said.

Most GCC states have embarked on economic diversification and reform programs that include subsidy cuts, raising power prices and even imposing val-

ue-added tax and other forms of taxation." Ongoing reforms are moving the GCC region in the right direction, but they need to accelerate," the IMF said. Rapid diversification of economies will not be enough, the IMF warned, saying the process should be accompanied by reductions in government expenditure and the introduction of broad-based taxes.

GCC nations must also rationalize spending, reform their large civil service sectors, and reduce public wage bills which are high by international standards. Most Gulf states see these measures as highly sensitive and a political risk because of the potential adverse affect on citizens who have grown accustomed to subsidies and low taxes. The proposed measures "would have a multitude of socioeconomic consequences affecting employment, household incomes, and business confidence and investment," the IMF admitted. —AFP

Exclusive privileges for frequent travelers with NBK-Kuwait Airways Oasis Club Visa Cards

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is continuously introducing all that is new for the benefit of its customers, ensuring it listens to their aspirations and tailor services that satisfy their needs. In that line, the NBK Credit Cards are the ideal tool to make daily payments as each one provides exclusive and unique sets of benefits, such as the NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Cards, which provide frequent travelers with unlimited privileges and rewards.

The NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Infinite Credit Card and NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Signature Card, as well as the NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Platinum Prepaid Card offer customers an array of advantages including earning Oasis Club Miles when using the card, redeeming earned miles for tickets with Kuwait Airways, upgrading to Business or First Class, in addition to many other benefits.

The cards also enable customers to enjoy more privileges that make travelling a lot more comfortable and

enjoyable, such as accessing airport lounges worldwide, enjoying travel insurance and special assistance at airports, as well as earning points with the NBK Rewards Program which can be redeemed at more than 850 participating outlets. These cards also enable customers to earn up to 15,000 bonus Welcome Elite Tier Miles upon card activation, as well as up to 10,000 additional miles when spending within the first 3 months of card issuance. Customers will then earn up to 4 Oasis Club Miles for every KD 1 spent on their daily purchases.

"At NBK, we are constantly partnering with leading service providers to benefit our customers by constantly developing our products and services to meet the needs of each segment of customers. We are committed to enriching the banking experience they are accustomed to receiving from NBK," stated Mohammed Al Othman, General Manager of Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait. Al Othman added: "The NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Cards are designed to ensure they add value to the privileges we offer, as we reaffirm our leadership position in providing exceptional banking services that are specifically designed with the needs and aspirations of our customers in mind."

Al Othman reaffirmed that this partnership with Kuwait Airways and Visa extends from the long-term and strategic partnership built by NBK with these leading service providers. He added: "We are confident that our customers will enjoy the amazing privileges we have to offer from this collaboration which each of the parties involved will ensure its continuity in the future." On his



part, Mesh Al Lafa Al Mutairi, Director, Commercially Important Persons at Kuwait Airways, said: "We are pleased to be partnering with NBK, the leading bank in Kuwait, in this unique product that will without a doubt reward customers and provide them with unique services when flying around the world with Kuwait Airways."

Through this partnership, we continue to enhance our position as the national carrier, as we continue to expand on the services, competitive offerings and travel packages that we offer our passengers to explore the world thanks to the Oasis Club and Kuwait Airways Holidays which we tailor with our trusted partners to serve our passengers." Al Mutairi added that Kuwait Airways is always focused on providing passengers with an enjoyable travel experi-

ence onboard its flights. The NBK-Kuwait Airways (Oasis Club) Visa Cards are a great contribution to this enjoyable travel experience in addition to the many travel services for frequent travelers.

"Visa is delighted to partner with NBK and Kuwait Airways to offer cardholders rewarding travel benefits. Visa is constantly looking for new opportunities to extend our value added products and unmatched travel proposition to new market segments and we are pleased to offer NBK and Kuwait Airways customers the security, flexibility and convenience of Visa's payment products with exciting value added rewards," said Shashank Singh, Visa's General Manager for Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain.

Poverty in Britain increases despite low unemployment

LONDON: Poverty in Britain has risen among workers despite the country's lowest unemployment in 45 years, an organization for social change said yesterday, while urging the new government to take action. "Although employment has increased, in-work poverty has also gone up because often people's pay, hours, or both are not enough," said the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. JRF's 'state of the nation' report on poverty in the UK revealed also that poverty had risen for children and pensioners over the last five years. In total, 14 million people in the UK were living in poverty, it said.

JRF added that a single person or family was deemed to be in poverty should they have an income that is less than 60 percent of their family type's median earnings after housing costs such as rent. "The new government has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make historic progress and enable people and communities to truly level-up," JRF said. Its executive director Claire Ainsley added: "As a nation we have made progress before and we can and must do so again with this new government and a new settlement after Brexit."

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative party convincingly won a general election in December that helped to unlock Brexit. Recent official data meanwhile showed that Britain's unemployment rate stands at 3.8 percent, the lowest level since 1975. The employment rate is at a record-high 76.3 percent. However JRF said that 56 percent of people in poverty come from a UK working family, compared with 39 percent 20 years ago. —AFP

Tesla's surge inspires fans to buy, skeptics to dig in, drives fear of missing out

NEW YORK: Pretty much everyone on Wall Street has an opinion about Tesla. The electric vehicle maker's stupendous rally in recent months has given shareholders something to cheer about, cost short sellers billions of dollars and vindicated legions of retail investors who have long adored Elon Musk's company.

Tesla shares have soared by nearly 320% since early June, helped by the company's better-than-expected financial results and ramped-up production at its new car factory in Shanghai. After surging 36% over Monday and Tuesday, the stock by Friday had settled back to a gain of about 15% for the week. On Friday afternoon, it was down marginally at \$747.11. Another factor driving this week's surge may be fund managers hurrying to raise their allocation of the stock, analysts said.

"A lot of advisors and institutions, they jump in the bandwagon because they don't want to trail," said vocal Tesla bull Ross Gerber, president and chief executive of Gerber Kawasaki in Santa Monica, California. "If Tesla goes to \$1,000 and they don't own it, what are they going to tell their clients?" Gerber trimmed his fund's position in the stock as the company's valuation soared. He hopes to buy more if the stock falls and said a fair valuation would be around \$550.

Retail investors have driven part of the surge. Among

Fidelity Investments customers, Tesla has been by far the most actively traded stock in recent sessions, with nearly 16,000 buy orders for the electric carmaker's shares. Twitter, ranked second overall in trading activity on Fidelity, had just over 2,000 buy orders.

On Monday, when Tesla shot up 20% in its biggest one day rally since 2013, clients at TD Ameritrade - millennials in particular - overwhelmingly took profits after having bought the stock for months, said JJ Kinahan, chief market strategist at the online brokerage. Tesla's biggest institutional shareholders are Baillie Gifford, Capital World and Vanguard, according to Refinitiv data.

It also has an international following. Retail investors in South Korea have been trading Tesla shares at a furious pace in recent weeks, buying and selling \$200 million worth of stock in January, according to the Korea Securities Depository. Volume in November stood at \$43 million. Tesla options positioning is also bullish. According to data from options analytics provider Trade Alert, skew turned deeply negative this week, meaning that demand for calls, used to position for further share gains, has surpassed demand for puts, used to guard against a fall in shares.

That's a departure from the usual dynamic in most stocks, in which options used for downside protection generally command prices higher than those for upside participation. Tesla's biggest winner is Musk, who stands to earn more than \$1 billion thanks to Tesla's recent rally. The company's market capitalization briefly exceeded \$150 billion this week, the second target in his record-breaking compensation package that opens the way to options awarded to him vesting.

The bears

Many investors remain skeptical that Tesla can consistently deliver profit, cash flow and growth. More Wall Street analysts rate Tesla "sell" than "buy,"



LOS ANGELES: People stand in a Tesla showroom at a shopping mall in Los Angeles. —AFP

and the company's stock is the most shorted on Wall Street, with nearly \$18 billion sold short. Those bearish investors plan to profit by selling borrowed shares and buying them back later at a lower price. Yet while short investors in Tesla have suffered paper losses of over \$11 billion so far in 2020, they have mostly held their ground, according to S3 Partners, a financial analytics firm.

One seller in the December quarter was Saudi Arabia's public investment fund, according to a filing on Tuesday. Some funds that reportedly hold short positions are London-based Crispin Odey, according to the Financial Times. Odey was not immediately available for comment. The Financial Times also reported that Greenlight Capital, run by David Einhorn, had told investors last month it held a put option against Tesla, which would be a bet against the stock. A spokesman for Greenlight declined to comment. —Reuters

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.779
Indian Rupees	4.275
Pakistani Rupees	1.974
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.677
Nepali Rupees	2.671
Singapore Dollar	221.540
Hongkong Dollar	39.288
Bangladesh Taka	3.551
Philippine Peso	6.020
Thai Baht	9.912
Malaysian Ringgit	77.992

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.374
Qatari Riyal	83.812
UAE Dirham	792.593
Bahraini Dinar	810.280
UAE Dirham	83.081

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	22.150
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	19.370
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.225
Tunisian Dinar	114.210
Jordanian Dinar	430.390
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.203
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.407

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	304.950
Euro	338.490
Sterling Pound	397.650
Canadian dollar	231.370
Turkish lira	52.580
Swiss Franc	316.340
US Dollar Buying	297.500

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	304.590
Canadian Dollar	230.005
Sterling Pound	396.755
Euro	336.485
Swiss Frank	299.425
Bahraini Dinar	810.020
UAE Dirhams	83.330
Qatari Riyals	84.570
Saudi Riyals	82.120
Jordanian Dinar	430.890
Egyptian Pound	19.321
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.677
Indian Rupees	4.272
Pakistani Rupees	1.971
Bangladesh Taka	3.556
Philippines Peso	6.006
Cyprus pound	18.120
Japanese Yen	3.770
Syrian Pound	1.595
Nepalese Rupees	2.667
Malaysian Ringgit	74.835

Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.205
Thai Bhat	10.780
Turkish Lira	51.370
Singapore dollars	220.428

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
British Pound	0.387352	0.401252
Czech Korune	0.005392	0.014692
Danish Krone	0.040736	0.045736
Euro	0.327371	0.341071
Georgian Lari	0.110636	0.110636
Hungarian	0.001150	0.001340
Norwegian Krone	0.029024	0.034224
Romanian Leu	0.065380	0.082230
Russian Ruble	0.004810	0.004810
Slovakia	0.009125	0.019125
Slovenia	0.027675	0.032675
Swiss Franc	0.305891	0.316891
Australia Dollar	0.195848	0.207848
New Zealand Dollar	0.189633	0.199133
Canada Dollar	0.223932	0.232932
US Dollars	0.300850	0.305400
US Dollars Mint	0.301050	0.305400
Bangladesh Taka	0.002877	0.003678

Chinese Yuan	0.042214	0.045714
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037309	0.040059
Indian Rupee	0.003622	0.004394
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002698	0.002878
Korean Won	0.000246	0.000261
Malaysian Ringgit	0.070117	0.076117
Nepalese Rupee	0.002600	0.002940
Pakistan Rupee	0.001321	0.002091
Philippine Peso	0.005847	0.006147
Singapore Dollar	0.214437	0.224437
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001316	0.001896
Taiwan	0.010144	0.010324
Thai Baht	0.009458	0.010008
Vietnamese Dong	0.000013	0.000013

Arab

Bahraini Dinar	0.802730	0.810798
Egyptian Pound	0.019281	0.020221
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000199	0.000259
Jordanian Dinar	0.424210	0.434210
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000104	0.000254
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021071	0.0245071
Omani Riyal	0.786944	0.794853
Qatar Riyal	0.083105	0.083941
Saudi Riyal	0.080233	0.081523
Syrian Pound	0.001293	0.001513
Tunisian Dinar	0.103564	0.111564
Turkish Lira	0.044481	0.054326
UAE Dirhams	0.082393	0.083221
Yemeni Riyal	0.000991	0.001071

Business

US job creation surges in Jan, adds 225,000 new positions

US economy sees an explosion of new hiring

WASHINGTON: The US economy saw an explosion of new hiring in January, possibly helped by mild weather but nonetheless getting the year off to an impressive start, according to key government data released Friday. The surprising gain will be a boon to President Donald Trump, who has emerged intact from his impeachment and trial and can now trumpet his economic record as he battles to win re-election in November.

"JOBS, JOBS, JOBS!" the president tweeted following the report, using the hashtag "#PromisesMadePromisesKept." "So jobs continue to be great. Our country continues to do great," Trump told reporters later at the White House. Still, after more than a decade of steady growth and job gains, and with steep tariffs on many products from China still in place, it is questionable whether the hiring pace can continue, especially since the economy is projected to slow this year.

US employers added 225,000 new non-farm jobs last month, far surpassing expectations, thanks to big gains in construction and leisure and hospitality, but also health care and transportation, the Labor Department reported. The blockbuster number was a rebound from a tepid December report, but the latest gains mean the economy added an average of 211,000 jobs in the last three months. That is a healthy improvement on the 175,000 average of 2019 when the economy cooled amid Trump's multifront trade wars that led to tariffs on huge amounts of imports and American goods sold abroad.

Even with the big job gains in January, the unemployment rate ticked up by a tenth of a point to 3.6 percent. But that can be attributed to an increase in the labor force, as more people returned to the job market, and the jobless rate still remains near a 50-year low. "Amid virus-induced fears of a sharp economic slump,

strong job creation and firming wage growth in January provided reassurance that the record-long economic expansion still has room to run," Oxford Economics analysts said. However, they said, "employers continue to face a volatile and uncertain global environment which, along with a cooling domestic backdrop, will lead them to be more cautious hiring."

Mild weather boosts building

The construction sector, which is highly weather-dependent, added a stunning 44,000 positions last month - nearly four times the monthly average of 2019. But the housing sector, a key driver of the US economy, continues to face a shortage of workers, making it hard to keep up with demand for new homes, with buyers drawn by low interest rates, which is pushing up prices. "America is currently short by around 5 to 6 million housing units and much more construction is needed," said Lawrence Yun chief economist at the National Association of Realtors.

Meanwhile, jobs in the leisure and hospitality sector jumped 21,000, bringing the total over the past six months alone to 288,000, according to the report. The manufacturing sector, which slumped into recession last year under the weight of punitive tariffs imposed in the trade confrontations, both on inputs and on exports, lost 12,000 positions in January - almost entirely due to a decline in the auto sector.

Trump has justified his confrontational trade policy with promises to help US manufacturing, but industries have not seen the big boost. "Manufacturing accounts for only 8.4% of payrolls, but it punches above its weight in the eyes of the markets, media, and politicians," said Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics. And despite a trade truce signed with China last month, which left most tariffs in place, as well as the continental free trade deal with Mexico



STATEN ISLAND: A woman works at a fulfillment center at the 855,000-square-foot Amazon fulfillment center in Staten Island, one of the five boroughs of New York City. — AFP

and Canada known as USMCA, industry leaders remain concerned.

"What blue collar boom? Factory job growth simply hasn't been noticeable for a year now," Alliance for American Manufacturing President Scott Paul said in a statement. "The president took a victory lap by signing the China 'Phase 1' and USMCA deals, but out in the real world, the manufacturing sector is still hurting." Meanwhile, the US health care sector added another 36,000 jobs in the month, and has grown by 361,000

over the past 12 months, according to the report.

The labor force participation rate rose 0.2 percentage point to 63.4 percent as more people returned to the workforce to look for jobs. Worker pay grew by seven cents to an average of \$28.44 an hour last month, and has grown 3.1 percent over the past 12 months. That gain outstrips inflation and is key to helping US consumers keep buying goods and services - a force which has been shoring up economic growth in the face of headwinds from abroad and sluggish growth at home. — AFP

Europe economies falter as new virus clouds the outlook

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: Tumbling industrial production in Germany and France in December rounded off a year blighted by trade war tensions for Europe's top economies, official data showed Friday, while the novel coronavirus outbreak threatens hopes of a 2020 revival. Growth in both nations sputtered in 2019, with output actually shrinking for Germany in the April-June quarter and for France in October-December.

German growth overall slowed from 1.5 percent in 2018 to just 0.6 percent in 2019, according to preliminary data, while France did better but still slipped from 1.7 to 1.2 percent. In December, manufacturing output was down 3.5 percent month-on-month in Germany and off 2.8 percent in its western neighbor. In Germany, "there are very few positive elements to find in the December industrial data," ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski said, adding that the figures point to Europe's top economy having shrunk in the fourth quarter.

In the final months of last year, there was still widespread uncertainty about whether the US and China would bury the trade hatchet, after months of tough negotiations and tit-for-tat tariffs. Figures released Friday showed Germany's trade surplus - the amount exports outweigh imports - shrank slightly from 228 billion euros (\$250 billion) in 2018 to 224 billion euros in 2019. The US and China last month signed a "phase one" trade



BREMERHAVEN: Cars wait to be shipped at the harbor in Bremerhaven, northern Germany. Tumbling industrial production in Germany and France in December rounded off a year blighted by trade war tensions for Europe's top economies, official data showed yesterday, while the novel coronavirus outbreak threatens hopes of a 2020 revival. — AFP

pact, designed to ease the commercial tensions whose knock-on effects last year battered European manufacturers.

Meanwhile, Britain's departure from the European Union - pushing the risk of a fresh "no deal" cliff-edge back to December - also helped brighten the mood. More positive "soft" indicators like German business sentiment surveys in Germany have prompted some analysts to see clearer skies ahead for manufacturers. Despite December's data, "forward-looking indicators continue to point to a modest cyclical rebound in the near term," said Frederik Ducozet, strategist at Pictet Wealth Management.

Coronavirus threat

With Brexit and trade tensions less prominent for now, two of the main risks to growth

cited by institutions like the European Central Bank have ebbed. Against that backdrop, "the coronavirus comes at a particularly bad moment," BNP Paribas analyst William de Vijlder said. "The global economy was showing tentative signs of a growth pick-up and, in all likelihood, this momentum will now be stopped or even reversed".

Global efforts to contain the coronavirus will likely brake activity at companies around the world for whom China is a vital link in global supply chains - including Germany's massive car industry. Given that, "we doubt this will be the last of the run of negative quarters," said analyst Andrew Kenningham of Capital Economics. There is also little prospect that the ECB will step in to shore up growth by further opening the money sluices, analysts said. — AFP

Family or job? Tough decisions for Hong Kong border commuters

HONG KONG: Waiting at a bus stop on Hong Kong's border with mainland China, Billy Yiu was preparing to say goodbye to his wife and baby, unsure when he might see them again. The 40-year-old Hong Konger works in the semi-autonomous financial hub and commutes daily from neighboring Shenzhen, where rents are far cheaper. But the journey will be all but impossible for the foreseeable future.

In a bid to halt the spread of a deadly new coronavirus, Hong Kong on Saturday began placing anyone crossing from the mainland under a mandatory 14-day quarantine. So on Thursday night Yiu was making a final trip back to Shenzhen to see his family before returning to Hong Kong where he would stay with his parents. "I don't know how long this is going to last but what can we do?" he told AFP. His wife had opted to stay in Shenzhen with their baby. "It's not easy for her. But we have a domestic helper and we will make video calls," he said.

'One country, two systems'

Tens of thousands of people are making



HONG KONG: A general view of Shenzhen is seen from a bus travelling on the Shenzhen Bay bridge in Hong Kong. Hong Kong began enforcing a mandatory two-week quarantine for anyone arriving from mainland China, a dramatic escalation of its bid to stop the deadly new coronavirus from spreading. — AFP

similarly tough decisions. Under the "one country, two systems" model, Hong Kong is a part of China but maintains its civil liberties and free market economy. The border acts as a de facto international boundary. Usually about 660,000 people cross between the two sides each day, 17 percent of them Hong Kongers who live in mainland China.

But as the virus has spread, the 14 checkpoints have gradually been reduced to just

three-two bridges and the airport. With mandatory quarantining now in place, Hong Kong authorities expect cross-border travel to slow to a trickle. Those waiting at the bus stop on Thursday night were a typical cross-section of people who live on both sides of the border. William Tang, 61, works in Hong Kong's finance industry and lives in Shenzhen. Tang said he had been talking to his bosses about possible working arrangements or taking a long holiday. — AFP

Boursa Kuwait launches BK Main 50 Index

KUWAIT: Marking yet another milestone in its market development journey, Boursa Kuwait yesterday announced the launch of its BK Main 50 Index, which is based on a market cap-weighted price return criterion and will represent the most liquid 50 securities in the Main Market. The BK Main 50 Index will classify securities according to the index's methodology, published on the Boursa Kuwait website. Companies will be included or excluded based on the calculation of the average daily traded value (ADTV), which signifies liquidity.

The Index constituents will be reviewed annually based on their average daily traded value (ADTV), which will be published simultaneously with Market Segmentation results. The results

Former WTO chief: EU has upper hand in post-Brexit trade

BRUSSELS: The former head of the World Trade Organization expects Britain to struggle for years to redefine its ties with Europe - and says Brits won't swallow US products like chlorinated chicken. In an interview with AFP, Pascal Lamy - who has also been an EU trade commissioner - said London and Brussels may yet come to a bare bones trade deal this year to avoid a breakdown in ties. But further negotiations will continue for many years after that, and the smaller British economy will be at a disadvantage compared to the much bigger and richer European Union.

If 2020 and the post-Brexit transition period come to an end without a deal between London and Brussels, cross-Channel trade will be disrupted by border checks and tariffs. "The EU and the United Kingdom would fall under WTO rules, which isn't hell but is far from today's heaven. It would hurt, which would be stupid," Lamy told AFP in Brussels. "In my opinion, they'll find a way - that's the diplomat's art." As things stand, the two camps seem far apart as, in Lamy's phrase, Prime Minister Boris Johnson and EU negotiator Michel Barnier put on their "war paint" ahead of intense negotiations.

BoJo the 'bluffer'

Johnson insists he will give no ground on reasserting British sovereignty over its fishing waters, ending free movement of citizens and escaping from EU laws and regulations. But Barnier's negotiat-

ing mandate will be equally clear that Britain will not enjoy privileged access to the EU market if it does not accept tough conditions to ensure a level playing field. Lamy thinks that Johnson, whom he has known since the British premier's former life as a Brussels-based journalist covering EU politics, will give ground when economic reality sets in.

The sparse structure that could be in place by the end of the year will be gradually filled with the workings of a more ambitious trade deal - largely on the EU's terms. "Unlike Barnier, BoJo is a bluffer, a populist as they say. You mustn't take him at his word in what he says every day," said Lamy, who was head of the WTO between 2005 and 2013.

"It would be an agreement whose principles are established and we can see how it works as we go along, with Barnier taking out the necessary insurance against British dumping," he suggested. "My prognosis is that this negotiation is a regatta that is going to last a long time. For 15 years, they will continue to exchange blows within the British political system," he said. "In the end, I find it very hard to think the British will win the regatta. Especially in a globalised capitalist market system, in which economies of scale still play a very important role."

But what if Britain pivots to its vaunted special relationship with the United States, turning its back on EU regulations in return for a trade deal with President Donald Trump? Lamy does not think that British consumers will change their habits simply to see US-UK trade climb from 10 to 15 percent of Britain's total commerce. "The Americans will say: 'chlorinated chicken', 'hormone-raised beef', 'drug pricing'," he predicted. "My feeling is the British public will not really want to eat chicken with chlorine because they are still mentally Europeans, with certain ideas about safety, health and the environment." —AFP

Business

Owl-right start for ECB's Lagarde in first 100 days

‘I’m neither dove nor hawk, and my ambition is to be this owl’

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: Wearing an owl brooch to her January press conference, Christine Lagarde made clear her determination to run the European Central Bank differently from her predecessors as it hunts for a way out of crisis-management mode. “I’m neither dove nor hawk, and my ambition is to be this owl that is often associated with a little bit of wisdom,” the bank’s first female president told reporters the previous month. Central bank watchers have long resorted to ornithological categories to sort policymakers.

Those favoring generous support to the economy are dubbed “doves” and those backing tough love “hawks”. The battle lines have been drawn especially clearly over the ECB’s 21-year history, as the euro single currency brings together countries with vastly different economic histories and cultural foibles around money. Lagarde took over after a turbulent few months for the Frankfurt institution and her chief aim for her first 100 days in office – a milestone she reached Saturday – was to smooth the divisions and avoid any upsets on her own account.

Acrimony

By the end of 2019, predecessor Mario Draghi’s repeated salvos of unprecedented stimulus measures to buttress the flagging euro-zone had divided members of the ECB’s governing council like never before. Doves

believe the Italian economist’s generous doses of medicine helped the euro-zone survive years of struggles after the 2008 financial crisis. Meanwhile, hawks accused him of having taken the central bank far beyond the limits of its treaty mandate to maintain price stability and having encouraged reckless borrowing by governments.

Among Lagarde’s first acts on taking office in November was to whisk the whole governing council to a conciliatory “retreat” at a plush hotel outside Frankfurt. She aims to “show she’s listening to others’ arguments, rather than imposing her own views on them right from the beginning,” said Eric Dor of France’s IESEG business school. “I would have preferred her to emerge from her predecessor’s shadow more” rather than maintaining Draghi’s policies for now, said Markus Ferber, a German conservative in the European Parliament.

With the ECB forecasting a gradual pickup in growth and inflation, Lagarde “will be judged on how successfully she is able to manage what is likely to be a slow process of monetary policy normalization,” said Nomura economist George Buckley. The bank will eventually have to wind down its “quantitative easing” bond-buying program, which has so far pumped almost 2.7 trillion euros (\$3.0 trillion) into the financial system. At the same time, Lagarde has launched a year-long rethink of the ECB’s monetary policy tools and goals.



Christine Lagarde, President of the European Central Bank (ECB)

Observers expect to see the central bank add flexibility to its just-below-two-percent inflation target. And Lagarde’s promise to include climate considerations in monetary policy has set traditionalists’ teeth on edge. In the near term, she will have to address the risks posed by the novel coronavirus outbreak to the euro-zone economy in a possible first major test. So far, Lagarde has “spent more time dealing with politics than monetary

policy,” said Frederik Ducret of Pictet Wealth Management.

Going local

In photos on her Twitter and Instagram accounts, the former French finance minister and International Monetary Fund chief likes showing herself in the company of important decision makers. She has taken particular care in Germany, where Draghi’s disinterest in making friends made the pill of low or zero interest rates on cherished savings accounts all the more bitter.

Living in a hotel room while apartment-hunting, Lagarde has looked to integrate in Frankfurt by appearing alongside the mayor to eat the local “Green Sauce” speciality at a new year event. People close to the ECB chief say she attends the opera, visited a Van Gogh exhibition when her husband visited from Marseille, and that she enjoys walks along Frankfurt’s Main river.

She has also looked to anchor herself among the ECB’s multinational staff, eating occasionally in the canteen or playing table tennis with disabled employees at a diversity event. But she also appears concerned with keeping a grip on internal communication. “There’s talk of getting rid of anonymous posts on an intranet forum for the staff,” limiting room for criticism, one ECB insider who asked not to be named said. “No one will say anything if anonymity is removed,” the person complained. — AFP

KFH teams up with Paladion for PCI-DSS 3.2.1 certificate of compliance

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH), the world-leading Islamic financial institution, has successfully complied to payment card industry data security standard PCI DSS 3.2.1 after teaming up with Paladion a global cyber defense company, to manage end-to-end consultation and ensure the fulfillment of PCI DSS Compliance standard.

Group Chief Operations Officer at KFH, Abdullah Abu Al-Hous said: “We are very glad to effectively and successfully meet the latest PCI DSS Compliance standards. It has been the fruit of collaborative efforts of different departments in the bank. This is definitely part of our digital transformation strategy and efforts to continuously invest in and enhance our technology, operations, and information security systems to meet the highest standards in customer data protection.”

Abu Al-Hous added on the sidelines of receiving the Certificate of Compliance from Paladion’s EVP and Regional Head of EMEA, Amit Roy in a ceremony held at KFH headquarters that KFH is always keen on offering best service quality, while implementing best technologies in efforts to preserve customers’ rights and protect their information, yet to achieve growth in all indicators.”

He emphasized that KFH is keeping abreast of the latest standards of protecting transaction processing, cards, merchants, and consumers’ need. Led by a team of highly-experienced specialists, Paladion help KFH get PCI DSS 3.2.1 certified after an extensive audit. The KFH team was tested by auditors to



KFH officials receiving the certificate from Paladion officials

ensure measures for all 12 of the standard’s security requirements were implemented and effectively functional. “As experts in PCI DSS consulting services for the past 19 years, we are aware that global compliance is currently at a record low,” said a Paladion spokesperson. There is a direct correlation between cyber breaches and non-compliance to PCI DSS, so we are proud to work alongside progressive institutions like Kuwait Financial House to ensure regulatory compliance, safety and security of sensitive customer information.”

AUB reports record net profit of \$730.5 million

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank BSC (AUB) reported a net profit attributable to its equity shareholders of \$172.1 million for Q4/2019 which represents a 1.7% improvement over the Q4/2018 reported profit of \$169.3 million. AUB reported a net profit attributable to its equity shareholders of \$730.5 million for the year ended 31 December 2019, an increase of 4.7% as compared to \$697.5 million achieved in 2018.

The Basic and Diluted Earnings per Share in 2019 was US 7.9 cents (+3.9%), compared to US 7.6 cents in 2018 (EPS: US 1.8 cents in Q4/2019 versus US 1.7 cents in Q4/2018). Comprehensive income attributable to the owners of the bank for Q4/2019 was 38.5% higher at \$194.5 million compared to \$140.5 million for Q4/2018. Comprehensive income attributable to the owners of the bank for year ended 31 December 2019 was \$772.3 million (31 December 2018: \$662.5 million) an increase of 16.6% over the prior year.

The excellent financial performance for 2019 continues to reflect the sustained benefits arising from AUB’s diversified business model, robust risk management framework and judicious business driven operating culture centered on maximizing prudent and sustainable returns within a disciplined “intelligent spend” cost culture.

Despite the very low prevailing average interest rate environment and overall weak market conditions, net operating income increased (+5.1%) from \$1,124.3 million in 2018 to \$1,181.1 million in 2019 (Q4/2019: \$301.0 million versus Q4/2018: \$279.1 million). Net interest income improved to \$951.5 million in 2019 compared to \$940.5 million in 2018 driven by growth in average loans and investments.

Increases in net interest income, trading and investment income and others resulted in a rise in operating income to \$1,235.5 million during 2019 compared to \$1,210.6 million in 2018 (Q4/2019: \$316.2 million versus Q4/2018: \$303.5 million). Cost to income ratio was controlled at 28.6% (2018: 27.1%) reflecting the consistent implementation of AUB’s structured cost discipline and intelligent spend approach.

Solid asset quality levels were sustained with an unchanged



Meshal Abdul Aziz Al Othman, AUB Chairman

Return on Average Equity achieved for 2019 was 17.7% (2018: 18.1%). The Group’s total assets at 31 December 2019 increased by 13.4% to \$40.3 billion (31 December 2018: \$35.5 billion).

This is attributable to a 6.3% growth in the loans and advances portfolio to \$20.7 billion (31 December 2018: \$19.5 billion) and growth in the non-trading investments portfolio to \$9.1 billion (31 December 2018: \$7.6 billion) as part of an overall strategy to further balance-sheet diversification and to enhance in-built liquidity sources while expanding risk adjusted returns on a prudent basis.

Asset growth was funded from an increase in customer deposits (+\$1.9 billion) and through repo borrowings (+\$1.1 billion). Return on Average Assets was at 2.1% for 2019 (2018: 2.2%). The Board of Directors has recommended a distribution comprising of a cash dividend of US cents 5.0 per share (2018: US cents 5.0 per share) together with a bonus ordinary share issue of 10% (2018: 10%).

Meshal Abdul Aziz Al Othman, AUB Chairman, commented: “AUB has achieved record results and sustained its excellent core performance for 2019 driven by its well-managed business model based on diversification and cross border flows seeking the effective deployment of capital resources across the AUB Group’s markets in a prudent and profitable manner. Our results are attributable to the clear defined vision of the bank and to the exemplary execution of its business strategies by its highly competent and dedicated management and staff.”

High demand for new heavy crude grade

KUWAIT: Kuwait’s plans to begin exporting a new crude grade and sharpen its focus on refined products are among the topics explored by Jamal Al Loughani, Deputy Managing Director, International Marketing, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), in a wide-ranging video interview he gave recently to Oxford Business Group’s online broadcasting channel, Global Platform.

Al Loughani told licence holders that KPC planned to begin exporting heavy crude material this year, having already bolstered its international sales of Kuwait Export Crude with the launch of a second grade – Kuwait Super Light Crude. “The whole market is waiting because the demand is very high for the heavy material,” he said. Al Loughani also gave details of key projects in the pipeline which are set to boost upstream activity.

“A very important milestone in 2020 is the introduction of our new mega-project, particularly the clean fuel project, where we will introduce 800,000 barrels per day of refined product,” he said. “Also, we are going to start up our new refinery located at Al Zour.” The country’s new liquefied natural gas import terminal was another focus. Al Loughani told OBG that new 15-year contracts had been signed, effective from 2020, that will ensure most of Kuwait’s gas requirements are met.

In addition, he highlighted Kuwait’s involvement in several international joint ventures, which include a refinery in Vietnam and the Duqm Refinery in Oman. “We [also] have a number of petrochemical joint ventures through our affiliates, Petrochemical Industries Company, all over the world,” he added. Marc-Andre de Blois, OBG’s Director of PR and Video Content, said the filmed interview with Al Loughani provided valuable insight into Kuwait’s plans for strengthening its position in the market at a time when the global energy industry is in the midst of change.

“Producers like Kuwait have a key role to play in meeting demand from countries for crude, even as importers take steps to diversify their energy sources and increase the focus on renewables,” he said. “Our video offers a fascinating snapshot of the vision that KPC has set out to ensure it retains its place in a rapidly evolving industry and how it intends to achieve its goals.”

NBK Economic Update

Non-oil activity accelerates in Q3

KUWAIT: Preliminary GDP data from the Kuwait’s Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) show that economic growth slowed in Q3 2019 to 0.4% y/y (-0.7% q/q) from 1.8% in Q2 2019. This is the slowest rate since the first quarter of 2018, and due mainly to a decline in oil sector output related to Kuwait’s OPEC+ production cut obligations. Oil sector activity fell 5.3% y/y (-0.6% q/q), which correlated perfectly with the fall in oil production over the same time period (-5.3% y/y), from 2.78 mb/d in 3Q18 to 2.64 mb/d in 3Q 2019.

Kuwait has routinely produced less crude than its OPEC+ quota, notching up a compliance rate of 182% in Q3 2019. Continuing maintenance issues at Kuwait’s giant 1.7 mb/d Burgan oil field has also been a contributing factor. Burgan may get some respite if Kuwait and Saudi Arabia can bring online oil production from the Partitioned Neutral Zone (PNZ) in 2020 now that the two countries have signed an agreement to restart production from the Khafji and Wafra fields, which they share equally.

Non-oil activity boosted

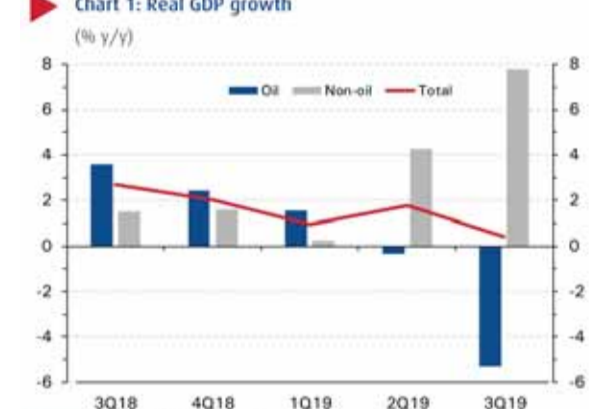
Non-oil activity, on the other hand, was robust in Q3

South Africa Airways axes more domestic, international routes

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa’s ailing national airline announced plans to close almost all its domestic services and some international flights, the latest bid to save cash after a spree of cancellations. Flag carrier South African Airways (SAA) has failed to make a profit for more than a decade and gets by on government bailouts. Debt-ridden and strapped for cash, it was placed under a state-approved rescue plan in December following a week-long strike that pushed it to the verge of collapse.

The business administrators have since cancelled more than one hundred flights in an attempt to streamline services and conserve funds. In their latest announcement, they detailed plans to definitively shut down some of those

Chart 1: Real GDP growth (% y/y)



Source: Central Statistical Bureau (CSB)

Chart 2: Non-oil sector GDP growth (% y/y)



Source: CSB; sector shares in brackets are >100% before subtracting FISIM/taxes

2019, with raw data showing a growth rate of 7.8% y/y (-0.9% q/q). This is almost twice the rate of growth in Q2 2019, which will be revised down when the annual growth rate is officially published. The main growth drivers were the ‘other services’ sector, which includes real estate (+9.2% y/y) and electricity, gas and water (+4.1% y/y), which typically goes up during the summer months, followed to a lesser extent by education (+2.9% y/y), trade (+2.9% y/y) and public administration (+1.3% y/y). Sectors that were contracting in 3Q19

include: manufacturing (-3.7% y/y); construction (-7.3% y/y); telecommunications (-5.8% y/y); and transport (-9% y/y).

As noted above, due to differences in the way the national accounts are compiled and calculated for the annual and quarterly GDP series, once seasonally volatile sub-components such as ‘taxes and subsidies’ are accounted for, the level of non-oil growth is usually revised down. On this basis, Q3 2019 non-oil growth would have been in the more moderate 1-2% range.



as possible.” Meanwhile, SAA subsidiary SA Express appealed a judgment that placed the company under business rescue. “It is clear that the court went over and above what it was required,” said the airline on Thursday in a statement. — AFP

What's On



DWC holds Africa Day exhibition



Sheikha Hala Al-Bader stressed that Kuwait has outstanding relations with all African countries and that this was not strange for Kuwait: the center of humanity led by the Amir of humanity.

Speaking in the sidelines of sponsoring Africa Day exhibition organized by the Diplomatic Women Committee (DWC) at Dar Al-Athar Al-

Islamia, Al-Bader said that Kuwait was home for everybody and that such cultural exhibitions contribute in exploring those cultures. "I noticed so many similarities between Kuwaiti cultures and traditions and those of African countries", she underlined.

On her part, DWC chairperson and the Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan in Kuwait, Samargyul

Adamkulova said that Kuwait is the land of benevolence and the fact that the event was held under auspices of Sheikha Hala Al-Bader proves that the people of Kuwait take part in the cultural activities organized by the diplomatic corps. "Kuwait is interested in the Silk Road project and we organize cultural activities for countries showing interest in this humongous project", she underlined.



Burgan Bank offers its Youth Account holders a chance to watch 'Sonic The Hedgehog'

Burgan Bank, in collaboration with Grand Cinemas, announced yesterday that its Youth Account Holders will be offered the exclusivity to watch the first screening of the new movie "Sonic The Hedgehog" for free at the luxurious movie theatre of Grand Cinemas located in Al Hamra Luxury Centre.

The movie screening will be held on Thursday February, 13th, 2020, wherein each customer is entitled to 2 free tickets on one of the two shows, at 5:00 pm or 7:30 pm.

To book the free seats, Youth Account Holders are required to visit Grand Cinemas box office in Al Hamra Luxury Centre and present their Youth

ATM card. The bank strives to reward its Youth account holders with exclusive offers that fits their lifestyle. The Youth Account is dedicated for young individuals, between the ages of 15 to 25, and who seek to attain a successful future. Furthermore, account holders receive an ATM card which entitles them to discounts at selective merchants along

with an exclusive discount at Grand Cinemas Theatres.

To receive regular updates about Burgan Bank's promotions, customers can follow the bank's Instagram page @Burganbankkuwait. For more information customers are required to visit their nearest Burgan Bank branch or call 1804080, or visit the bank's website on



KUWAIT: The Ambassador of Sri Lanka Mohammed Jauhar hosted a reception on the occasion of 72nd anniversary of Independence at Radisson Blue over the weekend. Higher official, diplomats, cross section of Sri Lankan community and media persons attended the event. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

LAPA to host Sharjah Performance Arts Academy today

As part of the cooperation between both academies, LOYAC's Academy for Performance Arts (LAPA) is scheduled to host Sharjah Performance Arts Academy (SPAA) today (February 9) at its headquarters in Al-Qibliya school in a bid to support regional theatrical and performance talents.

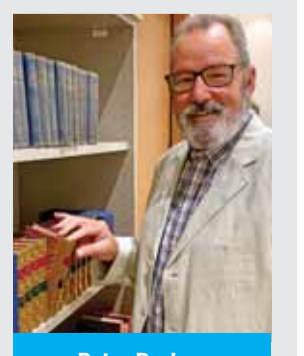
For the first time, both sides will take part in auditions for several talented people from the Middle East made to select qualified ones to join the 2020 batch of students.

In this regard, SPAA executive manager, Peter Barlow stressed that SPAA is keen on boosting gifted individuals' skills and pave the way for a brighter future for them in the world of theatre.

Barlow added that under auspices of HH Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Al-Qasemi, SPAA offers a number of full scholarships and stunning opportunities for all qualified students to develop their theatrical skills and talents. "Theatre is capable of bringing everybody under one umbrella and bridge intercultural gaps", he underlined.

On her part, LOYAC's chairperson, Fare'a Al-Saqaf stressed that theatre is undoubtedly one of the means LOYAC vision includes to develop youth awareness and practices. She added that cooperation with SPAA comes to explore new horizons for Kuwaiti youth.

Also speaking on the occasion, LAPA's executive member, Dr. Khalifa Al-Hajeri welcomed professor Peter Barlow and his accompanying delegation adding that both sides would work on achieving sustainable cooperation that would help achieve both academies' goals for everyone's best interests.



Pangolin suspect #1 as direct source of coronavirus outbreak

PARIS: Chinese researchers investigating the animal origin of the deadly coronavirus outbreak in China said Friday the endangered pangolin may be the "missing link" between bats and humans, but other scientists said the search may not be over. An earlier study — since discredited — pointed to snakes, and there remain numerous candidate species in the Wuhan wildlife market thought to be ground zero of the epidemic. The SARS outbreak of 2002-3, involving a different strain of coronavirus, was transferred to humans by the civet, a small mammal prized in China for its flesh.

Missing link: A pangolin?

Many animals are capable of transmitting viruses to other species, and nearly all strains of the coronavirus contagious to humans originated in wildlife. Bats are known carriers of the latest strain of the disease, which has infected at least 31,000 people and killed more than 630 worldwide, mostly in China where the outbreak originated.

A recent genetic analysis showed that the strain of the virus currently spreading among humans was 96 percent identical to that found in bats. But according to Arnaud Fontanet, from France's Pasteur Institute, the disease likely didn't jump straight from bats to humans. "We think there's another animal that's an intermediary," he told AFP. Several studies have shown that the bat-borne virus lacks the necessary

hardware to latch on to human cell receptors. But it's still not clear which animal is the missing link. Fontanet believes the intermediary was "probably a mammal," possibly belonging to the badger family.

After testing more than 1,000 samples from wild animals, scientists at the South China Agricultural University found the genome sequences of viruses in pangolins to be 99 percent identical to those on coronavirus patients, the official Xinhua news agency reported. But other experts urged caution. "This is not scientific evidence," said James Wood, head of the department of veterinary medicine at the University of Cambridge. "Investigations into animal reservoirs are extremely important, but results must be then be published for international scrutiny. Simply reporting detection of viral RNA with sequence similarity of 99+ percent is not sufficient."

Wild goose chase?

To conclusively identify the culprit, researchers would need to test each species that was on sale at the market — a near impossibility given that it's now permanently closed. Martine Peeters, a virologist at France's Institute for Research and Development (IRD), worked on the team that identified the host animal of the Ebola virus during recent epidemics. They found that it was indeed a bat that passed the virus on to humans, and Peeters believes that's

likely to be the case this time around. During her Ebola research, "we collected thousands of bat droppings from several sites in Africa," Peeters told AFP. Fontanet said that Chinese researchers were doing likewise now. "They say they've analysed samples from a rubbish truck," he said. "They don't say which, but I think it's likely to have been excrement that was just lying around."

Why does it matter?

While it may be too late for this outbreak, identifying the carrier animal for the novel coronavirus could prove vital in preventing future flare ups. China for example outlawed the sale of civet for food in the wake of the SARS epidemic.

Eric Leroy, a virologist and vet at the IRD said the search could well turn up a result quickly like in the case of SARS. Equally, it could take years. "With Ebola, research started in 1976 and we didn't see the first results published until 2005," he told AFP.

One determining factor could be what percentage of the same species are infected. "If that's low, less than one percent for example, that's obviously going to lower the chance you stumble upon an infected animal," said Leroy.

Prevent future outbreaks?

For Fontanet, coronavirus is just the latest example of the potentially disastrous conse-



SINGAPORE: In this file photo taken on June 30, 2017, a juvenile Sunda pangolin feeds on termites at the Singapore Zoo.— AFP

quence of humans consuming virus-carrying wild animals. He said that China needed to "take pretty radical measures against the sale of wild animals in markets."

Beijing has prohibited the practice, but only moved to do so last month, when the outbreak was already out of control. "Each time, we try to put out the fire, and once it's out we await

the next one," said Francois Renaud, a researcher at the Paris-based National Centre for Scientific Research.

He recommended compiling a watch list of all animals that could potentially transmit viruses to humans. "You need to see epidemics before they come, and therefore you need to be proactive," he said.— AFP

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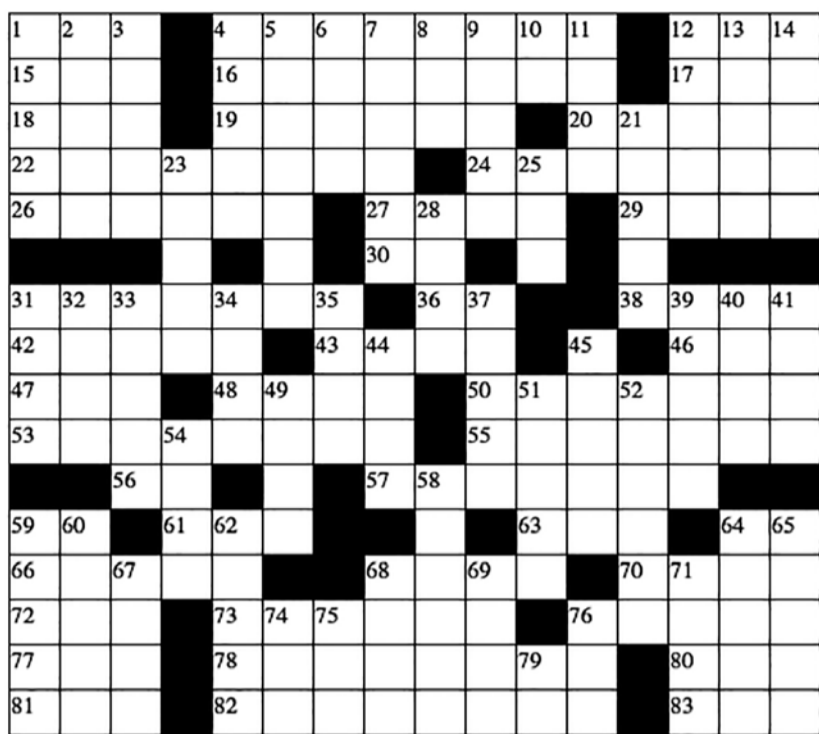
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ACROSS

1. Intentionally so written (used after a printed word or phrase).
 4. Foot pain.
 12. What you can repeat immediately after perceiving it.
 15. A pass between mountain peaks.
 16. Of or relating to an oracle.
 17. A branch of the Tai languages.
 18. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
 19. Small genus of Eurasian herbs.
 20. American professional baseball player who hit more home runs than Babe Ruth (born in 1934).
 22. Born out of wedlock.
 24. An esoteric or occult matter that is traditionally secret.
 26. Tropical American shrub or small tree having huge deeply palmately cleft leaves and large oblong yellow fruit.
 27. In bed.
 29. Inspired by a feeling of fearful wonderment or reverence.
 30. A chronic inflammatory collagen disease affecting connective tissue (skin or joints).
 31. Sweet liqueur made from wine and brandy flavored with plum or peach or apricot kernels and bitter almonds.
 36. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
 38. An inn in some Eastern countries with a large courtyard that provides accommodation for caravans.
 42. (Zoroastrianism) Title for benevolent deities.
 43. Cheeselike food made of curdled soybean milk.
 46. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
 47. A sharp hand gesture (resembling a blow).
 48. A collection of objects laid on top of each other.
 50. Characterized by plundering or pillaging or marauding.
 53. A mining town in southern Wales.
 55. A department of Greece in the central Peloponnese.
 56. An official prosecutor for a judicial district.
 57. Type genus of the Carimidae comprising only the crested carima.
 59. A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
 61. United States liquid unit equal to 4 quarts or 3.785 liters.
 63. A period marked by distinctive character or reckoned from a fixed point or event.
 66. Someone who bakes commercially.
 70. A brace that extends from the rear of the keel to support the rudderpost.
 72. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
 73. A narrow republic surrounded by Senegal in West Africa.
 77. A colloid that has a continuous liquid phase in which a solid is suspended in a liquid.
 78. Not established or confirmed.
 80. A member of a Mayan people of southwestern Guatemala.
 81. The compass point midway between northeast and east.
 82. A flammable colorless gaseous alkene.
 83. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- DOWN**
1. One who is playfully mischievous.
 2. Region of western Asia Minor colonized by Ancient Greeks.
 3. A fastener (as a buckle or hook) that is used to hold two things together.
 4. (Great Britain) Money received from the state.
 5. The Japanese art of folding paper into shapes representing objects (e.g., flowers or birds).
 6. Herb of the Pacific islands grown throughout the tropics for its edible root and in temperate areas as an ornamental for its large glossy leaves.
 7. Any organic compound formed by adding alcohol molecules to aldehyde molecules.
 8. (Irish) Ancient Irish god (probably a god of the sun).
 9. Used especially of fruits.
 10. A state in midwestern United States.
 11. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
 12. Of a pale yellow color like straw.
 13. A holder attached to the gunwale of a boat that holds the oar in place and acts as a fulcrum for rowing.
 14. An atom having a valence of one.
 21. Having the wind against the forward side of the sails.
 23. An imaginary elephant that appears in a series of French books for children.
 25. A condition (mostly in boys) characterized by behavioral and learning disorders.
 28. Cattle that are reared for their meat.
 32. According to the Old Testament being a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
 33. Of a tire.
 34. King of Saudi Arabia since 1982 (born in 1922).
 35. Essential oil or perfume obtained from flowers.
 37. 100 aunar equal 1 krona.
 39. A member of a seafaring group of North American Indians who lived on the Pacific coast of British Columbia and southwestern Alaska.
 40. God of fire.
 41. Kamarupan languages spoken in northeastern India and western Burma.
 44. An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
 45. A Roman Catholic priest who acts for another higher-ranking clergyman.
 49. A British peer ranking below a Marquess and above a Viscount.
 51. A small zodiacal constellation in the northern hemisphere.
 52. Having a woven pattern.
 54. A feeling of intense anger.
 58. Of or belonging to an acium.
 60. Gallery where works of art can be displayed.
 62. Present reasons and arguments.
 64. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
 65. Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
 67. Informal terms for money.
 68. Be obedient to.
 69. Exhibiting or restored to vigorous good health.
 71. God of love and erotic desire.
 74. (prefix) Opposite or opposing or neutralizing.
 75. A hormone secreted by the anterior pituitary gland that controls the degree of pigmentation in melanocytes.
 76. A sweetened beverage of diluted fruit juice.
 79. Half the width of an em.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Good decision making will be a prominent asset today, Aries. It's an excellent time to make a list of things that you've either put off or haven't been able to settle on. This doesn't need to be things that are just related to work or finances. Consider putting effort into your personal life as well. If there are issues surrounding friends, your romantic partner, or family, this is a great opportunity to think up options.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Your ability to concentrate will be enhanced today, Taurus. If you have studying or detailed work to tend to, this will be an opportune time to get to it. Hobbies that require a lot of focus may also strike your fancy. Even if a herd of stampeding elephants runs through your space, you aren't likely to lose your concentration. Pull out your most intensive tasks and have a great day.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

It's time to get up and get moving, Gemini. If your job or home life leans toward the sedentary, your health can suffer if you don't engage in some physical activity. Not only is your body affected by a lack of exercise but your mind and emotional disposition can become depleted over time as well. Even a daily walk or playing a sport once a week can make a world of difference. Try something today.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

It's a great day to explore your creativity, Cancer. This probably isn't a new thing for you, since you're artistic. Staying focused on one thing can be another story, though. Today's energy can give you the extra concentration you need to get a creative project completed. Make the most of this by either finishing something you started earlier or tackling a new project. Have fun expressing yourself and creating!



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Taking the easy way out won't tempt you in the least today, Leo. This isn't to say that you usually favor this approach, by any means; yet it's safe to say that everyone is tempted from time to time. Not so for you, though, as the planetary aspects are giving you the strength to take all of the necessary steps, however long they may be. Stand your ground if a partner tries to convince you otherwise.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Practicality and planning will work well for you today, Virgo. It's a good time to take a long look at your financial situation. Are you where you want to be? Have you got plans in place for down the road? Do you have sufficient cash flow? Think about what you'd like to improve and make some plans. You can include talking with a financial planner or trusted banker to create more options for yourself.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

It's a super day to make decisions, Libra. You can sit on the fence for a little too long when it comes to serious choices. Seize the energy that flows from today's planetary aspects, make a list of things that need to be decided in the areas of work, relationships, and finances, and go down the list one by one. Don't be afraid of making a mistake. Better than missing out entirely, don't you think?



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

It's a great day to set some of your ideas into motion, Scorpio. The courage you need to forge ahead is available to you with this day's planetary aspects. All you need to do is use it. If your thoughts aren't clear, sit down and write your ideas out. Note the steps you need to take in order to get things rolling and then make your move. Don't let fear or insecurity hold you back!



Sagittarius (November 22-December 18)

A renewed sense of values and integrity may be present for you today, Sagittarius. Connecting with this can be extremely uplifting, as it can put everything into perspective for you. With your hardworking tendencies, it can be easy to drift from the things that are most important to you as a person. Make the most of this day by getting in touch with yourself. If you keep a journal, explore your mood on paper.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Settling a dispute may be on your agenda today, Capricorn. You may find yourself getting caught smack in the middle of the stew if you aren't careful. If this happens, the wisest thing might be to pull out. When you're in this position (especially with two people you care about), the outcome winds up hurting someone, and it may just be you. If you tell them you care about them both too much to get involved, chances are you'll be far better off.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

You're likely to be feeling pretty energetic today, Aquarius, making it an opportune time to do some much-needed cleaning and organizing. Why not tackle those closets, attic, and storerooms? If you have to work, your desk, workspace, and filing cabinets could use a little attention. Just think how great it will feel when everything is in order! Make the most of your energy by accomplishing as much as you can.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

See about getting as active as possible today, Pisces. This could really give your overall health a boost, especially if you've been sedentary lately. Try something fun like engaging in sports or taking a pooch for a walk. Gardening and cutting the lawn are other activities that are better for you than sitting all day. The physical movement can reduce stress and give you a sense of accomplishment. Every part of you benefits from being active. Check it out.

Wordsearch Puzzle

More 80's Songs

Find and circle all of the 1980's song titles that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the title of an Elton John song.

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

- AFRICA
- ALWAYS
- AMERICA
- BEAT IT
- BROKEN WINGS
- CALL ME
- CONTROL
- CRUISIN'
- DOWN UNDER
- ENDLESS LOVE
- FAITHFULLY
- FAME
- FAST CAR
- FREEDOM
- GLORIA
- GUILTY
- HEARTBREAKER
- HEAVEN
- HOLD ME
- HUMAN
- HUNGRY HEART
- INFATUATION
- KOKOMO
- LA BAMBA
- LET'S DANCE
- MAGIC
- MANIC MONDAY
- MONY MONY
- NEVER
- NOTORIOUS
- OUR HOUSE
- PASSION
- PATIENCE
- PINK HOUSES
- PURPLE RAIN
- ROCK ON
- SAILING
- SARA
- SATISFIED
- SHOUT
- SONGBIRD
- SUKIYAKI
- SUSSUDIO
- THE FLAME
- THE LOOK
- THE ROSE
- TIME
- TOO SHY
- TRUE
- TRULY
- TWO HEARTS
- VACATION
- VOICES CARRY
- WE BELONG
- WHIP IT
- YOUR LOVE

More 70's Songs

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

- AFTERNOON DELIGHT
- AMERICAN PIE
- AMERICAN WOMAN
- ANNIE'S SONG
- BAD GIRLS
- BARRACUDA
- BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY
- BROTHER LOUIE
- CRAZY ON YOU
- DELTA DAWN
- DONT STOP
- DREAM ON
- DREAM WEAVER
- DRIFT AWAY
- EBONY EYES
- FIRE AND RAIN
- HELP ME
- IMAGINE
- LAST DANCE
- LET IT BE
- LOVE HURTS
- LOW RIDER
- MAGIC MAN
- MAIN STREET
- MARGARITAVILLE
- MY LOVE
- MY SHARONA
- NIGHT FEVER
- PHOTOGRAPH
- PIANO MAN
- REUNITED
- ROSE GARDEN
- SHADOW DANCING
- SHE'S GONE
- SIGNS
- SOUTHERN NIGHTS
- SUMMER NIGHTS
- SUNDOWN
- SUPERSTAR
- THE GAMBLER
- WITHOUT YOU
- WOODSTOCK
- Y.M.C.A.
- YOU'RE SIXTEEN

Hidden words: AMERICA BREAD NAZARETH HEART BLONDIE BOSTON CHICAGO ABBA QUEEN KISS

Friday's Solution

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

Daily Sudoku

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

Friday's Solution

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

Lifestyle

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2020



Soumaila Zacharia Maidjida passes on horseback in front of a house ruined by conflict in a street of Bangui on Jan 23, 2020. — AFP photos



One of the horses of Maidjida is waiting to be equipped in a municipal park in Bangui.



Neighborhood children play with Maidjida's horse.

Horse dreams: The plucky riders of the Central African Republic

It's an arresting sight: In the middle of a dusty street in Bangui, a chestnut horse appears, trotting gracefully among the bashed-up cars, motorbike taxis and crumbling buildings. The rider is a well-known figure in the capital of the Central Republic of Africa: he's Soumaila Zacharia Maidjida, nicknamed "Dida," a former sprinter who set a national record for the 800 m at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and retains it today.

The diminutive twinkling-eyed man is one of just a handful of horse riders in the CAR, a country whose poverty, climate, war and overall chaos make it one of the world's least equine-friendly environments. "Everyone knows Dida," the rider said. "When ministers and bosses want to go out on a horse, it's me they come to." Dida dreams of setting up a horse centre but admits the vision is far away. To help feed his animals, he works as a guard.

Glory days

The horse has a troubled history in the CAR, a landlocked country that gained independence from France in 1960 but has been buffeted by war and coups ever since. For many people here, the horse is more associated with raids by marauding gangs who cross the border on horseback from Chad or Sudan rather than with polo or genteel rides in the forest. Older citizens, though, remember its glory days under Jean-Bedel Bokassa, a horse-loving despot who in 1977 had himself crowned himself emperor.

Enamored of the pomp and ceremony in

Paris, Bokassa had a bronze and gold carriage shipped from France to parade around Bangui. On one tragic occasion, two of the poor creatures died of heatstroke under the pitiless

ride for a few francs. It was the only leisure activity at the time," Auguste, who had an Arabian horse as a young man, said with a nostalgic sigh.

said Auguste. "Today, when I think about it, I feel really sick."

Dida managed to save a few of the animals and today, despite the militia groups who

was to be a military parade, and Jean-Bosco intended to be there to salute the head of state from horseback, bedecked in the CAR colors. Bosco had only ridden once, which



Captain Jean-Bosco, a central African officer, practicing horseback riding in a Bangui municipal park, on Nov 30, 2019.

tropical sun. Bokassa imported hundreds of horses during his time and even set up a cavalry - a unit that proudly officiated at major ceremonies.

As a child Dida watched the displays and became fired up by the idea of mounting a horse. Bangui had two well-regarded equestrian centres - one was for "high society", essentially French emigres, and the other was for the general public. "At weekends, young people in the neighborhood used to go for a

End of the era

In 1996, the halcyon days of the horse in the CAR came to a terrible end. The army mutinied, triggering a cycle of violence and instability from which the country has never recovered. Bangui's two equestrian centres were abandoned and the horses were stolen, sold abroad... or ended up on market stalls. "They gave me a big sum of money to sell my horse to an abattoir. I was broke at the time,"

control two-thirds of the country, still makes the epic drive to the Chadian border to bring back horses to Bangui. "Horses are what I live for - I can't do without them," he said with a shrug. Memories of the glorious past have even stirred Jean-Bosco, an army captain, to try to revive the mounted guard.

Dressed in a splendid red vest, with a plumed kepi head and a sabre at his belt, he had come to Dida with a last-minute request for a riding lesson. The following day, there

explained his haste to get in a second lesson before the big event. But he was undaunted by the idea of a fall or a horsey mishap. "I've been wanting to bring back the mounted guard for years," he said. "If I can take part in the parade, I hope I can persuade my superiors to back the idea." — AFP



Maidjida practices horseback riding among cars on the roads of Bangui.

In war-torn Yemen, zoo animals face daily struggle

Yemen's war makes life a daily struggle for millions of civilians, but creatures in the country's neglected zoos, including lions, leopards and baboons also face an uncertain future. At the country's main zoo in Sanaa, the capital seized in 2014 by the Iran-backed Houthi militias who control much of the north, a man



In this photo taken on Jan 21, 2020, a trainer plays with a lion cub at the country's main zoo in the Yemeni capital Sanaa. — AFP photos

unloaded one of a dozen dead donkeys trucked in each day to feed 31 resident lions. Lion keeper Amin Al-Majdi said some animals, including four lions that perished in 2017, have already starved to death.

"We import meat from all provinces of the country, but we are struggling with this because of the increase in the price of donkeys," he told AFP. "We used to slaughter three or four donkeys for six lions, now with 31 we have to slaughter 10 to 12 donkeys."

Like the rest of the country, where millions have been driven to the brink of famine after five years of conflict, the zoo's 1,159 animals, which include two critically endangered Arabian leopards, are at risk. Among those fighting on behalf of the animals is Kim-Michelle Broderick, founder of One World Actors Animal Rescues, which raises funds to keep Yemen's zoo creatures alive.

Of the country's three main zoos, the one in Sanaa is in better condition than others in the cities of Taz and Ibb, she said, but added all are in poor condition. "The public authorities are destitute because of the war," she said. "The animals are underfed or hardly fed, or not fed at all in the case of Ibb zoo."

With the help of coordinators on the ground, the organization conducts rescues across Yemen, she said, distributes emergency food and water, and provides basic veterinary treatment to horses, other farm animals and strays. The lions in Sanaa zoo look relatively healthy compared to big cats in other regional zoos,

where emaciated animals have elicited outrage.

A team of international wildlife conservationists recently flew to the Sudanese capital of Khartoum, to examine four starving and sick lions at a zoo where a lioness died earlier this month. But Sanaa zoo authorities said they are struggling to feed their animals, with rampant inflation making supplies expensive, and the number of visitors plummeting since the war broke out. "We are facing a lot of challenges," the zoo's deputy director Mohammed Abu Aoun told AFP. "Our only revenue comes from visitors, the sale of tickets."

The zoo currently makes two to three million riyals (\$3,300 to \$5,000) per month, he said, not enough to feed the animals and pay employee salaries. Tens of thousands of people, most of them civilians, have been killed and millions have been displaced in the conflict in Yemen, which the United Nations says is gripped by the world's worst humanitarian crisis. But the Sanaa zoo is one of the few places to provide an outlet for people stuck in years of grinding conflict. "The zoo these days has become the only breath of fresh air... we only see destruction, war and aggression," said one visitor, Tawheed Al-Thabbi. — AFP



A trainer plays with a lion cub.

Lifestyle | Movies



Stuntman Daniel Locicero demonstrates his technique doing flips for actress Courtney M Moore during a training session in Los Angeles on Feb 5, 2020. — AFP photos



Locicero demonstrates how to take a hit while working out with Moore.



Locicero works with Moore, holding a fake weapon.

STUNTMEN EYE OSCAR AS PITT SHINES LIGHT ON DANGEROUS TRADE

For Hollywood's stuntmen, the sight of one of their own receiving an Oscar at today's ceremony would be a cause for celebration. Stunt performers have been campaigning for their own Academy Award for years, arguing their input equals that of the sound mixers, makeup artists and visual effects gurus already honored. But the "stuntman" favored to win this Sunday is Brad Pitt, nominated as best supporting actor for playing one in "Once Upon A Time... in Hollywood."

For Los Angeles-based stunt performer and trainer Daniel Locicero, a win for Pitt would bring "good exposure" for his profession, but falls short of the real deal. "I'm sure

he had a double in the film!" joked Locicero, whose credits include 2017 Oscar-winning war movie "Dunkirk". Stunt performers are already honored at the prestigious Screen Actors Guild awards, where "Avengers: Endgame" and "Game of Thrones" stunt teams won last month.

"Our stunt performers put everything on the line, they actually protect us and save our lives," SAG president Gabrielle Carteris told AFP. "The work they do is not easy, and they actually help to make our TV shows and films dynamic - that's why we honor them." But so far, the Academy has been reluctant to add categories for stunt work. "I think the Oscars are a little afraid of us right now," said Jack

Gill, who is spearheading the campaign for recognition. "They've given me every reason why we can't be in it."

One of these reasons included the fear that stunt performers would be incentivized to take excessive risks in pursuit of Oscars glory - a notion ridiculed by Gill. "If that's true, special effects would do (the same) because they have explosions - they're blowing things up... they haven't gone out and tried to kill people for an award!" he said.

'Step up'

For Locicero, another factor explains Hollywood's reluctance - studios' fear of letting audiences see behind the curtain. "They

don't want to burn the magical aspect," he said, giving as an example a "clip of supposedly Leonardo DiCaprio kicking the guy." Oscars viewers might say, "Oh, that wasn't Leonardo doing that!" and the film could lose credibility, Locicero said.

Many stunt performers have called on actors to rally to their cause. "Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood" portrays a close bond between Pitt's stuntman and DiCaprio's actor, with the pair inseparable even off set. This is close to reality in many cases, says Locicero. "I've trained more or less famous people and created that connection with them as a friend," he said. In return for keeping their A-list actors safe, "the friendship, the thanks is

everything, you know?"

But more than friendship is needed if Gill's campaign for a change in stunt performers' status can come to fruition. "When you see Brad Pitt... do something like this and then get nominated for it, it's the time we really want to push as hard as we can," said Gill. "What I really want to see on the red carpet is for these actors to step up and say, 'I think it's about time we had an action category in the Oscars.'" He added: "The Academy can then say, 'yes, it's time.'" — AFP

Hollywood diversity progress masks behind-scenes failings

Women and minorities made major gains in Hollywood acting roles last year, but key behind-the-scenes jobs such as directing remain shockingly low for diversity, a study found Thursday. The annual report was published three days before the Oscars, which have been slammed for overlooking minorities - Cynthia Erivo is the sole non-white acting nominee. The 2020 Hollywood Diversity Report reveals progress in the broader movie industry beyond award shows.

Women and minorities "are within striking distance of proportionate representation when it comes to lead roles and total cast," said co-author Darnell Hunt, of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) social sciences division. Women had 44.1 percent of lead acting roles in blockbusters last year. People of color - slightly more than 40 percent of the US population, including black, latino and Asian people - had 27.6 percent of leading roles.

But statistics on the dearth of diversity in directing, editing and executive jobs show "a

very different story," suggesting Hollywood's progress is limited to on-camera roles. Most shockingly, 93 percent of all senior executive positions were held by white people, and 80 percent by men. While both the Oscars and Golden Globes were hit with fierce criticism for failing to nominate a single female director this year, the report also shows wider problems across the industry. Just 15.1 percent of directors were women - though even that was an improvement on 7.1 percent a year earlier.

"Are we actually seeing systematic change, or is Hollywood just appealing to diverse audiences through casting, but without fundamentally altering the way studios do business behind the camera?" said Hunt. The report hints at one potential explanation for the growth in acting roles for minorities which may appeal to Hollywood executives - profit. In 2019, the films that performed best at the box office featured casts composed of between 41 percent and 50 percent minority actors. — AFP

Inside the \$225,000 gift bag for Oscar nominees

An Oscar nomination can open doors to bigger roles and higher pay. This year, it also comes with a cruise on a luxury yacht, cosmetic surgery, and a personal matchmaking service in a gift bag worth more than \$225,000. The gift bag, which is not affiliated with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, will be sent to all 20 acting nominees and the five men nominated for best director. Distinctive Assets, the Los Angeles-based company behind the goodie bags, said on Friday.

"It's the highest value we've ever put together," said Distinctive Assets founder Lash Fary, who has been assembling the bags for 18 years. This year's top swag includes a \$78,000, 12-day yacht cruise; \$20,000 of facial rejuvenation treatments; and \$20,000 in matchmaking services. The nearly 80 items also include clothing, gadgets and a 24-carat gold-plated vape pen that Fary said was selected with Leonardo DiCaprio in mind. Photos of DiCaprio vaping a few years ago helped popularize the trend.

More than a dozen items have philanthropic elements, including a book that

empowers young girls and a cleanser that supports showers for the homeless. Fary said the bags aren't given based on need, but appreciation. "This is an acknowledgment of an amazing performance that they put in and, for many of them, a lifetime of amazing performances. So, you're never too rich or famous to outgrow gratitude," he said.

Because Fary is not officially connected to the academy he's allowed creative freedom with what's included and its recipients. "I only give this to the top acting and directing nominees. So, because we're only gifting about 25 people, that means I get the most insanely priced things," he said.

It's also a chance for brands to be associated with high-profile celebrities. "This is a business endeavor. This is about the promotion. This is about products connecting their services and their wares with the biggest trendsetters in the world," Fary said. Each bag is delivered directly to the nominees during the week leading up to the Oscars today. — Reuters

Five things to watch for on Oscars night

The silver screen's biggest night is here - Oscars campaigns have been wrapped up, predictions placed and champagne iced. While many pundits expect relentless marches to victory for "1917" and the four leading acting nominees, surprises will no doubt be in store. Here are five things to look out for at Sunday's Academy Awards:

Will Oscars go global?

Many records could tumble today, but there is no doubt which would be the most historic of all victories. South Korean black comedy "Parasite" has defied conventional wisdom to keep the pace with the best picture Oscar frontrunners, defying what its director called the "one-inch-tall barrier of subtitles." A non-English-language movie has never won the movie industry's top prize, despite Mexican drama "Roma" making a serious run last year. With a wave of support for its charismatic director Bong Joon-ho, and an increasingly international voting bloc within the Academy, could this be the year?

Diversity on show

This year's Oscars feature just one non-white acting nominee - Cynthia Erivo for "Harriet" - earning the Academy plenty of criticism. No women were shortlisted for best director, leaving the grand total of females nominated in this category over 92 years at a paltry five. The glitzy Sunday show - produced by two women - appears intended to redress some of that imbalance. Once again there is no host, but guest presenters include actresses of a wide range of nationalities including Penelope Cruz (Spain), Salma Hayek (Mexico) and Gal Gadot (Israel).

Song and dance

Coming just two weeks after the spectacular Grammys, the Oscars have a lot to do to compete in terms of musical performance. Organizers appear determined to try, with Grammy record-setter and soon-to-be James Bond songstress Billie Eilish set to perform, along with funk futurist Janelle Monae. British pop legend Elton John also will grace the stage, performing his nominated song "(I'm Gonna) Love Me Again" from the film about his life, "Rocketman". And Eimear Noone will make history as the first female conductor of the in-house orchestra for the ceremony. Producer Lynette Howell ("A Star Is Born") has promised some "some additional musical surprise moments" - telling journalists they will "have to tune in" to find out what they are.

Kirk and Kobe

Each year, the Oscars presents a montage honoring those Hollywood has lost over the past 12 months. This year will be particularly poignant, given the still-raw grief in Los Angeles over the deaths of Golden Age legend Kirk Douglas and Oscar-winning basketball star Kobe Bryant. Organizers have confirmed that both will be featured in the traditional "in memoriam" section, and watch out for frequent mentions in the winners' speeches too.

Brad Pitt's speech

Sure, he hasn't won the Oscar yet. But Brad Pitt has been on a relentless awards sweep for his supporting role in "Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood". Thankfully, he has broken up the monotony by delivering consistently the most witty and entertaining speeches this season. From quipping "Hey Britain. Heard you just became single - welcome to the club" at the BAFTAs in remarks delivered by co-star Margot Robbie, to promising to post his Screen Actors Guild award on Tinder, Hollywood's enduring heartthrob has unexpectedly become its awards circuit jester. Hopefully he - or his joke-writer - has saved the best for last. — AFP



Brazilian film producer Lucy Barreto and her husband, Brazilian film director Luiz Carlos Barreto, speak during an interview with AFP in Rio de Janeiro on Jan 29, 2019.



In this file photo taken on Jan 27, 2020, US actor Brad Pitt speaks with Brazilian actress and filmmaker Petra Costa during the 2020 Oscars Nominees Luncheon at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood.



In this photo taken on Feb 5, 2020, (from left) US producer Shane Boris, British director and producer Joanna Natasegara, Brazilian actress-filmmaker Petra Costa and Producer Tiago Pavan, nominees for "The Edge of Democracy" attend the Oscar Week: Documentary at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP photos

Brazilian film booming, but vulnerable under Bolsonaro

Brazilian cinema is having a moment: An Oscar nod, prizes at Cannes, an invitation to the Berlinale. But filmmakers are also feeling vulnerable amid the boom, as far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's government has declared a "culture war" and slashed state support for the industry. Since the man dubbed the "Tropical Trump" took office in January 2019, directors, producers and actors have sounded the alarm over what they say are ideologically driven policies that threaten Brazilian cinema. It is an industry that employs 300,000 people and projects the South American country's soft power around the world.

"Artistically, we're flourishing," said Caetano Gotardo, co-director of "All the Dead Ones," which is up for the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival this month. "We have commercial movies that are doing very well at the box office and arthouse films that are succeeding at festivals. But we have doubts about

whether it will last." Gotardo's movie, a French-Brazilian co-production, tells the story of two families, one black and one white, in the days after Brazil abolished slavery, in the late 19th century.

The filmmakers managed to wrap production before the current turbulence broke out, like their colleagues on "Bacurau," by Kleber Mendonca, which won the Jury Prize at the Cannes festival last year, and "Invisible Life," by Karim Ainouz, which won the Un Certain Regard prize at the same event. Bolsonaro has stayed notably silent as all those films have raked in accolades.

War on 'leftist art'

His government has instead called for what his former culture secretary, Roberto Alvim, called a "culture war" to fight "leftist art" and promote "conservative values". The administration has been particularly aggressive in condemning the Brazilian film that is up for an Oscar Sunday in the docu-

mentary category: "The Edge of Democracy," by director Petra Costa, which chronicles the events leading to Bolsonaro's rise to power.

On Monday, Bolsonaro's office accused Costa of "slandering" the country, and last month, the president himself denounced the movie as "rubbish". Bolsonaro's government has eliminated the culture ministry, making it a secretariat of the tourism ministry, and has cut funding for the arts from state-owned companies. "The state has bigger priorities," he said.

He has also threatened to shut the Brazilian Film Agency (Ancine), the government body responsible for the national cinema industry, if it does not "filter" the content of the movies it funds. Ancine's budget for funding films, the Audiovisual Sector Fund, was slashed by more than 40 percent this year. "Bad decisions are harming" the industry, said Sara Silveira, a producer on "All the Dead Ones", accusing Bolsonaro's government of being "anti-culture".

'Disturbing' times

"This may be the most disturbing cultural moment in Brazilian history," said Luiz Carlos Barreto, a longtime producer who used to negotiate with the country's military dictatorship (1964-1985) so certain films deemed "subversive" by censors could be released. Barreto, a 91-year-old veteran of Brazil's "Cinema Novo" movement in the 1960s, said the Bolsonaro administration has updated the military regime's strategy, installing a "system of prior censorship". "Instead of suppressing (a film), they simply put up a barrier so it never gets made," he told AFP.

Last year, the Rio de Janeiro International Film Festival nearly had to be canceled after state oil company Petrobras slashed its funding. "We have to fight to make the industry of culture, the creative economy... be seen as a pillar of the economy, which it is," said the festival's director, Ilda Santiago. Bolsonaro is already on his fifth culture secretary.—AFP



Canadian model Coco Rocha presents a creation for Christian Siriano during New York Fashion Week at Spring Studios on Feb 6, 2020 in New York City. — AFP photos



Models present creations for Christian Siriano.



COMICS AND CUBISM AS CHRISTIAN SIRIANO SHINES AT FASHION WEEK



American creator Christian Siriano kicked off New York Fashion Week with a gleeful mix of comics, cubism and glamour, in the build up to Sunday's Oscars where he could well triumph. The young designer, based in New York since he was 22, has become one of the city's biggest fashion attractions over the last few years with the exit of several big names. His outfits are sought out and worn by stars on the red carpet.

This season he drew inspiration from characters and emotions from the DC Comics superhero film "Birds of Prey". "The whole idea was everybody has a little inner Harley Quinn in them," Siriano, referring to the movie's main character, told AFP before the show. Quinn, the Joker's former companion, is an extreme anti-hero who sways between good and evil.

The 34-year-old Siriano sought to make her "more romantic, beautiful, elegant" and didn't skimp on the sequins, velvet and shimmering fabric to make his creations shine. It is par for the course for this master of the spectacle who added his touch of glamour with long robes, padded shoulders and opulent materials, velvet in particular. The designer also took flamenco by the arm, using its frills and traditional Cordobes hats as well as - more daringly - cubism. The last outfits of the collection were all formed of angles.

While designers increasingly ponder the relevance of the catwalk, Siriano is clear: It is part and

parcel of what he does. "Fashion is so hard right now. It's rough. But this is my dream fantasy world. So I feel if we didn't have this some of my clothes wouldn't make sense anymore and that's so sad," he said. "That's why I get up every day to do this job because I like the dream world of it. I take a lot of risks and I think people are intrigued by that hopefully. You never know who's going to sit front row, you never really what the shapes are going to be. So I hope that gets people coming back."

Hollywood's darling, Siriano is living a high-stakes, high-stress moment, with Thursday's show and the Oscars on Sunday. "It's the worse. Half my team is at my studio right now," preparing the outfits that will grace today's red carpet. "It's so hard. It's the hardest we've ever had." — AFP



Models walk the runway at the Pamela Roland fashion show during New York Fashion Week at Pier 59 Studios on Friday.

Models present creations for rag & bone Fall/Winter 2020 during New York Fashion Week: The Shows at Skylight on Friday.

Models walk the "Runway on a runway" J Winter 2020 show at JFK Airport produced by Jessica Minh Anh in partnership with DHL Express on Feb 6, 2020.

JENNY BUI, THE 'QUEEN OF BLING' AND CARDI B'S NAILS

In a city with thousands of nail salons, Jenny Bui has managed to carve out a niche: People come from all over to have their acrylic nails done by the "Queen of Bling", who has turned nail art into jewelry. It's a far cry from the zen, trendy salons all over Manhattan: Visitors pass through an unremarkable door in a Bronx shopping district, and then climb a steep staircase to reach "Jenny Spa".

Once inside, the reason for its popularity becomes instantly clear: poster-sized photos of Jenny Bui and Cardi B cover the walls. The rap star, known for her songs "Bodak Yellow" and "I Like It" and her extravagant nails - nearly five centimeters of glittering crystals that she waves around like a fan - has helped skyrocket Jenny Bui, a 50-year-old mother of five, to social media stardom.

Cardi B was relatively unknown in 2012

when she "found" Bui. At the time, Bui, a Cambodian refugee, only had a small salon in Harlem. "The first time (Cardi B) came, I didn't have time to do her nails," Bui said, who had been busy trying to feed her new Instagram account. But the second time was the charm: Cardi B left delighted, and she has been back every month since to see Jenny. The rapper regularly shows off Jenny's creations to her 58 million Instagram followers.

Fans come from all over the United States, ready to pay hundreds of dollars for similarly flashy, glitter-covered nails that will last them four to six weeks. Cardi B "helped me a lot for my business. She is loyal and humble. She never forgets who helped her from the beginning," said Bui.

Indispensable influencers

Cardi's praise drew the attention of other

influencers, who have become incredibly valuable in the fashion and beauty world and contribute further to the success of Bui's salon. One such influencer is Paula Galindo, a Los Angeles-based blogger from Colombia with 8.5 million followers on Instagram. In January, she gave control of her nails to Jenny for the first time. Armed with a mini-tripod and a camera, the 25-year-old filmed every step of her nails' creation. "It's really beautiful," Galindo exclaimed at the end of the two-hour process, before sharing photos of her new nails on Instagram.

In another sign of influencers' role in the beauty world, Bui now has a contract with the jeweller Swarovski, as well as a line of nail products named "Jenny Secret". And her reputation has gone international: she has traveled to Paris and London to show off her nail techniques. "I rather go around the world

to teach," Bui said. "Before I die, I want everyone to know my skills."

Rare promotion

Jenny Bui's fame is rare in an industry that in 2018 employed 24,000 manicurists in New York alone - mostly first-generation Asian immigrants. While the industry had revenues of nearly \$4.5 billion in 2015, multiple studies have shown that labor law violations - whether in terms of wages or sanitary conditions, such as with acetone fumes - are far too common.

But Bui has triumphed. Dogged determination and the support of her second husband have no doubt played a role in the success of the nail artist, who remembers having to escape the Khmer Rouge massacres as a child. "When I start talking about this I want to cry," she said in accented English, choking

back tears as she recalled famine and fields of bodies.

Her parents finally managed to bring her to Canada, before she moved to the US for her first marriage. She tried hairstyling, without much success, before finding a job in a nail salon. After a couple of years, she opened her first salon, where initially she was the only employee. The idea to make "bling" nails came to her in the beginning of the 2000s, after looking at Japanese fashion. In the beginning, no one was interested, she said. But now, she manages two salons, 20 employees, and a clientele full of regulars. She is striving, she said, for a better life for her kids and "a really good immigrant dream". — AFP



Nail Artist and Entrepreneur Jenny Bui aka "The Queen of Bling" works in her nail salon in the Bronx borough of New York City on Jan 10, 2020. — AFP photos



Colombian beauty vlogger Paula Galindo shows off her nails created by Bui at her nail salon.



Galindo gets her nails done by Bui.

Lifestyle | Cocktail

Malawi's Rastafarians win landmark dreadlock ruling

Makeda Mbewe was just six years old when she was kicked out of her primary school in Malawi for wearing her hair in the dreadlocks of her Rastafarian religion. Two years later, she is back in the playground, thanks to a landmark court ruling in January forcing state schools to accept children wearing their hair the Rastafarian way. The case was galvanized by her family, who joined forces with dozens of other Rastafarian parents to try to force the education system to end discrimination against children from one of the country's smallest religious minorities.

"I am delighted with the ruling because it takes a huge burden off my shoulders," Makeda's dreadlocked father, Wisdom Mbewe, told AFP. At first there was no problem when Makeda enrolled at Blantyre Girls Primary School, in the country's capital. But after two years - and as her hair grew long and prominent - the child was told to leave. "They demanded that we cut her hair," said her father, a 40-year-old truck driver.

Rastafarianism is a religious movement of Jamaican origin which considers former Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie to be its Messiah. Many Rastafarians sport dreadlocks which for them symbolize the Lion of Judah, one of the late emperor's titles. Dreadlocks gained global recognition thanks to the cultural influence of the late reggae star Bob Marley, also a Rastafarian, and have since become popular the world over.

Malawi's 15,000 Rastafarians have long suffered discrimination because of their hairstyle. In government-run schools, children were told either to shave or cut off the locks, refused enrolment or simply thrown out of class. Whether the practice had a legal foundation was the central point of the courtroom battle. The ministry of education said the ban was justified under a policy that required all pupils to have a smart appearance and keep clean hair. But, challenged by lawyers for the Rastafarian children, it was unable to produce documents to prove that the policy existed.

'A burden off my shoulders'

As a result of her exclusion, Makeda was home-schooled for two years - a change that placed a strain on her family's finances. Enraged, Wisdom Mbewe approached a local advocacy charity, the Centre for Human Rights Education, Advice and Assistance (CHREAA), for help. Subsequently, the centre received complaints from the parents of 76 other Rastafarian children about being "denied admission into government schools," CHREAA lawyer Chikondi Chijozo said.

It then took the issue to court. On January 14, High Court judge Zione Ntuba ordered the country's 7,000-odd government-run schools to admit "all children of Rastafari religion, who have dreadlocks". Ray Harawa, a Rastafari leader in the forefront of the fight for the rights of his co-religionists in Malawi, welcomed the ruling. "This judgment will go a long way in showcasing how seriously advanced our democracy is," he said.

The order is in line with judgments by courts in Kenya, Zimbabwe and

South Africa. They all ruled that excluding dreadlocked children from school was an infringement of their right to freedom of religion, according to the Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC). "The court's order recognizes the injustice endured by many Rastafari children," said SALC's litigation director Anneke Meerlotter.

The practice was a clear violation of Malawi's constitution, which guarantees the rights to freedom of religion and to equal treatment, said Edge Kanyongolo, a law professor at the University of Malawi. "In the case of Rastafarian children, I cannot see how allowing them to keep hair in dreadlocks harms anyone at all," said Kanyongolo.

'Lots of damage'

Makeda was back in school days after the court ruling. In the playground the other children touched her hair with curiosity, but she appeared used to the attention and took it in her stride. For Rastafarian parents, the court victory is bittersweet. Ezaius Mkandawire said the judgment was "just the beginning"



of the battle for compensation. "There has been lots of damage," Mkandawire told AFP. "What about those people that have not gone to school for the past 25 years? "Someone has to pay for that." — AFP

Ezaius Mkandawire, a Malawian Rasta, picks his son, Uhuru, up from a private school in Lilongwe on Jan 30, 2020. — AFP

Pranks and patience: Passing the time on the Diamond Princess

Tai chi, Bible study, karaoke and dancing with the "Dive Duo": that was the entertainment promised passengers when they boarded the Diamond Princess. But an outbreak of the coronavirus has left 2,600 guests confined to their cabins and searching for ways to pass the time. So, facing at least 14 days of quarantine in Japan's Yokohama, holiday-makers are coming up with innovative ways to quell the boredom as their dream

cruise turns into a nightmare.

One Japanese passenger posted on Twitter that she had tried to prank the crew by greeting them wearing a seaweed face pack. "I decided to put on a short comedy performance for the crew members delivering meals. I'm waiting for them with seaweed on my face... but I wonder when they are coming. Yesterday the lunch arrived at 3 pm," she said, before delivering a crushing blow. "Lunch arrived.

My comic face didn't get any laughs."

Matt Smith, a 57-year-old passenger, told AFP that the cruise operators had gradually increased the TV options to stave off boredom for those trapped inside their cabins. "They've always had some live TV channels and then some on-demand content movies and TV series. And since they announced the quarantine, they've added a number of live TV channels, they got them from around the world," he said. One passenger enthusiastically tweeted: "I can't get enough of these crazy cake shows." But the choices were not to everyone's liking. "Also watched 'Dumbo'. Kinda boring for me," complained one passenger on Twitter.

If you think being trapped in a cruise ship cabin is bad, imagine trying to entertain a six-year-old boy at the same time. That's the fate confronting Yardley Wong, who is also documenting the experience on social media. She posted a picture of her son pulling up the sheets on his bed with the caption: "Playing hide-and-seek in a small cabin. #killtheboredom." Another parent posted a picture of an "entertainment pack" for children, with crayons, coloring and a (play) face mask.

Sudoku, crosswords and word searches are also being provided, along with playing cards - presumably patience for the solo traveller. Others are finding entertainment in the most mundane of activities,

like changing the sheets and doing the laundry, as well as making a careful choice of what to select for meals.

More recently, some passengers - mainly those in inside cabins, without access to a balcony - have been allowed up on deck under strict conditions. Wong published a video of people dancing with joy as they frolicked in the sunshine, saying "I'm so excited, I just can't hide it" and "so nice to breathe fresh air". Others have just been gasping for their favorite tipple as the mini-bar quickly runs dry.

British passenger David Abel, who has become a minor celebrity with his Facebook postings from the ship, implored the captain to personally deliver him a glass of whisky. "I take Talisker, 10-year-old single malt, no ice, no water. It would be fantastic if that could be arranged," he laughed. Another wag hung a sheet out of a cabin window, with the plea: "SOS, I need a Corona beer." A more risqué option emerged on Friday, as an adult webcam site announced it would be offering its services free to those on board "in an effort to keep their minds off of the coronavirus and to help with the boredom". — AFP



The Diamond Princess cruise ship with over 3,000 people on board arrives at Yokohama port on Feb 6, 2020. — AFP

Weinstein expert questions memory as testimony nears end

A psychologist called by Harvey Weinstein's defense team said memories of an incident can become "contaminated" over time by new information, as testimony in his rape trial entered its closing stages Friday. Elizabeth Loftus, a University of California, Irvine professor, said leading questioning about an event sometimes causes a "misinformation effect," where false details are incorporated into someone's memory. "If you are urged to remember more, in trying to produce more to satisfy that situation, you may produce something like a guess and then it starts to feel like a memory," she testified.

Since testimony began on January 22, six women have taken the stand to say they were sexually assaulted by Weinstein. All of the allegations against the former Hollywood titan are at least six years old, while one of them dates back three decades. Weinstein, 67, faces life imprisonment if convicted of predatory sexual assault charges related to ex-actress Jessica Mann and former production assistant Mimi Haley.

Mann says Weinstein raped her in March 2013 while Haley alleges he forcibly performed oral sex on her in 2006. The defense says the women willingly had sex to advance their own careers and that Weinstein was in relationships with them. Mann admitted to the court that she had had "non-coerced" sexual contact with Weinstein, producer of "Pulp Fiction" and "Sin City," up to 2016.

Sexual assault allegations against Weinstein made headlines worldwide in Oct 2017, igniting the #MeToo movement. Loftus - who testified in about 300 trials, mostly for the defense - said media coverage can lead people to change their recollection of an incident. "If it is relabeled, it can be remembered as more upsetting and traumatic than it was at the time," she said. "It does not mean the person is lying but their memory could have been transformed," Loftus added.

The psychologist said memory can also be distorted from the start by alcohol or drugs, particularly Valium, a sedative. "The Sopranos" actress Annabella Sciorra testified that she was taking Valium around the time she says Weinstein raped her in the early 1990s. Under cross-examination Loftus said that for traumatic events it is mostly "peripheral memories" that become distorted, "not the core of the event".

The prosecution rested its case on Thursday and closing arguments are expected next week, well ahead of schedule. The trial has raised complicated issues surrounding consent for the jury of 12 to grapple with. "It was much more clear-cut in the Bill Cosby case. He drugged the victim," said Pace University law professor Bennett Gershman, referring to the US comedian convicted of sexual assault in 2018. The jury must reach a unanimous verdict. If it can't then the judge may be forced to declare a mistrial. "It takes just one juror to say, 'I don't buy it,'" said criminal defense lawyer Julie Rendelman. "I think it's going to be difficult to reach a verdict," she added. — AFP

Malaysian Hindus defy virus fears to mark festival

Hindus gathered in temples across Malaysia yesterday to celebrate the annual Thaipusam festival, with many piercing their bodies with hooks and skewers, despite concerns about the deadly coronavirus outbreak. Massive crowds descended on the Batu Caves temple complex on the outskirts of capital Kuala Lumpur to participate in the event, where Hindus showcase their devotion to the deity Lord Murugan. Worshipers walked barefoot up 272 steps to reach the temple - an important religious site for Tamil Hindus - armed with gifts including milk pots which are eventually smashed as offerings.

Many displayed their fervor by carrying heavy ornate metal structures called "kavadis", affixed to their

bodies with sharp metal spikes that are hammered into the skin. Some devotees appeared to be in a state of trance as they carried the kavadis, which can weigh as much as 100 kg. Others pierced their faces with tridents or hung multiple hooks and chains from their bodies in an act of penance.

The crowd at the Batu Caves looked as big as in previous years despite worries about the new virus, and only a handful were wearing protective masks. The pathogen has killed hundreds and infected tens of thousands in China and is spreading around the world. Malaysia has so far reported 16 cases, mostly in visiting Chinese nationals. "We are quite worried about the Wuhan virus," conceded devotee Navindran Arumugam,

referring to the Chinese city at the centre of the outbreak. But he added he was not too concerned about picking up the illness at such a "holy place".

Prior to Thaipusam, devotees will typically hold daily prayer sessions, abstain from sex and stick to a strict vegetarian diet for weeks. Most of Malaysia's roughly 32 million people are Muslim, but the country also has around two million ethnic Indians. Most are descendants of laborers brought from ethnic Tamil areas of southern India by Malaysia's former British colonial masters. Murugan is particularly revered in southern India and among ethnic Tamil communities in Southeast Asia. — AFP



This picture taken on Friday shows Hindu devotees with their backs pierced with hooks as they walk towards the Batu caves temple to make offerings during the Thaipusam festival in Batu Caves on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

China film industry's 'bleak winter' deepens

Even before the new coronavirus, people working in Chinese entertainment had been calling the industry's struggles their "bleak winter" - as tighter censorship, a crackdown on tax evasion and new government restrictions strangle opportunities for work. The epidemic is only exacerbating that misery. Cinemas across China have closed as part of efforts to curb the outbreak and the premieres of seven expected blockbusters scheduled for the Lunar New Year holidays - a time when box offices usually rake it in - were postponed or cancelled.

Since Jan. 24, the day when the government warned against large gatherings in public and the day before the holidays, box office takings for the world's most populous nation have been virtually negligible. Industry bodies have also asked actors not to return to work until further notice. "I think China's annual box office revenue will likely halve from last year due to the coronavirus outbreak. Nobody is going to a cinema until the danger has passed," Qiu Hongtao, vice president of Taihe Entertainment, a movie production and investment firm, told Reuters. "We expect quite a lot of cinemas will go bankrupt. Actors and actresses may have to cope with a lack of work, but for cinemas, the rent and management cost burden will crush them."

The epidemic, which has so far claimed more than 630 lives, is forcing some production houses to make unconventional and controversial choices. Huanxi Media Group released "Lost in Russia", a comedy that was widely expected to go on to blockbuster success, on Bytedance's online platform free for consumers in return for 630 million yuan (\$90 million) to fund new films - a move that has infuriated China's cinema industry. The makers of the martial arts comedy "Enter the Fat Dragon" made a similar move, with video streaming service iQiyi Inc announcing a fee-based online release.

Censorship pain

The virus-induced gloom comes at a time when the world's second-biggest movie market has been in dire need of a shot in the arm. While box office takings climbed to a record 64 billion yuan (\$9.2 billion) last year helped by higher ticket prices, the average occupancy rate at Chinese theaters hit a five-year low, Tencent Entertainment said in a report last month. Domestic movie-making - essential to sustaining the market as the government generally caps the number of major foreign releases allowed in any one year at 34 - has also been in a precipitous decline as censorship grows.

Content offensive to "core socialist values" has been banned since 2017 - part of efforts, under President Xi Jinping, to tighten controls on society which have also included clampdowns on activists, internet regulation and the rise of government surveillance. Last year, censors were especially sensitive as the country celebrated the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, industry sources say. At least 15 movies were either pulled, rescheduled or amended, according to media reports.

The biggest to fall victim was the World War II epic "The Eight Hundred" by director Guan Hu with a reported budget of \$80 million. Its June release was suddenly cancelled at the eleventh hour after retired Communist Party officials complained it glorified the heroism of the rival Kuomintang party. Other movies are just not getting made. Beijing Enlight Media and Beijing Jingxi Culture had both planned 23 movie releases in 2019 but Enlight only released 11 while Jingxi Culture had just nine.

Creative freedom has shrunk so much that the China Independent Film Festival, one of the country's longest-running and largest, said last month it had suspended operations indefinitely. "It is impossible to organize a film festival that truly has a purely independent spirit," the organizers said. Nor is censorship expected to let up anytime soon as the Communist Party will be celebrating the hundredth anniversary of its founding in 2021.

New rules on salaries and intense government scrutiny of tax strategies used by some of China's most well-known faces have also been wreaking havoc within the industry. The crackdown saw A-list movie star Fan Bingbing slapped with a \$129 million fine. Between the scramble to get their taxes in order and censorship, nearly 1,900 movie production companies folded in 2019, domestic media have estimated. — Reuters

Classifieds

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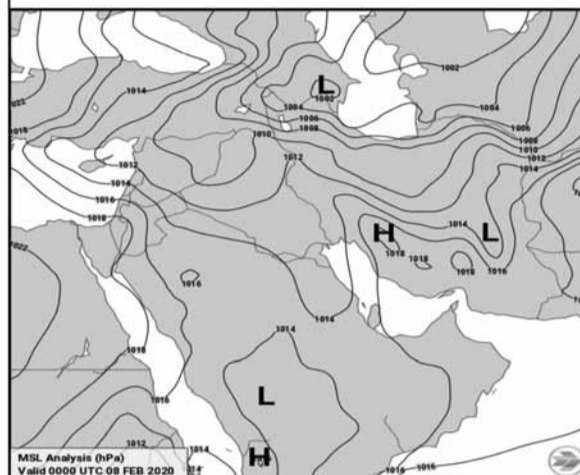
BY DAY: Warm and Partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times southerly wind changing to north westerly wind, with speed of 15 - 45 km/h.

BY NIGHT: Cold with light to moderate north westerly wind, with speed of 12 - 38 km/h and some scattered clouds will appear.

WEATHER WARNING No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX. EXP.	MIN. REC.
KUWAIT CITY	25 °C	15 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	27 °C	11 °C
ABDALY	27 °C	09 °C
BUBYAN	22 °C	09 °C
JAHRA	30 °C	12 °C
FAILAKA ISLAND	23 °C	15 °C
SALMIYAH	22 °C	16 °C
AHMADI	23 °C	17 °C
NUWAISIB	28 °C	13 °C
WAFRA	29 °C	11 °C
SALMY	30 °C	11 °C

SFC. CHART 08/02/2020 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Sunday	02/09	A significant decrease in temperature and some high clouds will appear.	19 °C	07 °C	NW	15 - 35 km/h
Monday	02/10	Cold with a chance for frost forming in agriculture and desert areas.	15 °C	03 °C	NW	15 - 42 km/h
Tuesday	02/11	Cold and Partly cloudy and rising dust with a chance for frost forming in agriculture and desert areas.	11 °C	01 °C	NW	20 - 50 km/h
Wednesday	02/12	Cold with a chance for frost forming in agriculture and desert areas.	14 °C	02 °C	NW	15 - 40 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	05:12
Sunrise	06:33
Zuhr	12:02
Asr	15:09
Sunset	17:32
Isha	18:50

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	27 °C
MIN. Temp.	15 °C
MAX. RH	73 %
MIN. RH	23 %
MAX. Wind	SE 46 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

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Hospitals

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

Clinics

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

NOTICE
 February 5, 2020

Mr. Vivian Anastasios Dias son of Mr. Anastasios Dias, resident of Haridwar Bldg, 1st Floor, L 4 Malad Evershine Nagar, Mumbai 400064 and Ms. Estella Joyce Mendes daughter of Mr. Davis Joseph Mendes, resident of H No 43, Fuldem Vaddo, PO-Arpora, Nagao, Goa, both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (welfare2@indembkwt.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22533315, 00965 - 22533125).

(Ranveer Bhatti)
 Second Secretary (Cons) and Marriage Officer.

Embassy of India, Kuwait.
 Email: cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in

CHANGE OF NAME

Name: Sayed Nazir Ahmed
 Sayed Ibrahim, Surname: Kadri, Civil ID No: 260120702964. (C 5632)

Old name, Surname: Challa Jahnavi, given name: Abhijna, new name: Surname: Challa, given name: Jahnavi Abhijna, Passport No: N0434930, Civil ID No: 308030502272. (C 5633) 9-2-2020

I, formally known and addressed as Akalezi John Kelechi, now wish to be known, called and addressed as Akalezi Stephen. The wrong date of birth is 27/12/1983 n and the right date of birth is 27/12/1986. All former documents remain valid. The general public, banks and concerned authorities should please take note.

I, SHAHID ABDUL KADIR ANSARI (Indian Passport No. Z5183824 issued in Kuwait) hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as given

name: SHAHID ABDUL QADEER, surname: ANSARI for all purposes. (C 5631) 7-1-2020

I, Javed Ahmed Abdul Hamid holder of Indian Passport No. M4640773 having permanent address House No. 76-106-A11-A5, Guru Raghavendra Nagar, near Bellary Chowrasta, Kallur, Kurmool, Andhra Pradesh, India, Pin Code No. 518003. Residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Given name Shaik Javed Ahmed S/o Shaik Abdul Hamid and surname Shaik. (C 5628)

I, Abdul Jabbar father of Aasiyah Zareen holder of Indian Passport No: 59728352 issued in Kuwait on 16/8/2018. Do hereby declare that my daughter's given name is Aasiyah Zareen and Surname is Abdul Jabbar. (C 5635) 6-2-2020

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

Flight Schedule

DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Sunday 9/2/2020				Departure Flights on Sunday 9/2/2020			
Airlines	Flt	Route	Time	Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
IGO	1757	Kochi	00:10	KAC	741	Dammam	11:20
AIC	989	Mumbai	00:10	GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
FEG	241	Alexandria	00:30	JZR	213	Jeddah	12:00
NIA	561	Asyut	00:45	JZR	221	Riyadh	12:00
JZR	254	Amman	00:45	JZR	139	AAN	12:05
JZR	734	Cairo	00:50	MEA	405	Beirut	12:55
THY	772	Istanbul	00:50	JZR	115	Doha	13:00
PGT	858	Istanbul	00:55	QTR	1075	Doha	13:00
KAC	504	Beirut	00:55	MSR	611	Cairo	13:00
KAC	102	London	00:55	GFA	210	Bahrain	13:05
JZR	002	LGW	01:25	SGL	4132	Baghdad	13:20
DLH	625	Dammam	01:30	KAC	781	Jeddah	13:30
ETH	3424	Addis Ababa/Bahrain	01:30	SAW	702	Damascus	13:30
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50	JZR	123	Dubai	13:40
PGT	840	Istanbul	01:50	PVV	734	IOA	14:00
IGO	1759	Delhi	01:55	UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
JZR	722	Alexandria	01:55	AXB	394	Kozhikode	14:15
UAE	853	Dubai	02:15	RBG	218	Asyut	14:50
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:15	QTR	1079	Doha	15:00
RBG	551	Alexandria	02:25	FDB	060	Dubai	15:10
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
KLM	446	Bahrain	02:30	UAE	878	Dubai	15:40
QTR	1086	Doha	02:40	KAC	775	Riyadh	15:45
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	KAC	673	Dubai	15:50
KKK	1268	Istanbul	03:05	KAC	563	Amman	16:00
RJA	648	Amman	03:05	SVA	501	Jeddah	16:00
PGT	860	Istanbul	03:05	KNE	530	Jeddah	16:00
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10	KAC	615	Bahrain	16:05
MSR	612	Cairo	03:15	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
LMU	510	Cairo	04:00	KAC	743	Dammam	16:20
QTR	1076	Doha	04:00	KAC	283	Dhaka	16:25
KAC	414	Bangkok	04:00	KAC	785	Jeddah	16:30
IGO	1751	Chennai	04:10	OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
KAC	418	Manila	04:25	ABY	128	Sharjah	16:35
OHY	352	Istanbul	04:30	JZR	103	Bahrain	16:50
KAC	302	Mumbai	04:40	KAC	503	Beirut	17:05
JZR	406	Kochi	04:45	KAC	619	Doha	17:35
JZR	540	KTM	04:45	KAC	357	Kochi	17:35
FDB	069	Dubai	05:00	UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
KAC	358	Kochi	05:10	FDB	052	Dubai	17:45
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:10	JZR	539	KTM	17:50
JZR	404	Hyderabad	05:10	KAC	343	Chennai	18:00
KAC	784	Jeddah	05:20	QTR	1073	Doha	18:00
KAC	382	Delhi	05:20	KAC	675	Dubai	18:10
THY	770	Istanbul	05:25	JZR	733	Cairo	18:10
JZR	112	Doha	05:35	JZR	715	Sohag	18:15
KAC	284	Dhaka	05:35	SVA	511	Riyadh	18:20
QTR	8511	Doha	05:45	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
UAE	873	Dubai	05:50	KAC	301	Mumbai	18:35
JZR	216	Jeddah	05:50	JZR	127	Dubai	18:35
JZR	402	Mumbai	06:05	JZR	403	Hyderabad	18:40
KAC	344	Chennai	06:10	KAC	381	Delhi	18:45
KAC	120	Dubai	07:00	JZR	721	Alexandria	18:55
KAC	544	Cairo	07:05	JZR	253	Amman	19:20
KAC	678	Dubai	07:05	FDB	064	Dubai	19:20
IGO	1766	Mumbai	07:10	UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
BAW	157	London	07:10	MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
KAC	204	Lahore	07:15	IRA	664	Shiraz	19:35
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50	QTR	1081	Doha	19:55
QTR	1084	Doha	08:00	JZR	653	OSS	20:05
KAC	622	Doha	08:00	ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05
UAE	855	Dubai	08:35	RBG	556	Alexandria	20:05
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	08:55	RJA	641	Amman	20:10
JZR	102	Bahrain	08:55	GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
KAC	334	Trivandrum	09:00	KAC	345	Ahmedabad	20:25
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05	JZR	501	Lahore	20:40
KAC	384	Delhi	09:30	KAC	353	Bengaluru	20:50
KAC	304	Mumbai	09:30	KAC	333	Trivandrum	20:50
IGO	1753	Ahmedabad	09:40	JZR	401	Mumbai	20:55
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	QTR	1091	Doha	21:00
QTR	1070	Doha	09:45	OMA	648	Muscat	21:20
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00	DLH	624	Dammam	21:45
JZR	114	Doha	10:20	DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	QTR	1089	Doha	21:55
PVV	734	Bahrain	11:00	KAC	203	Lahore	22:15
JZR	122	Dubai	11:15	RBG	214	Sohag	22:15
QTR	1074	Doha	11:35	JZR	701	Asyut	22:15
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
JPJ	3740	TQD	12:00	ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
MSR	610	Cairo	12:00	ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:25
GFA	209	Bahrain	12:05	GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
SAW	701	Damascus	12:30	UAE	860	Dubai	22:55
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
				KAC	783	Jeddah	23:15
				KAC	383	Delhi	23:20
				KAC	411	Bangkok	23:25
				QTR	1083	Doha	23:25
				KAC	543	Cairo	23:30
				KAC	303	Mumbai	23:40
				KAC	351	Kochi	23:55



An Indian Muslim bride takes a selfie with her mobile phone as she participates in an 'All Religion Mass Wedding' ceremony at Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad on yesterday. — AFP

Kuwaitis urged to avoid travel...

Continued from Page 1

authorities, and avoid crowded places and shopping malls. A 60-year-old US citizen diagnosed with the virus died on Thursday in Wuhan, the city at the epicenter of the health emergency, according to the US embassy, which did not provide more details about the person. China's foreign ministry said in a statement to AFP that the victim was a US citizen of Chinese origin. A Japanese man in his 60s with a suspected coronavirus infection also died in hospital in Wuhan, the Japanese foreign ministry said, adding that it was "difficult" to confirm if he had the illness.

The only fatalities outside the mainland were a Chinese man in the Philippines and a 39-year-old man in Hong Kong. Nearly 35,000 people have been infected by the new strain, which is believed to have emerged in a market selling wild animals in Wuhan last year before spreading across China. The epidemic has prompted the government to lock down cities home to tens of millions of people, as anger mounts over its handling of the crisis, especially after a whistleblowing doctor fell victim to the virus.

Vice Premier Sun Chunlan, on a visit to quarantined Wuhan this week, instructed officials to take a "wartime" approach as they implement drastic measures that include combing the city for feverish residents. With panic spiralling around the globe - more than 320 cases have emerged in nearly 30 other countries - researchers are racing to find treatments and a vaccine to fight the virus. While the World Health Organization is set to give the disease a name within days, China's National Health Commission said it would temporarily call it "novel coronavirus pneumonia", or NCP.

Hong Kong began enforcing a two-week quarantine for anyone arriving from mainland China, under threat of both fines and jail terms. Most people will be able to

be quarantined at home or in hotels but they will face daily phone calls and spot checks. The financial hub has 25 confirmed cases with one patient who died earlier this week.

The virus has revived memories of the SARS outbreak that killed 299 in the semi-autonomous city, leaving profound psychological scars and saddling residents with a deep distrust of authorities in Beijing who initially covered up the outbreak. In the last week, Hong Kong has been hit by a wave of panic-buying with supermarket shelves frequently emptied of staple goods such as toilet paper, hand sanitizer, rice and pasta.

Similar scenes were seen in Singapore yesterday as shoppers cleared grocery store shelves after the city-state, which has 33 confirmed cases, raised its alert level over the virus. China has expanded its own measures far from the epicenter, with cities hundreds of kilometers from Hubei telling residents that only one person per household can leave the house every two days to buy supplies. Yesterday, Shanghai became the latest jurisdiction to order residents to wear masks in public places, warning that those who don't cooperate will be "seriously" dealt with according to the law.

Anger over the government's handling of the health emergency erupted on social media on Friday after the death of a Wuhan doctor who was silenced by police after he had raised the alarm about the emerging virus threat in December. The government responded by sending its anti-graft body to Wuhan to launch an investigation after the death of Li Wenliang, an ophthalmologist who contracted the disease while treating a patient.

Other governments around the world have hardened their defenses, with several countries banning arrivals from China while major airlines have suspended flights. New cases emerged abroad, with five British nationals, including a child, testing positive for the virus after staying at the same ski chalet in France. Asian cruise ships have become a focal point. Sixty-four people on board the Diamond Princess off Japan's coast have tested positive and passengers aboard the ship have been asked to stay inside their cabins to prevent new infections. — Agencies

ing that the two firings were "petty retaliation" carried out "for telling the truth". There was also outrage from Biden, who interrupted a debate with other presidential hopefuls in New Hampshire to encourage the audience onto its feet in honor of Vindman.

Vindman served as director of European affairs on the National Security Council, with responsibility for Ukraine. Crucially, he was present during a July 25 phone call during which Trump asked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to open an investigation into Biden. House Democrats argued that the call was part of a plot to coerce a foreign ally into helping him ruin Biden's chances in November's presidential election.

Subpoenaed by Congress to testify at the House impeachment hearings, the Ukrainian-born Vindman gave damning evidence. "It is improper for the president of the United States to demand a foreign government investigate a US citizen and a political opponent," Vindman said in testimony that riveted television viewers. Sondland told lawmakers he followed the president's orders in seeking a "quid pro quo" deal for Ukraine to investigate Biden in exchange for getting Zelensky a coveted White House visit.

Sondland said Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani led the effort at Trump's direction to pressure Zelensky for the investigation and that top officials in the White House and State Department knew about it. That testimony helped build the case leading to Trump becoming only the third president ever impeached by Congress, before his acquittal this week. —AFP

In Trump impeachment, 4 months, 28,000 pages and one loose end

WASHINGTON: When it was over, the impeachment of US President Donald Trump produced 135 days of partisan rancor, 17 witness accounts, more than 28,000 pages of documents and testimony, and one big loose end. The impeachment inquiry provided a remarkable inside view of a White House effort to secure politically beneficial investigations by Ukraine's government at a time when Trump is seeking re-election. But - whether one ascribes the shortcoming to Democrats' haste in their investigation or Trump's recalcitrance - it yielded little direct evidence of what happened inside the Oval Office itself.

The Democratic-controlled US House of Representatives voted to impeach Trump in December without hearing from the aides who dealt with him directly, after Trump directed officials not to cooperate with the inquiry. The US Senate acquitted him on Wednesday without hearing from them either.

In public and closed-door testimony, White House aides detailed an effort to withhold nearly \$400 million in security aid and a coveted White House visit unless Ukrainian officials announced the investigations Trump sought into his Democratic political rival, Joe Biden, and his son, Hunter Biden. That exchange was at the center of the House charge that Trump abused his power for political benefit. But because almost none of the aides who testified had spoken to the president about the issue, their accounts left one central question largely unanswered: What did Trump himself do?

Trump's former national security adviser, John Bolton, appeared last week to be on the cusp of supplying an answer when The New York Times reported he had written a book claiming that Trump told him he would not restore security aid to Ukraine until it launched the investigations he wanted. Bolton

said he would testify if the Senate subpoenaed him.

In his as-yet-unpublished manuscript, Bolton said Trump discussed the aid freeze with him in August, more than a month after it began. That account appeared to leave unanswered how and why Trump ordered the aid frozen in the first place, why it was ultimately restored and how closely Trump associated benefits to Ukraine with political favors.

"We have demonstrated, we believe, that the scheme was entirely corrupt," said Representative Adam Schiff, the head of the group of House Democrats who prosecuted Trump. But he told senators: "If you have any question about that, ask John Bolton."

In the end, Trump's fellow Republicans in the Republican-controlled Senate suggested the answer did not really matter. Whatever Trump's involvement, several senators said, the pressure campaign was not the type of wrongdoing for which they were willing to remove a president from office for the first time in US history.

"While we can debate the president's judgment when it comes to his dealings with Ukraine, or even conclude that his actions were inappropriate, the House's vague and overreaching impeachment charges do not meet the high bar set by the founders for removal from office," said Senator John Thune. Senators also acquitted Trump of a related charge of obstructing the House impeachment investigation.

The conclusion of Trump's trial offered a sharp contrast to previous impeachment trials, which all have led to acquittal but left little doubt about what the president did or why. The last time senators put a president on trial - Bill Clinton in 1999 - lawmakers extracted a detailed, even lurid, account of his sexual relationship with a White House intern and the cover-up that followed. — Reuters

Trump ousts impeachment...

Continued from Page 1

Vindman's twin brother Yevgeny, also a lieutenant colonel who worked as an attorney in the NSC, was fired simultaneously, US media reported.

Trump has described the impeachment process as a hoax, denying there was anything wrong in his push for Ukraine to open a politically embarrassing investigation into Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden's family. On Friday, Trump told reporters that he wants Republicans to retake control of the lower house of Congress in the next election and to "expunge" his impeachment. When asked earlier Friday whether he wanted Vindman gone, Trump responded with a veiled threat. "I'm not happy with him," he said. "You think I'm supposed to be happy with him?" Trump said.

Pressman said there was "no question in the mind of any American" why Vindman had been ousted. "The truth has cost LTC Alexander Vindman his job, his career, and his privacy," he said in a statement. "He served his country, even when doing so was fraught with danger and personal peril." Pressman said this was why "the most powerful man in the world... decided to exact revenge."

Democratic Senator Ron Wyden echoed this, tweet-

Thai gunman kills at least 20...

Continued from Page 1

"Police, military commandos and sharp shooters are surrounding Terminal 21," he said. The Thai Health Minister told reporters around 10 people were already in hospital in a "serious condition".

The bloodshed began yesterday afternoon when Jakrapanth shot three people - among them at least one soldier - at a nearby army barracks. "He stole an army vehicle and drove into the town centre," police Lieutenant-Colonel Mongkol Kuptasiri. There the gunman used weapons stolen from the army arsenal to bring carnage to a town center, walking into the Terminal 21 mall. He "used a machine gun and shot innocent victims resulting in many injured and dead," police spokesman Krissana Pattanacharoen said. Jakrapanth's motive remains unclear.

But he throughout the day he posted images of himself and wrote several posts on his Facebook page as the attack unfolded including "should I surrender?" and "no one can escape death". In one Facebook video - since deleted - the assailant, wearing an army helmet, filmed from an open jeep saying, "I'm tired... I

can't pull my finger anymore" and making a trigger symbol with his hand.

There were also photos of a man in a ski mask holding up a pistol. A Facebook spokesperson said "we have removed the gunman's accounts from our services and will work around the clock to remove any violating content related to this attack as soon as we become aware of it".

A witness who was inside the mall before the attack told AFP the shopping center was thronging with shoppers on a long weekend. "There were loads of people at the mall today," a 32-year-old from the city said, requesting anonymity. "I was pretty shocked when I found out because I just left the mall not long before." Street lights below the shopping center were switched off as army and police units sealed off the Terminal 21 mall.

The city - better known as Korat - is home to one of Thailand's largest barracks in a country where the military is enmeshed in politics and society. Thailand has one of the highest rates of gun ownership in the world. Several shootings at courthouses late last year renewed concern about gun violence in the Southeast Asian country. In another high-profile case, a two-year-old boy was among three people killed in Thailand when a masked gunman robbed a jewellery shop last month. Late last year two lawyers were shot dead by a clerk at a court in the east of the country during a hearing over a land dispute. — AFP

Rafael Nadal wins inaugural Kuwait Champions Challenge

Game, Set, Match! Sporting history for the Middle East



- First-ever match at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex played in front of packed 1,500-seat crowd, including Sheikh Jaber, Kuwait Tennis Federation (KTF) officials, diplomats and VIPs
- Landmark match serves as inauguration of Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait - a first of its kind in the Middle East - now accepting membership applications ahead of April opening



KUWAIT: Global tennis icon Rafael Nadal made history on Wednesday, defeating fellow Spanish star David Ferrer in the inaugural Kuwait Champions Challenge, the first match to be played at the all-new world-class Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex.

The match, which served as the inauguration of the Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait, a

partnership between Tamdeen Group, Kuwait's leading mixed-use developer, and Rafa Nadal Academy by Movistar, only the second such facility in the world bearing the 19-time Grand Slam champion's name, and the first outside of his hometown of Mallorca, Spain.

World No. 2 Nadal and former top-ranked ATP star Ferrer played out an intense match, complete with fast-paced action and the occa-

sional trick shot, with Nadal prevailing 6-4, 6-3 after a 90-minute encounter.

"This was an incredible experience for me and hopefully for everyone here," said Nadal after the match. "There was a great crowd out there and for us it is a big night, a very special night."

The match was watched by packed out 1,500 crowd including Sheikh Jaber Al-

Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and Sheikh Ahmed Al-Jaber Abdullah Al-Sabah, President of the Kuwait Tennis Federation (KTF); President of the Arab Tennis Federation and Honorary Chairman of Asian Tennis Federation, distinguished members of Kuwait's diplomatic community and VIPs.

The Kuwait Champions Challenge, the first clash of its kind in the state of Kuwait and

Nadal's Kuwait debut, represented an unprecedented opportunity for the packed crowd to get close look at Spaniard's trademark skills, power, lightning movement and winning desire that have made him one of the greatest players in history.

Rafa Nadal Academy is now accepting registrations for memberships ahead of officially opening its doors in April.



Sports

Taylor's 'simple' approach leads New Zealand to ODI series win over India

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard in the second one-day international between New Zealand and India in Auckland yesterday:

New Zealand	
M. Guptill run out (Thakur/Rahul)	79
H. Nicholls lbw Chahal	41
T. Blundell v Saini b Thakur	22
R. Taylor not out	73
T. Latham lbw Jadeja	7
J. Neesham run out (Jadeja)	3
C. de Grandhomme c Iyer b Thakur	5
M. Chapman c&b Chahal	1
T. Southee c Saini b Chahal	3
K. Jamieson not out	25
Extras: (b4, lb4, w6)	14
Total: (eight wickets: 50 overs)	273
Fall of wickets: 1-93 (Nicholls), 2-142 (Blundell), 3-157 (Guptill), 4-171 (Latham), 5-175 (Neesham), 6-185 (de Grandhomme), 7-187 (Chapman), 8-197 (Southee)	
Did not bat: Hamish Bennett.	
Bowling: Thakur 10-1-60-2 (3w), Bumrah 10-0-64-0, Saini 10-0-48-0 (2w), Chahal 10-0-58-3 (1w), Jadeja 10-0-35-1	

India	
P. Shaw b Jamieson	24
M. Agarwal c Taylor b Bennett	3
V. Kohli b Southee	15
S. Iyer c Latham b Bennett	52
K. Rahul b de Grandhomme	4
K. Jadhav c Nicholls b Southee	9
R. Jadeja c de Grandhomme b Neesham	55
S. Thakur b de Grandhomme	18
N. Saini b Jamieson	45
Y. Chahal run out (Neesham/Latham)	10
J. Bumrah not out	0
Extras: (lb4, w12)	16
Total (all out: 48.3 overs)	251
Fall of wickets: 1-21 (Agarwal), 2-34 (Shaw), 3-57 (Kohli), 4-71 (Rahul), 5-96 (Jadhav), 6-129 (Iyer), 7-153 (Thakur), 8-229 (Saini), 9-251 (Chahal), 10-251 (Jadeja)	
Bowling: Bennett 9-0-58-2 (3w), Southee 10-1-41-2 (1w), Jamieson 10-1-42-2, de Grandhomme 10-1-54-2 (2w), Neesham 9.3-0-52-1.	
Result: New Zealand won by 22 runs.	

AUCKLAND: New Zealand wrapped up the one-day series against India with veteran Ross Taylor and debutant Kyle Jamieson combining to set up a 22-run win in game two in Auckland yesterday. Taylor, who was also New Zealand's hero with a century in the four-wicket victory in game one, set up the second success with 73 not out and an unbeaten 76-run partnership with the novice Jamieson.

Jamieson went to the middle with New Zealand 197 for eight and almost nine overs remaining following a spectacular collapse in which they lost seven wickets for 55 runs. He said Taylor, in his 231st ODI, had a "pretty simple" message to try to bat out the overs.

"It was about trying to stay there and stick with Ross and get to a score that we could defend in the end." Captain Tom Latham called their partnership "vital" and said he knew once India lost early wickets that 273 was a satisfactory total.

India were dismissed for 251 with nine balls remaining in their innings, but captain Virat Kohli was not too despondent having already beaten New Zealand 5-0 in the Twenty20 series.

"One-day cricket in this calendar year is not as relevant if you look at the T20s and the Tests, but having said that, to show that kind of fight and see who are the guys who can play under pressure is a big revelation for us," Kohli said.

New Zealand made a strong start in Auckland with Martin Guptill (69) and Henry Nicholls (41) putting on 93 for the first wicket.

Following Nicholls' dismissal, Tom Blundell joined Guptill to get the total to 142 before the seven-wicket collapse. New Zealand had trouble negotiating the spin of Yuzendran Chahal (three for 53) and Ravindra Jadeja while Guptill was run out looking for a quick single.

In comparison after 41.3 overs, New Zealand were 197 for eight and India 202 for seven. But while the home side were rescued by a flurry of boundaries from Taylor and Jamieson, the tourists were unable to assert the same dominance over the New Zealand attack.

Ravindra Jadeja and Navdeep Saini put on 76 for



AUCKLAND: New Zealand's Henry Nicholls opens the batting during the second one-day international cricket match between New Zealand and India at Eden Park in Auckland yesterday. —AFP

the eighth wicket but Jadeja's 55 came off 73 balls only included two fours and one six. The 274-run target set for India was not a daunting prospect on Eden Park with its short boundaries and when Prithvi Shaw smacked the first two deliveries of the innings to the boundary it seemed the tourists would wrap the match up quickly.

But after Mayank Agarwal was dismissed in the third over India struggled to regain momentum. Jadeja went in at the end of the 21st over when India were in strife at 96 for five. New Zealand pace bowler Tim Southee — who was unwell and only played because his team had no other bowlers to call on — made his

tory when he dismissed India's talisman Virat Kohli for 15. It was a record ninth time he has dismissed Kohli across all formats and moved him past England pair James Anderson and Graeme Swann who have claimed the Indian captain's scalp eight times.

With Kohli's early dismissal India looked to Shreyas Iyer to lead them home. The right-hander played his part until he reached 52, his second ODI half-century, when he lost his composure and tried to cut a Bennett delivery that was heading towards middle stump and succeeded only in nicking the ball through to the wicketkeeper. The third and final match in the series is in Mount Maunganui on Tuesday. —AFP

Sydney Sixers win Big Bash final

SYDNEY: The Sydney Sixers were crowned Big Bash League champions for a second time yesterday after the Melbourne Stars fell short during the run-chase in a rain-affected match that capped a near two-month competition.

Chasing 117 to win a game reduced to 12 overs, Glenn Maxwell's Stars could only manage 97 for six as they suffered a second final defeat in a row after imploding against the Melbourne Renegades last year.

"It's fantastic, it was an entertaining game of cricket," said Sixers captain Moises Henriques after the 19-run win at the Sydney Cricket Ground secured their second title and first since the inaugural season in 2011-12. "The wicket played pretty well after so much rain. Well done to the ground staff and congratulations to the Stars on a great season." It was remarkable the match went ahead with Sydney drenched by torrential rain for two straight days, which only let up as the final was due to start, with the game getting underway more than an hour late.

Unlike most other Twenty20 events around the world, no finals reserve day is built into the BBL structure which would have meant the Sixers claiming victory as the host team if no play was possible.

Nathan Lyon (2-19) and Steve O'Keefe (2-27) were the pick of the Sixers' bowlers after they made 116 for five in their innings, spearheaded by impressive opener Josh Philippe's 52. In reply, Marcus Stoinis clubbed a four and a six off Lyon's first three balls to signal the Stars' intentions, but he pushed his luck too far and was caught near the boundary off the fourth delivery.

Fellow opener Nic Maddinson followed in the next over, offering a limp chip shot to Josh Hazlewood which was easily collected by James Vince at cover. When the potentially explosive Maxwell was out lbw to O'Keefe for five trying to sweep, they were 18 for three and in big trouble.

A comical run out of Peter Handscomb for one, sent back by Nick Larkin as he went for a second run, made matters worse. Ben Dunk was the next out, lbw to Lyon, then Seb Gotch was caught at deep mid-wicket off O'Keefe as he tried to slog a boundary. Nathan Coulter-Nile (not out 19) and Larkin (not out 38) produced some late fireworks in a last-ditch bid to reel in the Sixers score, but it was too little too late. —AFP

Babar, Masood help Pakistan dominate Bangladesh

RAWALPINDI: Sparkling hundreds from Babar Azam and Shan Masood put Pakistan in command against Bangladesh on the second day of the first Test at Rawalpindi yesterday.

Azam scored a career best unbeaten 143 for his third successive hundred in as many Tests — fifth of a burgeoning career — while opener Shan Masood made 100 as they pulverised a hapless Bangladesh attack at Rawalpindi stadium.

At close, Azam was still batting with Asad Shafiq on 60, piling agony on the visitors during their unbroken 137-run stand for the fourth wicket. Masood said he and Azam have done their jobs.

"We have batted our way to take the team in a strong position and hope that the remaining batsmen come and score so that we can build a good lead," said Masood, who hailed Azam as world class.

"When Babar was coming out to bat the crowd chanted 'Babar, Babar' and that is the sign of a great batsman who is so popular." Pakistan lead Bangladesh's first innings total of 233 by 109 runs with six wickets intact.

Since his fighting century against Australia at

Kuwait's Whites defeat Oman in a marathon match

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The 37th Gulf Volleyball Club Championship is about to conclude, as teams will take today as a rest day, while the final round will start tomorrow. The third round played on Friday, saw Kuwait team "Whites" regain its balance following a very difficult win against Oman's Al-Seeb club by the score of 3-2 as follows (12-25, 22-25, 25-23, 25-20, 16-14).

Meanwhile, Qatar's Police team continued its winning ways by having its third consecutive win against UAE's Al-Ain 3-1 (29-31, 25-14, 25-14, 25-18). The third match saw Bahrain's Dar Kulaib beat Saudi Arabia's Al-Hilal 3-0 (25-23, 25-21, 25-22).

These results kept Qatar's Police on top with 9 points, followed by Dar Kulaib in points scored difference, Al-Hilal in third, Kuwait fourth, Al-Seeb fifth and Ain with the points in sixth place.

Brisbane (104) in November last year, Azam was notched 102 not out and 100 not out against Sri Lanka in two Tests — making this his fourth hundred in five Tests.

In between he missed a hundred at Adelaide by a mere three runs. Azam steered spinner Taijul Islam to short third man boundary for his 15th four to complete three-figure mark off just 134 balls.

He has so far batted for 276 minutes, smashing 18 boundaries and a six. His previous best score was 127 against New Zealand in Dubai in November 2018. Shafiq also batted with confidence, having so far hit eight boundaries in his 111-ball knock.

But it could have been an early exit for Azam had Ebadot Hossain not dropped him off Islam at long-off when his score was only two. That lapse cost Bangladesh dearly as Azam added an invaluable 112 for the third wicket with Masood, who also knocked his third Test century — second in successive Tests.

Masood — who was finally bowled out by Islam — reached his hundred by hooking pacer Rubel Hossain for his 12th boundary. He reached three figures off 157 balls in 226 minutes of batting.

Islam (1-111) toiled hard as he bowled 27 overs on the trot since start. The only other successful bowler was paceman Abu Jayed whose figure read 2-66. When Pakistan started their innings in the morning all focus was on Abid, who scored two hundreds in his first two Tests against Sri Lanka in December last year.

Another hundred would have equalled Indian player Mohammad Azharuddin's unique record — three suc-

cessive centuries in his first three Tests — but Abid fell far short when he was dismissed without scoring.

He edged a short and wide delivery from Jayed into the hands of wicketkeeper Liton Das and trudged off to the pavilion heartbroken. Azhar added 91 runs for the second wicket with Masood and looked set for a big score until he miscued a drive off Jayed and was caught by Najmul Hossain Shanto in the slip. Azhar's attractive 34 included four boundaries. —AFP

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at the close of play on the second day of the first Test between Pakistan and Bangladesh at Rawalpindi stadium yesterday:

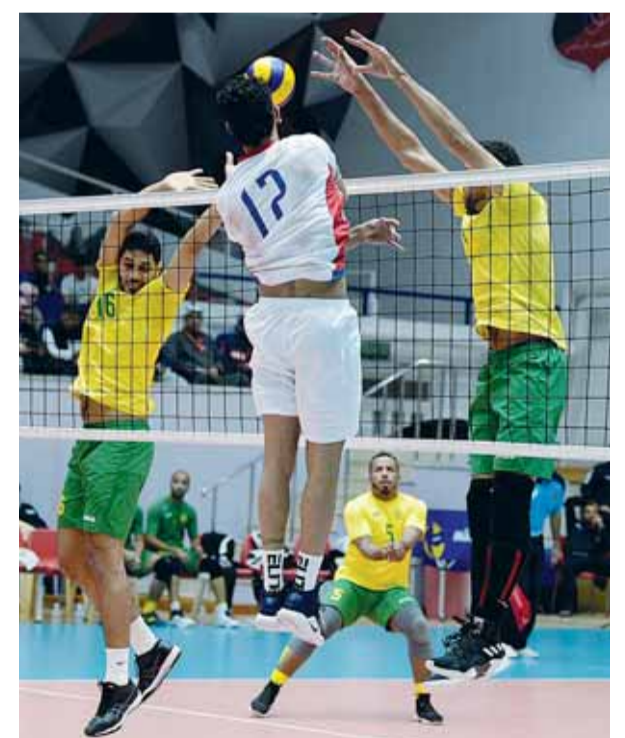
Bangladesh 1st innings 233 (Mohammad Mithun 63, Najmul Hossain Shanto 44, Shaheen Shah Afridi 4-53)

Pakistan 1st innings	
Shan Masood b Islam	100
Abid Ali c Das b Jayed	0
Azhar Ali c Shanto b Jayed	34
Babar Azam not out	143
Asad Shafiq not out	60
Extras: (b 1, lb 3, nb 1)	5
Total: (for three wkts: 87.5 overs) 342	

Still to bat: Haris Sohail, Mohammad Rizwan, Yasir Shah, Mohammad Abbas, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah
Fall of wickets: 1-2 (Abid), 2-93 (Azhar), 3-205 (Masood)
Bowling: Ebadat 14.5-2-78-0, Jayed 20-2-66-2, Rubel 17-3-77-0 (Inb), Islam 34-5-111-1, Mahmudullah 2-0-6-0.

cessive centuries in his first three Tests — but Abid fell far short when he was dismissed without scoring.

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Ali Jassim Al-Kharafi wins Al-Dabbous Horse Jumping Championship

KUWAIT: Kuwait Equestrian Club rider Ali Jassim Al-Kharafi won the title of the first day, within the Seventh Late Raed Faisal Al-Dabbous Horse Jumping Championship being held at Kuwait Equestrian Center with the participation of a large group of riders who represent local clubs. The total prizes of the championship was KD 10,000 and two cars for the grand prize winners.

Al-Kharafi won first place in the main round at a highest of 130 cm beating Ghazi Al-Jraivee, Abdallah Al-Gharabally, Latifa Al-Hajiri, Babil Foronco and Abdelrahman

Al-Fuzaie.

Championship Director Abdelmohsen Al-Dabbous said the seventh championship of late Faisal Al-Dabbous championship is a complete festival, and not only horse jumping competition. He said Al-Dabbous family continues its support of Kuwait's equestrian sport, so that riders can continue representing Kuwait in all arenas.

Abdelrahman Al-Awadhi won first place in the 120 cm category, followed by Ahmad Al-Enaz Rawan Al-Durais, Khalid Al-Zubaid, Ahmad Al-Omran and Fawaz Al-Ghunaiman.



Sports

Rebensburg masters 'hell' to win women's downhill in Garmisch

Italy's Brignone was second with Ledeska of Czech Republic third

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN: Viktoria Rebensburg put her training woes behind her to complete the downhill sweep for Germany in Garmisch-Partenkirchen yesterday with victory in the women's World Cup race - a week after Thomas Dressen won the men's title.

"Wow, I couldn't have dreamed of that," beamed Rebensburg. In near-perfect conditions, Rebensburg claimed the first downhill victory of her career in 1min 41.94secs, mastering the tricky, icy mid-section of the course, dubbed 'hell'.

Italy's Federica Brignone was second at 0.61sec with Ester Ledeska of the Czech Republic third at 0.83 behind Rebensburg, the 2010 Olympic champion in the giant slalom. "That was crazy," said Rebensburg, who had a falling out with Germany's head coach Wolfgang Maier over the volume and intensity of her training in the build-up. "It was important for me to just stay true to myself and focus on my skiing. Things went well in training and of course it was very important to race well at home," added Rebensburg, who hails from the nearby town of Kreuth in the Bavarian Alps.

The 30-year-old said Friday's training run gave her ideas how to pick up speed on the "Eishang" (Ice slope) and "Hell" parts of the course, "which gave me momentum for the final section".

After her compatriot Dressen claimed downhill victory in the men's race seven days ago on the tricky Kandahar course, this is the first time two Germans have won in Garmisch since 2010.

'EXTREMELY COOL'

It's been a decade since Maria Hoefl-Riesch won the women's downhill and Felix Neureuther won the men's slalom in the same season. Dressen's win the week before "was certainly a big inspiration", said

Rebensburg. "I saw what it means to win a home race and how special it is." In the absence of overall World Cup leader Mikaela Shiffrin, who's father died last week, only four skiers managed to finish within a second of Rebensburg.

Swiss Corinne Suter, the overall downhill leader, was fifth at 0.98 while Austria's Stephanie Venier, the 2019 downhill winner in Garmisch, also struggled and finished 12th at 1.92sec. This was Rebensburg's 19th career World Cup victory yet only her first downhill triumph after 14 giant slalom and four super-G wins.

"It's really incredible to have now won in all three disciplines in which I race," she said. "It's extremely cool that it worked." This is her second World Cup win of the season having won the super-G race in Lake Louise last December. Brignone, who is now 190 points behind Shiffrin at second in the overall World Cup standings, knew exactly where she lost time to Rebensburg. "I didn't take the first big turn on the flat well and that's where I lost a lot of time," admitted Brignone. The 29-year-old has good memories of Garmisch, having taken giant slalom silver on the Kandahar at the 2011 world championships.

She also won the junior world combined title there in 2009. "I really like the snow, I always feel good racing here, especially in super-G," she added with one eye today's race. Ledeska joked that her podium placing was down to her pre-race breakfast, a fortnight after bombing on her last downhill race when she finished 32nd in Bansko. "I had scrambled eggs, which weren't on offer in Bulgaria, so that was the main difference," joked the 24-year-old, who is also a reigning snowboard Olympic champion in parallel giant slalom.

"I'll see how it goes for tomorrow now," she added before Sunday's super-G, the discipline in which she is the reigning Olympic champion. — AFP



GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN: Germany's Viktoria Rebensburg celebrates with team mates during the winner's ceremony of the FIS Alpine Women Skiing World Cup in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, southern Germany, yesterday. — AFP

Al Sayer promotes spirit of start your impossible at 'BeInspired Road Run 2020'



KUWAIT: Al Sayer extended its partnership for the 2nd year with the BeInspired Series as gold sponsor to facilitate an exciting run for all marathon enthusiasts in Kuwait. On Saturday, February 1, more than 500 participants across several age groups regardless the gender joined the 7.2 KM human endurance challenge to reinforce their healthy and active lifestyle.

Al Sayer senior management and employees also participated in the event. special category members who is suffering with hearing and speech impairments, but with high athletic capabilities we also invited to the event to spread the message of care and wellness.

BeInspired marathon is one of the favorites for Kuwaiti community because of its start and finish points at the impressive Murouj complex, the race followed through the lush green backdrop of the Sahara Golf and Equestrian club to make the run energetic and refreshing, also secure for family and friendly to cheer along. To make the event more memorable, we engaged participants & visitors through a photo kiosk to make their participation picture along with race kits and medal.

According to Nehad Al Haj Ali, Deputy Group Manager Corporate Excellence "For ALSAYER 'WellBeing' is a key pillar of our sustainability vision

to address overall wellness of our people and community. In order to bring a positive change for our employees, customers, society and stakeholders, ALSAYER is spreading the spirit of "Start Your Impossible" through this challenging event to ensure the participants and associates are taking that extra leap to surpass what they perceive as impossible."

Advanced Researchers at Barts and University College London say that humans are evolving with greater endurance capabilities, but the inactive lifestyle often develops health issues. Events like marathon improves the health of a runner's arteries

that reduces the risk of heart attacks and strokes. Moreover, an active lifestyle helps to fight against increased obese among youth and adults which is a matter of concern in Kuwait.

Save the Date - Al Sayer invites participants across Kuwait in advance to join the thrilling BeInspired Mud/Obstacle 5KM Run on Saturday, 14 March 2020. We are confident such initiatives to bring long going positive impact on our society and lives of people by promoting the importance of sports activities to create even more productive community.

Osaka shocked as Spain seize Fed Cup lead over Japan

PARIS: A tearful Naomi Osaka followed up her Australian Open disappointment with another surprise defeat on Friday when she was beaten 6-0, 6-3 by world number 78 Sara Sorribes Tormo in the Fed Cup. Spain took an unexpected lead over Japan in the tie in Cartagena after Sorribes Tormo capitalised on a careless performance from Osaka, who made an astonishing 50 unforced errors in the 15 games.

Carla Suarez Navarro then made it 2-0 to the hosts after she eased past Misaki Doi 6-3, 6-4. Sorribes Tormo enjoyed the backing of a sizeable home crowd at La Manga Club and her consistency proved too much for Osaka, who has never played her best on clay.

"We knew that Sara had the game to make it very uncomfortable for Naomi," Spain captain Anabel Medina Garrigues said. "She stuck to the game plan perfectly." The winners of the eight qualifying ties will join four automatic entries, holders France, Australia, Czech Republic and hosts Hungary, in the inaugural Fed Cup Finals in Budapest in April.

Osaka, a two-time Grand Slam champion, has endured a shaky start to the year after being knocked out by 15-year-old American sensation Coco Gauff last month in Melbourne, where she had lifted the trophy in 2019.

Since claiming her second consecutive major triumph, Osaka has dipped, failing to go past the fourth round in

any of the four Grand Slams since. The 22-year-old, who has dropped to number 10 in the world, surrendered the first set to Sorribes Tormo in a swift 27 minutes before putting up more of a fight in the second.

But after Osaka led 2-0, Sorribes Tormo came back and a break midway through proved decisive, with a clearly disappointed Osaka struggling to contain her emotions at the finish. Sorribes Tormo's second career singles win in Fed Cup gave Spain the perfect start, which was extended by Suarez Navarro's comfortable victory over Doi. Osaka will now have to beat Suarez Navarro in the reverse singles today to prevent Spain booking their place in the finals in Budapest.

The United States were well on their way to an appearance in the finals after victories for 23-time Grand Slam winner Serena Williams and newly minted Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin.

Kenin got the ball rolling for the Americans in Everett, Washington, with a 6-2, 6-2 victory over Anastasiya Sevastova and Williams followed with a hard-fought 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/3) win over former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko.

"I was obviously a little nervous coming in after Australia," said Kenin, who needed just 68 minutes to subdue Sevastova. "I felt tired, but I tried to get that out of my mind and just represent and do what I do best." — AFP

Last-minute goal lifts Wild over Dallas Stars

DALLAS: Minnesota's Joel Eriksson Ek scored the second of his two goals with 25.7 seconds left in regulation, and the visiting Wild beat the Dallas Stars 3-2 on Friday night. After a big battle on the end boards behind Dallas goalie Ben Bishop, Eriksson Ek collected a miss by Jonas Brodin and wrapped the puck around past Bishop for the game-winning tally. Minnesota rebounded from a 2-0 deficit to beat the Stars for the third time in four meetings and win the season series. Ryan Donato scored, Devan Dubnyk stopped 31 shots and the Wild won their third straight and sixth of their last eight. Joe Pavelski tallied on the power play, Denis Gurianov added a goal and Bishop made 27 saves and also contributed his second assist this season on Gurianov's tally.

MAPLE LEAFS 5, DUCKS 4 (OT)

John Tavares scored his second goal of the game at 4:53 of overtime, and Toronto defeated visiting Anaheim. Tavares, who also had an assist, netted his 22nd goal of the season on a tip-in of a shot by Mitchell Marner during a power play. Auston Matthews had a goal and three assists, and Andreas Johnsson and Jason Spezza each added a goal for Toronto. Marner had three assists. Goaltender Jack Campbell stopped 26 shots in his first start for Toronto after he was acquired in a Wednesday trade with the Los Angeles Kings. Nicolas Deslauriers, Max Jones, Adam Henrique and Derek Grant

scored for the Ducks, who twice tied the game in the third period. Cam Fowler had two assists for Anaheim, and Henrique also had an assist. Ryan Miller made 29 saves.

BLUE JACKETS 2, RED WINGS 0

Elvis Merzlikins recorded his fifth shutout in eight games, Zach Werenski scored in the second period, and streaking Columbus stifled visiting Detroit. Merzlikins became the first rookie goaltender to record five shutouts in an eight-game span since Frank Brimsek in 1938. He needed to make only 16 stops against the Wings. The Blue Jackets are 9-0-1 over the last 10 games and have recorded at least one point in 18 consecutive games against Eastern Conference opponents. Werenski's 17 goals are an NHL high for a defenseman this season. He also scored the only goal in Columbus' last game, a 1-0 overtime win over the Florida Panthers on Tuesday. Boone Jenner scored the other goal for the Blue Jackets into a vacated net.

SABRES 3, RANGERS 2

Carter Hutton made 37 saves while Jimmy Vesey collected a goal and an assist against his former team as Buffalo held on for a victory at New York. The Sabres beat the Rangers for only the second time in the past nine meetings and also won for the second time in their past seven contests overall (2-4-1). Buffalo rebounded from a 4-3 home shootout loss to the league-worst Detroit Red Wings on Thursday. — Reuters

Zemgus Girgensons and Sam Reinhart scored in the first two periods for the Sabres. Vesey, who spent the first three seasons of his career with the Rangers, had the secondary assist on Reinhart's goal, and Jack Eichel collected two assists. Mike Zibanejad and Chris Kreider scored for the Rangers. — Reuters

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Sheffield United FC v Bournemouth FC	beIN Sports	17:00
Manchester City v West Ham United	beIN Sports	19:30
SPANISH LEAGUE PRIMERA		
RCD Espanyol v Real Mallorca	beIN Sports	14:00
Real Sociedad v Athletic de Bilbao	beIN Sports HD 4	16:00
Osasuna v Real Madrid CF	beIN Sports	18:00
Celta de Vigo v Sevilla FC	beIN Sports	20:30
Real Betis v FC Barcelona	beIN Sports	23:00
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE SERIE A		
spal v US Sassuolo Calcio	beIN Sports	14:30
Brescia v Udinese Calcio	beIN Sports	17:00
SSC Napoli v US Lecce	beIN Sports	17:00
Genoa CFC v Cagliari Calcio	beIN Sports	7:00
Parma Calcio 1913 v SS Lazio	beIN Sports HD 4	20:00
Internazionale Milano v AC Milan	beIN Sports HD 4	22:45
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA		
Borussia Monchengladbach v FC Koln	beIN Sports	17:30
Bayern Munich v RB Leipzig	beIN Sports HD 5	20:00
FRENCH LEAGUE		
Montpellier HSC v Saint Etienne	beIN Sports	17:00
RC Strasbourg v Stade Reims	beIN Sports	19:00
Paris Saint-Germain v Olympique Lyonnais	beIN Sports	23:00

25 Rafael Nadal wins inaugural Kuwait Champions Challenge



26 Taylor's 'simple' approach leads New Zealand to ODI series win over India



27 Rebensburg masters 'hell' to win women's downhill in Garmisch



LIVERPOOL: Crystal Palace's Zaire-born Belgian striker Christian Benteke controls the ball during the English Premier League football match between Everton and Crystal Palace at Goodison Park in Liverpool, north west England yesterday. — AFP

Everton move to seventh with Palace win

LONDON: Everton moved up to seventh and within five points of the Premier League top four as their resurgence under Carlo Ancelotti continued with a 3-1 win over Crystal Palace yesterday. Bernard, Richarlison and Dominic Calvert-Lewin scored the goals for the Toffees, who have won five and drawn two of eight league games since the Italian took charge in December. "Since I arrived the team did a fantastic job," Ancelotti told BT Sport. "Now we have a possibility to think about Europa League." At the other end of the table, Palace are looking over their shoulders at the relegation zone.

Roy Hodgson's men still have a six-point lead over the bottom three, but have not won in eight games and just once in the league since early December. "I can't fault the players' effort, but it's another defeat and another we go home without points," said Hodgson. "We know what we have to do. When we moved the ball quickly we asked questions and were close to getting more than one goal." Bernard gave the hosts a deserved first half lead with a thumping finish from Theo Walcott's cross to the back post. However, Palace were gifted a route back into the game six minutes into the second half thanks to another

error from Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford. The England number one's place at Euro 2020 is under debate and he let Christian Benteke's shot slip underneath his body as the Belgian striker registered his first goal of the season. "Disgusting. I was disappointed with myself," said Pickford, who later made amends with a fine save to preserve Everton's 2-1 lead. "My studs got caught but I hold my hands up for that. I reset and I never let anything affect me." Just as Everton were wobbling, though, a moment of magic from Richarlison swung the game back in their

favour seven minutes later. The Brazilian stormed onto Calvert-Lewin's flick-on to carry the ball from just inside the Palace half and past Gary Cahill before placing his shot into the far corner. "Richarlison did a fantastic counter attack and we won for this reason," added Ancelotti. "He is a fantastic player in counter attack, he used that situation really well." The same two players were involved when Everton sealed the points two minutes from time as Richarlison's header from a corner came off the bar and Calvert-Lewin turned home his 13th goal of the season. — AFP

Beal hits last-second winner for Wizards

WASHINGTON: Bradley Beal's layup with 0.2 seconds left lifted the Washington Wizards to a 119-118 win over the visiting Dallas Mavericks on Friday night. Beal took the inbound pass from Troy Brown Jr. near the foul line with 1.8 seconds left and drove for the layup. The Mavericks' alley-oop attempt at the buzzer failed. Beal had 29 points for Washington, ending a streak of seven straight games with 30-plus points. Davis Bertans added 20 points. Seth Curry led seven Mavericks in double figures with 20 points and Tim Hardaway Jr. finished with 19. Kristaps Porzingis, who suffered a broken nose in a loss to the Memphis Grizzlies on Wednesday night, played but was limited to 21 minutes due to foul trouble, and finished with 11 points and nine rebounds.

UTAH JAZZ 117 - PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS 114

Donovan Mitchell scored the tiebreaking layup with 19.5 seconds left, and Utah survived a controversial finish to post a victory over Portland in Salt Lake City. Mitchell's layup gave Utah a 116-114 lead. Damien Lillard then drove in an attempt to tie the score, and his shot hit the glass and was on its way into the basket before Utah's Rudy Gobert tipped it away, but goaltending wasn't called. Bojan Bogdanovic scored 27 points to help the Jazz halt a season-worst five-game losing streak. Utah

overcame a 16-point, second-half deficit. Lillard poured in 42 points for Portland, which lost for just the third time in the past nine games.

TORONTO RAPTORS 115 - INDIANA PACERS 106

Serge Ibaka collected 22 points and 10 rebounds as visiting Toronto extended its franchise-best winning streak to 13 games by beating Indiana, but may be without stalwart Kyle Lowry after he sustained what the Raptors referred to as whiplash after he came down hard on the leg of Ibaka in the third quarter. Fred VanVleet had 20 points and OG Anunoby added 16 for Toronto, which benefited from a 27-6 advantage in fast-break points to complete a home-and-home sweep of the Pacers this week. The Raptors posted a 119-118 victory over Indiana at Toronto on Wednesday. Lowry scored 10 of his 16 points in the first quarter to move past Vince Carter (9,420 points) for third place among the franchise's top all-time scorers. Carter once held the team record before being traded to the then-New Jersey Nets in 2004.

PHILADELPHIA 76ERS 119 - MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES 107

Furkan Korkmaz hit seven 3-pointers and scored a career-high 34 points, Tobias Harris added 21 and host Philadelphia defeated Memphis. Ben Simmons contributed 22 points and 10 assists while Al Horford had 10 points, eight rebounds and six assists for the Sixers, who snapped a four-game losing streak. Joel Embiid also had 10 points and 10 rebounds in 16 minutes before leaving the game for good with neck stiffness. It was Embiid's

29th double-double this season. Ja Morant led the Grizzlies with 15 points while Jonas Valanciunas added 14 points and 10 rebounds. Tyus Jones scored 13 and Brandon Clarke had 11.

OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER 108 - DETROIT PISTONS 101

Chris Paul scored 22 points to lift Oklahoma City to a home win over Detroit. The Thunder led for much of the game but never could stretch the margin to double digits before Detroit made a push early in the third quarter to come back and tie the score at 57. Oklahoma City then scored nine consecutive points quickly to ignite a 19-6 run overall and grab control. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 21 points for the Thunder while Danilo Gallinari added 19, Dennis Schroder 18 and Steven Adams 16. Reggie Jackson led the Pistons with 28 points.

SACRAMENTO KINGS 105 - MIAMI HEAT 97

Riding accurate 3-point shooting and taking advantage of the absence of Miami's Jimmy Butler, host Sacramento pulled away late to beat the Heat as Bogdan Bogdanovic, Buddy Hield and Nemanja Bjelica combined for 16 3-pointers, helping the Kings gain a 57-36 scoring advantage from beyond the arc in recording their second straight win. Bogdanovic finished with 23 points, while Hield collected 21 points and a game-high-tying seven rebounds, helping the Kings avenge an earlier overtime loss at Miami to gain a split in the two-game season series. Bam Adebayo had a game-high 26 points and a game-high-tying seven rebounds for the Heat, who lost their second straight. Miami was without Butler, who suf-

fered a strained right shoulder in Wednesday's loss to the Los Angeles Clippers in the opener of a five-game trip.

PHOENIX SUNS 127 - HOUSTON ROCKETS 91

Kelly Oubre Jr. scored a career high 39 points, Devin Booker added 33, and Phoenix ended a four-game losing streak with a rout of visiting Houston. The Rockets, playing without star guard Russell Westbrook (rest), had their four-game winning streak end as they posted a season low in points — despite 32 points from James Harden. Westbrook, who averages 26.7 points per game, was given the night off to rest, a day after he surpassed the 20,000-point mark of his career in a win over the Los Angeles Lakers. Phoenix made 15 of 31 3-point attempts, seven by Oubre to tie a career high, and four by Booker. Limited to only a five-man bench due to injuries, the Suns nevertheless ended the Rockets' 13-game winning streak in head-to-head meetings, and evened the all-time series at 108 wins for each team.

BOSTON CELTICS 112 - ATLANTA HAWKS 107

Jayson Tatum led the way with 32 points as host Boston narrowly held off undermanned Atlanta. Enes Kanter had 16 points and 15 rebounds, and Romeo Langford scored a career-high 16 as the Celtics won their sixth straight game and their ninth in their last 10. John Collins had 30 points and 10 rebounds, Kevin Huerter scored 25 and Brandon Goodwin added 21 for the Hawks, who have lost three of four. Atlanta had just nine players available after acquiring Clint Capela, Dewayne Dedmon, Skal Labissiere and Derrick Walton Jr. in separate trades this week. — Reuters